

Christ Church Communique



The Monthly Newsletter of Christ Church

December 2005

A Long History with a Short Past

On a couple of warm evenings in the summer of 2005, a group of people met together to talk and pray about forming a church in the East Bay. In the midst of sharing laughter and tears...hopes and disappointments...tough questions were asked and answered, strengths and weaknesses were openly discussed, and ideas were exchanged. Above all, the people prayed, watched, and waited upon the Lord. Little did anyone realize what God would do over the following few months.

Within a few short weeks, the group had the first draft of a Constitution, Bylaws, Statement of Faith, Membership Covenant, Elder Covenant, Articles of Incorporation, and more, typed out and distributed for prayerful review, consideration, and comment. The group met to discuss the first draft of the Statement of Faith and input was woven into a revised draft. Nearly everyone involved in the group rolled up his or her sleeves and responded to the call for workers. Service teams were established and a series of meetings were held to cover some of the challenges that would face a newly formed church and to discuss preparations for the unfolding opportunities that we would have as a congregation.

The ladies began to meet weekly for a time of fellowship, encouragement, and prayer. Shortly thereafter, a second prayer time was added to accommodate even more women. Meanwhile, the men had begun meeting on Thursday mornings for a time of fellowship, discussion, and study over breakfast, and soon a second and third table were pulled together to accommodate a growing group of men.

But God was only beginning to do amazing things in our midst. Without public advertising or soliciting, "Christ Church Establishment Sunday" was celebrated on 30 October 2005 at its new temporary location, Pleasanton Middle School. And what a Sunday it was! Twice the original number of people showed up to worship and praise God through singing, prayer, the reading of Scripture, giving, study, and fellowship. 2 Timothy 2:19 served as our text as we studied Paul's instruction concerning the identity and mission of the true church. And then, consistent with being the true church, the people gave of themselves—their time, their talents, and their treasures.

And then, God orchestrated a series of most remarkable events. Nearly every person at Christ Church completed an "Opportunities for Service" sheet. But God would do more. Independently, the members of the congregation signed up to serve with such graciousness and generosity that nearly every ministry opportunity at Christ Church is filled and has more workers than present needs demand. But God would do more. Nearly every person in the church attended at least one ministry orientation meeting (with several attending numerous meetings), and several critical ministries were ramped up to speed immediately. But God would do still more. The congregation, affirmed in their hearts and minds of God's undeniable leading in establishing *His* church through us, gave a remarkable gift of \$139,000 on Establishment Sunday. Praise God!

More than numerical or financial growth, however, the Christ Church family is committed to making a lasting impact for the cause of Christ in the community, in the region, and around the globe, as people are drawn and nurtured into a lifelong, maturing, and joyous relationship with Jesus Christ.

Declaring the preeminence of Christ in all things, to the glory of God in everything, and for the joy of all peoples everywhere.

Future Directions

So, what's next? Well, let's review what we have studied and put it into practice, shall we? Scripture is clear: 1) the Church is, 2) the church does what the Church is, and 3) the church organizes what the church does to do what the Church is. Therefore, to understand what the church ought to be doing, one need only understand what the Church is. So, what is the Church? In describing the Church, the scriptures provide three metaphors: 1) the people of God (e.g., Heb. 4:9), 2) the body of Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:27), and 3) the temple of the Holy Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor. 3:16-17 cf., 1 Cor. 6:19-20). In this we notice that the Church belongs *to* God, not man. As such, the Church exists because God has established it and, therefore, the Church exists *for* God, not man. Hence, the Church belongs to God and exists for God. The Church does not belong to man, nor does it exist for man.

Now, if we take all three biblical metaphors for the Church and bundle them together, a clear definition of the Church emerges. It unfolds like this. The Church is the people of God, the body of Christ, and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Now, the only people who are ever described as related to the Trinity in these ways are those who are converted and redeemed. As such, we may define the Church as the community of all those who have been thoroughly converted and truly redeemed, and who are rightly related to God, through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and who belong to God and exist for God. Such is the *Church*.

But then there is the *church*. And the Bible portrays the *church* as but a local expression of the *Church*. You see, the *Church* is universal; the *church* is local. Therefore, the *church* is a local community of thoroughly converted and truly redeemed people, who are rightly related to God, through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and who belong to God and exist for God. This much is clear.

