

History and Philosophy of the Newark Church of Christ

Early years

In 1961 Christians from the Elsmere (DE) and Kelton (PA) churches joined with Christians moving into the area to form the Newark church. The congregation initially met in the U.A.W. Hall in Brookside.

The congregation purchased property and constructed a building that opened in 1965. Total attendance was about fifty. Although it has had many additions and renovations over the years, the building continues to serve the congregation and community.

In 1967 the Newark church was one of the targets of the “Exodus” movement of Christians from Abilene Christian to the Northeast. Thirty-five families moved to the area, effectively doubling the size of the congregation. Several of the Exodus participants continue to work with the church, including Richard Duzan, principal of Aletheia Christian School and one of our current elders.

Charles Moore and Whole Life Worship

The growth and effectiveness of the Newark church is a team effort, but there is no underestimating the influence of Charles Moore on the congregation. Charles served as pulpit minister from 1963-69 and 1971-97. In the early 1980’s Charles did his doctoral work (D. Min) at Drew University. There he had the opportunity to think deeply about the concept of worship, and he concluded that the New Testament worship words were intended to apply to all of life, not just the Sunday morning assembly.

This led to a new focus for the Newark church. Focus shifted from the building to the community. The church began numerous ministries designed to serve the community in Jesus’ name. In 1973 the church constructed a foster care home. In 1974 a day care opened which later became Aletheia Christian School (K-8) and Child Care. The church is active in ministries to the community that are supported by other churches and ministries, including Angel Tree, Hope Dining Room, and Prison Fellowship.

Campus Ministry

The Newark church is a few miles from the University of Delaware, and for many years the congregation ministered to university students in a variety of ways. As part of a long term planning process in 1974, the congregation attempted to establish a “Bible Chair,” where students could enroll in Bible-related classes and receive college credit.

In 1993 the congregation hired Ian Morgan to serve as its first full-time campus minister. Ian did not notice much interest among undergraduate students, but he met a number of Chinese students

and began an outreach of teaching English by reading the Bible. A number of international students came to Christ through this outreach. Individual members continue to take this approach as there are many Chinese students at UD.

In 2000 the congregation invited David Blackwell and his wife Angie to serve as Minister to Students (high school and college). David served in this role for two years before shifting his attention entirely to campus ministry. During this time the ministry grew in its outreach to undergraduate students. The church established a campus ministry foundation and in 2004 the foundation bought a home on East Park Place, near the heart of the university campus, to serve as a student center.

David established a strong mission emphasis in the campus ministry. Students travel regularly to engage in mission work. Hurricane Katrina clean-up was a major emphasis for several years. We are pleased that two former UD students relocated to New Orleans to aid in recovery efforts following their graduation.

Matt Wilson came to Newark in 2005 to serve as Youth and Worship Minister. Because of his talent and enthusiasm Matt became involved with the campus ministry and worked alongside Dave and Angie. When the Blackwells left in 2008 Matt took on campus ministry along with his other responsibilities. The campus house officially opened in 2008, after extensive renovations were made to meet city codes. The ministry has continued its steady growth during Matt's tenure. Tuesday evening dinner and devotional attendance averages over fifty students, making expansion of the house a future possibility. Matt's long-term career goal is to teach at the university level, and in 2009 he was offered a position with Wilmington University. Matt will work part-time with the campus ministry for the 2009-10 school year and he will be available to ensure a smooth transition to the new campus minister.

Current Emphases

The Newark church continues its tradition of being a Christ-centered, ministry-oriented church. The five elders have an "empowering" leadership style. By emphasizing Jesus' life and teachings, members are strongly encouraged to participate in ministry.

In the past eight years the congregation conducted three *Natural Church Development* surveys. From these surveys there has been a renewed emphasis on the congregational worship assembly. Ken Young came for a weekend in 2003 to help us implement a praise team, and in 2009 Keith Lancaster hosted a Praise and Harmony workshop. While we do not view Sunday morning as "the worship" (to the exclusion of the rest of the week) we see it as an important time where the congregation gathers to praise God, to encourage one another, and to be reminded of our purpose.

The Newark church has maintained a small group ministry for many years. Initially groups met two Sunday evenings a month in place of the Sunday evening assembly. Now groups meet at a

variety of times and places, and have different focus areas depending on the needs of the group. The congregation currently has six “Life Groups” in addition to various discipleship and support groups.

Theologically, our congregation is focused on “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” rather than specific doctrines or patterns. We emphasize textual studies in our adult Bible class ministry, respecting the importance of the Bible to shape our hearts. Sermons likewise tend to have a Biblical emphasis, even in “topical” sermon series. The church developed a purpose statement incorporating the “five purposes” identified by Rick Warren in *The Purpose-Driven Church*.

One area where we may differ with traditional, or even “mainline” churches of Christ is that we value the diverse views of our membership. It would not be unusual to find widely varying views of women’s involvement in the Sunday morning assembly, the place of instrumental music in assemblies, the meaning and purpose of baptism, and so on. We center our allegiance on Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead, and we try to keep his life, his message, and his grace, at the center of church life.

One way to understand the emphasis of a church is to listen to who is being quoted. Between the pulpit and classes one would be likely to hear quotes from C.S. Lewis, N.T. Wright, Eugene Peterson, Rob Bell, Philip Yancey, and Scot McKnight (thought not all in the same class or by the same teacher!)

Scot McKnight’s *Embracing Grace* has been influential with our current staff:

“This generation wants an authentic gospel, one that is both proclamation and performance, a gospel that deals with the world they live in: a world that is full of images of people dying and starving and being put to death by goons, a world where there is a profusion of tensions, a world where the Christian faith is not the only one in town, a world where one particular denomination doesn’t own the market on everything, a world where neighborhoods don’t look like the one in *The Waltons*.

“A come-as-you-are culture ... will develop permeable walls. Such walls don’t separate between believers and unbelievers, but invite everyone to come to the table to listen to Jesus.”