

WHCC

Philosophy of Ministry

A common question people ask is what makes a particular church unique? This question focuses on information which goes beyond a church's *Statement of Faith* and touches on how a church practically lives out its faith. This *Philosophy of Ministry* explains in more detail what makes West Hills Community Church unique.

Foundations

West Hills Community Church is founded on five principles. These principles inform how we serve God, honor Christ and serve and love each other. As a church, we purpose to be:

1. God Centered Worshipers

We seek through the gospel to be a God-centered body of believers who worship God and reflect His glory in all we are and do. Worship is defined as reflecting God's worth and glory back to Him. It is a fundamental ingredient of who we are as a local body of believers. When we are satisfied in Him He is glorified in us.

We focus on worship in three contexts: corporate worship, personal worship and household worship:

A. Corporate worship occurs as the congregation gathers weekly to encourage and equip one another in the Lord (Acts 2:46; 20:7; Heb 10:24-25). It is our purpose to worship God corporately by praising Him in music, preaching, teaching, giving, prayer, and observing the sacraments together, as we exercise our spiritual gifts toward one another in the church (Rom 3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-11; Eph 4:7-15; 5:18-20).

B. Personal worship occurs in our individual lives as we seek to honor God in thought and action every day. This includes personal prayer, study of God's Word, sharing Christ with others, and reflecting Christ-like character in interaction with others as a result of His sanctifying work in our lives.

C. Household worship occurs as we seek to reflect God in our homes. Household worship is the natural outflow of personal worship in the context of our family and living situation (Deut 6:4-9, Eph 6:1).

2. Scripture Grounded

We base our belief, structure, strategy and philosophy of ministry on God's Word and believe Scripture is authoritative with respect to corporate and individual conduct. Commitment to "sound doctrine" - the 'pattern of sound teaching received' from the Lord and His Apostles - is paramount for us (1 Tim 4:16; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 3:16).

Our [Core Beliefs](#) statement summarizes the teachings of Scripture we hold basic and essential for fellowship at West Hills. It is the doctrinal standard by which we evaluate our own ministries and the mission agencies, ministries and organizations we partner with or support (2 Tim 1:13-15; 2:15).

3. Gospel Formed

The reality of the gospel changes our relationship with God, other Christians and people who don't know Jesus:

A. The gospel changes our relationship with God

The gospel is the good news that in Jesus Christ, God drew sin, evil and death together in one place -- the cross. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, He defeated sin. The result of Christ's work on the cross is reconciliation

between God and sinful people that brings about a new way of living and a living hope in a future resurrection from the dead for all believers (Rom 6:4). The gospel declares that God has saved us for relationship with Himself now and into eternity.

B. The gospel changes our relationship with other Christians

Because we have been forgiven and shown much grace, we forgive and show much grace to others. Our life is formed and informed by this gospel of reconciliation. This good news of deliverance, forgiveness and reconciliation through Jesus Christ is for everyone who repents and believes. It informs the focus of all our ministries and the way in which we relate to one another inside and outside the church (2 Cor 5:17-21; Heb 2:14-15; 1 John 3:7-8, 11, 17; 4:7-8).

C. The gospel changes our relationship with people who don't know Jesus

God seeks the lost that they might know Him and calls us to be part of His work in the world today. We participate in God's continued work of redemption by seeking to bring the gospel to people who don't know Jesus in our workplace, neighborhoods, community and around the world (Matt 28:16-20).

4. Christ Focused

Because Jesus Christ is God's Son and reconciled us to God, following Him by faith, obeying His commands, spreading the good news about Him and serving Him by loving one another is paramount for us. Our desire is to live and function as a church and as individuals as Christ followers in such a way that the world sees Jesus by our lives and how we love God and others (John 10:27-28; 13:34-35; 14:21; 1 John 2:4-6).

5. Spirit Led

We rely on the Holy Spirit as we live out our faith in relationship with God, other Christians and those who do not know Jesus.

A. In our relationship with God, the Holy Spirit gives us assurance that we belong to God (1 Jn 3:24), teaches and reminds us about what is true (John 14:15-18, 26) and helps us in our prayers (Rom 8:26-27). The Holy Spirit comforts us in our distress (John 14:15-18) and gives us the ability to live a God honoring life (Gal 5:13-23).

Being *spirit led* means we actively grow in our love for God in our knowledge of Him and the manner in which we live our lives both publicly and privately.

