

# **Raleigh Mennonite Church**

## **Core Values**

### **1. Centrality of Christ**

At the center of our congregational life is the understanding that Jesus Christ was the complete expression of God's life and love on earth. In Jesus, God has acted to restore human beings to the life of wholeness that God purposed in creation. In all that we do as a church our focal point is on Jesus Christ as our Savior, Lord, and Model for life.

With Christ as our center, we respect the variety of cultures, backgrounds, ages, and denominational traditions that make up RMC. Additionally, we seek to respect one another's differences without a quarrelsome, arrogant, or divisive spirit. We encourage people to search the scriptures with humility, seeking balance and mutual understanding as we work together. As followers of Jesus Christ, we welcome all people to join us on this journey of "loving God with all our being and loving our neighbors as ourselves".

At RMC we seek to take these two commandments that Jesus taught – "loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves" as our mission (Matthew 22: 36-40). Our mission is focused on living out these commandments and to not get caught up in endless questions and controversies that can divide us as Christians and distract us from our mission (2 Timothy 2:23-24).

### **2. Environment of Grace**

We understand that the good things that happen in our church are a result of God's grace at work among us and in us. The way we treat one another is always the truest test of our credibility in what we say we believe. If we treat one another with respect, unconditional love, an attitude of servanthood, a readiness to forgive and to look for the best in each other, we will witness a revolutionary transformation of our life and the lives around us.

We seek to live without facades and pretense. We know we will stumble and make mistakes. We confess our sins to each other and we try to learn from our failures. The freedom to fail makes it possible for people to be bold in trying new things, venturing forth into the unknown more confidently, and walking by faith more securely. An environment of grace brings freedom because we know that we can expect a loving response from others. Grace from God enables us to give grace to others without condemnation, without looking out for ourselves, but responding to others in the way we would want them to respond to us.

### **3. Making Disciples**

In the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) Jesus said, "As you go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you". We believe that we are a people who have been sent on a mission by Jesus. Our mission is to be disciples of Christ and to make disciples, to learn to live as Jesus teaches, and to influence others to do so as well. Our focus is on a holistic disciple-making

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process where we invite people into a relationship with Christ and to a life of discipleship and spiritual growth. We actively seek to be spiritual friends and companions with the people we encounter on a daily basis and we enthusiastically welcome visitors and newcomers into our congregational life.

### **4. New Humanity**

Jesus came announcing the arrival of the “reign of God” and invited us to be part of a new humanity drawn from all races and nations. We know that as Christians race, class, culture, economics, and gender often divide us. At RMC we seek to “live into” this new humanity that is being formed by Christ (Galatians 3:28). We view each other, not from a human perspective, but from the viewpoint of a new relationship with Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:16-17) that transforms all our relationships and ways of doing things.

We affirm the gifts and calling of women, as well as men, in ministry and leadership. We are committed to building relationships with people who are materially poor and are on the margins of society, as well as with those who have many resources. We seek to address and change attitudes, behaviors, and structures that deny opportunities and power to people because of the color of their skin. We value racial and cultural diversity. We know that overcoming these human barriers is not easy, but by the power of God’s Spirit at work among us we seek to demonstrate the oneness of the Body of Christ with the diversity of all its parts.

### **5. Spiritual Vibrancy**

We believe that the best context for a transforming relationship with Jesus is one that stresses both an “inner journey” of contemplation, prayer, worship, and study and an “outward expression” of that journey in service to the world. We refuse to choose one over the other. At RMC we want to experience a vibrant spiritual life with Christ through all the stages of life. We don’t believe that Christians reach some plateau of “maturity” where they coast until they reach heaven. We believe every life-stage, from the youngest to the oldest, is an opportunity to experience God in new ways and to deepen our love relationship with Christ.

The inner journey may have ups and downs, joys and disappointments, delights and sufferings, hopes fulfilled and dreams lost, but it is nourished through spiritual disciplines or habits such as prayer, fasting, feasting, fellowship, meditation, journaling, silence, reading scripture, corporate worship, and so forth. As we intentionally confess our daily need for forgiveness and open ourselves to God’s love and grace through these disciplines, we will continue to grow and be transformed into the image of Christ.

