

Identifying the Core Values of a Church

“The most important single element of any corporate, congregational, or denominational culture is the value system.”
-Lyle Schaller, America’s foremost church consultant

The core values of a congregation answer the question, “Why do we do what we do around here? A ministry based on clearly articulated core values drives a fixed stake in the ground that says to all, ‘This is what we stand for; this is what we are all about; this is who we are; this is what we can do for you.’”¹

No two churches are alike, even churches of the same denomination. Differences arise out of geographic location, demographics of the community, size of the active membership, its history (age), and particularly the people who have shaped the ministry of the church and helped to form its personality and values. Each church is a family system which affects the way it interacts and ministers.

A good core value statement should articulate clearly what a congregation most highly values. New congregations being planted in America are establishing their core values from the onset. This lays the foundation for building ministry and accountability. An established congregation that takes a good internal look to discover and define its core values moves closer to discerning its unique mission. This definition can assist a congregation in shaping its vision and ministry for the future. It can also be helpful to persons looking to join the group who seek to understand the very nature of the church and its priorities.

Core values and the mission of a congregation (its purpose) should be in close alignment. A core value statement provides a vehicle by which a church’s sense of mission can be defined in as much distinctive detail as the congregation desires. Yet it is helpful to pull out single words/short phrases to represent the values so that they can be easily remembered and used.

The greatest challenge in uncovering the core values of a congregation is the willingness of individuals to release their personal agendas and allow a sense of corporate values to emerge. This takes great objectivity and can be difficult to do. Once the values are discerned and articulated in a statement, it is imperative that the congregation allow the understood values to shape ministry, guide decision making, set goals and priorities, plan budgets and determine the best use of human and material resources. This focus can maximize a congregation’s potential for living into its God-given mission.

¹*Values Driven Leadership, Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry.* Aubrey Malphurs, Baker Books, 1996. ISBN 0801090156

Core Values . . .

Answer these Questions:

What do we stand for?

What are we all about?

What makes us different from other congregations?

Reflect Uniqueness

A congregation's distinctive "personality", culture, very nature and its priorities

Values are deeply held by the congregation and have been demonstrated in actions

Values are actual, not aspirational

Reflect Mission

Values are in close alignment with the congregation's sense of purpose

Shape Ministry

Values guide decision making

Values guide goal setting, ministry priorities, budgets, best use of human and material resources

Lay the Foundation for Vision

God given vision for the future is best discerned when a congregation has clarity about what it values, then seeks God's guidance and blessing to build a vision based on its mission and positive values

Touch the heart, elicit strong emotions, and are important to parishioners

Define a congregation's culture