

Harvest Mission Work Description

Mission: We exist to worship the Lord, edify his saints, and witness to the world by the power of and in obedience to Christ our prophet, priest, and king.

To plant a Christ-exalting, Spirit-dependent, God-glorifying, gospel-centered, biblically faithful, multi-culturally accessible Presbyterian church community in SE Grand Rapids.

Notes on the mission statement: The mission statement reflects the language of the OPC Form of Government concerning the work of the Church. FOG 2.4 says “The work of the church, in fellowship with and obedience to Christ, is divine worship, mutual edification, and gospel witness.”

The priority of worship, edification, and witness in the Church reflects the truth of scripture.

The proper ordering of these elements is crucial because edification and witness are NOT ultimate. Edification exists to enable God’s saints to more faithfully worship and glorify Him. Witness exists both to glorify God in the proclamation of his saving grace and as God’s ordained means of gathering all those whom God has ordained to praise him.

Biblical Basis for the Priority of Worship: The Lord sent Moses to Egypt with the words ““Let my son go that he may serve [worship] me.” (Exodus 4:23) This is also repeated in Exodus 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, 9:13, and 10:3. God delivered his people from bondage towards the end that they may worship him. The church exists to worship God according to his will.

In John 4, Christ reflects the priority of biblically faithful worship by teaching “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.” The Father seeks and gathers people for the purpose of worshipping him.

Biblical Basis for Priority of Edification: Mutual Edification is also a crucial priority in the church. Christ himself is the one who actually builds the church. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said “on this rock I will build my church.” However he does it through people, starting with the apostles and prophets (the unique unrepeatable foundation see Ephesians 2:20) and then through the saints (see 1 Corinthians 14:12). God’s desire is that his people truly grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Through the preaching of the living Word, the prayers of believing saints, and the sacraments of Lord’s Supper and Baptism, the Spirit of God works to strengthen God’s people so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith (Eph 3:16-17).

Biblical Basis for Priority of Witness: Witness is another crucial priority for the Church. We are commanded by Christ to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (see also Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47).

WHY A MULTI-CULTURALLY ACCESSIBLE CHURCH?

The Harvest Mission Work is NOT a separate species of local Church known as “multicultural.” Our goal is to be a faithful, Gospel-centered Church. We are convinced that the Church, as the Church, is called to be deliberately accessible to whomever our God will call. We *intend* our worship, edification, and witness *to be* in step with the truth of the gospel and therefore reflect the unity and catholicity of the Church Christ is building. We DO NOT want to give the impression that the gospel and the system of doctrine taught in scripture (and reflected in our Reformed confessions) is ethnically exclusive. This is a popular misconception shared by many within the Grand Rapids area (both Reformed and non-Reformed). This misconception needs to be confronted for the sake of clarifying the gospel. We are Presbyterian because we are convinced that the Westminster standards reflect the system of doctrine taught in God’s Word (our primary standard and the only rule of faith and practice). To the extent that Reformed Christianity reflects biblical Christianity, it is for everyone.

Part of our vision is to be a gospel-centered multi-culturally accessible church community. We are gospel-centered first and are deliberately pursuing multi-cultural accessibility *because* of our gospel-centeredness. We seek to be accessible to God’s diverse people in our worship, edification, and our witness for the sake of the gospel. There have been many misguided efforts which have in essence pursued ethnic diversity *at the expense of the gospel* so that cultural diversity becomes the guiding principle and accent of all that they do. Some even view cultural accommodations as the engine which drives the fruitfulness of the church or the magic key which will unlock the door to effective ministry. *That is not our vision.*

We believe that we must first strive to be a true church – a Christ-exalting, Spirit-dependent, God-glorifying, gospel-centered, biblically faithful community of believers! Our desire to be multi-culturally accessible simply flows from our conviction that a true church of Jesus Christ will desire and pursue the things that He desires and pursues. There are a host of scriptures that reveal God’s gospel determination to unite a diversity of people in Christ for the sake of his glory and worship. (see Gen.12: 1-3, Acts 17:26, 27, Ephesians 2:11-22, Rev. 5:9; 7:9)

Consequently, in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, Paul wrote “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.” The gospel was at the center of Paul’s desire to accommodate culturally, to self-consciously remove cultural barriers which clouded the nature of the gospel. He didn’t want Gentiles to think that they had to become Jewish culturally in order to worship God aright or vice versa. He also didn’t want people to be confused about the nature of the gospel or culturally impeded from hearing it out. It is not a “Jewish-only” or “gentile-only” gospel but God’s gospel for all the nations. By doing this, Paul was aware that he would also benefit by sharing in the blessing of the gospel with the people to whom he witnessed. God gives the church gifts through the people whom he would gather and Paul knew he would share in these gospel blessings not alone, but with them.

