

September 25, 2021

Dear Church Family,

This is a notice to remind you that there will be a congregational meeting immediately following worship tomorrow morning. The purpose of the meeting will be for the Session to offer a series of recommendations to the congregation regarding the formation of a Pastoral Search Committee. During the meeting there will be an opportunity to discuss and amend these recommendations before those gathered will be asked to approve them.

If you are unable to attend in person, you may access the meeting using a private Youtube link. If you have questions during the meeting, you may relay them to me via text: 423.400.0637.

Enclosed is a revised edition of the Session's proposed mission/vision statement. We thought this would be a helpful backdrop as we enter the more formal period of our pastoral transition. Please look over it. We will be taking two or three Sunday school sessions to discuss the document in the coming months.

Please be advised that the Chattanooga Ironman race will be underway tomorrow. Those of you coming from outside of the neighborhood will want to give yourselves extra time to get to church. (Reminder that we are underway with both children and adult Sunday school, each beginning at 9:30 am sharp).

Yours in Christ,
Jay

Purpose of Our Ministry: Our Vision Statement which is subordinate to the Scriptures and in agreement with the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* and *The Book of Church Order*, is...

To Glorify God by knowing, living out, and proclaiming the wonder of God's grace in Jesus so that the influence of God's kingdom may grow in St. Elmo, its neighboring communities, and the world—transforming individuals, families, and communities.

Mission of Our Ministry: To make disciples of all nations who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are being more fully conformed to the image of Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 8:29).

Means of Our Ministry: The gospel is not just the entryway into a relationship with God but the very power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners—the Father electing, the Son redeeming, the Spirit renewing. We want every element of our ministry to be shaped and empowered by the gospel as we keep it central in all that we do.

1. **The Ministry of Worship and Prayer in the Spirit:** God alone is worthy to receive glory and honor and power (Rev. 4:11). Therefore, we want our worship services to be for the glory of God, enabled by the gospel (Jesus' life, death, and resurrection) and according to Scripture. The note of our worship is joy and awe because God's grace is amazing. The voice of our worship is simplicity which is intelligible to non-Christians and edifying to God's people. Our services emphasize the ordinary means of prayer, the Word, and sacraments, each of which God uses to be with us and transform us. Our services use a variety of instruments and music from different genres and centuries but the most important sound is that of the congregation singing. There is a thoughtful but flexible structure rooted in four phases: praise, renewal, proclamation, and response. We regularly employ the creeds, confessions, catechisms, responsive readings, doxologies and other elements that have been common in the Reformed tradition. Our services ordinarily include a prayer of adoration, a prayer of confession, a prayer of intercession, a prayer of illumination, and a brief prayer after the sermon. Our gathered worship on the Lord's Day should inspire and instruct our all-of-life worship Monday through Saturday.
2. **The Ministry of Learning Which Nurtures Faith:** Romans 12:1-2 says: *"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."* From beginning to end, the Christian life is a life of offering one's self wholly to God. We are called to give our lives to God every day. Each day we die in order to live. The motivation for our self-sacrifice concerns the "mercies" God has given us in Christ. God shows mercy by choosing us for salvation, justifying us by faith, adopting us as sons and daughters, sanctifying us in the likeness of Jesus, preserving us through every struggle, and finally glorifying us in his presence. But the method for our sacrifice involves the renewal of our

minds. Mind renewal is the work of God's Spirit, who accomplishes this transforming work as we read, study, and meditate on God's Word. This is a fundamental method for discipleship. We affirm the necessity of expositional preaching. We also emphasize the importance of studying the Bible in smaller groups and of having a Bible school program, not only for children, but adults. This includes instruction in Bible, theology, church history, and practical Christian living. Children especially are trained in catechism and Bible memory. But our goal is not simply the discipleship of the mind but the transformation of the whole Christian. Our sinful impulses are rooted in idols of the heart. But the gospel asserts, "Though I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared to believe, through Christ, I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared to hope." When we take this good news to heart, we begin to make God our chief delight—obeying him as a joyful response of gratitude.