The outward journey will also have its ups and downs, joys and disappointments, delights and sufferings, but here too we only grow as we put our faith into action. Jesus said he did not come to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:25-28). Just as Jesus washed his

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disciples feet, so we are called to a life of service in our homes, church, and community. Through the simplest acts of service, the smallest words of kindness, and the most ordinary deeds of love we open the doors to God's reign in the world and to having our spiritual lives transformed.

### **6. Neighborhood Relevancy**

We believe God has called RMC to worship and work in Capital Park (public housing community) and the Mordecai neighborhood. Our vision is to be a presence for Christ in the neighborhood, calling out the gifts and strengths of this community, and responding to the needs and challenges as we work with others for the neighborhood's common good and well being.

While our faith community is made up of people from all over the triangle area, we are committed to worshipping and serving in this neighborhood. As people join us from across the street or from around the city our ministries, worship services, and life together will be shaped by the gifts, strengths, and needs of this neighborhood God has placed us in.

### **7. Worship**

Worship is our principal vocation as Christians because we are created to be in relationship with God. Our informal worship service is a coming together to celebrate God's acts among us through inspirational singing, drama, dance, preaching, and congregational sharing. We are committed to interpreting all of scripture in light of God's full revelation in Jesus Christ. While we value a blend of more traditional hymns and contemporary songs, aided by use of guitars and other instruments, our main focus is on finding songs that enrich our worship theme and lead us into God's presence.

We value a participatory worship style that includes the gifts of all our members. Children are given opportunities to participate in worship and we value their presence. We value a time of sharing that builds up the Body of Christ where people can give a word of encouragement, share an insight from scripture, tell how God is at work in their life, or ask for prayer (1 Corinthians 14:26). We value the use of language in worship which affirms that the personhood of God embraces all that is truly male and female, and that men and women are one in Christ. Our worship, with all its many parts, is meant to call us back to our identity as the people of God and to equip us for service in Christ's name.

### **8. Anabaptist / Mennonite Identity**

As a Mennonite Church our roots go back 500 years to the sixteenth century reformation period and the Anabaptist movement. Our church today is affiliated with Mennonite Church USA through a regional body - Virginia Mennonite Conference. As a

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congregation we affirm the “Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective” that was adopted in 1995 and we find it helpful and necessary to be connected with the larger Mennonite Church for resources, pastoral oversight, accountability, fellowship, and mutual aid. While we appreciate our rich heritage, what we value most is interpreting life and faith from a Mennonite perspective, and not being bound to the cultural and ethnic practices of our tradition that exclude others.

Our primary relationship is with the larger Mennonite Church because of similar core values and beliefs, but we also value our dialogue with other believers and congregations in the larger Christian Church as we continually discern faithful expressions of what it means to be Christian in our world. Jesus prayed for the “unity of his followers” in John 17:20-21 and we will continue to pray and work for the unity of Christ’s body in our community and around the world.

### **9. Commitment to the Poor**

Jesus said his mission was “to bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, and to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18). One of the clearest themes in scripture is God’s concern for the poor, the exploited, and the downtrodden. God loves rich folks, but God always calls them to a richer quality of life, which includes a relationship with the poor. We try to share our resources with each other and the community in such a way that every person’s dignity is affirmed and so that no one lives in extreme need while others live in excess. As followers of Jesus we are encouraged to spend lavishly on the needy, without feeling irresponsible, and to work for a more just order in our community and around the world so that everyone has enough. We value gracious generosity, compassion, and mercy towards all people.

### **10. Caring Community**

We seek a vital balance between mission (doing, what we seek to achieve) and community (being, how we relate to one another). We pursue our mission through community, and we experience community as we pursue our mission. This dynamic balance is essential to our congregational life.

First, we believe the Christian life is to be lived alongside others, not in isolation. We need each other for encouragement and growth, for confronting one another in a supportive way, and for help in times of crisis (Romans 12:5). We encourage everyone to be involved in a Disciple Group (small groups of 6-12 people meeting in homes) where we can be “real” together by laughing and crying, seeking counsel, sharing resources, enjoying each other’s gifts and abilities and caring for each other’s spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. As a community we value accountability in relationships, broad ownership in decision making, and working together. A caring community is essential to growing in Christlikeness.

