





austin  city life

Partners on Mission





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Vision & Values



## Vision & Values

Gospel. Community. Mission.

### Vision

*Cultivating **communities** of Spirit-led disciples who redemptively engage **peoples** and **cultures** through Christ for the glory of God.*

- **Gospel:** through Christ for the glory of God
- **Community:** cultivating communities of Spirit-led disciples
- **Mission:** redemptively engaging peoples and cultures

### Values

**Truth:** All truth is Trinitarian truth.

**Christ-centered Worship:** All things are in, through, and for Jesus.

**Missional Community:** All peoples need meaningful relationships with one another and with Christ.

**Redemptive Discipleship:** All disciples are called to serve in the power of the Spirit and the pattern of Christ.

**Culture Engaging:** All cultures contain and disdain truth, beauty and virtue.

**Kingdom-building:** All of the churches in Austin are needed to reach and renew the city.

## A Short Story

### The story of Austin City Life

The vision of Austin City Life started in downtown Boston, during a worship service. I turned to one of my best friends and whispered into his ear, “How about we plant a church in downtown Boston?” That was (2002). In the years that followed, that vision grew, transformed, withered, and was reborn. In 2007, Austin City Life started in the Dodson’s living room...in Austin.

In November 2006, the Dodsons moved to Austin. In July 2007 eight of us began to dream about how the gospel could address the brokenness of our city. We began meeting weekly to cultivate community through discussions, meals, and mission. A few months later about twenty of us committed to the emerging vision of ACL. We committed to one another be a church that is Jesus-centered and city-focused. The following months were filled with shared meals, vision, mission, and life.

As we grew, we organized ourselves into city-focused, geographically-based communities called City Groups and then eventually into public gatherings. In January 2008, Jonathan went full-time with ACL in order to devote more attention to growing, shepherding and leading the church. In April we began public gatherings at the Hideout Theatre.

Austin City Life exists to: *cultivate communities of Spirit-led disciples who redemptively engage peoples and cultures through Christ for the glory of God.* This vision is community-based, gospel-centered, and city-focused. We believe the church is a Spirit-led missionary community, not an event, gathered around Jesus, not religion, on the mission of God. In short, this vision is shaped around three primary values: Gospel, Community, and Mission.

## Leadership Structure

Who leads at Austin City Life?

### Biblical Leadership

The Trinity is the ultimate authority over Austin City Life, expressed through the Word of the Father, the reign of the Son, and the leading of the Spirit. As a church that looks to God's Word for authority on matters of faith and practice, we follow the church leadership guidelines given in Titus and Timothy regarding elders and deacons in the local church.

However, until elders can be fully trained, tested, and approved, our church relies on an external board for wisdom and accountability in decision-making. We also rely on an internal leadership team comprised of key staff members for daily decisions. Once God has provided qualified elders to give oversight to the church, the external board will be dissolved and we will be a self-governing church. We will continue to participate in the *Baptist General Convention* and the *Acts 29 Network* for broader accountability and networking.

It is critical that a church function under the authority of God, with Christ as our Head, not the pastor or leadership team. Thus, the church is called to submit to their leaders as unto the Lord. All partners covenant to give cheerfully of their time, creativity, spiritual gifts, and finances as an act of worship to King Jesus and a witness to the gospel for the good of the church and the city.

Biblical church leadership requires a structure of spiritual authority within the church. There are several layers of leadership that function in Austin City Life: Elders, Deacons/City Group leaders, Ministry Team leaders. In the case of ACL, most Ministry Team leaders and CG leaders will be required to meet the biblical qualifications of deacon.

### Definitions of Leadership

***Jesus as Head*** Scripture informs us that Jesus is Lord of the Church, Head of the Body (Col 1:18; Eph 4:15); the Cornerstone of the Temple (1 Pet 2:6-7; Eph 2:20); the Chief Shepherd of the Flock (Heb 13:20); Lord of the Harvest (Luke 10). Therefore, ACL submits to Christ and his Word as our ultimate authority in faith and practice.

**The Board** is an external board of qualified pastors and church leaders from the BGCT that hold Austin City life accountable to its vision, budget, and mission. The board is a temporary leadership structure that will dissolve upon appointment of elders from within Austin City Life.