3. **The Ministry of Fellowship in Love:** The early Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the *fellowship*" (Acts 2:42). Fellowship involves sharing or having something in common with somebody else. On the basis of Jesus Christ's saving accomplishment, we have access to God the Father by one Spirit. Our fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ, is what makes one a Christian. In addition, our fellowship with God enables our fellowship with one another as children of God. The church is God's household and our relationship with God is deepened by our relationships with one another. As a community of sinners saved by grace, we are becoming people capable of building transparent, honest, intimate and loving relationships. Because the gospel points to the One who died for his enemies, it encourages service over selfishness and sacrificial love over personal fulfillment. We enjoy life together as a genuine, diverse, multi-generational community as intended by God. We feel a sense of accountability with one another and a sense of responsibility to care and support and guide each other. It's not enough for us to get together for worship once a week. Instead, we see the importance of small-group communities where learning, loving, and worshipping are practiced.
4. **The Ministry of Shepherding Providing Oversight:** We believe that God chooses and equips a team of shepherds to provide loving pastoral care for every member of the church family. In Acts 20, Paul uses three terms to describe these church leaders. The first term is "elder" or one who is mature in the faith. "Overseer" is the second term. Whereas elder refers to a leader's qualifications, this term pertains to his functions. He rules, governs, provides oversight. The third term is "shepherd," a term that is rich in pictures of pastoral care (Ps. 23). All three titles refer to the same group of men. The biblical pattern for spiritual leadership is not hierarchical but shared. God has invested spiritual authority in a team of men who together give wise counsel, spiritual oversight, and pastoral care to God's people. Church life is organic life. The body of Christ functions as an organism, not just as an organization. When the church's shepherds exercise oversight in a spirit of servant love and when the members of the body accept oversight with humble love a *ministry of order* results. We are committed to organizing ministry groups into *ministry clusters*, each overseen by one or more elders. In this way

vision, encouragement, coordination in planning, and accountability are provided to the members of the body as they serve in love.

5. **The Ministry of Mercy Giving Hope.** In the sobering judgment scene in Matthew 25, Jesus separates the sheep from the goats—those who truly are his followers from those who aren't despite their profession. The criterion Jesus uses for evaluating the authenticity of one's profession are deeds of mercy. Jesus' prophecy doesn't contradict the biblical message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. For one thing, Jesus invites his sheep to receive his Kingdom as an "inheritance" (Mt. 25:34) and an inheritance is never earned; it always comes as a gift. However, true faith bears good fruit and while concern for those in need is in no way a means of salvation, a life poured out in deeds of mercy is a sign that the heart has been transformed by God. Mercy is simply meeting people's needs out of a gospel-produced compassion. The deeds of mercy Jesus rewards all concern physical needs—food, water, clothing, care, and friendship. Performing these deeds may require significant personal, material, and financial investments. But the investment necessary is also spiritual. It takes time and wisdom to figure out how to help those in need so that instead of always dealing with immediate needs, the deepest spiritual needs of the poor are discerned and addressed. We want to lift up the poor, the broken, and the marginalized, giving them new identities and deepened confidence in Christ. The ministry of mercy, as the judgment scene proves, is the responsibility of all believers not just a few. But we believe deacons have a unique responsibility to coordinate the efforts of God's people in showing mercy.

6. **The Ministry of Witness Proclaiming Life:** Since Jesus is the world's only Savior, then obviously the whole world needs to know about him. God has therefore called our church to have a global mission. Jesus commanded, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt. 28:19); "As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). To evangelize is not to make converts, but we are called to present the gospel and leave the results to God. The reason the gospel must be proclaimed to all nations is that God demands the praise of all nations (Ps. 46:10). But what should we do to meet the goal of missions, which is the glory of God? First, we support the work of the church in other parts of the world. We support theological training, the planting of new churches, working with indigenous churches, and partnering with those God has called to serve as missionaries. We also pray for the church's worldwide work, especially in places where Christians face hardship and persecution. Second, when Jesus gave the Great Commission, he wasn't talking about something that some Christians do in some places. He was talking about what every Christian does in every place. Wherever we are we are by God's design. Our local community is our mission field. Thus, we must seize appropriate opportunities to speak about spiritual things with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and family members--and not just to speak but to *live faithfully* in light of those spiritual realities. We must seek to penetrate society in culture-transforming ways. America needs Christians at every level of society and in every suitable occupation. Christians must use their gifts in ways that honor God. Christian participation in social

institutions helps to influence the culture for Christ. Missions is not simply something that we support; it is who we are.