The Apostle Peter is a counter example: Early on Peter refused to make cultural accommodations and withdrew himself from among the gentiles as if they were culturally or ethnically inferior. This gave the impression that the gospel was only for the Jews. Paul vigorously opposed this ethnocentrism and said that this conduct “was not in step with the truth of the gospel.” (Galatians 2:14) This is our desire: to carefully consider how to remove unnecessary cultural barriers in our worship, edification and witness, for the glory of God and the sake of the gospel.

Ecclesiastical resources for multi-cultural accessibility:

We have great ecclesiastical grounds to pursue multi-cultural accessibility. For instance The OPC Dir. For the Public Worship of God 1.4 says “The unity and catholicity of the covenant people are to be manifest in public worship. Accordingly, the service is to be conducted in a manner that enables and expects all the members of the covenant community—male and female, old and young, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and infirm, people from every race and nation—to worship together.”

The mission work will be multi-culturally accessible toward the end of enabling and expecting ALL the people whom our God would call to FULLY participate in our communion in the worship of God and mutual edification.

Outline of Practical Matters

➤ MULTI-CULTURALLY ACCESSIBLE WORSHIP

* Directed by the Word of God. God is so unlike us that we must depend wholly on his Word and Spirit to direct us in worshipping Him. This means that our worship (if it is to be pleasing to God) must be directed and ordered by the Word of God. We believe God’s Word directs us to deliberately pursue worship which is multi-culturally accessible.

* In comparison with the worship at Harvest OPC, we intend our worship to be the same in substance, similar in form, while allowing for culturally appropriate, biblically faithful variations. See WCF 1:6 “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.”

* We will deliberately resist unbiblical cultural hegemony as it pertains to what “reverential” and “solemn” looks like.

For example: We have confessional warrant to verbally respond during worship. Dir for Public Worship Chapter 1.C says “it is appropriate that worshipers at times respond with brief spoken or sung expressions of praise or affirmation such as "hallelujah" or "amen." The former is a heartfelt declaration that the living God alone is worthy of adoration. The latter grows out of the responsibility of God's people to affirm solemnly and earnestly the

truthfulness of his Word and the permanence of his characterWhen believers sing or say "amen," they are testifying to their wholehearted agreement with what has been spoken as being in harmony with God's permanently valid Word.”

WCF 20.2 says “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in anything, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship.” **Therefore, we will vigorously maintain our blood-bought liberty to respond to the goodness of the LORD in all the ways the scripture recognizes as valid. We will deliberately resist the inappropriate tendency to exercise assimilation-purposed worship-constricting social pressure over the consciences of God’s free worshippers.**

No worshiper at the mission work should feel genuine social constraint against a Spirit-led desire to verbally respond to God’s goodness, grace, and truth with “Amen” or “Hallelujah” or joyfully lift their hands at an appropriate time in worship (see 1 Tim. 2:8, Psalm 63:4, 134:2).

* Preaching should be fit to the capacity of hearers, many of whom may not have Reformed backgrounds. Dir for Public Worship Chapter 2.3C says, the exposition and application of the Scriptures in preaching “must be clear and simple, having regard to the capacity of the hearers, in demonstration of the Spirit and power, with fervor and zeal.” Preaching which is unclear or takes no notice of the varying spiritual, intellectual, theological, and cultural capacities of the hearers (with both Reformed and non-Reformed backgrounds) can easily confuse and/or unnecessarily offend multi-cultural congregations. Fervor and zeal are also very important since preaching that comes off as cold or impassive can communicate to minorities that the preacher is either prideful, apathetic, or inauthentic, or much worse that the message is somehow insignificant. Yet, we must also clearly demonstrate the good news which empowers such zeal, so that empathic preaching does not come off as mere emotionalism.

See also WLC 159 “They that are called to labor in the ministry of the word, are to preach sound doctrine, diligently, in season and out of season; plainly, not in the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power; faithfully, making known the whole counsel of God; wisely, applying themselves to the necessities and capacities of the hearers; zealously, with fervent love to God and the souls of his people; sincerely, aiming at his glory, and their conversion, edification, and salvation.”

* Sacraments must be explained biblically, plainly, repeatedly. One of the greatest cultural learning curves may be infant baptism. Many people from non-reformed backgrounds have baptistic or ordinance-only leanings toward the sacraments. We will need to instruct God’s people biblically, plainly, repeatedly, and patiently about the nature of the sacraments (particularly as it pertains to the sacraments participating in the realities they signify and by

the Spirit mediating real grace.) We will also need to spend extra attention explaining infant baptism and the need to fence the Lord's table.