**The Elder Team** is comprised of qualified men who meet and maintain the standards expressed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. These men may be vocational or non-vocational elders whose main responsibility is to shepherd the flock of God with wisdom and integrity. The Vision and Teaching Pastor will function as the first among equals. *The Elder Team is accountable to God.*

**The Deacon Team** is comprised of men and women who meet and maintain the standards expressed in 1 Timothy 3. These men and women may be vocational or non-vocational deacons whose main responsibility is to serve the church in order to further its ministry and support the elders to do the work of leading, preaching, teaching, study, and prayer. In most cases, all ministries formed and led in ACL will be led by a deacon and/or elder. *The Deacon Team is accountable to the leadership of the Elder Team.*

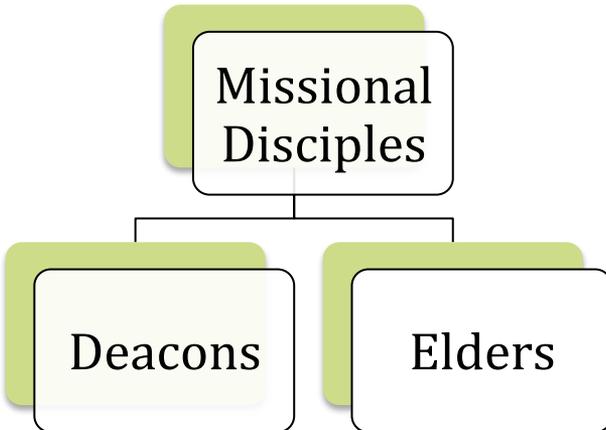
**1. Ministry Team Leaders** are qualified men and women who provide oversight and leadership for a specific ministry, e.g. Set Up/Tear Down, Hospitality. Qualifications should fit the spirit, not the letter, of 1 Timothy 3. In most cases these leaders will be qualified deacons, accountable to their respective elder.

**2. City Group Leaders** are qualified men who work as a team with their spouses, when applicable, to provide pastoral and missional leadership for City Groups. Qualifications should fit the spirit, not the letter, of 1 Timothy 3. City Group leaders will be accountable to the elder who oversees City Groups.

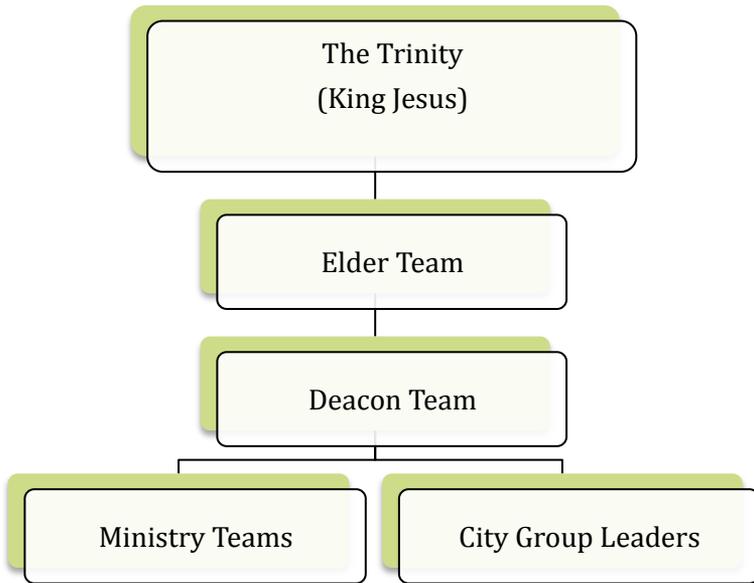
## Missional Leadership

God uses ordinary people for extraordinary ends. The basic biblical category of leadership is a *disciple*. Disciples are both missional and pastoral; they baptize and they teach. *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matt 28:19-20). One of Jesus primary commands regarding leadership was to make disciples, a command that applies to all people. Making disciples is a *temporary necessity*. The Church will baptize only so many, the elect, and then the end of the age will come. So, we have a limited time to make disciples. However, you will always be a disciple of Jesus. You are first and foremost a disciple of Jesus Christ, not a CG leader, deacon, or elder. There will be no elders, pastors, deacons, or CG leaders in heaven. So, you are first and forever a follower of Christ, second and subsequently a deacon or elder.

## Missional Leadership Structure



## Basic Flow of Leadership



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Doctrine & Gospel



## Doctrine

### What is Doctrine?

Evangelical theologian Wayne Grudem defines doctrine as: “what the whole Bible teaches us today about some particular topic.”<sup>1</sup> It is important that we know what we believe so that we are: 1) Directed by the Word of God, not merely tradition or opinion, on all matters of faith. 2) Be the church with theological integrity, shepherding, exhorting, encouraging, and correcting one another in love. Doctrine, then, is of the utmost importance in governing all matters of faith and practice. Doctrine is not at odds with practice, but rather should lead to doxology. Accordingly, John Calvin writes: “It is what we know, not what we do not know, that subdues our pride and causes us to render to God the worship that he is due.” The knowledge of God is practical, personal, and worshipful.

