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Community Church Sheppey

The Purpose of the Church

The Community Church Sheppey is made up of people who have experienced God's love, mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We hold to the conviction that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, is God's inspired word. This shapes our understanding of what it means to be a church family and members together of the body of Christ.

The purpose of our church community is to:

- Share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the world
- Engage in missions at home and overseas
- Welcome people into the church family
- Encourage believers to grow as Disciples of Christ and
- Inspire them to worship and honour God in their daily lives.

The Bible says that the first Christians "were continually devoting themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." (Acts 2: 42 NASB). As a congregation we aim to follow their example and this is reflected in the life and character of our church as follows:

'The Apostles Teaching'

The apostles' teaching is about Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross as a substitute for sinful people and rose from the dead on the third day to be their Saviour. In the Bible this is referred to as the 'Gospel' which means good news. It is 'the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes' (Romans 1:16). The Gospel was initially handed down by the Lord to those whom Jesus specifically appointed as apostles. They were eye witnesses of Christ's resurrection and were given a clear understanding about the significance of the cross to preach the Gospel in the world.

The apostle Paul wrote, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures". (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NASB)

Sin is a word used in Scripture to describe the rebellion of humankind against God's holy character and word. We have an inherent fallen nature which means our thoughts and actions are motivated by selfish desires. Having turned away from our Creator we fall short of the glory of God (Romans

3:23). The outcome of sin is both separation from God and death (Romans 6:23). While we deserved nothing but God's wrath, He lovingly took action to save a people from the earth by sending Jesus Christ into the world to be our Saviour.

The Community Church Sheppey holds to the apostolic teaching that Christ was miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18-23). In the incarnation, God the Son took upon Himself human flesh. Christ was truly God and truly Man. He experienced temptation and suffering but was completely without sin (Hebrews 2:17-18, 4:15). In the Person of Jesus the apostles actually beheld the glory of God, the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14).

Salvation from the guilt and the penalty of sin is solely through Christ's perfect obedience and substitutionary death. The apostles were not only witnesses of His bodily resurrection but testified that Jesus had ascended to heaven and was exalted to the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33, Philippians 2:8-11).

When the apostle Peter preached about Christ to a large crowd in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, the people were cut to the heart and asked what they should do to be saved. He replied 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38 ESV).

In preaching and witnessing to the Gospel, the Community Church Sheppey calls:

1. People to repentance and faith in Christ. (*When a person is convicted of sin and experiences the new birth, there is a change of heart and mind as they turn away from sin to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. While salvation is a gift of God by faith, the Gospel requires a response*).
2. Believers to be baptised by total immersion as a symbol of their faith and commitment to Christ. (*Baptism signifies the death and burial of the old life and a resurrection to a brand new life in which the believer owes their allegiance to Christ*).
3. Everyone who believes to be fully assured that by faith in Christ they receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (*The presence of the Holy Spirit within the believer is the guarantee of salvation, testifying to their adoption as a child of God. He sanctifies the believer and empowers them to live the Christian life and to witness to the Gospel in the world. Christ baptises His people with the Holy Spirit through whom He also endows them with gifts for ministry and mission*)

As a church we gather every Sunday for corporate worship and to hear teaching from the Bible. We usually look at a whole book of the Bible over a number of weeks. The aim each Sunday is for the message to be faithful to the text while being relevant to our lives as individuals and as a church family. This is to challenge, encourage and inspire us to follow Jesus Christ and to share the Gospel with others

Everyone is also encouraged to read the Bible for themselves to help them grow in their knowledge of God and understanding of the Christian life. As the apostle Paul wrote, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration by God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3: 16 – 17 NKJV).

The first Christians were devoted to Fellowship

The word fellowship conveys the idea of a partnership between people in relation to their common commitment to Christ. On reading the New Testament it is evident that the early Christians were full of enthusiasm for their church family and their shared goal of making Jesus known in the world. Christian fellowship is only really possible as each individual is in a living relationship with Jesus, participating in the benefits of God's grace through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible tells us that the early followers of Jesus were of 'one heart and soul' (Acts 4:32 ESV) and as a church we aspire to draw together in unity as members of Christ's family. This means that we worship together, engage in mission and relate to one another as people who share a common faith in Christ, holding firm to the importance of Biblical truth. In other words, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is central to the fellowship of the church.

Meeting together with a church family and sharing in fellowship is the right thing to do if we have a genuine faith in Christ:

'And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near' (Hebrews 10: 24-25 ESV).

Jesus is the Head of the church and it is made up of everyone who has been born again. In the Scriptures, the church is also called the body of Christ and the household of God, a holy temple, a chosen race, a royal priesthood and a holy nation. In our church family individuals are encouraged to discover their area of ministry and to serve using the various gifts that God gives to His people. In the fellowship of the church we are strengthened and encouraged in the Christian life. Each member benefits from the ministry of the word, the discipline of belonging to the church family, participation in the communion meal, mutual encouragement and edification among believers, the communal prayers and the spiritual support that we receive from one another.

