

Church Life Distinctives

Membership Class

Cross of Grace Church

At Cross of Grace there are some distinctive ways we live as a church body and places where our beliefs shape our life as a church.

Our Church Gatherings

Core practice: Expository preaching // Normally on Sunday mornings we preach books or sections of the Bible, passage by passage, until the end of the book or section. Sometimes we preach topically on questions like “What does the Bible say about money?” or “How can I be a good Christian employee?” But we want our general pattern to be working through books or sections together as a church. Why? First, because we want to make sure we understand what we’re reading in context with the passages that surround it, to best understand what God has said. We want the main point in our sermons to be the main point in the text of Scripture. Second, we want God to set the agenda for our Sunday messages. As we study Scripture this way we find ourselves encountering wonderful, strange, controversial, and uncomfortable passages because they’re what God has in His word for us. Last, we believe that every part of Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (1 Tim 3:16). So we believe that any passage we cover on Sunday together can be helpful, informative, and applicable to daily life.

Core Practice: Gospel shaped worship // In our Sunday gatherings we want our times of singing in worship to be shaped carefully by the truth of Scripture and truth of the gospel. We make every effort to pursue a gospel-shaped liturgy (meaning our order of service and what we do in our gathering). In our gatherings we read Scripture to open and close our meeting and throughout our time of singing. We do this because it’s important that what we sing about God and say about God flow from his revealed Word.

Additionally, the songs we sing during the first part of the service often fall into a distinct pattern: God - Man - Christ - Response. We open by reminding ourselves of who God is (God), sing about our need for Him (Man), sing about what Jesus has done for us (Christ), and end by singing about our response to this truth (Response). We want the shape of the gospel story to shape our gatherings as the thing of first importance in the church (1 Cor 15:1-3).

Our Life as a Church

Core Practice: Gospel-Centered Life // The message of Jesus' life death and resurrection is of "first importance" (1 Cor 15), not just in what we believe but also how we live. Again and again Scripture makes clear connections between the truth of the gospel and how we should live. For example in Ephesians 5:2 we are encouraged to "walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us." Husbands are called to "love your wives as Christ loved the church" (Eph 5:25). This is why one of the main aims of our membership process is to make sure Christians have a strong grasp of the gospel and how to live in light of it. This also significantly shapes the way that we do counseling and other ministries.

Core Practice: Hospitality // When the early church gathered they were "breaking bread with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2). Families eat together, and we want to imitate this in our church family. Often in our groups and events as a church we'll gather around a meal. This is a means of hospitality (Romans 12:13) and a way to build relationships with one another as family.

Core Practice: Membership // In our church we encourage church membership as an expression of gospel partnership. It's formally saying, "I'm joining the partnership. I'm buying the boat with you. I'm taking on the mission." In our church membership agreement is a commitment to gospel partnership (Phil 1:4-6). We encourage people to understand what the church believes, how it lives, and what its mission is. Then we want them to prayerfully consider if this is really where God is calling them. Then if so, we want them to take our membership agreement and wholeheartedly affirm it.

Core practice: Serving // Scripture encourages us, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10). We encourage every member to identify their gifts and serve in many ways. One specific thing we encourage our members to do is sign up for a Sunday team because it takes all of us to pull off the gathering, serve people, and be hospitable.

Core practice: Giving // We also see a clear pattern of giving in the New Testament. Gospel people should be a generous people. This can take many forms: we see people give toward benevolence, Paul encourages Timothy to make sure pastors are paid something (1 Tim 5), funds are pooled for gospel mission. We want to encourage our church to express gospel partnership through giving.

Core practice: Small Groups // Community Groups are groups of 8-16 people that meet in people's homes in various areas of the city. The meetings consist of hospitality and plenty of time for fellowship, a time of opening and studying the Word together, and prayer and ministry to one another. While each group looks a little different, the core values and practices of the early church should be part of the meeting (see Acts 2:42-26).