### What Do We Believe?

We are first Christians, second Missional, third Reformed, and fourth Baptist.<sup>1</sup> Another way to state our beliefs is that we are: **Reformed in doctrine, Baptist in sacrament, and Missional in nature**

As **Christians** we distinguish ourselves from other world religions and cults by adhering to the historic, orthodox doctrine contained in the Apostles and Nicene Creeds (see appendix I).

As a **Missional** church, we believe that our local churches must be faithful to the unchanging content of Biblical doctrine (Jude 3), while also continually changing to the context of culture (1 Cor 9:19-23). We do this by *redemptively engaging the peoples and cultures* of the world with the gospel of Christ.

As **Reformed** we believe in the five “Solae” of the Reformation:

- 1) Sola Scriptura/Scripture
- 2) Sola Fide/Faith
- 3) Sola gratia/Grace
- 4) solo Christo/Christ
- 5) soli Deo Gloria/to God be the glory

Key theological issues:

### **God & Creation**

- All things were created by, through, and for the Triune Creator (Gen 1:1-2; Ps 19; 104; Col 1:15-16; Heb 11:3).
- God is the unchanging Sovereign over all things (Gen 50:20; Job 42:2; Ps 139:16; Prov 20:24; Matt 10:29; Acts 2:23; Eph 1:11; Col 1:17).

### **Humanity & Sin**

- Man was made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8).
- Adam was the best representative of all humanity and fell from God's grace through willful rebellion against God. As a result, humanity has inherited Adam's sin nature and is naturally opposed to God (Rom 5:12-13). Creation groans under the curse of Adam's sin (Rom 8:19-22).

### **Christ & Salvation**

- Because of man's rebellion God is not obligated to save, but rescues and redeems out of his electing love and mercy those whom he has predestined (Eph 1:3-13; Col 1:12-14; Rom 8:29-30).
- The salvation of God's chosen people was accomplished by the sinless life, substitutionary atoning death, and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ in place of His people for their sins (Rom 3:21-26; 1 Cor 5:21; 15:3-5).
- The Spirit of God spiritually recreates those whom God has elected (Tit 3:4-7; 2 Cor 5:17) and motivates a life of obedience, by grace, through a life of repentance from sin and faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 8:10-13; Eph 2:8-10; Phil 2:12-13); "Not perfection overnight, but perseverance over a lifetime." – Scott Hafemann

### **Mission & the Church**

- The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying him both now and forever (Ps 16:11; 37:4; Isa 43:7; Rom 11:36-12:2). "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him." – John Piper
- This God-glorifying joy is spread through redemptively engaging all peoples and all cultures through the gospel of Jesus Christ (Matt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15; Lk 24:48-49/Acts 1:8; John 20:21; Col 4:5-6;).

As **Baptist** we believe that the sacraments of baptism and communion should be reserved for those who trust in Christ for their salvation. Only those who have professed faith in Jesus Christ should be baptized, preferably through immersion. Communion is memorial not mystical.

## The Gospel of Jesus Christ

What is the Gospel?

### LCD vs. TOE

In our culture many believe the gospel is LCD *lowest common denominator* Christianity. If you just believe that Jesus is God, Jesus died for your sins, and Jesus rose from the dead, then you are a Christian; you are saved. This approach to the gospel is defective on two main counts. First, it assumes that mere agreement with the facts of the gospel is sufficient to “get you saved.” Second, it assumes a very narrow view of the gospel that does not comport with biblical teaching. Rather than LCD, the gospel is actually a TOE, a theory of everything.

The wonderful thing about the Gospel as a TOE is that it affirms the personality and soul of all individuals because they were made for relationship with a personal Creator. The gospel restores and renews that relationship over and over again.

The Gospel is not just how you get into Christianity, its how you stay in. It is the power for a salvation that we “work out with fear and trembling” all our days according to the “pleasure of God’s will” at work in us (Phil 2:13-14). The gospel changes us and everything we do, why and how we do it. The gospel affects everything, guiding all our interactions with people and culture. The Gospel is not merely a LCD; it is a TOE!

#### Questions:

- Have you viewed the gospel as an LCD or a TOE?

## The Gospel is God-centered

The gospel is God-centered because it is good news about a God-centered God. God is the most important Person in the universe.<sup>2</sup> *All things were created **by him, through him, and for him** (Col 1:17).*

The gospel is God-centered in that it renews peoples, cultures and creation to live for God's glory, not our own. It rescues us from our own glory seeking (Rom 1), and places us in his kingdom where there is joy in honoring the King.

## Three Gospel Dimensions<sup>3</sup>

### Doctrinal (Historical)

- The gospel is news rather than instruction. (1 Cor 2:2; 15:1-5)
- This first aspect of the gospel stresses the doctrinal content of the gospel. It shows us that the gospel is the news that Jesus Christ died and rose for our salvation in history.