B. In our relationships with other Christians, the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to live life together in a manner that glorifies God and builds up each other in love (Gal 5:13-23). The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts so we can encourage, build up, serve and love each other in Christ (1 Cor 12).

Being *spirit led* means we actively grow in our love for others in practical ways that change how we speak into each other's lives, serve one another, build relationship with one another and deal with conflicts and challenging life circumstances.

C. In our relationships with those who don't know Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives us power to tell people about Jesus in our neighborhood, community and around the world (Acts 1:8).

Being *spirit led* means we prioritize and actively seek to bring the gospel to people who don't know Jesus.

Vision and Core Values

Our vision and core values are derived from our foundational principles. West Hills Community Church exists to glorify God by making disciples through Worship, Community and Mission. Therefore, we:

1. Celebrate God's supremacy through Worship

We value worship because everyone was created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever—in short, we were made for worship! Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God is recreating a people by the Spirit who will worship Him in all of life. This means that every church—and every individual Christian—is called to acknowledge the greatness of the Triune God in everything. This applies narrowly to the Godward focus of our Sunday morning gatherings and broadly to how we engage our vocations, families, neighborhoods and city.

2. Love, serve, and equip God's people in Community

We value community because God does. As Christians, we worship a God of community. He is one God who has eternally existed in three persons known as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is communal by nature and we are created in His image. Therefore, as imitators of our God, we emphasize regular participation in each others lives. We meet throughout the week to care for each other and invite others into this family of faith that God is forming.

3. Make disciples in Mission

Jesus charged his followers to go out and make disciples. As a church, we continue this mission by primarily communicating the news of Jesus and His gospel to others. We also demonstrate this gospel by sacrificially and generously helping others because God is generous and sacrificial with us in giving us His only Son.

Distinctives

The Distinctives of West Hills Community Church are those qualities which make us unique as a congregation. These distinctives define how we think about roles, functions, ministries and priorities.

1. Biblical Leadership

The leadership of West Hills Community Church is comprised of elders, staff and deacons. We believe in a plurality of leaders recognizing the Lord Jesus alone as the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:1-3).

A. Elders are recognized as pastors and shepherds of the local church. Lay elders share equal responsibility and authority within the leadership with those who are paid as vocational pastor/elders (1 Peter 5:1-3; Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 5:17, James 3:1; Heb 13:17).

- *Equal responsibility* means that elders (staff or lay / paid or unpaid) are responsible for overseeing ministry and active participation in the shepherding of members and regular attenders.
- *Equal authority* means that elders (staff or lay / paid or unpaid) are empowered to make ministry decisions working in conjunction with relevant ministry leaders and other elders.

Because of the significance of the elder's role:

- Elders make carrying out these responsibilities their primary ministry in our church.
- Elders actively pursue opportunities designed to further equip themselves for this ministry.

B. Elder and pastor roles are filled by qualified men. The New Testament teaches that the role of pastor / elder is to be filled by men who meet specific character requirements (1 Tim 3:1-7). Scripture clearly shows that men hold primary leadership responsibility in the church in the same way they do in the family (1 Tim 2:11-14; Eph 5:23-24; 1 Cor 11:3). This pattern is also seen in the Old Testament priesthood, New Testament apostles and pattern of the ancient church.

C. In addition to their primary role of shepherding, the elders oversee the business and program functions of the church and work together to make significant decisions. We operate on the principle of unity rather than majority rule (where votes determine what is done). No one person has absolute authority except for Jesus, our ultimate Head. No one person is autonomous in authority or responsibility.

D. Deacons are men or women whose lives reflect the character described in Scripture (1 Tim 3:8-13). Deacons support the work of elders by assuming leadership over support ministries under the authority of the elders. They serve in ways that enable the Pastors / Elders to focus their attention on spiritual matters and shepherding (Acts 6:1-6; Phil 1:1, Rom 16:1).

2. Biblical Care

Biblical care is a core part of what we focus on at West Hills and something we take very seriously. God has called us to be involved in the lives of members and regular attenders in meaningful ways, equipping and helping each person toward maturity in Christ in all aspects of life (Col 1:28).

A. Pastors / elders are responsible before the Lord for *shepherding* the local body and must *give account* for the ministry at West Hills and the souls of every member (Acts 20:28-30; Hebrews 13:17, James 3:1).

- *Shepherding* means equipping, protecting, encouraging, rebuking, admonishing, and leading members.
- *Give account* means each leader will one day stand before God and be held individually responsible for how they oversaw the ministries and shepherded the body at West Hills (1 Cor 3:5-17; 2 Cor 5:9-11).

