



THE CHURCH OF CHRIST AT
WHITE STATION

Our Life Together at White Station

Empowerment

On a very unusual playing field--

Imagine a soccer field, players moving gracefully, passing smartly, enjoying the "beautiful game." But as the ball rolls toward the sideline, players shrink back, afraid to pursue, for just beyond the chalk line is a thousand-foot drop.

Throughout the rest of the match, players use only the center of the field. "Why not put up a fence around the field," they say--"a barrier that will protect us and at the same time allow us to use all the field at full speed without fear and without hesitation." And they did, and the game went on--players going full tilt, even along the sideline.

At White Station our empowerment model of leadership encourages all of us to identify our talents and then use them in service to the Kingdom--full tilt, without fear and without hesitation. But we need boundaries and limits as well--beliefs and core values to which we all subscribe that will keep us from stepping out of bounds. These common assumptions do not impede ministry; they empower ministry. They provide the fence along the cliff so that we can play hard and use the whole field.



Our mission (to serve everyone in our diverse community, to lead the lost to Christ, and to help everyone become fully mature) builds on a strong foundation of faith.

THE PROCESS

This is the third written statement of the White Station church, expounding who we are, what we are about, and how empowerment works. The first was our cogent **mission statement**. The second was the **Philosophy of Shepherding**, which the elders signed as a covenant with the congregation.

Now this document, **Our Life Together at White Station**, answers some of our questions in more detail about what *empowerment* is and is not, and it suggests how we can become involved in the work to which God has called us.

In an *empowerment model* of leadership, elders do not make all the decisions for the congregation.

The question that naturally follows is this: If the elders are not making all the decisions, how do others know what decisions *they* can make, what programs *they* can begin, what initiatives *they* can take?

For example, can members of a ministry do anything they want? Of course not, but what are the appropriate restrictions on this idea of "empowerment"? How do we work together as a community of believers?

This document was created to answer questions like these that have arisen as a spirit of empowerment has flourished at White Station. It defines our common beliefs, our core values, and our shared assumptions. As such, we all willingly embrace it because it becomes the liberating "fence" that allows us to use the whole field! The Scriptures that are cited are intended to be examples of the overall teaching in God's Word.

The Leadership Team, comprising elders and the ministry team, has written this document. It proclaims who we are and what we want to be so that everyone can easily grasp our shared vision for White Station. This document began with the ministry team in early 2007. The elders spent two days of prayer and work on it in the spring of that year; and at the Leadership Team Retreat in September 2007, the document was once again the focus. Since that time, editing and revision have taken place. The Leadership Team plans a full review of this work in 2010.

May God bless us all as we seek to serve everyone in our diverse community, to lead the lost to Christ, and to mature in Christ.

The Bedrock of our Faith

- God created the universe, sustains it even today, forever seeks to redeem it, and desires that it reflect his glory (Genesis 1-2; Exodus 34:6-7).
- Jesus Christ, God's Son, sent from the Father, came to earth in human form. Born of a virgin, he lived among people, died on a cross, was buried in a tomb, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven. He is the only way to the Father. We eagerly anticipate Christ's return and the ultimate victory of God over sin and death (John 1:1-14; 14:5-14; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:9-12, 1 Thessalonians 4).
- God's Holy Spirit dwells within everyone who has been born of the water and Spirit. His Spirit gives the church power to witness to others and to mature into the likeness of Jesus (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:9-11; Ephesians 3:16, 17).

The Cornerstone of our Faith

- God reveals his will through Scripture (both the Old and New Testament), which is God's inspired Word. The Bible provides full authority to shape who we are, what we believe, and how we worship (Romans 15:4; Colossians 3:12-17; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 10:1-10).