### Personal (Communal)

- The gospel is grace rather than merit. (Rom 8:13-15)
- This second aspect of the gospel stresses the personal individual impact of the gospel. It shows that the gospel is a transforming grace that changes our hearts and inmost motives.

### Social (Cultural)

- The gospel is reversal of the weak and the strong. (Isa 61; Luke 4)
- This third aspect of the gospel stresses the social impact of the gospel. It shows that the gospel brings a new order in which material goods or worldly status no longer control believers.

### Questions:

- Which dimension of the gospel do you identify with most?
- What happens when we identify primarily with one dimension?

## What the Gospel Isn't

### Keller Summary of Religion and Irreligion

"On the one hand, "moralism/religion" stresses truth without grace, for it says that we must obey the truth in order to be saved. On the other hand, "relativists/irreligion" stresses grace without truth, for they say that we are all accepted by God (if there is a God) and we have to decide what is true for us."

## Gospel vs. Religion and Irreligion

Pleasure Lens:

1. Religion says God is hard to please.
2. Irreligion says God is an obstacle to my pleasure.
3. Gospel says God is the path to true pleasure.

Acceptance Lens: (adapted from Keller/Kaufman)

1. Religion says if I obey therefore I am accepted.
2. Irreligion says I disobey and find my acceptance in other things.
3. Gospel says, I am accepted perfectly in Jesus therefore I obey.

### Questions:

- Do you lean towards religion or irreligion?

## Repentance and Faith<sup>4</sup>

It is not simply enough to understand the facts of the gospel. Upon hearing the gospel, man must respond to the risen Lord Jesus. How is man to respond to the gospel?

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:14-15)*

When Jesus preached the gospel of God he preached himself. He was the good news. Israel's king had finally come. The king demanded a response—repent and believe. However, what does this mean to repent and believe? When we hear repent and believe with our modern ears we assume that it means to quit sinning (repent) and believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead (believe). This is not what Jesus meant. How could it be when he had not yet died or rose from the dead? What Jesus meant was abandon your agenda and believing false promises (repent) and trust me and my true promises (believe). This is the same response demanded of us today.

**1. Repent**

Give up on your agenda. Turn away, not simply from sin, but from believing false promises. God wants your heart, not just your morality. Repentance is a stepping stone to true joy. False promises like—Be bright, witty, and wise and people will give you the acceptance you need—steal our joy. No human can offer perfect acceptance or lasting joy.

**2. Believe**

Trust Jesus. Believe in the promises of God. Jesus' call to repent and believe was a call to give up on all other agendas and false promises and trust him and his agenda/promises. Notice that the facts of the gospel are not the object of our faith. Neither is our faith the object of our faith. Faith in faith or faith in facts is not saving faith. Faith in Jesus, who he is and what he has accomplished for us, is true saving faith. This sort of faith demands allegiance and therefore repentance is a necessary component.

**Questions:**

- How has this changed your view of repentance? Faith?

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Community



## Gospel-centered Community

What is community?

### Acts: The Early Church

*And they devoted themselves to the **apostles' teaching** and the **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed **were together** and had all things in **common**... And day by day, attending the temple together and **breaking bread in their homes**, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

### Gospel Teaching

Their teaching was an outworking of Jesus discipleship and teaching (Luke 24:44), which was a Christ-centered explanation of the OT.

### Community-centered Gospel

The Early Church was devoted, not only to teaching, but also to fellowship. Fellowship is sharing life in the gospel. We could say they taught a community-focused gospel.<sup>5</sup> They shared life, gospel truth, and mission, but they also shared sin and suffering. It is important that we read beyond Acts 2 to Acts 5, where we see a very imperfect church clinging to a perfect Christ. The Early Church knew that Jesus was sufficient for their failures and strong for their successes. The communities of the Early Church shared the hope and hardship of life, truth, and mission.

### Missional Community

The Early Church wasn't focused just on teaching and community; they also shared mission. The church was missional. It redemptively engaged peoples and cultures. They were outwardly focused, not just inwardly oriented. They raised the problem of mission, solved it with the solution of the gospel, in the context of community. The gospel creates missional communities, missional churches, that live out the redemptive implications of the gospel both internally and externally, within the community and outside the community.

### Questions:

- Reflecting upon the Early Church, how does your church experience compare?

## Four Gospel Principles

Our community is based on Four Gospel Principles. When we agree and live out these principles, they promote authentic, redemptive, Christ-centered community.

1. **We all are broken:** We are all more broken than we want to admit, and God is more holy than we comprehend.
2. **We all need Jesus:** In Jesus we are more forgiven and accepted than we can imagine, and God is more delighted in us that we understand.
3. **We all need one another:** We need each other to share our struggles and joys in following Jesus.
4. **The world needs the gospel:** The gospel offers the hope of justice, the clarity of truth, the comfort of grace, and joy of Jesus to a broken world.

