

FAITH CHURCH DISTINCTIVES

The most important thing about Faith Church is not what makes us distinct—it's what we share in common with every other true church throughout history. Still, it's inevitable that each congregation will have its own culture and emphases. The following priorities are not mere formalities, but distinctives we pray will be the very heartbeat of our body and strengthen the unity of our mission and life together as a local church.

1. Clear Gospel

We want the church to be organized around a crystal-clear understanding of the gospel, because if we get this wrong, we might as well go home. Why is the gospel first on our list? Because it was first on Paul's: *"For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve"* (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

We never want to outgrow the wonder of God's rescuing grace. The way to grow as Christians, after all, is not to move beyond the gospel; it's to move deeper into it. Christians never graduate from the gospel. And what is the gospel? It is the incredible news of what God has accomplished through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ to redeem and restore a lost world to himself. And the most amazing part is that anyone can get in on this by repenting of their sins and submitting to Jesus as Lord and Savior. This message is the pulsing center of our life as a church, and its transforming power is the basis of everything we do. Without the gospel, we simply do not exist as a church.

2. Biblical Preaching

The preaching at Faith Church will primarily be "expository." This ancient approach, modeled for us in Scripture, seeks to expose God's people to God's Word, one passage at a time. Our commitment to expository sermons is more than a preference—it's a conviction. Why? Because we are convinced that it is the words of God, not the cool ideas or ingenuity of man, that truly transforms lives (2 Tim. 3:15-17; Heb. 4:12).

We believe every human needs to hear the full range of what God has to say—from Genesis to Revelation, each part understood in context and applied to the heart. God's Word, after all, is what brings spiritual life and growth to God's people. Given that even inspired apostles felt constrained to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), we won't try to improve on that. This is why we aim in all our preaching to make the main point of the sermon the main point of the Scripture passage being preached, then applied to the heart of the people. This doesn't mean you won't ever hear a "topical" sermon here (you certainly will!), but it does mean the steady diet of preaching at Faith Church will be expositional.

3. Meaningful Membership

Church membership isn't just having your name on a roll; it's much more than that. Being a member of a church means that you are entrusted with guarding the gospel. You do that by protecting and promoting gospel doctrine and protecting and promoting gospel living, not only in your own life, but in the lives of fellow church members.

This means church membership is a living-and-breathing web of relationships. It's a commitment to intentionally serve and help others, to take responsibility for their well-being. It's a willingness to submit to the shepherding oversight of church leaders and to the care and accountability of fellow members. Membership isn't primarily about opportunity or having access to certain perks, but about mutual responsibility and accountability. In membership we lock arms with our brothers and sisters as we march toward heaven *together*.

At Faith Church, the elders aim, according to Scripture, to "equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). The members are responsible for the mission. If the elders/pastors are the supply line, members are the front line.

4. Deep Discipleship

Following Jesus is not a solo endeavor; it is a team effort. Nor is it confined to a weekly event; it's an everyday lifestyle. At Faith Church, we don't want our growth in Christ to be haphazard and thin, but deliberate and deep. We want members to flourish in their knowledge of Scripture and theology so that the roots of their faith grow deep and strong. None of this can be manufactured or microwaved. Only God's Word, reverberating through the life of the church, can bring forth the growth we desire.

At Faith Church, our discipleship infrastructure is designed to facilitate such growth. This begins and is energized through our Sunday morning corporate gathering and Sunday evening prayer services. It continues through our community groups, one-to-one discipling relationships, informal hospitality, Sunday school classes, bible studies, and other opportunities the Lord may give. Regular, faithful attendance at our Sunday morning corporate gathering, which we believe is at the center of God's discipleship plan for every Christian, is required of all our members (1 Cor. 11; 1 Cor. 16:2; Heb. 10:24-26).

5. Joyful Complementarianism

Scripture teaches that both men and women bear God's image and are essential and indispensable to the mission of the church. Gender and the unique design and callings God has given to men and women are part of the goodness of creation and displays the glory of God. In the church, God limits the office and function of elder/pastor only to men who meet the biblical qualifications (1 Tim 2:12-14; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

This is why our elders and the formal, public teaching ministries of the church are led or overseen by men who meet these qualifications.

We also believe God's design for gender extends over marriage, which is the covenantal, sexual, procreative, lifelong union of one man and one woman, as husband and wife. Such union is itself a beautiful picture of the mutually self-sacrificing and covenant love we see displayed between Christ and his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33).

