



## Biblical Foundations (DNA) of a Church

**Introduction:** A shared sense of purpose is critical for any organization and that applies to the church of Jesus Christ as well. Within the context of the church we simply must be asking questions like this;

- What is it that we are trying to do?
- Why are we doing what we are doing?
- What is the purpose of the various ministries of the church?
- What makes our church distinct?

**The purpose of this document is to** 1) answer these types of questions 2) serve to generate healthy discussion among the family of MLEFC 3) to align who MLEFC is and what we are doing with God's Word 4) generate energy and enthusiasm that comes from a **shared sense of purpose!**

**Who are we as a church?** We must be careful not to define ourselves merely by what we see the church "doing" in Scripture. Think about it in Familial terms... Do we define a family based only upon what they do? "We are a family because we sleep in the same house, eat together, do dishes, share a budget, etc..." (**Defined by activity**). By who they are? "We are a family because we have the same parents, the same last name, belong to one another, etc..." (**Defined by being**). Or because of how we came into being? "We are a family because our parents gave birth to us or adopted us" (**Defined by Origin**).

A Healthy family would be defined in **ALL THREE WAYS:** 1) Our parents birthed us or adopted us – so we belong to them. 2) We are all related and share identity – so we belong to each other. And, 3) We do what families do together – life lived together defined by love. The Word of God, Scripture, must be the Foundation for both our identity and our actions as a church. With that said, the following **4 identities of a church** are all found in God's Story. **It needs to be said for the sake of clarity that WHO WE ARE (our identity as family, disciples, missionaries and servants) will drive all that WE DO.**

**FAMILY– We are all children of God who care for each other as a family.** (Gen 12:1-3, John 1:11-13, 1 Timothy 3:15)

- What this means...

- God has always desired a people—an earthly family—who would live in such a way that the world would know what he is like. Jesus said that those who live in his ways and obey his Father are truly his family. Through Jesus we believe we are Children of God and brothers and sisters with each other. As family we see it as our obligation to personally care for the needs of one another – both physically and spiritually. We disciple, nurture and hold each other accountable to this Covenant life together.
- **We do this through...**
  - **Being committed to one another in a Care Group (Missional Communities).** Care Groups will be the primary place where a person is known and loved deeply.
  - **What do we mean when we say “Care Group”?** Here is how Tim Chester from Crowded House describes it,
    - “The first thing to say is that a gospel community is not a meeting. It is a group of people who are committed to Jesus and committed to one another, sharing their lives together and sharing mission together. It is about people hanging out together, doing chores together, eating together, and serving in the neighborhood – all with gospel intentionality. That intentionality includes both a commitment to discipling one another with the gospel and sharing the gospel with unbelievers – all in the context of ordinary life and shared life. It’s not a meeting you attend. It’s not a thing you do. It’s who you are. It’s your identity. It’s your place of belonging.”
  - When personal conflict and the difficulties of life come, and come they will, we are committed to working it out, because we are God’s family.

● **DISCIPLES– We are students of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others.** (Matthew 28:18-20, John 16:13-15, Romans 8:28-30)

- **What this means...**
  - As a young man Jesus grew in both height and wisdom. He learned from local religious teachers, by living in community, and through regular times of listening to God. Jesus called others to follow his ways, to be his disciples and live in obedience to all that God commands. He then sent these followers out to make new disciples. We believe we are also called to be followers of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others. This includes both our personal time with God as well as involvement together in training provided by spiritual leadership.
- **The question many ask is, “how do you do discipleship as a church?” We do this through the “Five Spheres of Discipleship”**



- **Liturgical formation:** Discipleship happens as the church gathers for preaching, communion, worship and the testimony of the saints.
- **Personal formation:** Discipleship happens when each follower of Christ takes responsibility for their own spiritual growth which means immersing ourselves in God's Word and prayer throughout the week.
- **Missional formation:** Discipleship happens when followers of Christ move beyond head knowledge and into a life of active ministry. Based on what we see in God's Word we encourage being on mission in community (Care Groups.) This is also done as people join and participate with the Foreign Missions Team or heed God's call to go and live as missionaries overseas.
- **Relational formation:** Discipleship happens when we share our lives with other brothers and sisters. The Trinity reveals to us that our God places a high value on relationships! We grow spiritually; we are encouraged; we are held accountable in meaningful relationships. We do this through Life on Life relationships (2-3 people) and in our Care Groups (groups of 8-16 people).
- **Educational formation:** Discipleship happens when we learn more about who God is and the life He is calling us to through His Word. Knowledge is an important part of discipleship. We gain Biblical knowledge in the following ways: Bible studies in Care Groups, Adult Bible Fellowship Class, Bible studies in Men's and Women's Ministries, Bible studies in Children's and Youth Ministries.

