

Back to the Basics: Reclaiming our Identity & Purpose

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Following major disruption by the COVID-19 pandemic over the past several months, most churches are beginning to reopen their buildings for public worship and other activities, albeit with great caution. As I think about our own planned re-opening on Sunday July 5, I am wondering about the significance of that reopening. I am wondering whether re-opening our buildings is all God is calling us to do. I sense a call not just to return to our beautiful campus, but to our basic understanding of who we are and what we are about.

Many of you are aware that the pandemic was not the only cause of disruption for us. The greater cause of disruption for us was the dissension that happened a year before the pandemic. The pandemic came at a time when we were just beginning to regroup and refocus our attention to what needed to be done to recover from that major disruption. This means that for us at Ascension, re-opening does not simply mean reopening our buildings but reopening our hearts and minds to the healing and hope God intends for us. Genuine reopening begins with a renewed commitment to the Great Commandment (John 13:34) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Re-opening has everything to do with going back to the basics of our identity and our purpose.

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Purpose, Vision, Mission, & Core Principles

The basics of our identity and purpose are best articulated in the statements developed during our yet-to be completed Discernment, Visioning, and Strategic Planning process. The statements include a purpose statement, a vision statement, a mission statement, and core values/principles. Below are the statements along with the scriptural foundations on which they are based.

Purpose Statement: Our purpose is to proclaim God’s Love in Westminster and beyond. *“... repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”* (Luke 24:47 NRSV).

Vision Statement: Our Vision is to be a Christ-centered, Spirit-led, and mission-minded family of faith so reflecting the life of Christ that we may draw others to him. *“... you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”* (Ephesians 2:19-22).

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” (Romans 8:14)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

Mission Statement: Our mission is to provide opportunities for all people to Connect, Grow, and Serve in the name of Christ.

“...we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Core Principles: Prayer, Participation, Patience

Prayer - *“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6).*

Participation – *“We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: ... Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” (Romans 12:6, 11-13).*

Patience – *“But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” (Romans 8:25).*

“So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.” (Galatians 6:9).

It is my hope that this season of reopening, will be for us an opportunity to reopen our hearts and minds for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit to give us a renewed understanding and commitment to live into the reality of these statements. This form of reopening does not require being in our physical buildings but a willingness to pray from wherever you are, participate as you are able, and wait patiently for the harvest.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21).