We do not believe that gender is a social construct, nor is it something we can assign to ourselves. Rather it is a gift given to us by God and celebrated in the Bible as good. Therefore, we endeavor to be a church that delights in God's good design for men and women and where men and women gladly embrace the unique and distinct roles that God has created them to fulfill in his infinitely wise, glorious, and beautiful purpose.

6. Passionate, Bible-Regulated Worship

Worship isn't just the warm sensation one gets from music on a Sunday morning—it's meant to characterize every aspect of our lives. At Faith Church, we aim to worship King Jesus not only as we gather on Sundays, but as we scatter throughout the week.

What about musical style, though? It will be neither wholly "traditional" nor solely "contemporary"—you'll find it to be blended, featuring both time-tested hymns and modern praise songs. We are committed to "congregational singing," where the primary instrument is the church's collective voice. The whole church, then, is the worship team. (We do have musicians, but their role is more to accompany than to perform.) This style, by the way, is not rooted in denominational tradition or mere preference; it's simply our attempt to obey the command to sing not just upward to God, but also outward to one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

To this end, we prioritize songs that are biblically true, theologically rich, musically beautiful, and congregationally-singable. No matter what song we're singing—whether it was written a millennium ago or a year ago, whether we're really "feeling" it or not—we want to worship passionately, singing robustly as if Christ's tomb really is vacant. (Because it is.)

7. Persistent Prayer

There are few things more important that a church can do together than pray. In the New Testament, we see the priority not only of personal prayer, but also of corporate prayer. As the body gathers regularly to pray, we will have increasing ways to praise God for answers to prayer, to see him at work in our midst, to express care for each other, and to cry out for his help as we seek to be faithful gospel ministers in Cincinnati and around the world.

To that end, we will fill our gatherings with prayer, and we set aside the last Sunday evening of every month for a corporate prayer meeting. We also urge members to pray for one another throughout the week.

8. Diverse Unity

Christians believe that at the heart of all reality is a loving union, a community of eternal joy: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—one God in three persons. In other words, unity in diversity—and neither at the expense of the other. God is the apex of unity in diversity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternally existent, mutually glorifying, loving, honoring, and supportive diverse community. As his image bearers, we get to display that same kind of unity in diversity with other believers in the local church.

The world has no trouble understanding unity among people who are the same. And they have no trouble understanding diversity among people who are different. But what the world can neither understand nor explain is unity among those who have no natural reason to be unified. The diversity valued at Faith Church includes ethnicity, but that's just one of a multitude of ways that God builds diversity into his people. Diversity also encompasses things like age, social class, personality, gender, nationality, and cultural background. We long to be a multicultural, multigenerational church that gives our surrounding community a glimpse of the age to come (Rev. 7:9).

Such diversity is not something we manufacture; it's something we prayerfully and humbly pursue. The goal is not to meet a quota; it's to reflect the earthly community around us and the heavenly community ahead of us.

9. Constant Evangelism

At Faith Church, we expect our members to know and be able to articulate the gospel, to develop gospel-oriented relationships, and to seize opportunities to proclaim the good news to those around them. While we may have some evangelistic programs in and through the church, we emphasize the equipping and personal responsibility of our members to reach the lost. We try to keep our church schedule pretty mere, so that our members are freed up to weave their lives into the lives of those who need Jesus.

10. Deliberate Simplicity

If you're looking for a church with state-of-the-art production and a long menu of customized programs, that's fine, but Faith Church may disappoint you. While we deeply value excellence, we channel our best energies toward fostering a culture of evangelism, discipling, hospitality, and encouragement in our congregation.

Church programs can be helpful, and we will benefit from some, but we believe they must be downstream from our primary priorities. We don't want our church to turn into a spiritual drive-thru, a mere purveyor of religious goods and services. Nor do we want to endlessly subdivide the congregation among demographic lines. Our central identity, after all, is the whole gathering and not the small groupings. Because spiritual growth cannot be manufactured, we will orient congregational life around the ordinary means of grace, emphasizing personal initiative and life-on-life relationships—with corporate worship as both the centerpiece and springboard for all we are and do.

11. Urgent Mission

We pray that Faith Church will be a launching pad for the gospel—both to our neighbors and to the nations. We believe that the central mission of the church is found in Jesus' Great Commission: to make disciples among the nations (Matt. 28:18-20). We serve a missionary God who is gathering a people for his glory from every tribe, tongue, and nation. Our missions philosophy is to support strategic gospel workers with finances, prayers, encouragement, and care. We hope that many from our body will be raised up to proclaim the gospel and even help establish other healthy churches throughout the world. Each year, we aspire to give at least 20% of our giving to missionary efforts.