

WHAT KIND OF CHURCH WILL WE SEEK TO BE?

Gospel Centred (vs. legalism, liberalism) - it is the gospel that has power to transform people's lives; people's problems solved by the gospel, not trying harder. Most people think we become Christians by believing the Gospel, and then we grow by mastering biblical principles for living. They believe that the Gospel is the starting point, but then we must move on to more advanced teaching to grow. But the Gospel is not merely the way we enter the kingdom, it is also the way we make all progress in kingdom living. The Gospel is not the ABC's but the A to Z of the Christian life. It is the way of righteousness "from first to last" (Romans 1:17).

Missional (vs. evangelistic; seeker sensible vs. seeker sensitive) -- everything we do, and how we communicate keeps the non-believer in mind (vs. evangelistic events or programs); thus, we need to remember what it was like not to believe; each member is a "missionary", incarnating the gospel at home, school, work

Community -- a place to belong; you will never know the power of God outside of community; seeking not just "fellowship" but pursuing spiritual "friendships" (sharing resources, time, feelings, faith -- preaching the gospel to one another). A gospel-centred church is a "people-centred" church, not a "program-centred" church.

Relevant to men -- if you reach the men you reach the community; fail to reach the men and you lose the community and the generation. We will be careful not to be too "feminine" in our worship, communication and activities, but will be comfortable to men.

Serving/mercy -- Though we joyfully invite every person to faith in Jesus, we are committed to sacrificially serving our neighbours whether they believe as we do or not. We do this by using our gifts and resources for the needs of others, especially the poor. And more than merely meeting individual needs, we work for justice for the powerless.

Culturally engaged -- we understand, are involved in and speak to our city and culture, seeking to influence it (individually and corporately)

A church for the city -- We seek to be a city within the city. We will be a church that serves, not uses or judges; for and not "against"; we believe that nothing promotes the peace and health of the city like the spread of faith in the gospel.

Presbyterian

WHOM ARE WE AIMING TO REACH?

The unchurched. *Lost people matter to God.* Close to 90% of the people who live in the Vernon area do not go to a Christian church (ie. they are lost).

Free Grace Vernon exists to reach these people.

Although this includes lost in "general" in our city and region, specifically it means we exist to reach those lost people who are within your sphere of influence (neighbors, friends, family members, co-workers, teammates, etc.)

HOW DO WE REACH THESE PEOPLE?

People come to faith in Christ through a series of "mini-decisions" or steps, rather than making one "big" decision after hearing one "moving" sermon, or hearing a single clear gospel "presentation". Thus, we will create a seeker sensible, Gospel-centered environment, where the unsaved and hurting can continually and progressively make "mini-decisions" towards or back to the cross.

SPECIFICALLY:

EVANGELISTIC WORSHIP SERVICE

Worship is a powerful attraction to unbelievers. God commanded the Israelites to invite the nations in declaring His glory. God expects to find non-believers in church! (see Is.56:6-8; 1Cor.14:23ff.) So will we. We will constantly invite our city, our neighbors, our friends and other contacts that presently do not believe, to come to church and hear the Gospel.

Non-believers must find worship challenging and understandable, not comfortable. If the Sunday service and sermon aim primarily at evangelism, it will bore the believers. If they aim primarily at education, they will bore and confuse unbelievers. If they aim at praising the God who saves by sheer grace, they will both instruct the believers and challenge the unbelievers.

How do we do that?

- a) *Worship and preaching in the "vernacular".*
- b) *Explain the service as you go along.*
- c) *Directly address and welcome them.*
- d) *Quality aesthetics.*

g) Preach grace.

The gospel of free, gracious justification and adoption is not just the way we enter the kingdom, but also the way we grow into the likeness of Christ.

NON-NEGOTIABLES OF WORSHIP SERVICE AT FREE GRACE

We will worship *as if* dozens of non-Christians are present, believing that, although they may not be there presently, they will be brought. This means that a) the quality of speaking and music will be inclusive (ie. no "in-house" talk); b) the language will be plain (ie. no Christian "jargon"; theological concepts explained); c) people's problems will be solved with the Gospel (vs. trying harder).

