

Philosophy of Ministry at Christ Presbyterian Church: Presuppositions, Commitments, and Process of Spiritual Formation

Presuppositions

Presuppositions are understood assumptions of fact controlling how any church (or individual) approaches ministry. Though transcending any specific context (presuppositions are not contextual!), presuppositions affect the expression of a given church's ministry as it seeks to work out its commitments (see below) in a particular context. Presuppositions answer the question "why". Any and every method (how) of ministry can and should be informed by its presuppositions.

1. The Gospel Changes Everything

Summary:

Christ's gospel, the good news about his life, death, resurrection, ascension and reigning Lordship, can transform any person, community, institution or place.

Explanation:

Evangelical New Testament scholar Simon Gathercole distilled a simple, three-point outline of the Gospel as it is found in the New Testament:¹

- * Jesus was the promised Messianic King and Son of God come to earth as a servant, in human form, to establish God's Reign. (Rom 1:3–4; Phil 2:4–13; Mark 1:1).

¹ "The Gospel of Paul and the Gospel of the Kingdom" in *God's Power to Save*, ed. Chris Green Apollos/Inter-Varsity Press, UK, 2006.

- * By his death and resurrection, Jesus atoned for our sin and secured our justification by grace, not by our works (Rom 4:3–5:1; 8:1; 1 Cor 15:3–57; Mark 10:45).
- * On the cross Jesus broke the dominion of sin and evil over us (Col 2:13–15; Rom 6:3–7:6; Mark 1:14–2:10). At his return he will complete what he began by renewing the entire creation so that it reflects God’s original intention. We then will be free from the presence of sin and evil (Rom 8:18–21; Matt 19:28).

The Gospel then is that announcement of “Good News” that through the person and work of Jesus, the Messiah, God fully accomplishes salvation for us. He satisfied the judgment our sins deserve, bringing us into fellowship with God. He established his kingdom which eventually will be seen in a restored creation in which we will enjoy new life together with him forever. When we believe and rely on Jesus’ work and record (rather than our own), we find that God summons us into this new life so that we can begin to experience it now by his Spirit.

Therefore:

- * The Gospel Changes Individual Lives.
 - By showing people God’s uncompromising holiness, the gospel convicts people of sin, their rebellion against God, and utter separation from him (Is 6:1-7; Rom 1:18; 3:19-20; Jn 16:8). At the same time, by showing people God’s infinite love for sinners, the gospel gives people a desire to turn from sin and find ultimate meaning and satisfaction in living for God (Jn 3:16; I Jn 4:7-9).
 - Religion makes nice people; the gospel makes new people. Religion reforms you on the outside; the gospel transforms you from the inside out (Lk 7:36–50; 18:10–14).
 - The gospel is not just for entering the Christian faith, but is necessary to continue the Christian faith (Gal 3:1-3; Col 1:6).
 - Being “in Christ” gives individuals a new past, a new future, a new Father, and a new family; thus, a whole new identity (Rom 6:1–11).
 - Having “Christ in us” by the Spirit, individuals possess a new wisdom, love, power, motivation, and mindset (Rom 8:2–15).
- * The Gospel Renews Communities.
 - Jesus’s work establishes a new community by reconciling people from all different backgrounds, making them unified in him (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:14–17).
 - The gospel is good news about “the Kingdom of God”, his reign over every aspect of life (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Rom 1:1–4). Therefore, the gospel directly addresses injustice, the poor, the marginalized, the helpless, classism, racism, and isolation.
- * The Gospel Transforms Creation and Culture.
 - If sin is a misdirection that affects everything (Gal 3:22), and if grace is God’s answer to that problem (1 Jn 3:8), then no aspect of life should be excluded from Christ’s redemption—all things are reconciled to God in the sacrifice of Christ (Col 1:20; Eph 1:10; Rom 8:19–21). A biblical understanding of sin as a defection from God’s original intent, a disease which corrupts every aspect of human existence, necessitates an appreciation of grace that is equal in scope, equal in radicality, and even more powerful (Rom 5:20). And since sin touches business, education, arts, and politics, we believe Jesus came to cure all of these.