## Practicing Gospel-Centered Community

In order to live out this biblical vision of community, it is necessary to translate gospel principles into gospel practices.

### Community Practices (SPEL)

1. **SHARE** life and truth
2. **PRAY** for one another and the city
3. **ENGAGE** peoples and cultures
4. **LOVE** one another

## Structures for Steady State Community

Community is not an event, a meeting, or a service; it is a network of relationships gathered around Jesus. In order to emphasize this biblical kind of community, we encourage *steady state community*—a series of connections throughout the week that include sharing coffee, meals, shopping, social activity, service, vacation, emails, phone calls, Facebook, and mission. This is simply sharing everyday life, the context of community.

### Questions:

- Does steady state community inspire or intimidate you?
- What would you need to sacrifice in order to live in steady state community?

### **City Groups**

City groups are not Bible Studies, Community Groups, or Social Groups. They are local, urban missional communities of people that gather weekly to share life and truth, love God and one another, and engage the social and spiritual needs of our city. They are geographically-based and inter-generational, a place where the church can be the church to one another and to the city.

### **Fight Clubs**

Fight Clubs are simple groups of two or three people of the same gender who meet regularly to help one another beat the flesh and believe in the promises of God. They are based on three rules: 1) **Know your Sin** 2) **Fight your Sin** 3) **Trust your Savior**. They are Christ-centered not application centered, focusing on Jesus not works.

### **Sunday Gatherings**

Our Sunday gathering is not the church; it is a gathering of the church. City groups are where the church is most often the church to one another and to the city. Sundays, however, are very important. They are a time of rest, fellowship, and worship. Sunday gatherings allow City Groups to gather for worship, prayer, communion, community and teaching—to proclaim and participate in Christ-centered worship. We hope that our gatherings are attractive; that outsiders are attracted to what God is doing inside our community. We hope and pray that they taste and see that the Lord is good, that the gospel is true, and the church is love.

### **Partner Expectations: SHARE, PRAY, ENGAGE, LOVE, GIVE**

As partners in ACL, we will expect you to share, pray, engage, love, and give. To give of your time, your resources, your creativity, your skills, gifts, and finances to see the gospel renew this city and the world. Pray over all these things. Ask us questions. We don't want to coerce you to partner with us. We simply want you to partner out of conviction, joy, and obedience to Christ. If ACL isn't a good fit for you, we understand and will be happy to recommend a different church for you to partner with.

#### **Questions:**

- As you consider becoming a partner, what gifts/skills are you excited about bringing to the community?



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Mission



## Mission

What is our mission and how is it practiced?

### Theology of Mission

In order to understand what we mean when we talk of mission, we need to look at its biblical and theological roots. The big storyline of the Bible is a missional storyline. God has a purpose, plan, and process in creating all things; he has a mission. From **creation**, Adam was to fill the earth with God's image and rule over the earth modeling Trinitarian community and creativity. He was placed in an imperfect world. Even in Eden, Adam and Eve had to work, to cultivate and keep the garden. Fruit did not fall off of trees. The creation project had somewhere to go; it needed to mature, to be perfected and reach its goal of being filled and subdued by the image of God. Then the image was marred; Adam fell. Rebellion against the Creator--Sin--was introduced into the storyline. Creation was cursed. Man separated from God. Enmity was created between man and the Serpent. Murder, Sexual sin, Pride, Exploitation, Anger flourished. The creation project was derailed and somehow would need to be put back on track. All this occurred in Genesis 1-11, which raised the need for **redemption**. In Gen 3:15-24 we see God's first promise of redemption, his mission for creation. At Genesis 12, we reach a turning point. God chooses to refocus his plan for creation through Abraham, to bless him and make him a blessing to the entire world. Paul tells us in Galatians that this was the gospel being preached to Abraham and that those who possessed the faith of Abraham in his promise would inherit a new world, a **new creation**. To summarize, God's mission unfolds redemptively along the plotline of Creation-Fall-Redemption-New Creation. He is intent on restoring and escalating the creation project to a state of new creation. This is his mission. What began in Genesis 1 and fell in Genesis 3, is redemptively addressed in Genesis 12 to Revelation 22. God's mission is nothing less than new creation.

## How is mission accomplished?

### Missio Dei

The *missio Dei* guarantees the success of God's mission. The *missio Dei* is a Latin phrase that classically referred to the "mission" or "sending" of God—the Father sending the Son, and the Father and Son sending the Spirit.<sup>6</sup> So the mission of God has to do with his nature and his work. He is a sending God. It is God's missional commitment to his glory among the nations that forms the bedrock of our missional activity.