- **MISSIONARIES– We are sent by God to restore all things to him through Jesus Christ.** (2 Corinthians 5:17-21, John 20:21)

- **What this means...**
  - If I believe the Gospel, I no longer need a purpose to justify my existence. I have been justified through Jesus fulfilling his mission and purpose and I join him on the mission that is guaranteed to succeed. Our proof is the resurrection - nothing could stop him, not even sin or death. My justification is not connected to my success of the mission and yet, I am part of the mission that will succeed and the fruit of it is eternal. If I don't believe the Gospel, then I will dedicate my life to a lesser mission and purpose that is guaranteed to fail in the end because it will not overcome sin and death (i.e. A nice home, car, money will not go with me to the grave; a successful career could easily be taken away; a family with three lovely kids who grow up perfectly could end with my kids dying or then walking away from God, etc).
  - God sent his son, Jesus, to Earth to take on human form and live within the culture. He worked, ate and interacted among the people; living in such a way that those around him could see and experience what God was truly like Jesus came so that all people, places and

things could be restored to a right relationship with God. In the same way, we believe we are missionaries sent into our culture to restore all things to God through Jesus.

- **We do this through...**
  - **Our Care Groups.** Why is there an emphasis on doing mission as a community? Because God has created us to be a family of God. Families do mission together. We strongly resist the pervasive practice for church to merely be a Sunday morning experience, then people drive home, live their lives on their own throughout the week and come back for “church” again 7 days later. That is the church of America, not the church we find in the pages of Scripture. In Acts 2:42-47 we see the church as a community on mission together. When people ask us how we “do evangelism” it is simple, our people are on mission together.
  - **Foreign Missions Team.** We develop an appreciation for what God is doing globally as we join and participate with the Foreign Missions Team.
  - **Church planting.** One of the primary ways we see Paul spreading the gospel was through church planting. We need to be praying, identifying leaders, setting aside money in our budget for new church plants.
  - **Everyday life.** God is at work in every arena of life. We believe that every believer is in full-time paid ministry. We just have our checks routed through different channels.

- **SERVANTS— We are servants who serve Him as we serve others around us.**  
(Matthew 20:25-28; 25:31-46; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11; 1 Peter 2:16)

- **What this means...**
  - Fully God—fully human, Jesus took on the posture of a servant. He gave his life, even unto death, so that others could experience salvation, peace and restoration. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves...” All those who follow Jesus are called to serve in the same humility. For us this means joyful submitting to God, leadership and to each other, as we serve whoever God brings into our lives. We do whatever He leads us to do, whenever He tells us and wherever He wants us to do it.
- **We do this through...**
  - Care Groups will be serving one another in the context of their community.
  - The Missional Action Team (MAT) will plan regular, practical acts of service and love for the community in which we live

**Implications of this theology...**  
**RAISING** the Bar on Discipleship

<u>Typical Church</u>	<u>MLEFC</u>
Inward focused	Outward focused
Hoping people come to “church”	Church living as sent people
Looking to have needs met	Looking to meet needs of others
Program focus	Relationship focus
Friends who share our general interests	Committed to being part of a community on mission together
Success = how many come to church services	Success=how many our church serves
Sunday is main event	Every day is sacred
Professionally driven	Every person is a priest
Want personal life to improve	Committed and working to bringing the love of Christ to our suburban neighborhoods and world
Church planting is not on radar; too risky	Sending our best people out to church plant is embraced because we have a kingdom mindset