B. Prayer is an important part of shepherding. Leaders pray for our church family and encourage members of our church to pray for one another. West Hills maintains a prayer chain to help communicate areas of prayer to our church family. Special prayer is available with the elders for members and regular attenders who are experiencing illness or other life challenges (1 Sam 12:23; Jas 5:14-15).

C. Biblical counseling is a practical aspect of shepherding and outreach at West Hills. We provide counseling free of charge for all areas for which the Scriptures provide clear guidance and which we are equipped to address. The type of counseling that West Hills provides is rooted in helping people connect their struggles with their relationship with God, others and self from a Biblical perspective. While we seek to practically address real life struggles, the ultimate goal of counseling is relationship with and maturity in Christ. This is especially true when suffering is of an abiding

nature and not easily or quickly resolved.

Please refer to our [Philosophy of Counseling](#) document for more information.

D. Church discipline is a sobering aspect of shepherding at West Hills. We recognize that love often calls for direct confrontation of sinful patterns of living that bring harm to individuals, relationships and our church family. Our elders seek to address sinful situations that cannot be resolved between individuals in a gracious, loving and Biblical way (Matt 18:15-20; Gal 6:1).

3. Discipleship

A. Discipleship is living a God centered life. Living a God-centered life requires growing in Christ-likeness through discipleship. This should be the norm for every believer. Each member and regular attender of West Hills is urged to be discipled and to disciple others (2 Tim 2:2).

B. A primary responsibility of leadership in the local church is the active discipling of all members. Therefore, every leader is expected to model this behavior by maintaining active personal discipleship relationships, even as they are being equipped themselves. The discipling work of the elders and pastoral staff is supported and extended by adult education, biblical counseling, community groups, home bible studies, smaller group fellowships and one-on-one discipleship.

C. We seek to cultivate a culture of regular, systematic study and hunger for God's Word among His people. The nature of this equipping varies but has a single, common goal, which is to equip the saints with a basic but broad understanding of what we believe (2 Tim 2:15; 4:2).

D. Since Christian households are ideal environments for discipleship, we seek to aid people in building strong, Christ honoring households. To this end we prioritize helping couples establish and maintain strong marriages as a part of discipleship. We strive to support, encourage and equip parents -- married or single -- to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4), while providing ministries for their children and youth as supplements for nurture and equipping in the gospel.

E. Many people are single by choice, stage of life or divorce. We therefore are committed to supporting, equipping and encouraging single adults and single parents as they follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

F. While the basic message of the gospel never changes from generation to generation (1 Cor. 15:1-8), and while the basic nature of man in sin remains the same throughout time (Rom 3:9-20), the ways that sin manifests itself does change. We are therefore committed to train and equip believers to present the gospel's alternative to the sin issues of our day in the same way the church through the ages brought the gospel to bear on the sin issues of their day.

We desire to see our members equipped in the gospel in such a way so as to be ready and able to provide gospel alternatives to those trapped in and/or victimized by various sin patterns in our nation and culture. We also encourage members to pursue active ministry opportunities in these areas.

4. Women and Ministry

West Hills Community Church is *complementarian* and not *egalitarian* in our understanding of men's and women's roles. Scripture teaches that God created man and woman in His image and after His likeness to reflect His glory to the world around them.

While both women and men are of equal dignity and worth before God they were given different roles by God by which they complement one another and reflect His glory. As men and women fulfill their God given roles in Christ, they honor God and Christ in society and reflect Christ and the church's relationship to one another to the society around them.

We purpose to be a congregation where women are safe and highly valued in the same way they were safe and highly valued by our Lord Jesus Christ, as heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ's kingdom (Luke 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 11:38-42; John 4:5-26; Rom 8:16-7; Gal 3:26-28; 1 Peter 3:7).

In regard to ministry in the local church, women played a vital role in the early church and do so at West Hills as well. Women are free and encouraged to use their gifts to actively participate in any area of ministry that scripture does not prohibit (Acts 1:14; 16:14-15; 18:1-4; 26; Rom 16:1; Phil 4:2, 3).

5. Children and Youth

We prioritize ministry to children, youth and young adults because Jesus did. During Jesus' earthly ministry children were blessed by Him (Matt 19:13-15). He encouraged parents to bring their children to Him for blessing and reproved his disciples for hindering them from doing so (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17). He used a small child as an illustration of what greatness really involves (Matt 18:1-5; Luke 9:43-45). Youth and young adults were part of the broader group of people Jesus ministered to and were included among His disciples (Matt 4:21-22; Mark 14:51).