Implications:

- * Because the gospel of grace is God’s explosive power for salvation (Rom 1:16), it is the foundation for all that we do.
- * Because the Gospel of grace renders us righteous before God, our absolute confidence in God’s acceptance of us in Christ provides the greatest motivation for our ministry.
- * Because the gospel brings individuals to faith and matures individuals in faith, we preach the same gospel to believers and unbelievers.

- * Because it is the gospel of grace which trains us in righteousness (Tit 2:12), we motivate with grace not guilt.
- * Because the gospel brings us new life in the Spirit, we rely on the Spirit for the power to love and obey.
- * Also since the transforming power of the Spirit is present in the midst of our community, we are committed to preaching and teaching the dynamic and re-creative aspects of grace, which extend beyond the forgiveness of sins (1 Cor 15:10).
- * Since the announcement of the Gospel is an announcement that God's kingdom has already come in part, we expect that as God's new humanity, Christians will live transformed lives and be agents of renewal in the world (individual, communal, and societal).
- * But since the Kingdom has "not yet" come in full and we await its consummation, we recognize that all of us still struggle unsuccessfully to seek healing and change (Phil 3:12; Rom 8:23). For this reason we continually seek to remind people that Jesus' work is enough to cleanse them from any and every sin (Heb 9:14), and recognize that both individual Christian lives and our church community will continually be marked by confession, repentance, and forgiveness.

2. God is on a Mission

Summary:

In the words of Christopher Wright, the whole "Bible renders to us the story of God's mission" and the essence of God's mission is "to extend his reign through the gospel of Jesus Christ."

Explanation:

- * As Herman Bavinck put it: "The essence of the Christian religion consists in this: that the creation of the Father, devastated by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God and recreated by the Holy Spirit into the kingdom of God."
- * This is true regardless of appearances!
- * All mission starts with the mission of the triune God (Jn 20:21; Lk 24:49; Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4, 6). The Father sends the Son, who in turn sends the Spirit.
- * God's mission progresses "through God's people in their engagement with God's world for the sake of the whole of God's creation" (Wright).
- * All human mission is a participation in and extension of God's sending (Lk 9:2; Jn 20:21; Act 28:28). Thus it is not so much that God has a mission for his church, but that God has a church for His mission. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for God's mission.
- * The primary resources which God's gives the Church for mission are his Spirit and Word.

Implications:

- * Since it is *the Bible* that renders to us the mission of God, and the Bible which equips us for our mission, our mission is rooted unalterably in God's authoritative Word. We preach it, teach it, root our identity in it, and trust that God will bless our commitment to it.
- * Since God has been purposing and accomplishing his mission from eternity and will for

eternity, we have confidence that God is always at work (Jn 5:17; Matt 16:18; Acts 28:31), and will not be thwarted in advancing his Kingdom. This means...

- that we can be freed from the burden of feeling like it all depends on us.
 - that God's kingdom and mission should ignite and inform our prayers.
- * Since the Church exists for God's mission, it must constantly seek to reevaluate itself as to whether or not its emphasis, organization, and activity effectively position it to partner with God in mission.
- * Since God is about the building of his Kingdom, we should be kingdom-minded people.
- * Since Jesus provides the model for missionary encounter, in the same manner as our savior...
- the church must constantly be marked by crucifixion (2 Cor 1:5, 4:10–12; Phil 2:5–12; Col 1:24; Gal 6:17)
 - the church must continually seek ways to contextualize the gospel without compromising its truth (Jn 20:21).

3. Creation is Good

Summary:

Everything God created, as God's creation, remains very good (1 Tim 4:4–5).

