DISCIPLESHIP Vision

I am **the vine** and you are **the branches.**

If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

JOHN 15:5

CHRIST CHURCH

Vision for DISCIPLESHIP

Welcome to Christ Church—a diverse community of people on a lifelong journey toward becoming more like Jesus.

Whether you are enjoying friendship with this congregation, considering formal membership or exploring the possibility of baptism, marriage or some other significant engagement here, understanding the vision of Christian discipleship held by our Elders and pastoral staff will be helpful to you.

Please read on and let us know if you'd like to talk further about any aspect of our vision. **We are glad you are here.**

What is our HEART?

Christ Church welcomes into its **friendship** all persons without regard to their age, race, ethnicity, economic condition, sexual orientation, marital status or spiritual experience. We are eager to have everyone possible benefit from our ministries of worship, growth and service, and experience the grace, truth and love of Jesus Christ and His Body. We are a community of imperfect people seeking to be **biblically faithful** and **radically loving.**

This document will orient you to the mission, values, key principles and practices at the core of our church's vision of Christian discipleship. We hope that in reading it you will gain a deeper sense of who we are and how this church aligns with your own personal convictions and aspirations. At whatever level you ultimately become involved, we are glad to have you here and pray that our church will be a blessing in your life!

What is our MISSION?

Christ Church pursues an enduring purpose, derived from the Bible and the call of Christ, that serves as the North Star by which our life and work are guided. Following the ancient model of the Christian church, we are committed to:

> **Gathering in communities of disciples**
> **who worship, grow and serve; and**
> **going into all the world as witnesses**
> **of the life-changing love of Jesus.**

This rhythm of gathering for communion with God and in community with one another, followed by going forth to fulfill Jesus' great commandment and commission, defines our life together (Matthew 22:37–40; 28:18–20; Acts 1:8).

What are our VALUES?

Embedded within that mission statement are **six core values** that are especially important to us and breathe through all that we do. If these are values that resonate with you, we invite you to pursue discipleship with us.

We delight in
AUTHENTIC WORSHIP

Exalting and enjoying God is life's great purpose and pleasure.

We pursue
INTENTIONAL GROWTH

Becoming like Jesus is an adventure worth every effort.

We go all in for
GENEROUS SERVICE

Giving our gifts to help others is how we imitate God.

We seek to be
ATTRACTIVE WITNESSES

Living to draw others to Christ is our personal daily mission.

We invest in
GENUINE COMMUNITY

Doing life together is how we live the Christian journey.

We are all about
LIFE-CHANGING LOVE

Loving people extravagantly is the power and priority of God.

What do we mean by DISCIPLESHIP?

Christ Church is delighted to have you come enjoy the broad variety of ministries we offer to help people grow to their God-given potential. Our fondest hope, however, is that being here will help you (and your loved ones) become progressively stronger **disciples** of Jesus. The dictionary defines a disciple as someone who seeks to learn from and become like a teacher. **Christian disciples are people who seek to learn from and become like Jesus Christ.** In fact, the word "Christian" literally means "little Christ" (Acts 11:26).

> The Church exists for nothing else but
> to draw [people] into Christ, to make them
> little Christs. If they are not doing that,
> all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons,
> even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time.
> God became man for no other purpose.
> It is even doubtful whether the whole universe
> was created for any other purpose.
>
> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Becoming more like Jesus is a lifelong journey that requires both intention and investment. While Jesus welcomes anyone to "come and see" (John 1:39) what He is all about, His ultimate desire is to gain **followers, not just fans.** Disciples are people who intend to become like Him and then invest in the means of grace by which Christ forms His character in people. Jesus said: "I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit" (John 15:5).

Let's think together about what that really means.

What is Christian CHARACTER?

God loves us just as we are and too much to leave us that way! Like any truly loving parent, God meets us right where we are today, in all our doubts, struggles and imperfections. At the same time, our Heavenly Father wants us to fulfill our full potential— to see us become

> "mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."
>
> Ephesians 4:13

We believe that the Bible, comprised of the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God and the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. The New Testament defines **maturity** in terms of an abundance of "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22–23). The fruit of the Spirit is another way of describing **the character of Christ.**

The following list of fruits (page 6) are among the character traits the Bible teaches that God wants to produce in us. This is not an exhaustive list of all the aspects of Christian character, but it is a faithful list of what the Bible teaches God wants to grow up in us.

Unless you are an amazing saint, chances are that you winced a few times when reading that list. There may be qualities mentioned there that are relatively undeveloped or entirely missing in your character at the moment. You have plenty of company here at Christ Church! Developing this fruit is a work of God that does not happen overnight for any of us—but it can happen. Through the power of His Spirit, Word and Body, God can transform us, filling us with new capacities we don't know how to create in ourselves.