We therefore have ministries to children, junior high, senior high and college students. Our children's ministry, youth ministry and college ministry are not replacements for parental involvement in the lives of their children. These ministries are designed to complement and support Christian parents as they raise their children and encourage them to follow Christ.

Because some children, youth and college students who are connected to West Hills do not have parents who follow Christ, our ministry provides a haven for them to learn about Christ, experience His love, and grow in His grace.

6. Disability

West Hills is committed to being a welcoming and loving place for people with disabilities and their families and caregivers. We embrace the reality that God has placed his image in all people, including those with disabilities (Gen 1:16-27).

We see in Scripture that God protects, provides for and welcomes those with disabilities (Lev 19:14, Lk 14:12-24). We see people with disabilities as being important parts of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the local church. Therefore, their exclusion hurts both them and the church body (1 Cor 12:14-26).

We can inadvertently exclude people with disabilities from the life of the church in multiple ways. Many who have disabilities or have children with disabilities have negative experiences in churches. Some common experiences include:

- Not having access or inclusive seating for people in wheelchairs
- Excluding people with disabilities who may make noise in the worship service
- Rejecting children with unusual behaviors from children's program
- Communicating to parents of children with special needs that they and their children are not welcome

As a church, we seek to evangelize, embrace and include people with disabilities and their families and caregivers in the following ways:

- Outreach to people outside of our church:

We seek to connect with the disability community outside of our church through ministry events and networking with ministries and organizations who serve people with disabilities.

- Individualized support of people who come to our church:

We actively seek out and work with people with disabilities and their families and caregivers to identify the best way to support their participation in our church. Examples of this include ushers arranging preferred seating for a wheelchair, providing a support person so a child can participate in the children's program, providing an interpreter for a deaf worshiper, or meeting with a parent for encouragement and counseling.

7. Foster Care / Adoption / Family Preservation

We take God's call to care for and protect vulnerable children seriously. Over the years, many in our church have been foster parents or adopted children. Caring for orphans and vulnerable children is both a reflection of God's character and the gospel (Dt 10:18, Ps 68:5-6, Ps 82:3-4, Rm 8:14-17). Foster care and adoption is an important part of West Hills practically living out scripture's call to care for and protect the vulnerable (Jas 1:27).

We recognize and embrace the reality that our involvement in caring for and protecting vulnerable children can take many forms including adoption and foster care. We also recognize that the church has a role in helping struggling parents who may be able to continue to parent their children where spiritual or other challenges can be addressed.

As a church, we seek to practically minister to vulnerable children and their families in the following ways:

- Promoting adoption, foster care and family preservation awareness to our church family
- Equipping prospective foster and adoptive parents
- Providing practical support for adoptive and foster families in our church with things like prayer, encouragement and respite
- Supporting adoptive and foster kids as they participate in children and youth programs to the extent needed

8. Believer Participation in the Body

We encourage every believer in Christ to have an active role in the life of the church. The Scriptures tell us that the church is a group of households and individuals who are gathered together and in covenant together in Christ for mutual accountability, edification and service (Gal. 6: 1-2,10; Eph. 2:19; 4: 1-16; Heb. 10:21; 1 Peter 2: 5,6). It is therefore both normal and expected that individuals and households who affiliate with West Hills do so with the intention of being in covenant with and involved in the life of the church for this purpose. The modern idea of individuals or households in Christ who are not responsible to a local expression of the body of Christ is foreign to the New Testament. Further, the Bible teaches that every believer in Christ has been given gifts which are to be used in ministry for the building up of one another and the church.

A. The Word of God teaches us that the ministry which is of first importance for heads of households is that which takes place in the home. Heads of households, and not pastor/elders, deacons or Sunday School teachers, carry primary responsibility before the Lord to teach those in their households the Word of God, to train them in the ways of Christ through precept and example, and to take the lead for growth in grace for the household (Deut 6:1-9; Eph 5:25-31; 6:4; 1 Tim.3:5; 5:4, 8). We believe that this ministry is primary, while ministry in the church at large is secondary.

Another way to put this is to say that the light that shines the brightest in public ministry is the light that is already shining in the home; and ministry in the home is the proving ground for public ministry. Those who aspire to public ministry in the local church should therefore be people who are learning to love and serve one another first at home as they grow in their faith.

