

Lifelong Discipleship Formation

Discipleship means following Jesus—not just believing in him but continually learning from him, imitating, him, letting Jesus live in us, and living each moment with the love of Christ. *Informational* learning is about facts. But *formational* learning means being transformed: being formed “in the image of Christ, from one degree of glory to another.” This is a lifelong process of growing in faith. Like Boy Scouts who expect to progress from Tenderfoot to Eagle, we expect to grow. A church with lifelong discipleship formation has an intentional program of faith training that enables and expects people of all ages to continually grow in the practice of our faith.

A church with Lifelong Discipleship Formation might look like this:

- An intentional plan for discipleship formation and progression of all ages; from the cradle to the grave
- A regular practice of Bible study, prayer, and other spiritual habits
- Church teaches rituals and faith traditions, biblical literacy and spiritual practices to all members
- Church equips and empowers all people to interpret faith in daily life. It engages in, not hides from, difficult conversations of society and cultures today. (i.e.. sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, etc...)
- When people outside the church look at us they see what it means to follow Jesus
- ... What else?...

Outward Incarnational Focus

“Incarnation” means embodiment. God doesn't just *feel* love toward us. God makes the Word flesh and it lives among us. God embodies love. A church with an incarnational, outward focus carries God's love to others outside the church. The church is meant to be a beacon of Christ's grace, justice, freedom, and love. Like Jesus did, we bring love especially to those who need it the most: the poor, the needy, the marginalized, the outcast, the stranger, the “enemy.” There are two kinds of love of neighbor: *mercy* is when we tend to those who have fallen through the cracks. *Justice* is when we fix the cracks. Mercy is befriending a homeless person; justice is changing the policies that produce homelessness. Mercy is visiting a prisoner; justice is changing mass incarceration laws. A church with an outward incarnational focus practices faith in Jesus by participating in his ministry.

A church with an Outward Incarnational Focus might look like this:

- Conducts community analysis to ascertain the needs, fears, hopes, and pressure points in the community, so that the church's ministry and mission can address them.
- The church practices radical hospitality by including (not just inviting) people who are different
- We have actual vibrant relationships (with all kinds of diversity) with the lost, weak, suffering, lowly, least, marginalized, oppressed, outcast.
- We are a public witness and advocate for forgiveness and reconciliation, and for social change.
- We're more interested in taking love out of the church than bringing people in.
- ... What else?

Intentional Authentic Evangelism

Yeah, everybody hates that word. But what we actually hate is *bad* evangelism. Evangelism is simply sharing the Good News. It's like recommending a good restaurant. We've discovered something that enriches our lives—God's grace, and a community that focuses on it—and we want to share that with others. Evangelism doesn't mean convincing somebody to be a Christian, or to come to church. It means convincing them that they're loved. And sharing the good news that your church is a place they can practice giving and receiving that love. Evangelism is a five-star review for God that we share everywhere we can.

A church with Intentional Authentic Evangelism might look like this:

- Sharing about our faith is an authentic part of members' lives: not necessarily sharing our beliefs, but our experience of God's love
- The church develops practices for people to share their story and give witness to Good News in their lives
- Evangelism doesn't take the form of argument, but gift: we give people gifts and meet people's needs, and, when possible, let them know it's a sign of God's love.
- ... What else? ...

Empowering Servant Leadership

None of us is a volunteer. We are *ministers*. God gives us all gifts “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph. 4.12). To be a follower of Jesus is also to be leader; but being a leader doesn't mean power, it means service. Like Jesus humbly washing the disciples' feet, our service changes the people we serve. That's how we lead them. Everyone has gifts to share. Every person should be equipped, nurtured, and supported to use their gifts to glorify God, through servant leadership, and to understand their service as ministry. A church with empowering servant leadership helps people recognize their gifts and use them to serve the world in ways that feed their souls. People know their gifts and are confident of them. Everybody has something to contribute, and is glad to do so. Everybody is in ministry.

A Church with Empowering Servant Leadership might look like this:

- The church encourages members, when appropriate, to be “ministers” (priesthood of all believers)
- The congregation provides tools and a healthy environment to train and support leaders
- People are empowered to discover and to do what they are called to do
- The staff and other leaders model servant leadership principles
- Congregation assists people in discerning spiritual gifts for use in service to church and community
- ... What else? ...

