

Church Planter Community

Vision, Core Beliefs and Values¹

Our Vision

Our vision is to saturate Metro Philadelphia, South Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania with gospel centered churches so that many people come to Christ and together our communities are transformed. We desire to plant and support Gospel-centered churches that will reproduce themselves, engage in a ministry of word and deed in their particular communities, and participate in cooperative ministries, all to accomplish what can only happen in partnership with others.

Our Core Beliefs and Values

1. Our passion is to see the glory of God displayed throughout the whole earth.

The book of Revelation gives us a glorious glimpse of worship in heaven where we see the angelic host singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come", and the twenty-four elders raising their voices in chorus, singing, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:8b, 11). God delights in such worship. He desires that the whole earth be filled with His glory. All the redeemed of the Lord join in this great worship celebration. Indeed, Christ, by his atoning sacrifice, has "purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9b). Indeed, God is worthy of all praise for the greatness of who He is and for what He has done in His works of creation, providence, and redemption. Yet, in our sinful rebellion, it is our continual tendency to seek glory for ourselves. We do this by worshiping creatures and created things rather than the true and living God. But now as God's redeemed people our burden is to see God alone receive the glory due His name (Rom. 1:21–25). Indeed, our life's mission is to know Christ and to make Him known to all those around us in an ever-widening circle to the very ends of the earth so that they too might know Him and join us in worshiping Him (Matt. 28:19–20).

2. The gospel of the Kingdom moves and shapes the Church.

The gospel is the long-awaited announcement that God fulfilled his promise to bring salvation to a broken world—the kingdom of God. John the Baptist announced this good news and then pointed to Jesus as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus came as the King of the Kingdom and through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension we find new life for ourselves and hope for a needy world. Personally, we enter the Kingdom by the new birth as the Spirit enables us to repent and believe the gospel. Then we are brought together as a community that Jesus called "my church." Now, as Jesus' Church, we seek to be transformed by the gospel and to see the gospel transform our world. We preach the gospel to ourselves, to the church, and to the world. When the gospel is at work in us, it gives us new freedom, new power, and new relationships. The gospel changes everything.

What a rich and enriching thought: in Christ, the most menial task and the most common man is holy in God's sight and useful in His service. God works powerfully in and through the believer's daily life, whether in the marketplace, the assembly line, or the sanctuary; whether over a meal, a Bible study, or a back-yard conversation. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.... It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 4:23, 24). This changes everything. Life is not cut into compartments, some for Jesus and His service, some not. Every man and woman saved by His grace is a man of God or a woman of God and is in His service every day in every way. So every arena of life is touched by God and can be transformed by the gospel. He has sovereign claim and influence upon all of life.

¹ The Core Beliefs and Values of Church Planter Community have been adapted from those of CityNet Ministries, Inc. and City Presbytery (PCA) co-sponsors of Church Planter Community.

3. Kingdom-centered prevailing prayer is central to all we do.

Nothing of significance happens in the kingdom of God without prayer. In prayer we acknowledge our weakness and helplessness as we call out to the Lord for grace and power. Jesus tells us that without Him we can do nothing (John 15:5), but that as we remain in Him and His words remain in us we will be blessed with dramatic answers to our prayers (John 15:7). Just as the early church was devoted to prayer (Acts 2:42), we are called to be a community devoted to kingdom-centered prayer (as opposed to survival or self centered prayer), that our lives might be God centered and that we might see His power displayed in transforming us and the world around us. Jesus teaches that persistence in prayer is critical—we can either pray or give up (Luke 18:1). As we face enormous spiritual obstacles and powers, we know that the kingdom will only move forward as God's people cry out to Him. We are involved in intense spiritual warfare and our battle is not against flesh and blood; therefore we must put on the armor of God and fight in prayer (Eph. 6:10-20). As we do, we will see the forces of evil and darkness destroyed and the power of the kingdom of God revealed.

4. Christ-centered expository preaching is foundational to the vitality and mission of the Church.

Preaching the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the divinely-appointed means of bringing sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ and building believers up in the gospel. How can they hear without someone preaching to them? (Rom. 10:14). At a time when people will not tolerate sound teaching, but would prefer to hear something that reaffirms their own selfish desires, we are charged with this perennial imperative: "Preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Although our preaching is weak in itself, we believe it has the power to transform people's lives by the life-changing work of God the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

By expository preaching we mean preaching that is driven by Scripture and derived from its divine authority, so that God's Word is declared to God's people. It is not preaching that merely begins with a biblical text and then proceeds to communicate the preacher's own spiritual ideas or the values of contemporary culture. Expository preaching carefully and thoroughly communicates what the Bible actually teaches, exploring its context, explaining its meaning, expounding its doctrine in connection to the person and work of Jesus Christ, and applying its gospel to the spiritual needs of those who listen, exalting the glory of God. Because God's Word is supremely "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16), expository preaching is of its very nature practical. And because the Bible contains the gospel on every page, such preaching always is or ought to be evangelistic in its proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ.

