



# Why the Church?

“True North” Series - #8

Do you ever wonder what all this is about? You know....church!  
Singing – Communion – Preaching....if you think about it very long it can seem a little strange. Take communion, for example, eating little pieces of cracker and drinking mini cups of juice together while we sit in rows?...but before we get too far off track....think about some of the other “interesting things” of life that we totally accept as normal.

## Sports (any sport!)

**Hunting** – Thousands of men travel thousands of miles and spend thousands of dollars to bring home meat that their family won’t eat!

**Basketball** – 10 really tall guys bouncing a ball and trying to get it through a tiny iron circle.

Or take **Football** – not 10 guys but 22 guys; not a round ball but an oblong ball; this one you don’t bounce but when you give it to one guy 11 others try to run into him as hard as they can!

There are a lot of things in life that can seem really strange if you think about them for very long. So church isn’t so unusual! In this “True North” series we’ve been taking a new topic every Sunday. What we believe about the Bible, about God, about Jesus Christ, about sin and salvation, about heaven and hell...all these very important beliefs that form the foundation of our faith and of the church. They are beliefs that don’t change! Lots of things change in church – (this carpet definitely needs to!!) We have the piano and the organ for a while – then we have the guitars and drums – we preach from a pulpit and then we take the pulpit away – we sit in pews and then we go to chairs – we sing out of hymnals and then sing off a screen... methods change but the message remains the same!

And if you haven’t been able to be here for all these messages and want to know how to get a copy we have one for you. I announced a few weeks back that we have a theme that will carry us through to Easter. “**Advancing in Ministry – Answering the Call of God**” is that theme. To help us stay on track and to keep us together we have a notebook for each adult and for Jr. High and Sr. High students that would like their own copy...so we can all keep on track together.

This morning your notebook comes with a copy of the past 7 messages – the “True North” series – and the beginning of a

series on prayer. The Gorrie’s and the Lauer’s are leading a prayer team as we head into Easter but they need some help! If you’re interested in working with them talk with them this morning. “**What is prayer?**” Good question! Everybody has an idea of what prayer is like – but not everybody has the right idea! Today we learn that prayer is essentially “Communication with God – Talking to God.” Some scriptures, some quotations and then some prayer requests (what we call requests from one person to others who pray asking them to pray the same thing they are!) In fact, let’s take 30 seconds right now for everybody to talk to God – to pray! Let’s all close our eyes and silently speak to God in our thoughts. Amazingly, He can hear us when no one else can!

We are all going to learn some things about communication with God in the weeks ahead. That will be good for us! And this morning we’re going to learn what we believe about the church.

What does the Bible tell us about the church? This is some of what our doctrinal statement says about the church...

## What Do We Believe?

### Article III. Statement of Faith

**10. We believe that the local church is the local expression of the body of Christ and is a voluntary association of baptized believers equal in rank and privilege, subject to the Word of God and independent of any external ecclesiastical control...**

“Local Church” – There is a universal church – a world-wide, history-encompassing church – that is made up of thousands, even millions of believers in Christ who are gathered in local churches. Immanuel is a local church with people whose address is Forest Lake, Wyoming, Stacy, Ham Lake, North Branch, Scandia, Chisago City, Lindstrom, Taylors Falls, etc. I may have missed somebody but I don’t think I missed anybody from Cleveland, Ohio. Why do I say that? Because Christians from Cleveland wouldn’t belong to a local church in Forest Lake, MN; they belong to one in Cleveland. Local churches serve their local area.

“Expression of the body of Christ” – We exist because of our connection and relationship with Jesus Christ. The Bible

illustrates how the church functions by comparing it to the body. Christ is the head and the church is the body. Just as the body must be connected to the head for proper functioning, so the church must be connected to Christ. If a “church” no longer recognizes Jesus as their Head then they have no purpose. They may still be called “King of Kings Methodist” or “First Lutheran” or “Grace Baptist” but if Jesus isn’t the Head they are no longer a church – in the biblical definition!

“Voluntary association” – Nobody is here because they have to be (that is excluding kids of course ☺) If you are a follower of Jesus Christ you are free to unite with this church or you can also choose Maranatha, Crossroads, Centennial Free, Grace Alliance, Willowbrook, Eagle Brook, or any number of local churches that are also local expressions of the body of Christ.

“Equal in rank and privilege” – We believe that everyone is equal in rank and privilege. In other organizations there are usually a group of people that see themselves as higher in rank and privilege. They might be called “Charter members” or the “inner circle” or the “movers and shakers”...but in the church it is not to be that way. We still struggle with that attitude!

