

THE CHURCH:

IDENTITY, MISSION, & CULTIVATION

REVIEW

Identity –

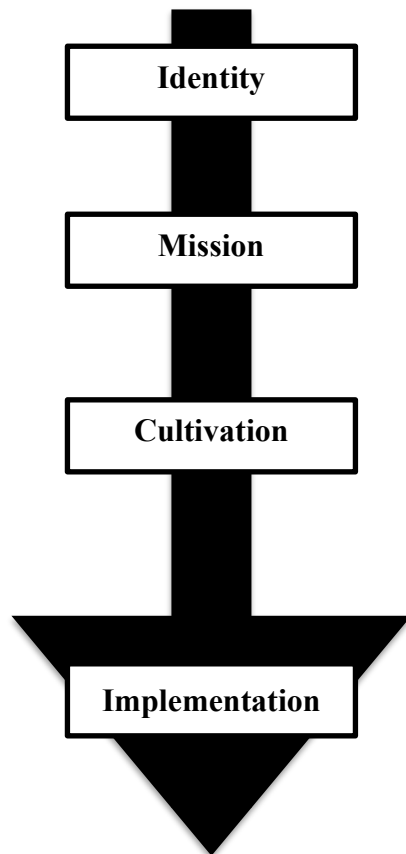
We are a local church. We are a local expression of that larger people that God has rescued through the saving work of his Son, Jesus Christ.

But we are not merely recipients of the Gospel. God has appointed us to spread that very same gospel by which we ourselves have been saved. We are God’s vehicle for advancing his gospel to the world.

Mission –

To glorify God by advancing the Gospel, which transforms people into fully devoted follows of Jesus.

“MINISTRY MAP”



We begin with what God has done and who we are as a result of it. Out of this identity (who we are) flows our mission (why we exist).

Because of who we are (our identity), this is what we are called to do. This is our mission, our purpose—why we exist as an organized community.

These are the principles we believe scripture identifies as those things that build up and equip our community for its mission. As such, these serve as our ministry values. They are vital for our church’s health and the fulfillment of its mission.

This is how we put those ministry values into practice in our specific church context. When you experience “life as CrossWay,” this is what you see. But these are not accidental activities, structures, and programs. These are intentional practices, built on our values, which seek to build up our church towards health and mission. In this way, everything we do is oriented towards our mission.

CULTIVATION

Our desire is that we would be a community that embodies our mission—a community of Christians...

- (1) ... *in whom* our mission is being fulfilled – we are glorifying God by increasingly becoming more fully transformed followers of Jesus by the power of the Gospel; and...
- (2) ... *by whom* our mission is being fulfilled – we are glorifying God by making more and more disciples through the Gospel.

As we move now to the subject of cultivation, we will consider how our church is cultivated into that sort of community. In other words, we know who we are (identity); and we know what our mission is. So now what? What do we do as a church? What are our practices? Our values? And how do these things (1) build us up as a people *in whom* the mission is realized – a mature and healthy church? And how do these things (2) equip us for our mission – how do they build us up as a people *through whom* that mission is fulfilled?

Scripture provides the following principles as those things scripture which foster the sort of community envisioned above—a mature and health community able to fulfill its mission and in whom this mission is realized. As such, it should be our desire that these ordinary means of grace would shape how we “do church.”

- **A strong sense of mission—the orientation of discipleship¹**

Question: Why is it important for our church culture to have a strong sense of mission?

Focusing and concentrating on our mission cultivates a healthy, mission-fulfilling church. It produces intentionality about fulfilling our mission and prevents us from losing track of our purpose, aim, and goal as a church.

Scripture: Philippians 1:27; 2 Tim 2:3-10; cf. Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20.

However, alongside these obvious advantages come a plethora of beneficial side effects.

Question: In what ways would our church benefits from a strong, pervading sense of mission?

It has been said that if you aim at a strong sense of unity and community, you likely won't fully achieve it. But when you aim at mission, unity and community are the natural by-products. Disunity, distractions, and diversions occur when people lose sight of the mission. In contrast, a vision towards mission motivates and excites.

Having a strong sense of mission helps us identify the most important things and not confuse the peripheral with the essential. It helps us evaluate our ministry habits and ask, “Are these

¹ In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus describes our mission as the call to make disciples and see them grow into fully devoted followers of him. Because our mission centers on making disciples, we will examine each of the below “cultivation principles” in terms of its relationship to discipleship.

really furthering our mission or are they unnecessary, mere relics, or, at worst, distractions?”²

A sense of urgency. As a corollary to our sense of mission should come a profound sense of urgency. This culture of urgency is vital to the well-being of our church because it makes us not only willing but eager to live radically, make great sacrifices, and change or grow when faithfulness and expediency demand it.³

Scripture: John 4:34-36; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2; Ephesians 5:15-16.

- **Centralizing people—the subject of discipleship**

This is a corollary that flows out of the previous “cultivation principle” – a strong sense of mission: That mission is to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). And because disciples are *people*, our mission as a church – and thus our life as a church – must center on people.

Question: What does this mean for how we “do church”?

Our ministry and life as a church must center on the discipleship of *people*, not – for example – the production or maintenance of programs. And so, although we recognize that certain programs, events, or structures may at times prove beneficial in facilitating or creating space for discipleship, the target of our ministry efforts and the center of our ministry decisions must always remain people. Maintaining this orientation to ministry guards us from diversions and is thus vital for the health and maturation of our church.

Question: How might this change the way you view church? Our various programs and ministries?

Question: Why is important for our mission as a church that we make our focus people (and not, for example, programs)?

- **Gospel-centrality—the source of discipleship**

Here we’re talking about keeping the gospel front and center in everything we do as a church.

Question: Why is this important if we are to be a people who embodies our mission?

