

CORE VALUES

Core Value #1

Passion for Christ

as demonstrated by our commitment to the authority of the Bible, the centrality of prayer and the pursuit of holiness.

Core Value #2

Compassion for the Lost

as demonstrated by evangelism and acts of mercy on a local, national and global scale.

Core Value #3

Servant Leadership

as demonstrated by the training and development of men and women for mission and ministry.

Core Value #4

Healthy Ministries

as demonstrated by changed lives through culturally sensitive churches and denominational institutions.

Core Value #5

Unity in the Body of Christ

as demonstrated by the networking of churches with the Evangelical Congregational Church and the larger Kingdom of God.

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The Church

What the Evangelical Congregational Church Believes

Introduction

The Evangelical Congregational Church maintains among its fundamental doctrines a belief in the Universal (General) Church of Jesus Christ. This belief is in accord with the affirmation of the Nicene and Apostle's Creeds, which confess belief in one "Holy Catholic Church." The term "catholic" should not be confused with Roman Catholic; the word itself meant "universal," and was used to recognize the unity of the Christian Church wherever it was located. One way of expressing this is that the universal is recognized in the local, while the local is always an expression of something that is universal. Without local visibility, the church would be an abstract concept; without universality, each local church would be an isolated gathering, limited to and limited by its own time and place. One contemporary theologian sums this by stating that the local, visible church is the whole church expressed in a particular time and place.¹ (Oden, pg. 283) Accordingly, Paul writes to the Corinthian Church, "To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2). This understanding of the Church is articulated in article nineteen of the denominational Articles of Faith. That article states:

The Holy General Church consists of the great body of believers who confess the Lord Jesus Christ and have life in Him. The individual church is a congregation or society of Christian believers, in which the pure worship of God is maintained, His holy word is preached, and His commandments and ordinances are sacredly observed.

The Nature of the Church

It is our belief that the Christian life is a deliberate movement toward Christ-likeness; that is, the believer's actions, attitudes, thoughts, motives and dispositions are to continually become more and more like those of Jesus. This movement toward Christ-likeness is not something Jesus ever intended for people to pursue in isolation from other believers. They very thought of a Christian existing

apart from the church is contrary to clear biblical teaching, as found in 1 Corinthians 12 (especially vv. 1-13) and in Ephesians 4 (especially vv. 1-16), wherein he concludes a teaching on unity in the Body of Christ by reminding his readers of the source and purpose of their identity as the church: "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

The biblical idea of the church as the body of Christ speaks not only to the unity of the church, but to its identity and purpose as well. The church is not "just" a body, but the body of Christ. It is his way of being present in the world, such that what Jesus did when he physically walked this earth, he continues to do through the church. The church loves, teaches, corrects, brings healing and hope, confronts sinful attitudes—just as Jesus did himself. The same Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised empowers this body by working in and through each of its members.

Perhaps human biology can provide a useful illustration of how the body and its members are interrelated. We now know that human DNA occurs in a unique pattern for each individual person. We also have learned that each cell of our bodies carries the genetic code that makes us what we are physically (think of the Psalmist's wonder over our being fearfully and wonderfully made!). When a person acknowledges Jesus as Lord, the Holy Spirit "incorporates" him or her, i.e., brings the person into the body of Christ by giving the "DNA" of Jesus. That same "genetic code" characterizes each member of the body, yet all parts take different shape to perform different functions in the work of the entire body.

Therefore, we believe that "The Christian church is the community through whom the Holy Spirit administers redemption and distributes gifts, the means in and by which God makes his reconciling work in Christ present to humanity. The Church is called from the world to celebrate God's own coming, and called to return to the world to proclaim the kingdom of God that is centered upon God's personal coming and expected return."² (Oden, pg. 272)

The Evangelical Congregational Church

The Evangelical Congregational Church is one local expression of the great body of believers who are the presence of Christ in the world. The Article of Faith recognizes several characteristics important to the identification of the church:

- The Church is comprised of true believers—those whom the Holy Spirit enables to say meaningfully that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3).
- In this church there is "pure worship" - not necessarily according to an ideal of pure form, but worship conducted "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24).
- The Word of God is proclaimed; or, as the Nicene Creed describes the church, it is *apostolic* in its message.
- The members are under a discipline of love, which has mutual edification and brotherly correction at its core (Eph. 5:20-28; Gal. 6:1-5).
- The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are observed in continuity with the church of all ages.

As a denomination, we joyfully join with other Christian bodies who share these principles even while differing in regard to how they are implemented in specific ways. We believe this article gives further explanation of our mission, purpose, and core values.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to know Christ and to make Him known.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Evangelical Congregational Church is to raise up healthy churches proclaiming Christ to a hurting world.