The Central Experiences of our Faith

- All mankind sins, falls short of God's glory, and stands in need of God's redemption through the grace and mercy of Christ Jesus. Those who embrace God's redemption will be welcomed into God's presence in Heaven; those who do not receive God's redemption will face the just punishment of God in Hell (Romans 1:18-2:11; 3:21-26).
- Through the redeeming blood of Christ, God grants salvation, forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and the Holy Spirit to believers after they are immersed. God adds baptized believers to the church (Acts 2:38-47; Romans 5:1-11; 6:1-4).
- Called into being by the Gospel, the church is God's community of faith to honor and glorify God through worship, discipleship, fellowship, and service (Acts 2:47; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 4:25-5:32).
- The church maintains the unity for which Jesus prayed by submitting to the headship of Christ and by growing toward maturity in a community of baptized believers who seek to glorify God (John 17; Romans 10:12-13; Galatians 3:26-29; Psalm 100).



The Worship of our Faith

- Though we seek always to expand our understanding of the nature of worship, our primary focus in worship is to praise God for all he has done and all that he continues to do among us. We encourage one another as we worship, and our needs are met as God blesses us and answers those needs.
- God hears our prayers and in response empowers, transforms, heals, and guides us even when he answers in ways other than we might desire.
- The Lord's Supper is a central part of our worship every Sunday. It reminds us of our covenant with God through Christ, it testifies to the resurrection of Christ, it anticipates the return of Christ, it affirms our fellowship in Christ, and it celebrates the forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Christ. It is also a time for acknowledging the special communion and fellowship we have with other members of the body, both here at White Station and around the world (Matthew 26:17-30; Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
- We sing to praise God and encourage one another. We sing a cappella, recognizing that this practice was followed in the first-century church (1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
- Courageous, biblically sound preaching encourages us to study the Word, to share a common mission as a church family, and to reflect on our relationship with the Father.
- Through generous and cheerful giving, we recognize we are only managers of God's many blessings. As an act of worship, our stewardship is a weekly confession we are all recipients of far more than we can ever repay.
- We meet the diverse needs of the congregation with several services each Sunday. These different services--well-planned and participatory--enhance outreach, involvement, and fellowship.

The Leadership of our Faith

- God calls servants (such as elders, ministry team members, deacons, and ministry leaders) to serve in specific areas where they can best use their God-given gifts.
 - God appoints shepherds (elders/overseers) to care for the spiritual well-being of the body. They provide general oversight, offer spiritual and moral guidance, pray regularly for the welfare of each member, establish and nurture mentoring relationships, and provide leadership for the future direction of the church (Ezekiel 34; Acts 20:25-35; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17).
 - God has called a ministry team to provide professional leadership in preaching, administration, worship and children, youth and seniors ministries.
 - Our shepherds and ministry team work together to enhance the church's ability to bring glory and honor to God (Ephesians 3:20-21).
 - We value leadership--the role of male leadership as elders and deacons, and gifted men and women as ministry leaders. We value the influence that older men and women have through mentoring those who are younger. We encourage all who have the gift of leadership to seek God's guidance in how that gift may be used to strengthen the church.
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The Organization of our Faith

- All Christians have direct access to God. Believers are not required to approach God through a hierarchy of professional clergy or church leaders (Matthew 6:5-16; Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-25); thus, we are an independent self-governing church (Mark 10:35-45; 1 Timothy 3; 5:17-21; 1 Peter 2:9-10; 5:1-5).
- We have a diversity of spiritual gifts in the body. An empowerment model of leadership demands that all members find their gifts, then use them to build up the whole body (Romans 12:1-8; Ephesians 4:11-16).

The Relationships of our Faith

- Christ accepts all who follow him; therefore, we strive for ethnic, social, economic, and generational inclusion in the body of Christ. Even in our diversity, however, we remain united in Christ (Romans 10:12-13; 1 Corinthians 12:4-13; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 4:1-6).
- As we operate as a church family, we desire to ensure accountability in finances, in the leadership team, and in the selection of those working with children and teens.
- We seek the intentional development of relationships within small groups through the Bible classes for the purposes of prayer, fellowship, encouragement, spiritual support, and accountability. These small groups provide a structure for connection with the shepherds of the church.
- Marriage is the union of one man and one woman. God intends for marriage to be dissolved only by death, but we follow the example of God's grace in extending mercy and support to those who have experienced divorce (Mark 10:1-12; Galatians 6:2-3).
- We value our relationship with other churches of Christ, and we cooperate in good works with them. We also cooperate with groups outside our fellowship to honor God and to meet needs within our community.

