

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.

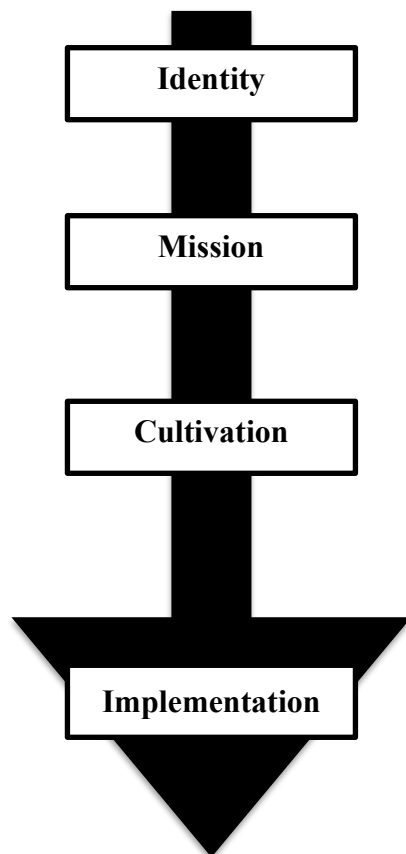
Mission –

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

Cultivation –

Here we consider how we are shaped into community *in whom* our mission is fulfilled and equipped as a people *by whom* our mission is fulfilled. Scripture provides the following principles, practices, and values as those things which foster and cultivate a healthy, mission-fulfilling church.

“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

- **The ministry of the Word¹—the means of discipleship**

Question: What role or purpose does the ministry of the Word play in our life as a church? What does it do?

God's Word is to be cherished as a gracious gift through which the Spirit sustains and nourishes his church. God nurtures and matures his church through formal ministries of the Word (e.g., the public reading and preaching of scripture), but also through the informal ministry of every member engaging each other with God's Word—encouraging, rebuking, equipping, challenging, exhorting, and counseling one another by prayerfully applying the truth of God's Word to each other's lives.²

Scripture: Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Romans 15:14; Ephesians 4:15-16.

Question: How does the ministry of the Word help us fulfill our mission? Why is it important for us in fulfilling our mission?

Question: How do we put this into practice as a church? What are the various ways we are to ministry God's Word?

This ministry of the Word ought to include several dimensions and characteristics:

The public reading of scripture. As a community defined, nourished, and sustained by scripture, the church must devote itself to the reading of scripture in its gatherings.³

The public preaching and teaching of scripture. The preaching of God's Word by gifted individuals is a primary means by which God nourishes, strengthens, and preserves the church and guards her from error.⁴

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1-2.

In short, the ministry of the Word is meant to build us and equip us for mission.

Question: How might this change the way you view the ministry of the Word (e.g., scripture reading, preaching, classes, Bible study, etc.) in the life of our church?

Question: How might this affect the way we approach our study and examination of scripture?

Christian education as discipleship. A proper approach to Christian education in the church

¹ By "ministry of the word" we refer to that ministry in which one speaks the truth of God's word to another.

² Acts 4:31; 20:20, 32; Rom 15:14; Eph 4:15-16, 25; 6:4; Phil 1:7, 14; 4:3; Col 3:16, 23-24; 4:6; Heb 3:12-13; 1 Pet 2:9; 3:15; 4:10-11.

³ Col 4:15-16; 1 Thes 5:27; 2 Thes 3:14; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Pet 3:15-16.

⁴ Acts 2:42; 20:7, 20, 25; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 3:14-4:2; Tit 2:15.

aims at discipleship. Its goal is not the mere acquisition of information, but the formation of more fully devoted followers of Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27; 28:19-20; cf. John 13:17.

Wholistic education. As such, the well-being of our church depends on an conception of Christian education in the Word that is wholistic—not merely the transferal of information, but the transformation of the whole person. It involves the cognitive (thoughts, understanding, knowledge, and beliefs), conative (behavior, choices, and skills), and affective (emotions, affections, and loves), as well as ones character (virtues, values, attitudes, and motivations).

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Ephesians 4:20:24.

Education as obedience to truth. As such, we might define teaching in the context of our church as leading and facilitating obedience to the truth of scripture. To teach is to create space in which submission to the truth of scripture is realized, in which the truth of scripture is more clearly perceived, considered more judiciously, embraced more passionately, obeyed more faithfully, and embodied with greater integrity. Correspondingly, a proper gauge of theological maturity is not mere comprehension but soundness and conviction.⁵

Scripture: James 1:22-25; Romans 12:1-2.