Mission is not something we do; it is something that we are. Mission is not an option, an elective for super spiritual Christians; it is endemic to the church. The church is a missional community because God is a missional community. The triune God is a missionary God.

- The Father sends the Son,
- The Father and the Son send the Spirit
- The Father, Son and the Spirit send the church into the world.

The result is community of Spirit-led disciples redemptively engaging the peoples and cultures of the world. God has been on mission throughout history. The triune God expresses his mission through creation, redemption, and consummation. Mission is not a program of the church, a subset of church activity alongside children's ministry and discipleship classes. Mission comes first from God as he creates, redeems, and renews through the sending of his Son and his Spirit. The church, then, is a sent people that embody God's missionary heart; his missional identity. Therefore, the church is mission, not does mission.

### Questions:

- How does this change your view of God? Of a missionary?

### The Missional Church

The missional church is "a people of God who are created by the Spirit to live as a missionary community."<sup>7</sup> As the sent people of God, we are missionaries and citizens. As missionaries, we should be constant students of culture, lovers of people, and communicators of the gospel.

### Attractional vs. Incarnational

There is considerable debate over how the missional church should engage in its mission. Some say that the church is to be *attractional*. They build buildings that look like the culture, preach messages that deal with cultural issues, and cater to consumer demands. The goal is to get people into “church.” Other churches say the church is to be *incarnational*. Incarnation takes its cues from the example of Jesus by incarnating the gospel in local cultures, neighborhoods, cities through relationships. The goal is to get the church to the people.

To be sure, Jesus is the paradigm for our sentness (Jn 20:21). He came neither as a soldier nor a spy, but as a servant, as a missionary of God. *Soldiers* enforce their message (fundamentalists). Soldiers see the church as a fortress. Build a doctrinal or ethical wall around yourself and tell others what they are doing wrong and how right it is to join them inside the walls of their fortress. *Spies* sneak in their message (marketers). Spies see the church as a product to be sold. They dress her up, dress her message down, and sneak truth in where it’s comfortable. They often focus on ethics and morals, not on the gospel. *Servants* freely share and embody their message. **Servants see the church as redemptive community under the lordship of Christ.** Instead of protecting or marketing, they risk reputation in service of their Lord. Together they seek to serve others in service of Jesus. As a result, they share the gospel with words and actions. Their actions are motivated by love. As a loving community grounded in the gospel they are quick to forgive, slow to anger. Quick to serve, slow to assume. As a servant community, the church is both attractional and incarnational.

#### Questions:

- Do you think the church should be attractional or incarnational?
- How can you change your life to become a missional disciple?

## Practice of Mission

The mission of ACL is to cultivate communities of Spirit-led disciples who redemptively engage peoples and cultures through Christ for the glory of God. In the end, our ultimate aim is the glory of God, not grand numbers. However, in the goal of glorifying God we want to redemptively engage as many peoples and cultures as possible. How should we engage people with the gospel?

### Local & Global Mission

In **local missions**, we want to introduce non-Christians to Christian community, or the gospel, or simply build relationships. We want to invite others into lively Christian community through natural social contexts such as neighborhood parties, barbeques, parties, etc. This community-centered evangelism allows us to build relationships and invite people into Christian community, where they may connect with people stronger in evangelism or with more in common with your friends. But most importantly, non-Christians are exposed to the beauty and depth of gospel-centered community. In ACL we encourage building relationships through your workplace, neighborhoods, and strategic social partnerships of City Groups. Strategic social partnerships are the social-missional activities of your CG, which renew the city socially, culturally, and relationally as you build relationships with people in need. Local mission is also expressed through church-wide opportunities like Church Under the Bridge and other Mission Possible events. Ultimately, we want to impact all the domains of city life. Domains are the various spheres of society that enable civilization.

In **global mission**, we are cultivating strategic partnerships with missionaries in Mexico, Asia and Africa. We send short-term and long-term teams to spread the whole gospel to the whole world.

## Culture

Culture is *the shared beliefs, behaviors, and artifacts of a particular group of people who share a common language*. If this seems all-encompassing, that's because it is. Robert Redfield helpfully defined culture as "*act and artifact*," denoting the behavioral *and* concrete dimensions of culture. Culture encompasses what we do and what we make.

Ken Myers defines culture concisely as "*what we make of the world*." This double-entendre refers to the activity of making artifacts, as well as our beliefs about what and how we make it. Culture is conceptual and concrete, idea and artifact. It is the lyrics and the music of the songs we sing, the beliefs and the books we create. To summarize, culture is *act, artifact, and assessment*.