* Biblically faithful, culturally accessible music will be a major part of making our worship more accessible. Music has a unique ability to capture the affections, especially music which resonates with us culturally. When the music exclusively reflects one cultural background, it preferences one group's tastes over others and places various obstacles before worshippers of differing backgrounds--effectively conveying the message that the dominant group's cultural preferences are either most important, most significant, or most fitting in this place. We intend to include psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in our worship. We should stress Christian liberty here, the need to love others in this area and resist the temptation to have our personal cultural taste predominate the feel of God's worship. We should seek cultural competency in this area, so that as we try to incorporate non-anglo or non-european styles, we do so in a way which honors the Lord and loves our brothers and sisters in Christ well by respecting the uniqueness of their culture. This may be a BIG stretch for many of us, since we are most often used to enjoying worship which reflects our cultural preferences. Yet, we must move beyond ourselves to seek the glory of God and the good of our fellow Christians in this area. In worship (and in everything else in the Church), we must "look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:4)

➤ MULTI-CULTURALLY ACCESSIBLE EDIFICATION

*Philippians 2:3 says "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." Our failure to consistently obey this biblical command has caused tremendous damage to our unity. All too often we fail to care enough about our brothers and sisters from different cultures to listen patiently to their perspectives without becoming overly defensive. We simply don't value them enough to go through the trouble of patiently learning about them, their lives, or their perspectives. We should assume the best about our fellow Christian and be eager to hear them out and believe that we have something to learn from their experiences. This is not liberalism, this is Christian humility. This can be challenging, because as it relates to other cultures, it will include ways in which we have unwittingly participated in harming them (systemically and personally). But the humility that the Bible commands would eagerly seek to learn how we have participated in harming others and to repent. (Trainings like CORR Congregations Organizing for Racial Reconciliation can help with this in practical ways)

Loving one another well (in all our cultural distinctiveness) as the Spirit empowers us will help us attain to the unity that Christ prayed for so that we might be better witnesses concerning the power of the gospel. John 17:22-23 says "The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me

and loved them even as you loved me.” Our union with Christ brings about real oneness with one another *for the sake of our witness to the world* concerning the gospel of Christ. John 13:35 also says “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

*Even in many multi-cultural churches, disciples of differing cultural backgrounds live essentially separate lives. They meet on Sunday morning and part ways the rest of the week, using their corporate worship to justify their self-selected segregation. We intend to seek practical ways to walk with one another. Living life together is crucial to discipleship. It will also be easier to exercise discipline where necessary.

Genuine love and radical acts of hospitality are key! Our love towards one another should be so conspicuous that people know we follow Jesus.

➤ MULTICULTURAL ACCESSIBLE WITNESS

*Although we have never planted a Church in this location, we should seek to be aware of the context in which we are stepping. If we do not build relationships of trust among the residents, we may never get an opportunity to share the gospel with them. God used Epaphras, a native of Colosse, to plant the Church in Colosse. He heard the gospel from the Apostles and shared it with the other Colossians (see Colossians 1:7, 4:12). You can also see this with the Samaritan woman (John 4) who convinces her fellow citizens to come out and see Jesus. Prior relationships served as a platform for the citizens to give the woman and Epaphras a hearing.

The perceptions of the many of the residents in the Seymore Square, Garfield Park, Algeir Heights about the Reformed community will be informed by the present and historic ethnic, political, and socio-economic dynamics at play in the area. For various reasons, there may be mutual feelings of distrust that must be overcome BEFORE we can rightly disciple them and before residents will hear us out. Our aim is not to suddenly appear on the doorsteps of our neighbors and throw a bunch of gospel propositions at them before disappearing back to “our neighborhoods and homes” and into “our building.” Discipleship is more than a one-time gospel proclamation. Though it should and must include gospel proclamation, our discipleship must also include forming genuine loving relationships with the aim of gaining a platform so that we may share the gospel. Our acts of love will NOT guarantee a hearing and they certainly won’t cause a person to accept the gospel. (Only the Holy Spirit working through the Word can do that!!) But if we do not build genuine relationships, our neighbors may never even give us a hearing.

Genuine love and radical acts of hospitality are key here as well!! This will help make us conspicuous. The world doesn't love people with genuine ethnic, economic, and political differences this way.

* Just like with worship and edification, our witness will include learning the culture and outlook of the people we hope to reach with the gospel. This is vital to any missions work. This one is no exception. If not, we run the risk of being misunderstood in our sincere acts of love and witness.

*Family evangelism is a key pattern in scripture. In the New Testament entire household are evangelized and come to faith. Therefore learning the varying family dynamics within the community is key.