B. The Word of God teaches that every believer has gifts and responsibilities for ministry within or outside the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7,12-27; 1 Pet 2:5, 9). We seek to help believers discover and nurture these gifts so that they may be deployed in service for the advance of the Kingdom for the glory of Christ. We are committed to helping believers find places of service where their gifts may be used most effectively inside and outside the church.

C. We believe that the most natural avenue apart from corporate worship for building vital relationships and for ministry to others inside and outside the local church is through hospitality in homes and as believers gather together in smaller groups (community groups, adult equipping classes, men's/women's groups/studies, etc.). The homes of believers provide an ideal place for fellowship, teaching, admonition, prayer and discipleship for believers. They also provide a natural avenue for evangelism of those who do not know Christ both in formal gatherings (such as a community group) and informal gatherings (such as having neighbors over).

9. Visitors

We seek to be "member-focused, visitor-sensitive". We seek to align what we do with Scripture while avoiding unnecessary things that may have the effect of driving people who do not know Jesus away from Him and His church.

A. We believe that the fundamental pattern of the New Testament church was to gather together in order to worship and equip believers (Eph 4:1-16), and to disperse to evangelize (I Thess 1:8). The local church is, by definition, an assembly of believers under one head, Christ Jesus (Col. 1:18). Our primary focus in most meetings of the church is worship and equipping of believers (Acts 2:42; 20:7-11; 1 Tim 4:11-16; 2 Tim 4:2-5; Heb 10:25; 2 Peter 2:9-10).

B. We are committed to systematic, expository preaching of the Word whether teaching on individual texts or whole Bible books during Sunday Morning Worship Services since these meetings provide the best opportunity for teaching within the corporate body of Christ (2 Tim 4:2). We are also committed to providing other opportunities for equipping, both corporately and in small groups.

C. We are not "seeker-driven", however we welcome those who are not Christ's followers from any and all backgrounds to attend our services. We seek to be ever mindful of the presence of people who are not Christians and avoid terminology or actions which may tend to discourage, confuse, or alienate these visitors. We seek to offer a welcoming, safe, and loving atmosphere in all services toward all people (Luke 2:10-11; I Pet 3:15-16).

The Gospel is also explained clearly whenever possible in order that unbelievers in our midst might have an opportunity to believe in Christ. (I Cor 14:22-25).

10. Mission

In the same way God sent His Son into the world to redeem the world, the Son sends His disciples into the world to make disciples of all nations (John 20:21; Matt 28:18-20). We therefore purpose to be a church which actively participates in our world as *sent ones*, seeking to make disciples who glorify God through worship, community and mission wherever we are. This means that mission is both local and global and occurs both inside and outside the walls of the church.

In practice we serve inside the church through various ministries and outside the church walls in our community as representatives of Jesus. Likewise, we are to go to the ends of the earth with the gospel or support those who do. Because of this, West Hills sends out and supports missionaries in our local community and worldwide (Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:45-48; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11-12; Colossians 3:19-20).

The mission activity of West Hills includes local mission outreaches, short and long-term global mission work, church planting, and special ministries focusing on foster care, adoption and disability.

11. Non-denominational

West Hills Community Church is non-denominational in affiliation as is not modeled after any particular denominational church. We welcome and embrace people from many different church backgrounds as well as people who have no church background.

We value these differences and see the fact that we are a diverse body as a strength. Because this diversity can potentially bring division, individual differences and preferences are subordinated to unity in Christ and the building of His church (Rom 12:3-21, 1 Cor 3:1-8).

12. Serving and Partnering with Other Churches

Although West Hills is an independent non-denominational church, we see in Scripture that we are connected through Jesus to other like-minded churches. Practically, this means we seek to support local like-minded churches, serve struggling churches and partner with churches and other organizations for the good of the broader body of Christ and furtherance of the gospel (Rom 15:26, Acts 8:14, Acts 11:22, 2 Cor 8:1-15).

Practical examples of what this looks like include:

- praying for other congregations in our local area and around the world
- lending staff to struggling churches to preach and carry out other duties
- networking with churches for ministry in our local area
- reaching out to churches when we notice an influx of members from their congregation
- prioritizing missions that build the local church and its leaders

For more information regarding our:

Statement of Faith: <http://westhills.org/core-beliefs/>

Counseling Philosophy: <http://westhills.org/counseling/>

Mission Philosophy: <http://westhills.org/mission/>

NOTE: If you have questions or comments about our Philosophy of Ministry, please contact us at info@westhills.org