

Disciples of Christ Identity Statement and Principles

Introduction

Who do we say that we are? Identity is a vital concern for all parts of the church. Many long-time Disciples worry that we may be losing crucial characteristics of our common life. New Disciples want to know about the distinctive gifts of this community of faith. All of us need to have clarity about who we are in order to be faithful and effective witnesses to Jesus Christ.

A church's identity must be firmly rooted in scripture and yet flexible enough to adapt to changes in culture and the shifting demands of mission. Early Christians in Jerusalem had to learn what it meant to be faithful in Antioch and Rome. The forebears of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as they moved from the frontier to the city, had to rethink such matters as congregational autonomy and the goal of "restoring" the New Testament church. Today, we wrestle with what it means to be disciples of our Lord in a world that is increasingly pluralistic, globally connected, and yet so often violently divided.

And so, we offer a succinct statement of identity, under girded by twelve distinct principles of what it means to be Disciples of Christ.

Statement Of Identity

We are Disciples of Christ, a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. As part of the one body of Christ, we welcome all to the Lord's Table as God has welcomed us.

Principles Of Identity

1. We confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and proclaim him Lord and Savior of the world, requiring nothing more – and nothing less – as a basis of our life together.
2. We hold the centrality of scripture, recognizing that each person has the freedom – and the responsibility – to study God's Word within the community of the church.
3. We practice the baptism of believers, which emphasizes that God's grace demands a response of faith and discipleship, while also recognizing the baptism performed in other churches.
4. We gather for the Lord's Supper, as often as possible, experiencing at this table the gracious, forgiving presence of Jesus Christ.
5. We structure our community around the biblical idea of covenant, emphasizing not obedience to human authority but accountability to one another because of our shared obedience to Christ.
6. We participate in God's mission for the world, working with partners to heal the brokenness of creation and bring justice and peace to the whole human family.
7. We hear a special calling to make visible the unity of all Christians, proclaiming that in our diversity we belong to one another because we commonly belong to Christ.
8. We witness to the Gospel of God's saving love for the world in Jesus Christ, while continuing to struggle with how God's love may be known to others in different ways.
9. We affirm the priesthood of all believers, rejoicing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit – which include the gift of leadership – that God has given for the common good.
10. We celebrate the diversity of our common life, affirming our different histories, styles of worship, and forms of service.
11. We give thanks that each congregation, where Christ is present through faith, is truly the church, affirming as well that God's church and God's mission stretch from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.
12. We anticipate God's coming reign, seeking to serve the God – Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer – whose loving dominion has no end.