5. The heart of our King also compels us to engage our communities in deeds of mercy and love, of justice and truth.

God's heart moves Him relentlessly to implement His holy agenda through His redeemed people, the Church. Isaiah tells us that when justice is driven back, when righteousness stands at a distance, when truth stumbles in the streets, when honesty cannot enter, when truth is nowhere to be found, when whoever shuns evil becomes a prey,... when the Lord sees this and there is no one among His people to intervene, He is displeased and appalled (see Isa. 59:14-16).

Jesus also made it clear in his ministry that the Kingdom was to be lived out as well as taught. He not only preached the gospel of forgiveness and reconciliation, but he demonstrated it in acts of healing, compassion for the hungry and poor, and passion for justice. This is Jesus' agenda for his Church; we are to continue, in the power of the Spirit, what "Jesus began to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). "Christ's love compels us, and he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

Therefore, putting feet on our faith, we seek to bring the power of the Gospel—through word, deed, and community—to our neighborhoods and communities in social healing, racial reconciliation, justice, and cultural renewal, by God's power. We are called to be salt and light in our culture through our work, Christian ministries, and all of our relationships. Ministries of word and deed need to complement each other, because "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

6. Church planting is of first importance to saturate metro Philadelphia with the gospel.

To reach new people you need new churches. The New Testament shows the expansion of the Church primarily through the starting of new churches. Individuals are changed by the Gospel, and then they go to others with that good news. As new people are reached in new places, new churches spring up. When the church in Jerusalem was scattered by the great persecution following Stephen's martyrdom, "those who had been scattered preached the Word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). Paul later devoted his ministry to planting new churches wherever there were groups of people who had not heard the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. He said, "It has always been my ambition to preach the Gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation" (Rom. 15:20). To the church in Corinth he opened his heart when he wrote, "Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the Gospel in the regions beyond you" (2 Cor. 10:15,16). We believe this pattern still holds today. It must shape our ministry priorities for reaching metro Philadelphia.

7. Ministry in and around the City of Philadelphia is a missional priority.

We have been called to minister in metro Philadelphia. It is impossible to minister effectively in our area without giving attention to the unique needs, opportunities, and challenges of the city itself. Too often the evangelical church has run away from the needs of our cities, seeing them only as centers of crime, poverty, and corruption. But the city of Philadelphia is the center of our mission field, and we believe that the Lord Jesus has a redemptive plan for it. We long to see the city of Philadelphia and its surrounding area reflect the beauty of the New Jerusalem, the holy city of God. We rejoice in the rich history, diversity, and complexity of the city—and the unique opportunities for the Gospel that it represents. We rejoice that the world has come to us with so many cultures represented here. We long to be used by the Lord to have a lasting impact on the city and its many cultures.

8. Christ's body, the church, is one: this compels us to work in partnership with others of like faith and ministry in order to see our vision become a reality.

Our Savior Himself compelled us to do ministry, not alone or in isolation, but in partnership with others of like faith, vision, and ministry when he prayed:

"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:20-23).

We have been given a vision for this region that compels us to work together with others in the body of Christ. No single congregation can accomplish it alone. No individual church has been given all of the resources of the Holy Spirit. The various parts of the body of Christ need each other (1 Cor. 12). The body of Christ in the Philadelphia area is rich and diverse. Our vision can be realized only as "the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4:16). Partnership within our church community is essential, as are partnerships with other congregations, networks and ministries. Therefore, we want to cultivate communication and cooperation with other parts of the body of Christ and to work in alliances wherever appropriate.

9. *Equipping and mobilizing every member for ministry is necessary in order to fulfill the mission of the King.*

We believe in "every member ministry". Real people are the raw material God develops and uses to do His ministry in a broken world. It is the Risen Christ who gives spiritual gifts to those He saves and transforms, that they might serve Him. He gives leadership gifts within the church "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.... 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" (Eph. 4:12,16). It is not optional for us to develop people in the Gospel for ministry; it is essential. The building of a glorious spiritual house takes lots and lots of living stones, not just a blueprint and a work crew (see 1 Pet. 2:4, 5). Every believer has been given permission and potential for ministry by King Jesus Himself.

10. *To fulfill our calling, we must develop and empower leadership at every level.*

Every leader learns this the hard way: you are just one limited person. You are just a man, just a woman. You can only touch a few lives and do a few things. When Moses tried to be "The Man," the only leader of a redeemed but unruly Israel coming out of centuries of slavery, he burned out. His father-in-law, Jethro, watched him work, and gave him wise advice: "What you are doing is not good.... The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone.... But select capable men from all the people...and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.... That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this,... all these people will go home satisfied" (Exo. 18:17–23). Leaders multiplied at every level: the only way to lead the people and get them home to the promised land. So it is into the New Testament. Paul urges Timothy, his young apprentice who was a leader in the next generation: "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2). To fulfill our calling—to make disciples of the nations until Jesus returns—leaders must be replicated at every level of ministry. Because ministry takes place at every level of life, we need leaders there, too: trained to serve, unleashed to lead, and able to develop new leaders.