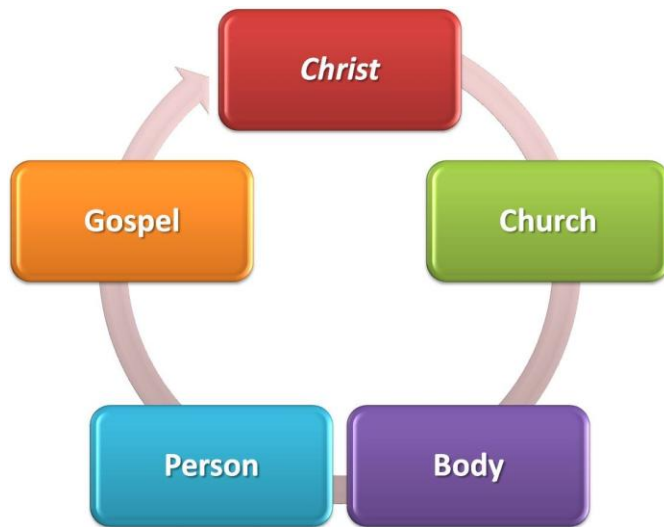


A Fellowship for Wholeness



For many years, our church letterhead and various other pieces of printed literature have featured the slogan "A Fellowship for Wholeness." Just what do we mean when we say this? For us, this is not merely an advertising clip. It is a heartfelt and deeply considered description of the core values for our church.

A WHOLE GOSPEL

Today, there are all sorts of "spins" on the good news of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, the message that Christians share seems more like a self-help book or a guide to material prosperity. At other times, in order to find a platform from which to speak inoffensively to a

culturally diverse audience, the message of the New Testament has been stripped of some of its most essential qualities. The idea of sinfulness disappears. The power of Christ's atonement through his sacrificial death is compromised. Ancient symbols of Christianity, like the cross, are absent (1 Co. 1:17).

The gospel as it comes to us in the New Testament, on the other hand, is centered in the death of Jesus on the cross, and his resurrection to defeat the powers of death and darkness (Ro. 1:16-17). It must be understood that the "whole gospel" will never be the good news it was intended if, as humans, we fail to recognize our present alienation from God and our powerlessness to rectify this estrangement (Ro. 3:9, 23; 5:6). When we, sinners under condemnation, cast ourselves on Christ, we receive the good news that in his death he rescues us from death and sets us apart as his heavenly people (Ro. 4:16, 22-25). As a fellowship for wholeness, Troy Christian Chapel must always keep the cross central (Ga. 6:14). Always, we must preach the whole gospel—the same gospel embodied in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and preached throughout the ancient Roman world by the apostles (1 Jn. 1:1-4).

A WHOLE PERSON

Accepting the gospel by faith is not the end but the beginning of a new life in Christ (Ga. 3:3; 5:7; Phil. 1:6). God's eternal purpose was to bring each believer into alignment with the character of his Son, or as St. Paul puts it, to attain "to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ep. 4:13). God's will for us as Christians is not upward mobility, better homes and gardens, greater social influence or any of the other things that churches sometimes seem to suggest implicitly as the essence of Christianity. Rather, God's will is for us to follow Christ—and everyone he calls is called to pick up the cross. This was the imperative of Jesus (Mt. 16:24-25).

Wholeness for the Christian is almost entirely at odds with the notions of fulfillment in a secular sense (1 Jn. 2:15-17). As a fellowship for wholeness, the people at Troy Christian Chapel must always remember that God's purpose in saving them is that they might become like him. In this process of "becoming," we advance "from glory to glory," fixing our vision not merely on what can be seen, measured and tallied, but what is unseen and eternal (2 Co. 3:18; 4:16-18). During our lifetimes, we confess, as did Paul, that we have not already attained all this (Phil. 3:12a). Still, as the great apostle also says, we "press on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of us" (Phil. 3:12b-14). As people on the path toward wholeness, we offer ourselves to his service, no longer conforming to the world system but allowing God to transform us from the inside out (Ro. 12:1-2).

A WHOLE BODY

The local church, the community of “called out” ones, is the immediate environment in which such wholeness comes about. By describing the church as a body (1 Co. 12:12-13), the New Testament links us in faithfulness to other believers in the same body, where we support and care for each other—hurting together, rejoicing together, nurturing each other and growing together (1 Co. 12:26). This metaphor speaks of a deep sense of loyalty to each other, for as St. Paul said, “No one ever hated his own body” (Ep. 5:29). Each member of the body offers his or her spiritual gifts for the blessing and benefit of the whole. The range of such gifts is diverse, from teaching, to encouraging, to serving, to contributing to the needs of others, to governing, and to showing mercy (Ro. 12:3-8). Together, every believer is joined to every other believer like the ligaments of a leg or arm, and each Christian contributes to the health and growth of the whole (Ep. 4:16).

Fellowship—the process of life together—works toward wholeness, not only of the individual, but also of the congregational community (Ep. 4:1-6). This aspect of church life results in a healing community for other believers who are wounded (He. 12:12-13). As a fellowship for wholeness, Troy Christian Chapel must always remain in the ministry of healing lives.

A WHOLE CHURCH

Every local church functions as part of the universal church (Ep. 2:19-22). No local church is an island unto itself (1 Co. 4:7). When God looks at the church, he sees not Christian denominations but Christian people and congregations (1 Co. 1:2). While clearly we have more in common with some groups than others, we always must remember that God does not use our criteria by which to judge others, but rather, his own perfect knowledge as the Lord of the church (Mt. 7:1-5). In missions, in cooperative effort, in fellowship, in unity we express the catholicity of the whole church. As a fellowship for wholeness, Troy Christian Chapel must see itself in the context of this larger vision (Ep. 5:23-24).

THE WHOLE MEASURE OF THE STATURE OF CHRIST

The central purpose of all leadership in the church is so that every Christian can develop into the fullness of Christ (Ep. 4:11-13). This means that we no longer behave as infants, tossed back and forth by every wind (Ep. 4:14-15). It means that we work toward the unity of the faith while keeping the unity of the Spirit (Ep. 4:3, 13). It means that we are truthful and loving as we grow up into the Head, who is Christ. As a fellowship for wholeness, Troy Christian Chapel must live and breathe the life of Jesus himself. Only as its members remain connected to him and draw their life from him will they flourish (Jn. 15:1-8).

There is only one true model for the church, and it is Jesus himself (1 Co. 11:1). He walks among the churches, assessing their spiritual life, rebuking their shortfall and encouraging them to seek the highest things (Rv. 2-3; Col. 3:1-4). In the end, he has promised to receive the church unto himself as a bride for her husband (2 Co. 11:2; Rv. 19:6-9). The Holy Spirit calls us to this glory (Rv. 22:17), and God assures us that he will accomplish what he has begun (Ro. 8:29-39)!



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