Explanation:

- * When God created the world, he created it very good (Gen 1:9, 32). Sin does not belong to the structure of things. Sin is an alien intruder, a parasite. Thus even though it is fallen, the world (as God's creation) remains good and as humans we are to care for, develop, and enjoy God's good creation (Gen 1:28; 2:15).
- * Creation can be taken in two directions: in a way that is in line with God's creative intention and in a way that is not. Sin is the misuse, misappropriate, distortion and perversion of God's good creation.
- * The two directions in which creation can be used, developed, and enjoyed correspond to the two opposing forces that are now at work in the world: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The enmity between these two hostile forces does not coincide with two parts of reality. Even though God will ultimately be victorious, both sovereignties lay claim to all things.

Implications:

- * We unapologetically enjoy God's creation (Gen 1:29–30; Ps 104:14–15; Ecc 9:7–10), believing that apart from sin all things are to be embraced, studied, marveled at, meditated upon, and enjoyed for God's glory and our pleasure (Jm 1:17). Whether we are raising children, playing music, enjoying food, appreciating art, laughing at a joke, having sex within marriage, whatever it may be, we seek God's glory (1 Cor 10:31).
- * Because both God and Satan lay claim to all things, no aspect of life is neutral or uncontested.
- * Quality and aesthetics matter in all things. Whether it's the music we hear and sing in our meetings, our web-design, the materials on which we print our bulletins, even down to the food we offer for hospitality, excellence and creativity is our goal. We desire to offer God the best of our creativity, energy, and skill that we might reflect his character.

- * Work is a gift from God, part and parcel of being created in his image. Therefore, rather than shrink from hard work, we pursue and promote it. We continually seek in the power of the Holy Spirit to improve our work for the advancing of God's Kingdom.
- * While Christians are called to reject culture that is in antithesis to God's design, they are also called to create, engage, and transform culture.

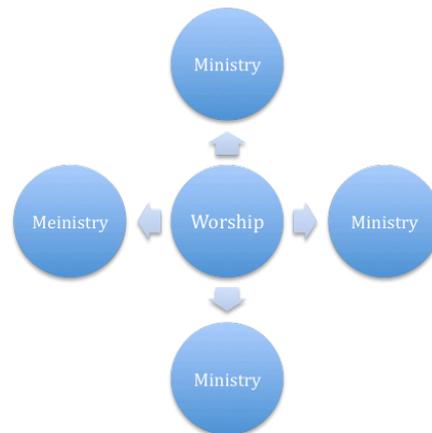
Commitments

Commitments are those things which we value and emphasize in ministry, believing that as we devote ourselves to these things, we will fulfill our purpose of bringing glory to God by being a sign of and witness to what God has accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish through Jesus Christ and by the Spirit. While flexible, whatever methods we choose for executing our commitments will inevitably be informed by our presuppositions.



1. Worship

Throughout the Bible, the distinguishing mark of God's people is that they know the living God to be present with them (Deut 4:6-7; 2 Cor 3:7-17). And while God is always with his people, it is in gathered worship that this truth is most acutely experienced and revealed (Lev 9:5-6; Jn 2:21-24; 1 Cor 14:24; Heb 12:22-29). Therefore, our services of worship hold primary place for what we do as a church. This meeting is the hub around which all our other ministries and gatherings revolve, the source in and out of which other ministries flow. Our purpose is to help people, believers and unbelievers (1 Cor 14:24-25), come into the presence of the living God and commune with him through Christ and by the Spirit.



2. Community

A central theme which runs throughout the Bible is that God is creating a *people* for himself. God is not merely saving individuals; he is building a new community. The development of that community lies at the heart of God's covenant promise "I will be your God and you will be my people." Consider the following:

- * Israel was addressed and dealt with primarily as a community and the covenant was directed to them as a community. The calling they had received from God was received as a nation and was meant to be lived out as such.