In the Community Church Sheppey we believe in the priesthood of all believers in which every member shares a responsibility for ministry and service in the life and worship of the church. As the apostle Paul says, 'From him (Christ) the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work' (Ephesians 4:16 NIV). Within the context of the church we believe in plural leadership, recognising that in the New Testament churches elders and deacons were appointed to serve in leadership roles (Acts 6:1-6, 4:23, 1 Timothy 3:1-13 Titus 1:5). As well as teaching the church community, the pastor/elder is called to shepherd the congregation and to be an example of what it means to live and serve as a Christian (1 Timothy 3:2, 2 Timothy 2:15, Titus 1:9, 1 Peter 5:1-4). The Community church is led by the pastor with the support of an assistant and others involved with pastoral and ministry responsibilities in the life of the church.

The fellowship of the church includes a shared commitment to mission and evangelism. Jesus promised the apostles that on receiving the power of the Holy Spirit they would be His witnesses in the world. The Community Church Sheppey encourages all believers to represent Jesus in the world, following His command to 'go therefore and make disciples' (Matthew 28:19).

As well as engaging in mission in the local area, the Community Church Sheppey is involved in supporting Christian ministries specifically in Uganda and India. We commission teams and individuals to go abroad for short periods to serve other churches in partnership with us in the Gospel.

The first Christians were devoted to the Breaking of Bread

When Jesus shared the bread and wine with His disciples at the last supper He said, 'Do this in remembrance of Me' (Luke 22:19).

The first believers met regularly to share the Christian family meal, obeying Christ's command to share communion together.

As a family brought together by Christ's sacrificial love we remember in the bread how His body was broken and in the wine we recall the shedding of His blood.

The apostle Paul wrote, 'For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Corinthians 11:26 NIV).

The breaking of bread is an important expression of the shared life of the congregation made possible through the death of Jesus on the cross. All church members are encouraged to attend communion as regularly as possible.

The first Christians were devoted to Prayer

The early believers were committed to praying together. It was within an environment of prayer that the church was empowered and emboldened to witness for Christ even in the face of persecution. Many people came to faith in Christ and there was a sense of God's grace upon the whole church.

The leadership of the Community Church Sheppey has a vision to encourage corporate prayer, learning from the account of the early church. Within the context of Sunday services, home group meetings and the church prayer meeting there are ample opportunities for everyone to pray together. Examples of prayer and of intercession in the Bible convince us of the significance of using Scripture to guide how to pray. A corporate prayer life centred on the Bible helps us to pray in accord with God's will for the church and for the world. God speaks to us through His word, changing our hearts and lives as we yield to Christ as a praying church.

Jesus said that when we pray we should say 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10 NKJV).

The New Testament urges Christians to pray for those in authority in the nation and in our local communities, for the salvation of men and women and the advance of the Gospel (1 Timothy 2:1-6). Christians are also called to intercede for one another, which includes prayer for those engaged in mission (Ephesians 6:18-20, Colossians 4:3). The Community Church Sheppey follows the practice outlined in James 5:14-16 in which the sick may call for the leadership of the church to anoint them with oil and pray for their healing.

We encourage every member of our church family to have a daily quiet time to pray as well as read the Bible, but any desire to pray and read Scripture is a work of the Holy Spirit within us. Prayer is an expression of faith and reliance on God as our loving heavenly Father.

Membership of the Community Church Sheppey

Everyone who is born again, professing faith in Jesus Christ, belongs to the universal church of Christ. However, the pattern in the New Testament is for believers to identify with the local church in their town or city. We believe that Christians are called to be gathered together in congregations under pastoral leadership.

Fellowship within the Community Church Sheppey and the communion table is open to all those who profess faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, seeking to live in obedience to the teaching of the Bible and who accept the FIEC statement of faith. A membership roll of those who have been baptised as believers is maintained by the pastor. All who wish to enter into membership and share in the fellowship life of the church should respect and accept the pastor's oversight of the congregation.

The Community Church Sheppey Programme & Community Engagement Activities:

Sundays

11.00am Family Worship

(Kidz on Broadway for children and crèche facilities are available during the morning service)

6.30pm Evening Service

(Communion during the morning service on the second and fourth Sunday of each month)

Tuesday

Wiggles and Giggles (onsite actives for children under 5)

Wednesdays

Wacky Wednesday (onsite activities for children under 5)

Midweek Bibles studies and home groups

Saturday

9.00am-10:00 am Prayer meeting (with the exception of the fourth Saturday in the month).

10:00am – 12:00 noon Hebrews Coffee Morning on the third Saturday of each month, including outreach activities.

Monthly Youth Meetings.

Other activities

We hold ad hoc men's and women's meetings/breakfasts.

Talks to community groups and school children on the life of the church and its involvement in overseas mission, including presentations on Ugandan culture.

Music practice.

Christians against Poverty – Money Courses

Courses about the Christian faith: The church runs different courses throughout the year to encourage faith in Christ and growth in discipleship. These include Christianity Explored, Life Explored, Discipleship Explored and other material prepared by the pastor.