The important question is: **Do you want to grow into this kind of person?** As counter-cultural or uncomfortable as it may seem, Christian discipleship is not a buffet. Jesus doesn't say, "Please pick from this list the fruits that are appealing to you and leave the ones you find difficult or distasteful behind." Christ aims to cultivate all of this fruit in us, so that we are

> "mature and complete and not lacking in anything."
>
> James 1:4

ASK YOURSELF | What would it be like to be someone who matched this description? Which of these fruits does my present life bear? Which of these are a challenge for me? Are there any that I have no intention of trying to cultivate? If I'm honest with myself, am I just looking for a little fine-tuning or blessing of my life as it is… or do I truly want to follow and become like Jesus?

Fruit of the SPIRIT

LOVE
I will the good of others and treat them as I would want to be treated myself.

PATIENCE
I demonstrate forbearance in the face of others' sins, fears and limitations.

FAITH
I put my trust in God's character and promises.

KINDNESS
I show practical consideration and compassion toward others.

HOPE
I choose to believe God is working for the good, even when I cannot see it.

GENEROSITY
I give to God's work in proportion to the grace I've been given.

JOY
I remain content, confident and thankful in all circumstances.

FAITHFULNESS
I remain true to God's Word and mine, persevering in the face of trials.

PEACE
I release anxiety about the past, present or future.

GENTLENESS
I exhibit sensitivity, tenderness and calmness in my treatment of others.

SELF-CONTROL
I display power, through the Holy Spirit, to control my passions and appetites.

MEEKNESS
I submit my power and capacities to the service of God's will and love.

COURAGE
I follow God's leading despite difficulty, fear or opposition.

CHASTITY
I refrain from sexual intimacy with others as a single person.

WISDOM
I discern how the Holy Spirit would have me act in most circumstances.

JUSTICE
I labor to shape societal systems that reflect the Kingdom of God.

FIDELITY
I engage in sexual intimacy only within a marriage between a man and a woman.

GRACE
I extend good and forgiveness to those who have hurt or failed me, even where they are ignorant.

STEWARDSHIP
I exercise care for the created world God has entrusted to me.

PURITY
I avoid images, speech and thoughts that objectify or dishonor people for my pleasure.

MERCY
I withhold bad from those who may deserve it if it can further God's good in them.

HOSPITALITY
I extend kindness to strangers, sojourners and people different from me.

HUMILITY
I choose to take the position of a learner and servant before others.

HONESTY
I speak the truth about myself and others, except where constrained by love.

ACCOUNTABILITY
I accept responsibility for my promises, commitments and actions.

What does character COST?

God's grace is truly amazing. In the beginning, God gave us the gift of life, a remarkable planet to spend it on and more blessings than we can count. On the cross, Christ gave His life to pay the supreme price for all our sins of commission and omission. In eternity, God has established for us an everlasting dwelling place of love and joy. All of this grace costs us nothing. In His grace, we have **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense (Ephesians 2:8–10).

Redemptive Principle No. 1 | Embrace the necessity of LOSS

Perhaps because God is so generous and good, we sometimes slip into thinking of Christianity as a cost-free benefits program—a means of getting more of what we want with little investment on our end. We can start to think of God as some Celestial Santa who can't help but fill our stocking, whether we are naughty or nice. We can view Him as a Cosmic Grandparent who focuses far more on all the wonderful things about us than those things that need changing.

Jesus and His apostles made it clear that God loves us profoundly, but that character change is the order of the day for Christian disciples (Matthew 4:17; Luke 15:7; Romans 12:1–2). If we want to live into our full potential in Christ, there is a price to be paid in terms of **self-denial.** Jesus said,

> "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."
>
> Luke 9:23

To follow Jesus and become like Him involves laying down or **losing** some of our presently ingrained character or conduct. Some appetites, attitudes and actions that we've accepted in ourselves are contrary to the way of the Kingdom and the character Christ seeks to form in us. These sins include

> greed, envy, hatred, strife, deceit, malicious thoughts, sexual immorality, gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, disobedience, infidelity; and lack of love, generosity or mercy.
>
> Romans 1:29–31

Before Christ can fill us with all the good He wants to give us, He needs to empty us of the inferior stuff that occupies that space (Colossians 3:5–14; Ephesians 4:17–32). Jesus says,

> "For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it."
>
> Matthew 16:24–25

To be a disciple involves regularly asking, **"Jesus, what do I next need to lose in order to find the greater life you want to give me?"**

- As you enjoy this church's **FRIENDSHIP** you'll be invited often to consider that question.
- If you want to join the **MEMBERSHIP** of this church, we ask you to commit to truly "attempt to live according to the spirit and teachings of Jesus as revealed in the Bible" (Christ Church Constitution, V.B.1.) This Discipleship Vision is our effort to summarize what this truly means in practice.