A right orientation to engaging the Word. As such, the health of our church's ministry of the Word depends on our attending to the proper aims of that Word, lest we subvert or distort its very purpose. We do not examine scripture as an end in itself—an exercise of merely examining scripture for the sake of examining scripture. Rather, our engagement of scripture must share the very equipping-ends for which scripture itself was given.

These equipping aims can be divided into the following five dimensions:

- Directed towards our knowledge of and relationship with God (theological), answering, “How does this text enhance our knowledge of God and foster an appropriate relationship with him?”
- Directed towards our worship of God (doxological), answering, “How does this text fuel our worship of God?”
- Directed towards our Christian living (mathetetical), answering, “How does this text form us as disciples (*mathetes*)?”
- Directed towards our life as a church (ecclesiological), answering, “How does this text shape us to realize our particular calling as a church?”
- Directed towards equipping us for mission (missiological), answering, “How does this text equip us for mission?”⁶

- **Regular administration of the ordinances—the symbols of discipleship**

Question: What is the role of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in our life as a church?

⁵ Ps 51:10; Ezek 3:10; Mt 28:20; Rom 6:13; 12:1-2; 2 Cor 4:16; Eph 4:23; Phil 4:4; Col 3:1-17; 1 Thes 5:23; 1 Pet 3:8.

⁶ Mt 7:24-27; Lk 8:21; 11:28; Jn 5:39-40; 13:17; Js 1:22-25.

The ordained rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are faith-nourishing signs that tangibly portray Gospel realities to believers. As such, they are not to be neglected, devalued, or misused, but, rather, are to be guarded, administered conscientiously, and cherished as gracious gifts from Christ.⁷

Scripture: Acts 2:41; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Corinthians 11:23-27.

Question: How do Baptism and the Lord's Supper serve our mission?

Question: How might this change the way you view and treat the ordinances?

- **Diligent and persistent prayer—the lifeblood of discipleship**

Question: Why is prayer important for our mission as a church? What role does it play in our mission?

The church is completely dependent on God for its existence and success. Because of this, the church is called to devote itself to prayer. As such, our church is committed to fostering a church culture where prayer is the air we breathe.⁸

Scripture: Matthew 7:7-11; Acts 4:23-31; Colossians 4:2-4; cf. Psalm 127:1-2; 1 Cor 3:5-7.

Question: How does this perspective affect your understanding of the importance of prayer for our health as a church?

Question: What would it look like if our church embodied this sort of dependence on prayer?

- **Passionate, truth-driven worship⁹—the fuel of discipleship¹⁰**

Question: What is the role of corporate worship in the life of our church?

Question: How does corporate worship relate to our mission?

We believe our personal and communal discipleship is fueled by regularly assembling together for collective worship. In corporate worship, we encounter and engage God through the reading and preaching of his word, the observance of his ordinances, the confession of our faith, and by responding to him through prayer and song—expressing to him our praise, thanks, awe, trust, petitions, and hardships. Encountering, engaging, and responding to the

⁷ Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20; Acts 22:16; Rom 6:3-4; 1 Cor 10:16; 11:23-27; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 3:21.

⁸ Ps 145:18; Mt 7:11; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 14:14-15; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Thes 5:17; 1 Tim 2:1-2, 8.

⁹ By “worship” here we mean the totality of our corporate worship, and not necessarily *just* its musical dimension (i.e., singing songs), although we certainly include this musical aspect as important and integral.

¹⁰ In addition, we might refer to worship as the “expression of discipleship,” i.e., worship is the end or goal to which our discipleship aims – we are saved to glorify God. At the same times, as we argue here, worship is not only the *end*, it is also a *means* by which we are formed into more fully transformed worshippers of God; and, in that sense, it is “fuel” for our discipleship.

truth of God in this way forms us as his worshipers. And by engaging in the act of worship together, we encourage, edify, and support one another.¹¹

Scripture: Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 14:26; 2 Cor 3:18; Colossians 3:16-17; Hebrews 10:23-25.

Question: Does this change the way you view corporate worship?

Question: How do we put this into practice as a church? As individual members?

¹¹ Acts 2:42; 20:7, 20; Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 5:4, 11; 11:17-18, 20, 33; 14:14-17, 23, 26-33; 15:1-4; 16:2; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 5:19-20; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-20; 3:15-16; 4:16; 1 Thes 5:27; 1 Tim 2:1-2; 3:16; 4:13; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:11-13; 3:15-4:2; Heb 10:25; Js 5:16.