We will create an environment with regard to hospitality in which unbelievers not only feel welcome, but they feel normal.

We will create an environment, especially, with regard to worship, in which **people are proud** to bring their unbelieving friends. (YOU are the most powerful form of "advertizement" for the church. 25% of your friends would come if they were simply invited -- George Barna)

**** One of the aims at Free Grace is that Christians would leave a service thinking 'if only my unconverted brother/co-worker/ friend had been here'.**

Whatever our practice in worship we should make sure that it is the best it can be (sound, music, preparation of leaders) We will plan our services and execute each aspect of it *as if* there were 150-200 people present.

We will assume that worship services will always be composed of believers and unbelievers, and that both of them are in desperate need of the same thing - the Gospel.

BODY-LIFE EVANGELISM PRINCIPLE

There is virtually no event in the corporate life of our church in which unbelievers are unwelcome. We will focus less upon the idea of "outreach events" and more on the idea that every event is outreach.

Unbelievers need to be included in various settings (small groups, worship service, ministry, friendship) so that they can "try on" Christianity, to see if it and how it "works".

BRIDGE BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Aimed at wherever a person may be at on his spiritual journey -- Alpha, Prodigal God, skeptics forum, worship service, discovery, Community Groups, recovery groups/seminars/workshops (drugs, divorce, grief, alcohol, abuse) etc.

MERCY MINISTRY

Serving our community through acts of service that aim to meet people's physical, financial and emotional needs. Being a "neighbor" to our city.

PRESBYTERIAN DISTINCTIVES

The [Presbyterian Church in North America](#) (known as the PCA in the US) is an evangelical Protestant Christian denomination, the second largest Presbyterian church body in the United States after the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

The PCA professes a strong commitment to evangelism, missionary work, and Christian education. The church declares its goal to be

"faithful to the Scriptures, true to the Reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission."

Some well known members of the denomination include authors Timothy Keller, Tullian Tchividjian, RC Sproul, Randy Pope, Scotty Smith, Susan Hunt and Francis Schaeffer, as well as musicians Michael Card, Steven Curtis Chapman, Laura Story and Jars of Clay.

The Presbyterian Church in North America is different from other denominations and Christian groups in several distinct ways.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT

'Presbyterian' describes churches ruled by elders (the Greek word presbuteros means elder) who are elected by the congregation.

There are two kinds of elders:

(a.) teaching elders are who are pastors, and

(b.) ruling elders who are ordained laymen. Local churches are governed by a "session" of "presbyters" (elders), elected by the members of the congregation. Representatives of local churches within a geographical area compose a "presbytery." Representatives of presbyteries meet annually at "General Assembly."

We also have deacons who serve the church (see 1 Timothy 3).

The PCA is complementarian.

COVENANT THEOLOGY

The relationship that God has with his people is the central theme of the Bible. The Bible calls this relationship a covenant, and it is expressed throughout Scripture in the covenant motto: "I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Believers from the New Testament era and the Old Testament era are part of the same covenant of grace...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness..." Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Galatians 3:6-9).

Because of this understanding, there is great continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Although, many of the symbolic rituals and laws are no longer needed since Christ has appeared, the relationship of God to His people by grace continues.

SACRAMENTS

a) Baptism

The covenant promise of salvation has always been for believers and their children. Baptism is the sign or symbol of the covenant of grace. All who profess faith in Christ receive baptism, as do the children of believing Christians. In the Old Testament, God gave the covenant sign of circumcision to be given to males eight days old. Romans 4 says that circumcision was the sign and seal of salvation by faith, yet it was given to eight day old children who obviously did not yet profess faith.

This did not mean that they were saved, but it meant that they were included in all the promises, privileges, and obligations that God gave to Israel. The New Testament confirms that the promise of God is for believers and their children (Acts 2:37-39). In the Old Testament the sign and seal of God's covenant was circumcision, but in the New Testament it is baptism (Colossians 2:11). Also, there are many New Testament accounts of entire households including children, who were baptized (Acts 16:14-15; Acts 16:31-34; 1 Corinthians 1:16).

