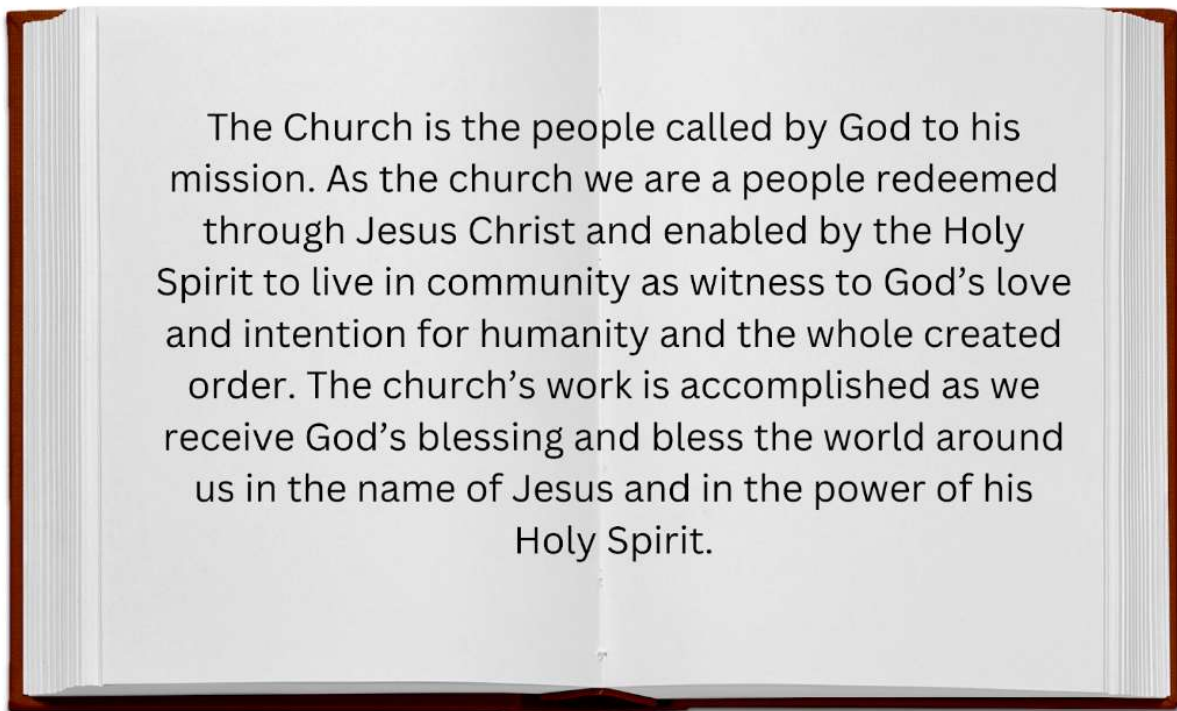


OUR VIEW OF THE CHURCH

We as Evangelical Congregational Church leaders and a Futures Initiative Team affirm the following understanding of and vision for the church:



Though a very general statement, understood in the context of our Articles of Faith and theological tradition, we believe it offers a picture of the church that is faithful to Scripture and applicable to the cultural context in which we find the church today.

Rather than an institution, organization or location, we understand the church to be a community of God's people. Redeemed through his Son, called to his mission, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the church is a people of God's own creation (1 Peter 2:9-10). Through the empowering of the Holy Spirit, the church is enabled to live as witness to God's love and will for his people and the world. (Acts 1:7-8).

This brings us then to the mission for which God called his church into being. As is reflected in our denominational purpose statement - to know Christ and make him known - we understand that the church joins with God in his mission of being known by

and in a relationship with the world (Ephesians 3:10). This mission of God is presented to us throughout Scripture in his creation, covenant, the incarnation, Christ's death and resurrection and the final restoration of all things. God's desire to restore the intended relationship between himself and his creation found its highest expression in the death and resurrection of Jesus; through Christ, the broken relationship between God and the world was restored and God's kingdom rule has and continues to come (Revelation 1:5-6). Jesus commissioned his disciples and the church that would follow to go into the world just as he did and share this good news by making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20 and John 20:21-23). Therefore, we receive God's blessing by being disciples enlivened by the power of the Holy Spirit and we bless the world around us by living out Jesus' love, teachings and example.

The local Evangelical Congregational Church congregation, then, should see itself as a community in which God's blessing and power have been received through Christ (Ephesians 1:3-10) and which exists to bless the world by being a witness for God and partner in his mission. Therefore, the local church will be profoundly committed to fulfilling the commission Christ has given. Ever open to the Holy Spirit's working within the church, we look for God's kingdom to come in all aspects of life even as we anticipate his final and eternal reign (Romans 8:18-24). The local congregation can expect its relationship with the denomination to be one in which the local church enjoys enhanced opportunities to bless the world through denominational connections and receives resources through those same connections that further enable the local church to fulfill its commission.