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Secondly, a caring community is essential in our reaching out and making our neighbors feel welcome. In a world increasingly fragmented and impersonal, many people need a place to belong before they can believe. A caring place is needed where questions of faith can be asked, doubts and struggles expressed, Christian living demonstrated, and answers to prayer and changes in people's lives actually witnessed. In a caring atmosphere people can experience God, find courage and freedom to change and grow, and find a reason to believe in God. Jesus said that it would be our "love for one another" that would validate his message and our authenticity as his followers. A caring community is essential to making disciples of Christ.

### **11. Peacemaking and Conflict Transformation**

Jesus calls us to "love our enemies" and to "overcome evil with good". Jesus refused to let his disciples use violence to defend him, and he even forgave his enemies while he was on the cross. In the cross, Jesus not only shows us how God deals with his enemies and sets the model for all believers, but God takes the initiative to make peace with us. Jesus has reconciled us to God in order to stop our warring madness with God and each other. In humility we accept God's call to be peacemakers.

For RMC, peacemaking involves helping people be reconciled to God and each other, stopping the cycle of violence by refusing to use violence or participate in military service, working for alternatives to violent resolution of conflict on personal and national levels, serving the poor and needy, and taking risks to work actively for justice and mercy for all people. The Holy Spirit empowers us to forgive rather than to seek revenge, to practice right relationships, and to resist evil nonviolently.

At RMC we also recognize conflict as a normal part of human life and church life. Conflict is not a sin or something we need to be ashamed of or to run from. Jesus assumed that conflict would be part of church life and so he gave us a process and some practical skills to follow in dealing with conflict (Matthew 18: 15-22). Sooner or later, each one of us will experience hurt feelings, misunderstandings, disappointments, and failures in relationships that need to be worked through. While these can be difficult, Jesus promises to be there with us (Matthew 18:20) and to help us work through our conflicts and find healing and reconciliation. In being part of this church we commit ourselves to learning new skills and to practice constructive ways of working through our conflicts.

### **12. Service Ministries**

At RMC you will hear a lot about the church being a center for mission and ministries. We consider every person a minister of the gospel. Pastors are not paid to do the ministry but to equip people for ministry and reaching out to their neighbors (Ephesians 4:11-12). The church gathers to worship God and to be equipped for effective ministry in the normal, everyday activities of working, playing, raising families, and so

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on. As we go about our everyday life we try to share the hope we have in Christ with others in a gentle and respectful way (1 Peter 3:15-16). We value taking our faith, in word and deed, into the community and being a witness to the reign of God breaking into our world.

Our church ministries grow out of an individual's call from God that has been affirmed by others in the church. As a base for ministry, our church is always paying attention to the gifts and calling of people in our midst, and then releasing them for ministry. We are not afraid to try new things (and fail) or to stop those ministries that have served for a valuable season of our congregational life but whose priorities or goals have now changed. We value ministries that grow out of our congregational life, reflect our values, and serve the people around us.

### **13. Stewardship of Resources**

Since God is the owner of everything we have (Psalms 24:1) we believe Jesus intended us to live a life of contentment, avoid consumerism and extravagance, and to share our resources generously with others. While the Old Testament required a tithe (10%), Jesus taught his disciples to give generously, cheerfully, and sacrificially. Jesus did not see the tithe as an ending point but a beginning point, so our practice is to encourage people to give proportionally as one's income increases as an act of worship to God.

Jesus said, "where your treasure is, there will be your heart also" (Matthew 5:21). We know that if we place our treasures in God's hands, that our hearts will follow. Since God ultimately owns everything, it only makes sense for us to give generously, even sacrificially, of our time, talents, and money as a way of surrendering our very hearts to God in love and gratitude. We value being faithful managers of all that we are and have in service to God and neighbor.

Another important part of stewardship for us is the use of facilities. While we are not opposed to owning a building, if it would enhance our ministries, one of our values is having a facility that is used daily. Even though shared space can be complicated at times, we value partnering with others and putting our resources into people and ministries that serve our community.