The Heritage of our Faith

- As a church of Christ, we remain committed to the central teachings of the American Restoration Movement, our heritage, as set forth by its leaders in the early 1800s. We seek to be Christians only, but do not claim to be the only Christians. We affirm the statement that early restoration leaders adopted: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things, charity."



The Maturing of our Faith

We seek to prepare God's people, whatever their age, for works of service, and we seek to build up the body so that we can become spiritually mature. No matter the life stage, we desire to walk with people through shepherding, teaching, counselling, mentoring, and caring.

- We value a strong children's ministry, under the leadership of a full-time children's minister, which nurtures children and families through Bible classes, children's church, community events for children, Vacation Bible School, and mentoring.
- We value teens as servants in the church now and seek their ideas for the church. Realizing that during the teenage years many will make the decision to follow Christ, we have full-time male and female youth ministers, who work with families to encourage spiritual development of the young through strong relationships. We offer opportunities for learning, serving, and maturing in faith, such as junior high camp, youth mission trips, and weekly activities.
- We value the needs of young adults on university campuses in Memphis and provide oversight for the Christian Student Center at the University of Memphis.
- We value young couples and professionals and provide Bible classes and fellowship groups.
- We value single adults and provide Bible classes and activities for fellowship and outreach.
- We value our senior adults through an active ministry, led by a minister, which recognises their worth and provides opportunities for service, care, evangelism, fellowship, and education.
- We value Christian education, and it occupies a prominent place in our life as a church family. We encourage studying Scripture in the home, and we are blessed to offer well-qualified teachers who teach Bible classes for all ages in Sunday school, and mid-week Bible study. Men or mixed-gender teams teach mixed-gender adult Bible classes. Women teach women's adult Bible classes. And both men and women teach classes designed to equip people for ministry.
- Our commitment to Christian education extends to the city and the world. We have supported the mission of Memphis Harding Academy and Harding University Graduate School of Religion since the 1960s. We host an elementary-school branch of Harding Academy on our campus.
- We value public-school education as well, and we have developed a relationship with Colonial Middle School to minister to their needs.
- Through a strong relationship with Agape Child and Family Services, professional counseling is available to anyone within our church family and community.



The Sharing of our Faith

- We have committed to stay at our present location so that God may bless our community, our city, our nation, and the world through the resources God has given us. We want to reach out to our community in more effective ways.
- We are committed to the support of missions and ministry among the poor. By devoting at least 30% of our budget to missions, this church has planted over 50 churches and has served the poor throughout the world. Our priority goes to long-term mission ministries locally, nationally, and internationally, but we also value annual short-term medical and youth missions.
- We value our ministry to Cambodians in Memphis and provide Bible classes for them.
- We value the deaf community in Memphis, and we provide a full-time minister, worship and fellowship opportunities, and classes for them. We assist worldwide with seminars, workshops, and Christian camps.

The Future of our Faith

We value long-term planning, and we hope for future growth. As we continue to discern who we are and what God wants us to be, we continue to discover areas of ministry in which we are not engaged, though they would support our mission. Knowing that we have not lived out all of God's purposes yet, we pray for more leadership and resources to fulfill our desire to grow in these ministries. Thus, in the future,

- We hope that our neighborhood will view us as a great resource, open to serving the community in a variety of ways. We want that service to provide opportunities to share the good news of the Gospel of Christ with those who are lost.
- We hope to learn better how to minister to all those who have been hurt by divorce, dysfunction, addiction, and abuse. We want to create a safe environment that affords healing and grace rather than a feeling of isolation and shame.
- We hope to be more involved in social justice issues in the Memphis community. We have many individuals who regularly pray for our community leaders, our city mission efforts, our adopted school, and community-service organizations, but as a church we want to become effective advocates for the poor and voices for those who have no voice in our community.
- We hope to plan and implement a church planting in a part of our community that is not currently served by a local congregation. We want that church to grow, to serve to the glory of God, and to become self-sufficient.

