

COMMUNITY MINDED

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Recently you've been hearing the leaders of SJ Ministry describe our congregation as a Community Church. I can tell it's beginning to sink in because the elders asked me to explain what that means at their recent meeting. 😊 I've noticed that when people are confused or critical of our leadership they often will call the Elders to express their concerns. I'm never bothered by that. It is one of the reasons we have elders. According to our structure, the SJ pastors and ministry leaders report to the elders and conduct their ministries under their spiritual oversight.

We have only two standing boards at St. John: The Board of Elders—who supervise the spiritual life of the church, and the Board of Directors—who oversee and direct the business affairs of St. John. Our day-to-day ministry is led by ministry teams formed under the leadership of our trained staff or high capacity volunteers whom the staff chooses and trains. All staff serve under the direction of the SJ Strategic Leaders: Jeff Cook, Director of Operation & Finance; Pastor Ryan Peterson, Director of Next Generation & LIFEjourney; and Pastor Dion Garrett, Director of Community Engagement. The Strategic Leaders serve under the supervision of our senior pastor Stephen Hower, who works under the supervision of the Chairman of the Board of Elders and the Chairman of the Board of Directors. TMI! 😊

Getting back to the issue at hand, it was helpful for the Elders to ask me what our staff leaders mean when they describe SJ as a Community Church. In many people's minds, that kind of thinking will lead to compromise as we try to be "all things to all people." I reminded the Elders that "being all things to all people" is actually a Biblical concept that comes from a direct quote of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:20–22.

"I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law—though I myself am not under the law—so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law—though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law—so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some."

Five things being a Community Church DOES NOT mean at SJ:

- We will NOT decide what is theologically right based on popular opinion NOR attempt to be politically correct.
- As teachers, we will NOT avoid topics that are divisive or controversial.
- We have NO plans to withdraw from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod despite our non-traditional approach to worship and ministry.
- We will NOT use our influence to promote political candidates NOR political parties but we will weigh in on political issues addressed in Scripture.
- We will NOT become internally focused on our members as our first priority, believing our primary mission is to seek and to save the lost.

Five things being a Community Church DOES mean at SJ:

- It means we WILL welcome, invite and encourage all people of every race, political persuasion, gender, age, and religious affiliation to join us in fellowship, the study of Scripture, and the worship of the Triune God as He reveals Himself in the sacred Scripture.
- It means we WILL invite people from the community to use our facilities to promote Godly causes, and use their unique talents, training, and testimonies to encourage others in life and faith.
- It means we WILL urge our leaders, our members and our friends to become involved in community activities that help people and honor God.
- It means we WILL partner with other ministries and community organizations to accomplish things for the common good.
- It means we WILL offer and promote a wide variety of opportunities on our campus to help people grow in faith and the improvement of their life.

A quick review of Jesus' life will reveal that He spent most of His time AWAY from Jerusalem and the Temple. His life is filled with stories of personal encounters with people who lived in villages and towns across the country. He was a people person willing to talk to the sick, the dying, the outcasts, the poor, religious leaders and the demonically possessed. He was Emmanuel, God with us. In His example, we see the heart of God who loves all people without distinction. If we are to be faithful to God's priorities we will do the same.

I hope this brief article helps you better understand the spirit of our ministry's priorities that drives us to find more and more ways to engage our community by any means possible, so that by all means we might save some!