### Six Ways to Engage Culture

- 1. Engage culture prayerfully.** I am not suggesting that we should actually bow our heads and recite a prayer before reading a newspaper or book, watching T.V. or a movie, or going shopping, though that certainly wouldn't hurt. Instead, we are to live life and engage culture in a spirit of dependence upon God; we are to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).
- 2. Engage culture carefully.** When approaching any given issue, from parenting to politics, we all have our biases. In order to engage culture well, we must strive to avoid the path of the sectarian and the secularist, of blind rejection and uncritical acceptance. This will require careful investigation into the issues we face, taking the opposing view seriously and weighing its merits. Make a habit of hearing both sides of an issue before you baptize your opinions. Be slow to speak and quick to listen (Js. 1:19).
- 3. Engage culture biblically-theologically.** Why hyphenate biblical and theological? Why not just say 'think biblically'? Well, the plain fact is that the Bible does not explicitly address *most* cultural issues. It does not tell you what political party to join, which school to go to, movies to watch, whether or not you should date, whether or not to abort your baby, or how to respond to cloning. Instead, the Bible offers theological principles which we can appropriate in order to form opinions and convictions about cultural issues.

**4. Engage culture redemptively.** Strive to connect your theological reflections regarding culture to redemption. We can redemptively engage culture in two ways: *practically* and *positionally*. To practically redeem, identify what is broken, what is in need of redemption and take restorative actions. Ask yourself questions like “How can I bring the gospel to bear on this issue?” “How can I restore, forgive, or reconcile in this situation?”

**5. Engage culture humbly.** Recognize that you have much to learn from a given culture. Read, converse, and reflect on cultural issues with a teachable heart. Ask God to shape your convictions through whomever or whatever he wills. Avoid proud dogmatism and cultivate humble conviction. Don’t put others down who believe differently than you. Consider others more important than yourself without surrendering your convictions.

**6. Engage culture selectively.** Realize and embrace the limitations of your own time, experience, interests. Spend your time wisely. Don’t sacrifice time with God, church or family in order to become more culturally savvy. Everyone has been created differently, to live a unique life. Make the most of your experience by redemptively engaging culture, but try to avoid making the experience of others your own. There are too many issues in the world for you to become an overnight expert on Christ and culture. Be selective about what you engage.

### **Engaging Culture**

In order to redemptively engage culture, we need cultural wisdom. To gain wisdom we must be good missiologists. Missiology, as Tim Tennent has pointed out, can be summarized with three words: *Adaptation, Gradualism, and Exchange.*

**Adaptation:** *To adopt a cultural form for Christian purposes.*

Many Christian leaders and Christians would frown on using a Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall for a church building because their conception of church is so narrowly conceived. Since my first day in Austin, I began praying that God would give us the abandoned male strip joint called La Bare for our church. Currently, we meet at the Parish, a bar on 6<sup>th</sup> Street in the heart of downtown. A venue that on Saturday night is a tool for unrighteousness is a place of worshipping our great God and King on Sunday mornings. Adaptation isn’t about

being cool; it's about adopting cultural forms, creating common cultural space for mission, and using these forms for Christ-honoring purposes.

**Gradualism:** *Implement Christian ideals slowly recognizing that individuals are undergoing and entire worldview shift.*

Don't expect radical holiness from your new converts. If they have embraced Christ but still smoke pot or occasionally drink too much, don't beat them up for their behaviors. Instead, shepherd their hearts, lead them into the gospel, and allow their inner joy to transform their outer joys. Allow for the gradual transformation of the gospel, especially in post-Christian contexts. What you think is normative holiness, probably isn't the norm. It's not about leaps and bounds, but steady advance in grace.

**Exchange:** *The creation of an entirely new cultural form in exchange for an existing idolatrous one.*

It is one thing to use pagan temples for church buildings, it is quite another to participate in pagan sacrifices. For example, if your people consistently go to happy hours to get wasted and have a social life, create a more God-honoring context for socializing.

#### Questions:

- What part of Austin culture do you regularly participate in?
- How can you redemptively engage that part of culture?

#### Future Mission

In the future, we will plant more churches that plant churches. One of the primary ways we see this occurring is through the clustering of City Groups that form the basis of new churches, provided an elder/pastor emerges or can be brought in. Pastors can emerge through internal cultivation or through church planter interns. By God's grace, we hope to cultivate a church planting movement through ACL multiplication and partnership with other Austin churches through the Austin PlantR Network and with Acts 29.

As the mission of God continues to unfold, we hope you'll join him by grace to bring the whole gospel to the whole world, one relationship at a time.



austin  city life

Appendix



## Doctrinal Creeds

### The Nicene Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

### Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary

Suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell

The third day he rose again from the dead

He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty

From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead

I believe in the Holy Ghost

I believe a holy catholic church; the communion of saints

The forgiveness of sins

The resurrection of the body

And the life everlasting. Amen.