- * When someone within Israel's community sinned, often God dealt not just with the individual offender, but with the corporate body. God sees his people as being deeply connected to one another and responsible for one another and treats them accordingly.
- * In calling the 12 Apostles, Jesus reconstituted Israel around himself. The church is Israel as it has been restored in Jesus. The New Testament does not lose interest in developing a community or shift the focus away from the community.
- * The great majority of the New Testament writings were not addressed to individuals, but to entire communities. They were meant to be read as communities, interpreted in communities, and embodied by communities. For instance, Romans 12:1 reads: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer you bodies (plural) as a living sacrifice (singular), holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service (liturgy)." The corporate body of the church is what is depicted as the living sacrifice, not the lives of individual Christians. We offer ourselves to God as a community. For Paul, the community has priority over the individual. Thus the question, "what does this mean to/for us?" is meant to have priority over the question "what does this mean to/for me?" This is not to suggest that we should not view ourselves as individuals or that our individuality does not matter. But the latter question is most appropriately formulated: "What does this mean to me as a member of this community?"

CPC must therefore take the call to be God's new community with utmost seriousness. We are made in the likeness of a God who is not only committed to community and calls us to community, but is himself a community. He did not create us to live in isolation and autonomy. We will never be what we are supposed to be or do what we were made to do while living in isolation from worshipful friendship with God, and mutually-serving friendship with others.

3. Mission

God desires and purposes to be known throughout his entire creation (Is 11:9; Hab 2:14). He has not only saved us from something (our sin), he has saved us for something: to participate in his mission to restore the creation, which happens when people repent of their sins and follow the world's rightful and gracious Lord. God's people have been blessed to be a blessing (Gen 12:2-3), called to call, elected for the world's sake (Ex 19:4-6; 1 Pet 2:9-11). Therefore CPC exists here in Santa Barbara as a witness to God's saving acts so that he might be known and worshipped as the world's Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. This makes us:

Kingdom-Minded:

As a church, we are both a model and agent of God's Kingdom and a witness to its unique priorities—loving and serving one another, ministering to the poor, upholding social justice, being generous with our resources, being a light in the darkness, serving God with our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Prayer-Oriented:

- * Knowing that all our efforts in mission are vain unless they are rooted in and aligned with the mission of God, we are committed to be a community that prays regularly—corporately and individually.
- * As we come to know the loving heart of our heavenly Father, we pray in anticipation that God will answer our prayers. While he does not always answer them in the way we expect, we trust that he is answering them in the ways that we need.

Outward-Looking:

- * Jesus makes us a people for others such that non-Christians are welcomed and respected, with all their questions, objections, struggles, and doubts.
- * Non-christians are not only welcome, but expected to be in our midst. We therefore strive for comprehensibility at all times, especially in worship services.
- * We realize that unbelievers will be “looking on and listening in” wherever we are as a body or as individuals. Barring officer meetings, there are no “in house” moments.
- * We embrace the call to simply love our neighbors in every-day life.
- * The gospel makes us a community where Christians say, “This is the place to bring my non-Christian friends. This is what they need to hear and how they need to hear it. I can be sure that they will be intelligently and respectfully engaged with the truth of the gospel.”

City-Positive:

We exist to love and renew Santa Barbara, to seek its peace and prosperity (Jer 29:7). As a church, we are the first fruits of God’s new creation and have the potential to be a transforming presence in this city. We are called to embody the gospel as we seek to give foretastes of the Kingdom by seeking the healing of our city’s brokenness. In the end we are not so much looking for Santa Barbara to have a better church, but for CPC to cultivate a better Santa Barbara. Therefore, we desire the gospel to change:

- the overall level of civility
- family health
- race and class relationships
- cultural work being produced

4. Renewal

God’s goal is to restore, to renew, to regenerate, his beautiful yet broken creation back to his original intention. In the Bible, that intention is called “shalom”. Shalom, as C. Plantinga defines it, is “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight. It means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight. Shalom is the way things ought to be.” In our worship-gatherings, community interactions, and missional engagement, we set our sights on the experience of God’s shalom, the renewal that only his Spirit can bring through the gospel.

**The Relationship of our Commitments:*

Having laid out our commitments individually, it is important to note that they are to be viewed as inseparable and interrelated. It is not as if when we devote ourselves to worship on Sunday morning, we stop being committed to community, mission, or renewal. Rather, when we prioritize any one thing, others are still valued. *We worship as a community in mission with the hope of renewal. We engage in mission as a community as an act of worship.*



Spiritual Formation

- * “I am in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...”
- * “Those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son...”
- * “All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image...”