None of us will do this perfectly, of course. All of us who become members of Christ Church, however, agree to attempt to turn (repent) from those ways the Bible calls sin and toward Christian character. Because we need a power greater than our own will to do that, we also commit ourselves to a variety of **spiritual practices** through which God forms fruit in us that we couldn't produce all on our own.

We respect that you may not be ready for this commitment at the moment. You are still very welcome to participate in the life of Christ Church and the majority of the ministries and blessings to be found here. We hope that God will lead you to root yourself here, for all the good He can do in you and through you.

The temptation for all of us is to think that maybe it would be better just to be an admirer of Jesus rather than a disciple. In those times, it helps to remember that there is also **a cost to not following Jesus fully.** Dallas Willard puts it like this:

> Non-discipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated throughout by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said He came to bring.
>
> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

ASK YOURSELF | How much of a disciple (a Jesus-like person) do I want to become?

What is our discipleship PATHWAY?

Whether you are a **FRIEND** of Christ Church or a **MEMBER,** we encourage you to make a few purposeful **investments** of yourself here. We believe that God will use these spiritual practices to strengthen your connection with Him and increase, by His grace, the movement of His power into and through your life.

Key Practice No. 1 | WORSHIP weekly with your church family

Find a worship service here that feels authentic to you and make it a part of your weekly rhythm. Come in person as often as you can. You have been made to exalt and enjoy God alongside others and having you with us improves our community! When you can't be here in person, join us in real-time through our worship live stream or catch up on any message through our on-demand library at media.ChristChurch.us or the Christ Church YouTube channel.

Key Practice No. 2 | GROW by taking intentional STEPs of faith

Talk with members of our staff about how you can gain clearer **Sight** for where you are and want to go in your discipleship. Start using some of our **Training** resources for Bible study, prayer and other essential spiritual practices. Take some of the classes or workshops we offer to provide you with the educational **Equipment** you need to make the most of your life. Let us help you find some **Partners** for your spiritual journey. These engagements will help you cultivate a heart, mind, soul and strength like Jesus Christ.

Key Practice No. 3 | SERVE the church and world with your gifts

Enter into a rhythm of prayerful **financial giving** that helps change lives for the good. Serve in a volunteer ministry **here** at the church or **near** to where you live. Extend your reach **far** away where people especially need your gifts. Through its mission partners, Christ Church is engaged in an astounding breadth of life-changing work, and your time, talent and treasure can make a profound difference to many people.

IF YOU PURSUE **MEMBERSHIP** in Christ Church, we will ask you to affirm a *Covenant of Membership* that describes in further detail the level of engagement we seek in these practices. Becoming a member entitles you to serve in some roles that FRIENDSHIP alone does not entail, such as voting at congregational meetings, and standing for election to the office of Deacon(ess), Elder and Trustee.

How else can we support your SPIRITUAL GROWTH and that of your CHILDREN?

HOLY COMMUNION | Whether you are a visitor, friend or member of Christ Church, we hope you'll join us for the sacrament of **Holy Communion.** The only requirements to come to the Lord's Supper are that you be sorry for your sins, put your faith in the grace of the Lord Jesus for your salvation and desire to live in obedience to Christ as Lord. We trust each person to determine their own readiness for this and parents to determine when their children have sufficient understanding of the meaning of the sacrament to participate in it with integrity. Some parents elect to wait until their children have been through our **Confirmation Course** offered in ninth grade.

BAPTISM | At Christ Church, we believe salvation is a gift—given by grace, received through faith. **Baptism** doesn't earn that gift. It responds to it. It is a sacred moment where we step into the story of Jesus, and His life becomes our life. Baptism marks a beginning, belonging and becoming. It is the beginning of new life in Christ; our belonging to His covenant community, the Church; and our becoming through the work of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, we practice both infant and young child baptism by sprinkling and believer's baptism by immersion.

For infants and young children, baptism reflects the faith of the family and the promise of God's grace at work even before we fully understand it. It's a moment for parents to say, "We will raise our child in the way of Jesus, within the life of this church."

For adults, baptism is an opportunity to make a public declaration of faith as an outward sign of an inward transformation. Baptism by immersion is a picture of death, burial and resurrection—marking the beginning of a lifelong journey of following Jesus.

All who pursue baptism will take part in a conversation or class—an opportunity to reflect, prepare and affirm their commitment to following Jesus within this community. For parents presenting their children for baptism, at least one parent must be a member of Christ Church and have affirmed the Christ Church **Membership Covenant.**

BLESSING OF CHILDREN | Even if you are a parent who is not ready to become a member of Christ Church or a member who wishes to let your child be baptized when they can make their own confession of faith, we invite you and your loved ones to participate in a special service where we perform the **Blessing of Children.** Jesus did not baptize children, but He did command His disciples to "let the little children come" to Him, so He could lay His hands on them and bless them (Matthew 19:13–14). Following Christ's model, we are eager to celebrate God's love for your child and your desire to raise your son or daughter in the life of Christian Faith.