Spirit-Inspired Worship

Spirit-Inspired worship is worship in which we encounter God. In worship we enact the story of God's grace so we are shaped by that story and become part of it. It's not about what we "like," it's about being drawn closer to God. It's not about what we "get out of it;" but how we give ourselves to God. In scripture and silence, sermon and song, prayers and actions we present ourselves to God and God meets us. Worship transports us out of our usual concerns and places our fears, hopes, hurts and desires in the context of God's loving presence. Worship should challenge, teach, transform, convict, and call us into deeper relationship with God and one another; not gratify our comforts and entertain our desires. Worship is an encounter with God that we understand and do not understand. It is an act filled with mystery and awe, but in worship we have the opportunity to express our deepest desires to God and listen for God's voice. In worship, we also experience the call to serve and be in mission.

A Church with Spirit-Inspired Worship might look like this:

- Prayerful discernment of members actively participating in all aspects of planning and leading worship
- There is thoughtful and sound biblical preaching
- Intentional worship does not cling to rituals, but is open to filling sacred space with new rituals
- Engages all people, of all diversity, and enables them to be active participants in the experience
- Creates space for peoples' stories; not afraid of silence
- Communal connectivity to one another, and connection to God
- Challenges and sends the people of God beyond their pew into daily life
- .. What else? ...

Caring Relationships

Pretty much every church thinks “we are a friendly church.” Yet, caring relationships in Christ requires more than friendliness: it requires true agape love; a sacrificial, self-emptying love. Loving community is about knowing one another and their struggles and joys, and being known and loved. It is about walking with people in tragedy, and rejoicing in their triumphs. It's allowing people to be real in their stories, without hiding or holding back, and loving every imperfect part of them. Church is a place where we can be real, imperfect and needy; where conflicts are confronted, crucial conversations of forgiveness and reconciliation are had, and people of God are transformed by agape-love. Caring relationships is about vulnerability and trust. It's about being present for people in their struggles and needs, whether in a listening ear or a prayer or a ride or a casserole. It's not the job of a committee or pastor, but everybody. A church with caring relationships is truly the household of God.

A church with Caring Relationships might look like this:

- Cultivates an environment of true caring relationships through genuine opportunities to share testimony
- The church seeks to strengthen ties within the household of God; fostering relationships between demographics, with members on the margin, people who are missing or who have been hurt
- The community knows when members are hurting and consistently reaches out to them
- The church seeks to build and rebuild relationships of conflict or strain; clear process of conflict resolution
- The church develops caring relationships in the neighborhood and community (i.e. other churches, community organizations, health and human services, advocacy groups...)
- ... What else? ...

Ecclesial Health

Ecclesial health is about: 1) Why we gather as a church community 2) How we practice being church together. It is about whether our mission, vision, and values match up with the ways we live together. It requires continual attentiveness, awareness, and assessment in asking “are we who we say we are?” And more importantly, “are we who God is calling us to be?” Prayer and discernment are at the heart of ecclesial health! There are several factors to ecclesial health: prayerful discernment, decision-making process, health of pastors, stewardship of budget and resources, clarity in mission and ministries. Ecclesial health is about the people of God having a clear purpose; all people are stake-holders invested in being a part of this community of faith. There are shared core values, a clear mission, and commitment and loyalty to the life we gather in as church. Yet, they also know that this is a living faith. So, they dare to dream and understand that change is inevitable. With ecclesial health, there is joy and gratitude in coming together; people, not programs or properties are valued. People gather and are sent to be Christ’s Church.

A church with Ecclesial Health might look like this:

- A communal life centered on prayer and discernment of God’s will
- Clarity in Vision, Mission, Core Values; budget reflects these core principles
- Continual attentiveness, awareness and assessment to mission and practices of being church
- Pastor and staff are regularly evaluated using best practices
- Pastor and staff, all servant leaders, are nurtured and supported in health; clear expectations
- Stewardship and tithing are taught year-round; accountable giving in gratitude
- Transparent in spending; continual discernment of budget sustainability
- All are stakeholders, committed to fiscal responsibilities, active participation, and necessary voices in envisioning, dreaming, and decision-making
- ... What else? ...