The Gospel is the good news that through his death and resurrection Jesus accomplished God’s rescuing and restoring purposes for all those who place their trust in him. It is the only message that ultimately addresses our human predicament, its grace is the only thing that empowers true, God-honoring life-transformation, and the task of advancing it is entrusted to the church. As such, keeping the Gospel clear, explicit, and central is vital to our church’s ability to fulfill its mission of seeing people embrace the Gospel and through it becoming fully transformed followers of Jesus.⁴

² Mt 28:19-20; Jn 4:35-37; 2 Cor 5:18-6:2; Phil 2:14-16; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:2-7, 23; Tit 3:9; Heb 12:1-2.

³ Mt 9:37-38; 25:14-30; Rom 13:11-14; Eph 5:15-16; 1 Thes 5:2; 2 Tim 4; Heb 12:1-2; Rev 3:11; 22:20.

⁴ Rom 1:16; 16:25; 1 Cor 15:1-4; Eph 3:16-17; Phil 1:5, 27; 2:14-16; Col 2:22-23; 2 Thes 2:13-15; 1 Tim 1:8-11; 2 Tim

Scripture: Romans 1:16; 16:25; Titus 2:11-14; Phil 2:14-16.

Question: How might this effect the way we approach ministry at our church?

Question: In what ways does CrossWay currently put this into practice? Or how might we individually or as a body put this into practice?

Gospel-centered preaching. One of the primary ways we do this is through Gospel-centered preaching in which we preach all of scripture in light of its redemptive-historical relationship to Christ, the truths of the Gospel penetrate our handling of every text, and the imperatives of scripture (our response) flow out of the indicatives of scripture (what God has done).

Scripture: Luke 24:27.

- **Sound doctrine and fidelity to scripture—the foundation of discipleship**

Sound doctrine. Theology is the church's task of critically examining God's word in order to form right thoughts and moral judgments after God. When done diligently and faithfully, theology yields sound doctrine.

Question: How do theology and sound doctrine fit into our mission? Why is sound doctrine important to our mission as a church?

Sound doctrine matters immensely. Everything is theological; and all theology—whether it is sound or not—will work itself out practically. (See 1 Tim 1:10-11 and 6:3 where godliness accords with sound doctrine). Our doctrine will manifest itself in beliefs, attitudes, emotions, actions, and—particularly relevant for our purposes here—our ministry practices.

Because of this, the church must diligently hold to sound doctrine and guard itself from error. Maintaining sound doctrine ensures that our ministry is based on truth—that we engage in the right sort of ministry practices and thus cultivate the right sort of community. Unhealthy doctrine will inevitably manifest itself in terms unhealthy ministry practices resulting in the cultivation of an unhealthy community.⁵

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10-14; 1 Timothy 4:16.

Question: How does this perspective change the way you view the role of sound doctrine in our life as a church?

Question: How do we put this principle into practice as a church?

Fidelity to scripture. Sound doctrine is achieved through vigilant fidelity to scripture. Because scripture is God's word to the church, the church maintains fidelity to God through

1:8; 2:8; Tit 2:10-14.

⁵ Mt 7:24-27; 1 Cor 3:10-17; 1 Tim 1:10-11; 4:6, 16; 6:3; 2 Tim 4:3-4; Tit 3:8.

fidelity to scripture. As such, the church must ground itself in and conform itself to scripture. Scripture is the supreme authority for the church's faith and practice, for what is true and for what is right. This means that the church must devote itself to seeking God's will through the diligent examination of his word.⁶

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:19-20; cf. 2 Tim 3:14-17.

Question: What are some practical ways our church can embody fidelity to scripture?

This commitment has several implications or outworkings worth highlighting.

Conviction. Fidelity to scripture entails convictionality. The church is to stand unapologetically, unashamedly, and unwaveringly on the truth of scripture.⁷

Scripture: Acts 4:20, 29.

Continual reformation. In line with the Reformation principle "the church reformed and always reforming," the church must give due diligence to continual reformation according to the word of God. This entails remaining critically self-reflective and diligent to reform when necessary.⁸

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Exposition of scripture. A primary means by which the church does this is through a specifically expositional method of preaching and teaching, which is a method of preaching and teaching that seeks explain the meaning and significance of the Biblical text, allowing God himself, through his word, to set the agenda and address the church.⁹

Scripture: 2 Tim 4:1-2; Acts 20:27.

Question: Why is expositional preaching important for our life as a church? Why is it important for our mission?

Elders' ongoing theological development. Because elders hold the primary teaching office in the church, it therefore is important that elders hold to and know sound doctrine. Therefore, our church does well to believe that their pastoral responsibilities entail – among other things – spending substantial time and effort pursuing further theological education and refinement. As a church, we should value, encourage, and expect this from our elders.¹⁰

Scripture: Titus 1:9.

⁶ Ps 127:1; Rom 15:4; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Thes 2:13; 2 Tim 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:20-21; Jude 1:3.

⁷ Acts 4:20, 29; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Thes 2:13; 1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 3:14-17; Tit 3:8; Heb 4:14; 10:23; 2 Pet 1:20-21.

⁸ 2 Kgs 22:8-23:25; Eph 4:14; 5:10; 1 Thes 5:21; 1 Jn 4:1.

⁹ Isa 55:10-11; 1 Cor 2:1-5; 1 Thes 2:13; 1 Tim 3:14-4:2; 2 Tim 4:2.

¹⁰ Acts 20:29; Gal 1:6-9; Eph 4:14; 1 Tim 1:3; 3:2; 4:11, 13, 16; 5:7; 2 Tim 2:15, 24-26; 4:2; Tit 1:9; 2:1; Js 3:1; 2 Pet 2:1-3.