

#1 Why Church?

Part 1 - Introduction

For years, you have been receiving this email blast from Collingswood Presbyterian Church telling you what's going on. I hope you've found it useful and I hope you are excited that for a small church, we do a lot of great work in our community. This is a second weekly email blast, which will be sent on Sundays. It will focus on spiritual issues which I hope will get you thinking. Feel free to forward it to your friends and family.

As your pastor, I've come to realize that you might be asking the question, "Why Church?" By that I mean, many people say they believe in God, but they feel that they don't really need to come to a worship service to learn about God. Others say that Jesus is a great guy and all, but they don't really relate to him. Still others have been driven away and totally turned off by the scandals which have rocked many branches of the church, ranging from horrible misconduct by pastors to questionable decisions about politics from both the left and the right.

To all these things, I must say that frankly, there is a lot of merit in these arguments. It would be arrogant in the extreme to say the Church has a monopoly on how people should encounter God and how they should experience God in their everyday lives. Moreover, many find fellowship and meaningful relationships in other organizations as well as among close friends. Furthermore, I will be the first to admit the Church has done a brilliant job of "shooting itself in the foot," driving millions of people away with all the problems I've mentioned above and the many, many, ways pastors and congregational leaders have alienated people.

All this is to say that as one pastor serving one congregation in one particular denomination, I apologize. I'll have more to say about that in the weeks ahead.

Next week, I will explore why the church has existed in the past.

Part 2 - Why the Church has Existed in the Past

I cannot speak for anyone but myself when I say the Church of Jesus Christ has failed terribly in explaining to humanity why it exists and why it should continue to exist. For nearly two millennia, the Church has just assumed that everyone should accept it and embrace it without question. After all, we supposedly are the Church, the mouthpiece of God. Everyone should just automatically listen to us. Period.

But the Church has forgotten that for every institution, respect must be earned. Trust is never automatic. We as the Church have collectively stretched our respect and trust to the breaking point and it should be no wonder that people are turning away from us in droves.

So why are we here? Why should Collingswood Presbyterian Church, or any church for that matter exist? Once upon a time, people went to church for fellowship. They saw and knew friends and family so they could meet and chat before and after the service. Once upon a time, people who wanted to serve the wider community, local or global, could meet and share common interests.

Well, nowadays, there are many ways to connect with friends and family. Whole supportive communities have arisen among people whose children are in sports leagues, people who are coworkers, or even people who are close-knit friends. The Church is hardly the only source of fellowship. Furthermore, there are literally hundreds of ways people who want to serve their communities can get involved in helping. Hundreds of non-profit organizations exist right now and are very willing to take people of every background to help in their unquestionably important missions.

At CPC, we have a small gym. We have numerous meeting rooms. We have a huge kitchen. Our building was created over 100 years ago to be a hub for the community and a place where people could gather, share, and recreate.

Needless to say, there are many other places in Collingswood and beyond that serve the same purpose and do it better than we can.

So, here is the pastor of CPC essentially putting everything about our church down. Why are we here? Why should you be part of us? What do we have to offer in the 21st century?

We'll explore these questions next week.

Part 3 - Why be part of a Church?

We are here, still, as few as we are, because at the core of all we do and can be and aspire to in life is a reason, a real reason, for being. Don't get me wrong. It is wonderful to be with friends. It is wonderful to get involved in the larger community. It is wonderful to draw support and strength from family and coworkers. Nevertheless, to be involved with a church, an organized religious community, takes all our aspirations to another level.

It is not enough to "be good" or "be nice" or "be involved." Of course we should be all of these things, but ultimately we have to answer the essential question of why. Why should we be good? Why should we be nice to others? Why should we care about what happens in our community or our country or our world? Why shouldn't we just use this life to make as much money as we can and throw everyone under the bus to get what we want? Eat, drink, and be merry!

There must be something more. There must be something that can give us a reason to get involved and be involved with the lives of our fellow human beings. I mean, it's easy to offer time and give money when things are going well for us. It is much more difficult

to be involved and be supportive when times are hard or the demands of life are overwhelming or we are consumed with the need to just survive.

What the Church offers, in all its failings, in all its imperfections, in all its highly flawed humanity, is the example of the life, death, and resurrection of the utterly Human One, Jesus of Nazareth, or as he is better known, Jesus the Christ.

Jesus. Just some nice dude, gentle, meek, and mild, who said and did a lot of nice things then died. Good-bye. Or, or, or, maybe there is more to this nice dude than we think.

You see, Jesus was not just a “nice dude.” No, far from it. Jesus gives us a reason to live. The whole point of Jesus coming into the world is to teach human beings that life is not just about eating, sleeping, and procreating. The real point of life and living is to love each other and do our best to build each other up so that we can be the best women and men we can possibly be. We’ll discuss how the church can and should be building us up next week.

Part 4 - How the Church Should Build us Up

Unlike any other club, organization, or group of friends, the Church in all its terrible imperfections, makes a ridiculous claim: You are here on this Earth for a reason. You are here, with your mind and body and spirit to do great and wonderful things. You are special. You are specifically created to be here. You are known and loved by a Creator God who wants nothing more than to love you into loving yourself and using all your tremendous talents and abilities to make this world all it can be.

No other organization can make this claim. Unlike other organizations, however, it is the Church and only the Church that should assure you that you are blessed and empowered and endowed with incredible, amazing gifts. It is the Church, week after week, that should assure you that you are loved (even when you think you’re not) that you are spiritually connected to amazing women and men whose examples of faith and action stretch back for centuries (even when you feel like you’re worthless). It is the Church that should build you up so that you can stand up to the many, many injustices that fill humanity and bring you the peace you need to overcome your fears and stand up to the evils facing the world today. In other words, we desperately crave the spiritual feeding we need to do whatever it is we have been called to do on this earth. It is the Church that should, when it is at its best, feed you, love you, and nourish you. I believe no other organization can make that claim, at least to the extent we can.

Now, if you are not feeling assured, connected, and built up, you are hardly alone. The Church has failed miserably in its mission. Nevertheless, we at Collingswood Presbyterian Church are dedicated to trying our best. We are here to make your life and living better. We want you to part of us so we can help you in life’s journey and when we fall short, we want to hear from you.

Let's talk. Let's open up about the many ways the Church has hurt us or God has let us down. Let's have a meeting of minds so that we can build each other up and actually live the incredible life Jesus wants for us.

In this season of Joy, let us learn to be joyful.

In Jesus' Name. Hallelujah. Amen.