Now, let's take this one step further. Why did God form the Church? Well, that's easy enough. Like *everything* that God created, the Church exists for His glory and purposes. So, we can confidently say that the church is a local community of thoroughly converted and truly redeemed people, who are rightly related to God, through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and who belong to God and exist for God, *and whom God has assembled together for His glory and purposes*. Such is the *church*.

So, now we know what the church is and what the church does (glorifies God and accomplishes His purposes). This leads us to our next questions: "What does it mean to glorify God?" and "What are God's purposes?" Well, these questions are not difficult, either. God's glory is simply the manifestation of His character and attributes. As such, to glorify God is to be such a person and to live in such a way that the qualities of God's character and attributes are seen in us. So, in order to glorify God, God's people ought to be the kind of persons and living the kind of lives that reflect God's character and attributes. And how is this accomplished? By becoming more like Jesus Christ—for Jesus Christ was actually God in flesh, who provides for us an example of what it means to be the kind of person and live the kind of life that reflects God's glory.

That leaves us with our second question: "What are God's purposes?" Well, this, too, is very straightforward. You see, if Jesus Christ was very God, then He would, necessarily, have been about His Father's business ("Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.'" John 4:34). As such, to know our purpose, we need only look at the life of Jesus Christ. And when we look at Him, what do we see? Well, among other things, Jesus' life revolved primarily around preaching, praying, teaching, discipling, fellowship, evangelism, and service. We might place these purposes under four headings: 1) worship, 2) equipping, 3) fellowship, and 4) expression.

So, the church is...the church is a local community of thoroughly converted and truly redeemed people, who are rightly related to God, through the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling of the

Holy Spirit, and who belong to God and exist for God, and whom God has assembled together for His glory and purposes. The church does what the church is...the purpose of the church is to do the will of God and accomplish His purposes as demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ through worship, equipping, fellowship, and expression. In short, we are to be doing what Jesus Christ would be doing if He were physically present with us today.

Now, on to the third point: the church organizes what the church does to do what the Church is. So, how will we organize worship, equipping, fellowship, and expression in ways that will faithfully reflect the biblical priorities of God for His Church and accomplish His purposes for His glory? Well, we might begin by positing a "purpose statement" for each biblical priority for the church that integrates our identity as the church with our purposes as the church. And when we do, it might look something like the following:

Worship

Christ Church will stress the importance of joyously responding to God through corporate worship; the blending of theology and doxology, reflection and praise...leading people to engage in an authentic, personal, and wholesome encounter with the living God. As such, corporate worship services ought to provide an opportunity to participate in a sacred, joyous, thoughtful, and inspiring time of glorifying God. Such is accomplished through music, prayer, giving, and the faithful teaching of God's Word, all of which are directed at exalting the Father, lifting up His Son, and allowing the Spirit to move in our hearts, minds, and lives.

Equipping

Christ Church will stress its desire to see every person grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, living lives intimately connected with the Lord through prayer and praise, and possessing a coherent and integrated Christian worldview that values the unseen and eternal more than the seen and temporal. As such the focus of every worship service, educational class, and small group study will be the sound teaching of God's Word, resulting in lives that are biblically grounded, theologically informed, wisely applied, and graciously lived.

Fellowship

Christ Church will stress the biblical reality that a growing, healthy relationship with Jesus Christ never occurs in isolation. Rather, spiritual growth and health occurs in the context of meaningful, open, and honest relationships with others ("As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend." Prov. 27:17). The Greek word for "fellowship" derives from a word meaning "common." As such, to have fellowship is to share in common with one another. At Christ Church we will share our very lives in common as members of a warm and loving community actively practicing genuine thoughtfulness, kindness, tenderness, generosity, courtesy, forgiveness, graciousness, encouragement, and appreciation.

Expression

Christ Church will recognize that thoroughly converted and truly redeemed people have a need to reach out to others and demonstrate the love of Christ through word and deed. Following Christ's pattern of living, we will consider others as more important than ourselves, and not merely look out for our own welfare, but for the welfare of others. At Christ Church, every member is a minister and has an important contribution to make, serving the church, community, and world in ways that exercise his or her God-given gifts. In short, there ought to be a meaningful place of service for everyone in the church.

