

Statement of Congregational Identity (Adopted in 1997)

1. INTRODUCTION. While Emmaus is a Baptist church and affiliated with the Baptist General Conference, the members and friends of Emmaus come from a wide variety of denominational backgrounds and faith traditions. In addition, as a church strategically located in a college community, we serve students who participate in the life of our congregation from across the country during their undergraduate years at Carleton and St. Olaf. The diversity that is ours we choose to view as a source of strength and constructive possibility in the ministry to which God is calling us.

The following Statement of Congregational Identity is intended to name that which binds us together as a church, so that we might find ourselves ready to respond to the work God has in store for us in our community and in our world. We understand that this statement does not say all that each of us would like it to say. Rather, it has been informed by a process of input from our past and present pastoral leadership as well as congregational focus group discussions as we have sought to name the core values that have shaped this body of believers over the years of its existence. Our intent is to strive to become a caring congregation made up of people willing to transcend personal differences to work together in joy, that God's healing and reconciling and saving power might be known and experienced in our sphere of influence.

2. STATEMENT OF CONGREGATIONAL IDENTITY. Believing that God desires a relationship with us through his son, Jesus Christ, we at Emmaus seek to bear witness to that truth in our individual lives and in the corporate life of our church. We have found joy in a personal encounter with a gracious and loving God through Jesus, and we have come to believe that his life, death and resurrection were motivated by an eternal and unconditional love for each one of us. We endeavor to be an inviting, hospitable church, committed to welcoming all who seek to join us in our faith journey through worship, discipleship and shared ministry.

In our commitment to proclaiming the Bible as God's inspired work of truth for the believing community, we understand that every believer is a priest, enjoying direct access to God through faith in Christ and the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Spirit endows God's people with spiritual gifts for the building up of the body, and we endeavor to earnestly seek to discover and use the gifts we have been given, as is our biblical responsibility. Our understanding of the New Testament is that God desires both men and women to use their gifts in all areas of the ministry of the church. We further embrace our Baptist heritage in its rigorous commitment to each individual's freedom in their own, unique discovery of God and in diverse expressions of faith. These convictions lead us to believe in the inestimable worth of every individual, and that we must strive always to understand another's point of view in humbleness.

As a worshipping community, we celebrate the great variety of ways God can be praised through the gift of music. We believe that biblical worship sees God as the audience, each worshiper as performer, and the pastor, musicians and worship leaders as prompters of our corporate expression of worship. Our worship thrives when it is participatory and each one brings their gift to God's holy altar.

In our life as a church, we have come to understand Emmaus as a place of nurture and non-judgmental acceptance. While our understanding of Scripture needs to govern that acceptance, we are best able to serve as vessels of God's amazing grace when we remember our own brokenness and the healing God is doing in our lives. We recognize that in an increasingly busy world God calls us to a simplicity of lifestyle, that we might be free to fulfill our shared ministry with Jesus in binding up the brokenhearted and meeting physical needs. We also aspire to be a place where the difficult questions of life are not skirted, where faith is recognized as often being hard fought, and where no sincere question of the seeker is off limits.

Emmaus is sometimes described as being an "atypical" or "non-traditional" Baptist church. The fact that we do not own a baptistery certainly gives credence to this designation! Traditions are cherished when found to be consistent with current needs, but we believe God is continually calling us to renewal and change, that we might be the kind of wineskin that Jesus taught his followers to be – a church able to welcome the new wine of its day and to allow it to mature and so nourish God's creation.