Regarding the mode of baptism, the "official" position of the Presbyterian Church in North America is that baptism by immersion is not necessary, but that sprinkling or pouring is fine. Many believe that putting water on the person, rather than putting the person in water, best symbolizes the meaning of baptism.

b) The Lord's Supper/Communion

We believe that in the Lord's Supper, while no physical changes take place in the bread and wine, *Christ is really present through the Spirit*, and that those who come in faith are truly blessed and that they spiritually receive Christ's Body and Blood. Communion is symbolic, but it's not *just* a symbol.

REFORMED THEOLOGY

The PCA's theological distinctives are based on the truths of Scripture, rediscovered during the 16th century reformation. These doctrinal beliefs are expressed in the Westminster Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms.

You don't have to be a Presbyterian to be a Presbyterian!

In other words, you don't have to hold to every point of Reformed theology in order to join Free Grace - you only have to have entered God's kingdom through faith in Jesus.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

Presbyterian Church in (North) America¹

We believe the Bible is the written word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error in the original manuscripts. The Bible is the revelation of God's truth and is infallible and authoritative in all matters of faith and practice.

We believe in the Holy Trinity. There is one God, who exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe that all are sinners and totally unable to save themselves from God's displeasure, except by His mercy.

We believe that salvation is by God alone as He sovereignly chooses those He will save. We believe His choice is based on His grace, not on any human individual merit, or foreseen faith.

We believe that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who through His perfect life and sacrificial death atoned for the sins of all who will trust in Him, alone, for salvation.

We believe that God is gracious and faithful to His people not simply as individuals but as families in successive generations according to His Covenant promises.

We believe that the Holy Spirit indwells God's people and gives them the strength and wisdom to trust Christ and follow Him.

We believe that Jesus will return, bodily and visibly, to judge all mankind and to receive His people to Himself.

We believe that all aspects of our lives are to be lived to the glory of God under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

¹ <http://pcanet.org/>

VISION

Presbyterian Church in (North) America

As one communion in the worldwide church, the Presbyterian Church in America exists to glorify God by extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ over all individual lives through all areas of society and in all nations and cultures. To accomplish this end the PCA aims to fill the world with churches that are continually growing in vital worship, in theological depth, in true fellowship, in assertive evangelism and in deeds of compassion.

The distinctiveness of the PCA lies in our stress on both reformation and revival. Without an emphasis on revival, "reformation" may become either a mimicking of political ideologies or sterile doctrinalism. Without an emphasis on reformation, "revival" may become a shallow pietism or mysticism. Only reformation and revival together can accomplish the Great Commission of our Lord.

We are committed to the Scriptures and the historic Westminster Standards (*Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger Catechism, Westminster Shorter Catechism*) based firmly on a biblical theology that answers the questions and issues of each culture and people to which we minister.

We are committed to worship that practices the presence and power of God within the church to the transformation of the surrounding culture through biblical application in population centres around the world.

We are committed to the winning of new converts and their incorporation into the church through the ministry of the Word and to significant ministry to the needy through deeds of mercy and service.

We are committed to the freedom of every member to minister through spiritual gifts and also to the responsibility to do so under spiritual authority and loving discipline.

We are committed to dynamic...confrontation of non-Christian thought forms and behaviour and also to the demonstration of the truth through the practice of holiness and love in Christian fellowship.

We are committed to guarding and strengthening the biblical family and also to a ministry to the broken family forms such as the divorced, the widowed and the unwed parent.

We are committed to teaching and discipling men and women in the whole counsel of God and also to ministering to the needs of the whole person.

True to the Scriptures, the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ

POSITION PAPERS²

Presbyterian Church in (North) America

Here is a list of position papers & committee reports on many relevant church and cultural issues addressed by the PCA, i.e. [The Baptism of the Holy Spirit](#), [Drinking Alcohol](#) etc...

REFORMED CONFESSIONS & CREEDS

[Westminster Confession of Faith](#)

[Westminster Shorter Catechism](#)

[Westminster Larger Catechism](#)

[Heidelberg Catechism](#)

[Belgic Confession](#)

[Children s Catechism](#)

[The Apostles' Creed/Nicene Creed/ Athanasian Creed](#)

*This information package is available online at www.FreeGraceVernon.com

2 <http://pcahistory.org/pca/>