Immediate Plans

The Bible is clear: 1) the Church is, 2) the church does what the Church is, and 3) the church organizes what the church does to do what the Church is. But precisely how do we bring together our identity, mission, and purposes as a church, and organize them so that we can be a faithful and effective local expression of what God intended for us to be? Well, with so much to do, we will need to prioritize our efforts, while keeping our identity, mission, and purposes constantly before us. And we will need to proceed prayerfully, dependently, wisely, patiently, and deliberately, one step at a time as we put in place the various forms, structures, ministries, and activities necessary to accomplish God's purposes both in and through us.

So, let's begin. We begin by prioritizing the various purposes of the church and then pulling together those so called and gifted for each task to strategize and implement the various forms, structures, ministries, and activities involved. After meeting with all of the service teams, here's a preliminary breakdown of how we might prioritize the work ahead of us in the immediate future.

January – March 2006

Adult Core Seminars: Core seminars will serve as our adult education hour and will be developed to help us understand the subtle intricacies and overarching truths of God and His Word. In January, we will meet to develop two adult core seminar tracks—one theological, and a second, practical—with an eye toward launching these classes on Easter Sunday morning.

Fellowship Groups: Neighborhood fellowship groups will serve as a core ministry of Christ Church. These small groups will aim to meet weekly for Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. This format will provide us with a great way of getting to know people better, deepening our understanding of the scriptures and the Christian faith, assimilating newcomers into the life and ministry of the church, serving and evangelizing our neighborhoods, identifying needs in the body, and exercising appropriate biblical accountability with one another. We will meet with the “small groups” team in January and aim to have the congregation sorted and assigned to fellowship groups by February.

Community Awareness: We will meet with our “Community Awareness” folks in early January to raise community awareness about our presence, vision, and work as Christ Church. I envision two foci: 1) letting the community know that we are here—ads, banners, flyers, mailings, radio, web site development, television, etc.—and 2) strategizing for our Easter service. We will have a large banner within the next week or two, and our informational brochure should be ready by 1 January. We'll aim to get the word out in an effective way beginning in February and growing to a crescendo by Easter.

Membership Matters: We have scheduled membership classes in late January and early February. Check the bulletin and make plans!

Guest Reception: We will meet with our Guest Reception folks in February and make plans to begin hosting guest receptions/newcomers' desserts, Supper Sixes, etc. beginning Easter.

Christianity Explored: I plan on conducting an informal ten-week course for people who would like to investigate the truth claims of Christianity, or just brush up on the basics. I hope to co-lead this class and have it up and running for Easter Sunday.

Community Outreach: This team will begin meeting in late January to begin preparations for a summer outreach event. Though in the early stages of development—the idea is great!!! This team will then work with the community awareness folks to launch this into the community.

April – May 2006

Men's Ministries: Shortly after Easter, we will pull our men together to strategize the work of the men's ministries. With a focus on fellowship, prayer, and Bible study, Men's Ministries carries with it the mission of building up one another in the Lord by close, accountable, and committed fellowship and service.

Women's Ministries: Shortly after Easter, we will bring our women together to strategize the work of the women's ministries. Like the men, the main focus will be on fellowship, prayer, and Bible study, along with a mission to building up one another in the Lord by close, accountable, and committed fellowship and service.

June – August 2006

Summer Outreach Event: Initial plans are underway to host a summer outreach event that will build upon our Easter service and penetrate the region with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. With an apologetics thrust, this could prove a highly effective way of compelling the community to a serious consideration of the truth claims of the Christian faith. More later...but I suggest that you cancel all summer vacation plans! Okay...a week off would be fine.

Concluding Thoughts

In addition to the above, we will be conducting our quarterly members' meetings, which will provide all members of Christ Church with regular opportunities to actively and meaningfully participate in the life and ministries of the church through questions, answers, suggestions, mutual accountability, and a time of prayer and fellowship, all in the context of a warm, gracious, loving, encouraging, and supportive environment, as becomes the people of God. The first members' meeting is scheduled for February. Please plan to join us.

These are exciting days, and I have never been more thrilled and humbled by what God is doing as I am today. I am confident that God will continue to smile upon that which He has so clearly established—Christ Church—and that the months and years ahead (should He decide to tarry) will provide yet additional opportunities to see God at work both in and through us. So, grab my hand and let's go...together, and for His glory. Kamrin, the kids, and I, love you very much.

Merry Christmas!

Robert W. Evans



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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1077, Pleasanton, CA 94566
Meeting Address: Pleasanton Middle School, Pleasanton, CA
925.989.9660 www.christchurch-trivalley.org