How else can we HELP EACH OTHER in our discipleship journey?

While Christian discipleship is a wonderful journey into a more abundant and eternal life, it does involve embracing the necessity of some sacrifice for the sake of the greater good God wants to provide. In addition to this **LOSS** principle, there are three other important principles we seek to live by at Christ Church in our quest to be a truly **redemptive community**—a circle where all of us find the loving help we need to become all we can be.

Redemptive Principle No. 2 | Prioritize the LOG

In this congregation, we seek to focus on **our own sins first.** We avoid acting like the Pharisees of Jesus' day — defining sin in convenient terms that leave us largely untainted, dwelling on the sin of others and distancing ourselves from those in whom we find it. We remember the hard words of Jesus to those whose version of religion or righteousness works like that (Matthew 7:1-2; 23:23-27; John 8:7). Jesus said, *"How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the **log** out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's"* (Matthew 7:3-5).

Redemptive Principle No. 3 | Practice effective moral LEADERSHIP

In numerous biblical passages, we are called upon to admonish and encourage each other along the discipleship pathway (Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 10:24). In seeking to effect life-change in others, however, we strive to exhibit the characteristics that gave Jesus and His disciples an **effective** moral authority:

a. **Holiness |** Others will be far more open to hearing what we might have to say about their lives if they see a genuine purity and beauty in our life. (Luke 2:52; Matthew 5:16; Hebrews 4:15)
b. **Transformation |** People will be more likely to believe that significant transformation of character or conduct is possible in their lives if we have a story of life-change to tell ourselves. (John 9:24–26)
c. **Love |** Our words of direction or correction will have greater power with others if we can demonstrate authentic, self-sacrificing love for them as Jesus did. (John 8:1–11; Romans 5:8)

Few people are successfully scolded or condemned into the Kingdom of God. Instead, we strive to implement the most effective approach possible to helping others grow.

Redemptive Principle No. 4 | Commit to traveling the LONG ROAD

The book of Acts says that the Lord filled the ranks of the early church with "those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). The Apostle Paul lamented over how difficult and slow the process of sanctification was in his own life (Romans 7:15–25). A lot of us experience that struggle. While justification by faith is an instantaneous act of God's grace, we recognize that being conformed completely to the image of Christ and His Kingdom is an ongoing process that will not fully be completed until we stand before Christ in glory (1 John 3:2). As individual disciples and as a congregation, we commit to supporting one another as we travel the long road of transformation together.

What IN THE WORLD **are we doing?**

When you join Christ Church and give your resources here, you become part of a **marvelous movement of life-changing love** that touches hundreds of thousands of people around the corner and across the world. Together we invest more than a million dollars each year to support the work of an amazing cadre of mission partners in the Chicago area, wider United States, Latin America, Asia, India, Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. We carefully selected partners with a proven track record of advancing **FIVE CAUSES** our church is most passionate about.

MULTIPLYING CHURCH & DISCIPLES. One of the primary ways God changes the world for the better is through the radiant influence of disciple-making churches. We, therefore, invest in individuals and ministries serious about evangelistic witness, discipleship and church-planting. In this way, we advance the redemptive work of Christ faster than any other measure.

LIFTING WOMEN & CHILDREN. Jesus was a strong advocate for the dignity and well-being of women and children. As a result, we fund partners who work to protect children from abuse, ensure that they are adequately fed, clothed, and cared for, and provide them with the spiritual and academic nurture that increases their health and hope, and draws them closer to God.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES. The Bible reveals God's passion not only for individuals but also for the flourishing of whole neighborhoods and cities. For this reason, we invest in Christian ministries that advance integrated community development strategies, attending to needs such as clothing, shelter and housing; nutrition and health care; vocational assistance and micro-finance.

RELIEVING SUFFERING. The Gospel is about the "GOD Samaritan" who came to help people lying beaten down in a ditch and without the resources to help themselves. Having experienced this grace from God, we are moved to offer relief to people who have been ravaged by crises and need practical help to get back on their feet.

DEVELOPING LEADERS. Jesus chose apostles who would not only influence individuals but also multiply ministries that changed entire regions. In like fashion, we seek to identify catalytic change-makers and provide them with theological education, leadership training, financing, and volunteer and prayer support that helps increase their impact.

Discipleship Vision

CONSIDER IT

Friendship

Blessing of Children

COMMIT TO IT

Membership

Baptism



WE'RE GLAD YOU'RE HERE | Wherever you are on your journey today and whether you decide to pursue active membership or simply enjoy the friendship of Christ Church, we'd love to get to know you further. Our passion and purpose is to support God's good work in you and through you.

CHRIST CHURCH

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