When Paul wrote these words to his congregations (Gal 4:19, Rom 8:29, 2Cor 3:18), he was writing about spiritual formation. Christian spiritual formation is the engagement of the whole person into the continuing process of being progressively formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. Everyone receives spiritual formation as everyone is in the process of becoming something. The question is: What is a person becoming and is that process leading to good or ill? As a church, we need to take a conscious, intentional hand in a disciple’s developmental process as they are impacted by the gospel Word and under the direction and energizing of the Holy Spirit. We need to be able to say: “This is how you mature in the faith here at CPC.” Maturity will involve:

- * **The Mind:** engaging church attendees, at whatever point in their pilgrimage, with the truth of Scripture, so that they are steadily increasing in their knowledge of, confidence in, and practice of the Christian faith.
- * **The Heart:** as important as the mind is, the core of a person is their heart and we will not be transformed “into his likeness” by mere information alone. We must also cultivate personal and corporate growth inwardly after the character of Christ. Our willing and desiring needs renewal. We must therefore seek to form whole persons after the image of Christ, and this will inevitably involve...
- * **The Hands:** developing the whole person after the image of Christ will involve apprenticeship, especially in certain practical disciplines (prayer, fasting, meditation, memorization, solitude, silence, fellowship etc). Only in this way will people be equipped for the quality of christian service required to address the world’s needs.

At a macro-level, the process in which one engages to cultivate these things is:²

1. Gospel-Shaped Worship

Corporate Gatherings:

The anchor and center of discipleship at CPC is Sunday worship. Since the object (or objects) of our worship defines us psychologically, sociologically, and spiritually, the things we worship shape the way we think, feel, behave, and relate. Worship is the most formative thing any individual does. In the service we are reoriented toward God and nourished through the liturgy of Word and Sacrament. There, the gospel challenges the religious, the irreligious, the mature christian and the new christian all the same time. There we are renewed in covenant with God.



² Note that our spiritual formation process parallels our commitments.

Private:

Through the gospel-shaped liturgy of our corporate gatherings, worshippers learn a paradigm for how to related to God on a daily basis.

2. Gospel-Created Community

Corporate gatherings (and individual times) of worship, however, are not enough for one to fully understand, live out, or grow in the Christian faith. Christianity can only be experienced through community life.

- * In community, we devote ourselves to one another with increasing vulnerability, because the gospel frees us from hiding our faults. We are free to struggle and move from the isolation, loneliness, and relational disfunction of the culture around us into relationships of reciprocal love. In community, we grow, we take care of each other's needs (spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and physically), and create synergy to serve both the church and the city.
- * Since we were created for community, we know that living in isolation ultimately will not work. The isolation, loneliness, and relational fascination of the culture around us provide an exciting ministry opportunity.
- * As important as community is, we nevertheless recognize that community is also messy and unpredictable; we never get to be in community with perfect people. Yet, God uses this messiness to promote his grace in our lives.
- * Cultivating true community will require intentionality and sacrifice. One will never enjoy the productive community that the body of Christ was designed to be without making specific and concrete sacrifices of time, energy, schedule, leisure, privacy, etc.

3. Gospel-Propelled Mission

Life in community creates alignment of purpose through which we serve both the church and the world. As more of our deep spiritual, emotional, psychological, and social needs are met by the gospel as it is lived out in community, God's grace begins to overflow from our hearts into actions of service, mercy, and a desire to communicate the gospel to those who do not yet know God. We begin to look for ways to make and renew culture and its institutions so that they honor God's design. Recognizing that many of these things cannot be accomplished individually, we also appreciate the need to move out in mission with others, as a community.

4. Gospel-Achieved Renewal

The more we reach out in mission, the more the Spirit makes us aware of how much our own lives fall short of God's intention. Consequently, our need for God's empowering grace deepens and we begin to hunger for his presence more and more. This Spirit-given desire, in turn, leads us back to worship where we are renewed by God's presence afresh.