“Subject to the Word of God” – We have one authority over us and it’s not another man or woman. What we do or don’t do comes from the Book. Not all issues are clear and Christians will go round and round sometimes about what the Bible does teach about cultural issues but as much as we know how we make it our goal to be defer to the Word. Plus, we are...

“Independent of any External Ecclesiastical Control” – Our denominational affiliation serves as a support structure for us (students going to SHOUT is good example) but it does not control us. The choices we need to make (staff, programming, building, by-laws) are made by us. We are both interdependent and independent.

## Why Do We Exist?

### 1. Worship

“**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.**” (Deuteronomy 6:5)

A church is grouping of people who love God and it exists to assist those people to encourage one another to worship Him. God is worthy of worship. Man's nature tendency is to self-worship or creature worship rather than creator-worship. The church exists to point people to Jesus. We were just talking a minute ago how things change. One of those things is the steeple / non-steeple look. Years ago a church had a steeple. (Learned the little finger play about "Here is the church...here is the steeple...open the doors...see all the people.") The purpose of the steeple was to lift a person's eyes upwards. Worship! May not have a steeple but our purposes still include worship.

## 2. Evangelism

**"My prayer (Jesus) is not for them alone (his disciples). I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message." (John 17:20)**

From the beginning when Jesus established the church it has always had a message to bring. That is the message of the gospel, the evangel, the good news. The church's message is to be a message of good news! Mankind is lost in sin but God, who is rich in mercy, sent his own Son to die in order to take the penalty for our sins. So that anyone who wants a piece of the forgiveness action can experience that total and complete forgiveness but simply accepting the free gift of God! That's the good news and that's the message we are constantly trying to get out there!

## 3. Fellowship

**"From him (Jesus) the whole body (the church) ... grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work." (Ephesians 4:16)**

One of the functions of the church is to serve as a collection agency, kind of... Not to get your money but to collect and connect people. We don't naturally bond together! Maybe as families or people who work together but just putting a bunch of people together and expecting them to connect is ... well, it's just not going to work.

Imagine a bag of marbles – shake them around, slosh them around, squeeze them, whatever you try they are going to stay marbles.

But then imagine a bag of grapes – shake them up, squeeze them, the walls of the grapes start to break down and the juices start to mingle and mix, they lose their separate identity and become part of something totally new! Separately we can only accomplish a little – Together we can become something much better. That's fellowship and part of our purpose is to help it happen!

## 4. Service

**"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?...You are the light of the world...let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:13-14, 16)**

Salt and Light – two entities that exist to serve. Salt serves to enhance flavor and to preserve. That preserving was seen this past week as the #1 concern that voters had were "moral values." More than the war in Iraq, more than terrorism, more important than the economy – their vote was motivated by a concern that the moral values of our nation did not decay any further than they have. The church exists to "salt" the society.

Light is another picture of serving. "Let men see your good deeds" and what will happen? They will praise your Father in heaven. We're not just here in our communities to evangelize and worship...we've got work to do! We should be looking for the chances to serve – to "do old-fashioned good deeds" because Jesus says that's how people praise God! OCC is a prime example of just a little something we can do. Another is...

## 5. Discipleship

**"So we preach Christ to everyone...in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature individual in union with Christ." (Colossians 1:28 GNT)**

God's goal for each of us is maturity. He wants us to become more and more and more like Jesus. That's part of the church's mandate – to teach and train – did you notice? "each one" Everybody's included! How do we do that? Messages on Sunday / Sunday School classes / Wednesday evening Bible stories / Men's and Women's studies / Opportunities to put what we've learned into practice – at home, at work, at school...

The church – sometimes it's kind of a funny thing – but where would this world be without the body of Christ? It comes in all sizes. It has any kind of name you can almost imagine. (First Missionary Baptist to Colonial Church of Edina) It meets in elaborate church buildings, or very common ones, in school auditoriums and cafeterias, outdoors or in. It takes on so many different forms yet it is part of the body of Christ and because it is it has value! Kind of strange – the church is – but we're family!

An old song says,  
*I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God  
/ I've been washed in the fountain,  
cleansed by his blood.*

*Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod  
/ For I'm part of the family, the family of God.*

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This message was presented by Pastor Mark Coughlin on November 7, 2004 at Immanuel Church of Forest Lake, MN.  
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