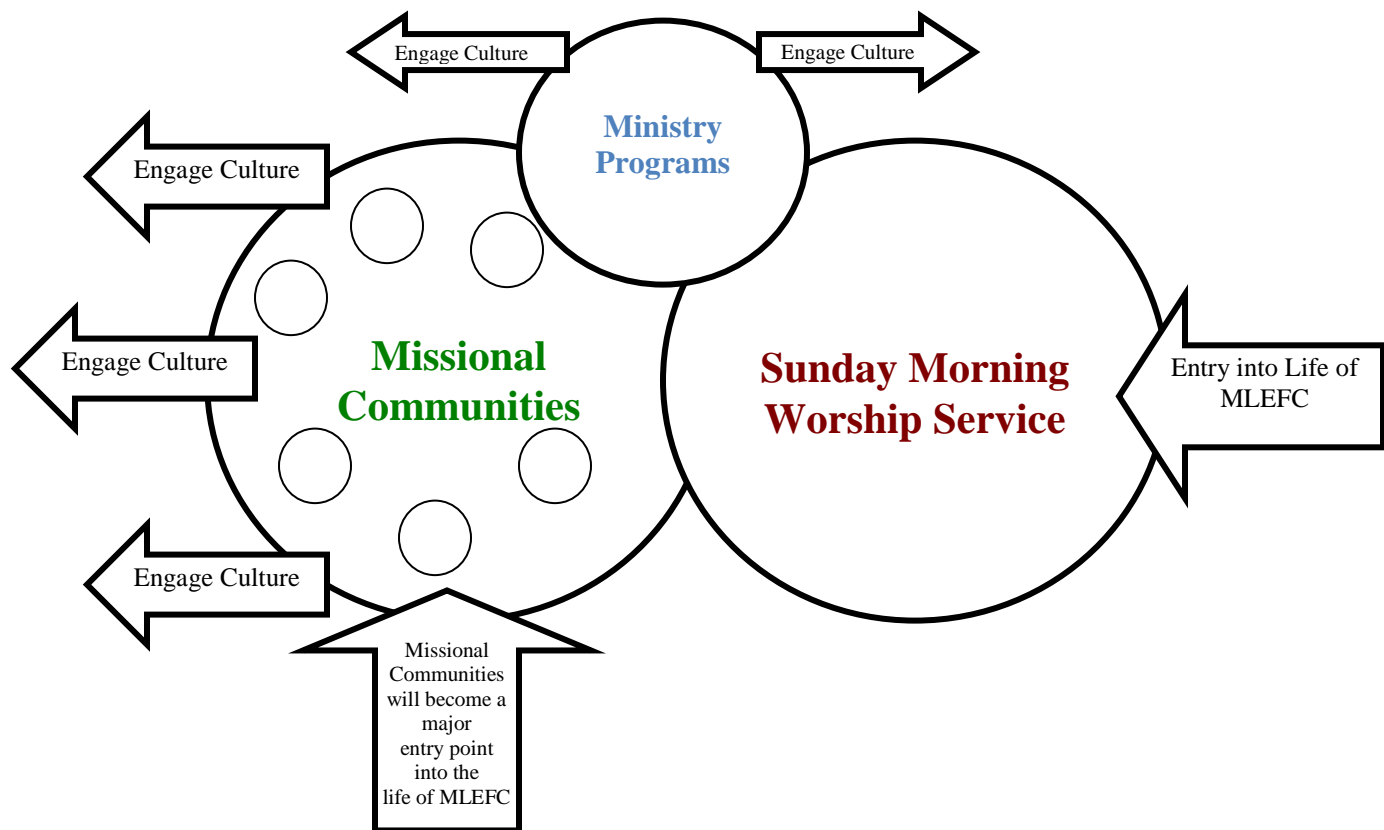
**A Current Debate: Attractional vs. Missional**

- Presently, we find ourselves having a polemical debate around Attractional vs. Missional Church, as mutually exclusive emphases. The issue really isn’t about whether we are for or against attraction. **The issue regards the SOURCE and MEANS of the attraction. To follow what we see in Scripture we will be both Attractional and Missional.** We will be Attractional because people will see our love for God and for one another. We will be Missional because that is part of our identity as children of God. We must be concerned about all 7 days of the week (not just Sunday) or the church will merely be events and programs we attend as we fit them in and around the rest of life. This often leads to a de-sacredization of the majority of life, robbing our people of living the Gospel out in the everyday, OR to a life packed with “church” programs pulling people out of the missionary context.

**Sunday Morning Worship Service** is a place for preaching/teaching the Bible, worship and an entry point into Missional Community life. In our context we believe an involvement and commitment to both Sunday morning and Missional Community are critical.

**Missional Communities** are at the heart of who we are as a community of Christ followers on mission together. *In the future we anticipate Missional Communities taking on a more prominent role as an “Entry Point” into the life of the church.* This will occur as Missional Communities deepen their relationships with their neighbors and begin to share life together.

**Ministry Programs** (Foreign Missions Team, Missional Action Team, Men’s Ministry, Women’s Ministry, Children’s Ministry, Youth and Family, Adult Bible Fellowship, etc...) Ministry programs are wonderful tools and avenues for training, missional engagement and discipleship to take place.



- Some ideas and content borrowed from:
  - Soma Community. Tacoma, Washington
  - The Well. Feasterville, PA