## 8 Ways to be Missional (Without Overloading Your Schedule)

Missional is not an event we tack onto our already busy lives. It is our life. Mission should be the way we live, not something we add onto life: “As you go, make disciples...”; “Walk wisely towards outsiders”; “Let your speech always be seasoned with salt”; “be prepared to give a defense for your hope”. We can be missional in everyday ways without even overloading our schedules. Here are a few suggestions:

**1. Eat with Non-Christians.** We all eat three meals a day. Why not make a habit of sharing one of those meals with a non-Christian or with a family of non-Christians? Go to lunch with a co-worker, not by yourself. Invite the neighbors over for family dinner. If it’s too much work to cook a big dinner, just order pizza and put the focus on conversation. When you go out for a meal, invite a non-Christian friend. Or take your family to family-style restaurants where you can sit at the table with strangers and strike up conversations (Mighty Fine Burgers, Buca di Peppo, The Blue Dahlia, etc). Have cookouts and invite Christians and non-Christians. Flee the Christian subculture.

**2. Walk, Don’t Drive.** If you live in a walkable area, make a practice of getting out and walking around your neighborhood, apartment complex, or campus. Instead of driving to the mailbox, convenience store, or apartment office, walk to get mail, groceries, and stuff. Be deliberate in your walk. Say hello to people you don’t know. Strike up conversations. Attract attention by walking the dog, taking a 6-pack (and share), bringing the kids. Make friends. Get out of your house! Last night I spend an hour outside gardening with my family. We had good conversations with 3-4 neighbors. Take interest in your neighbors. Ask questions. Engage. Pray as you go. Save some gas, the planet.

**3. Be a Regular.** Instead of hopping all over the city for gas, groceries, haircuts, eating out, and coffee, go to the same places. Get to know the staff. Go to the same places at the same times. Smile. Ask questions. Be a regular. I have friends at coffee shops all over the city. My friends at Starbucks donate a ton of left over pastries to our church 2-3 times a week. We use for church gatherings and occasionally give to the homeless. Build relationships. Be a Regular.

**4. Hobby with Non-Christians.** Pick a hobby that you can share. Get out and do something you enjoy with others. Try City League sports. Local rowing and cycling teams. Share your hobby by teaching lessons. Teach sewing lessons, piano lessons, violin, guitar “”, knitting, tennis lessons. Be prayerful. Be intentional. Be winsome. Have fun. Be yourself.

**5. Talk to Your Co-workers.** How hard is that? Take your breaks with intentionality. Go out with your team or task force after work. Show interest in your co-workers. Pick four and pray for them. Form mom’s groups in your neighborhood and don’t make them exclusively non-Christian. Schedule play dates with the neighbors’ kids. Work *on mission*.

**6. Volunteer with Non-Profits.** Find a non-profit in your part of the city and take Saturday a month to serve your city. Bring your neighbors, your friends, or your small group. Spend time with your church serving your city. Once a month. You can *do it!*

**7. Participate in City Events.** Instead of playing X-Box, watching TV, or surfing the net, participate in city events. Go to fundraisers, festivals, clean-ups, summer shows, and concerts. Participate missionally. Strike up conversation. Study the culture. Reflect on what you see and hear. Pray for the city. Love the city. Participate *with the city*.

**8. Serve your Neighbors.** Help a neighbor by weeding, mowing, building a cabinet, fixing a car. Stop by the neighborhood association or apartment office and ask if there is anything you can do to help improve things. Ask your local Police and Fire Stations if there is anything you can do to help them. Get creative. Just serve!

Don’t *make the* mistake of making “missional” another thing to add to your schedule. Instead, make your existing schedule missional.



## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This line of thinking has been adapted from the Acts 29 Network explained here: <http://www.acts29network.org/about/doctrine/>

<sup>2</sup> For more on this see John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* and the following article:  
[http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/1993/2990\\_God\\_Is\\_a\\_Very\\_Important\\_Person/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/ConferenceMessages/ByDate/1993/2990_God_Is_a_Very_Important_Person/)

<sup>3</sup> For more see Tim Keller:  
[http://www.redeemer2.com/visioncampaign/papers/Vision\\_Paper\\_1-The\\_Gospel-The\\_Key\\_to\\_Change.pdf](http://www.redeemer2.com/visioncampaign/papers/Vision_Paper_1-The_Gospel-The_Key_to_Change.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See Tim Keller's article, *All of Life is Repentance*:  
<http://www.greentreewebster.org/Articles/All%20of%20Life%20is%20Repentance.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> This phrase—community-centered gospel—is taken from Steve Timmis.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of *missio Dei* was first advanced by Karl Barth in 1932 at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference, where Barth emphasized that mission is an activity of God himself, as opposed to a purely ecclesiastical task. For more on the history of *missio Dei* see Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 389-93.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 25