

Circles of Friendship and Faithful Mission

A faithful congregation embraces and fulfills God's call to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ—in all of its dimensions—to its community and to all peoples. It faithfully manifests God's kingdom through obedience to four comprehensive scriptural mandates:

1. *The Prophetic Requirement*: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)
2. *The Golden Rule*: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)
3. *The Two Great Commandments*: "... 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)
4. *The Great Commission*: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

These four mandates have one thing in common: They recognize the priority God places on being in a right relationship with our Maker as well as our neighbor. If we as individuals and as church communities practice the art of friendship with both God and other humans, all four visionary statements may be fulfilled.

A valuable exercise for a congregation is for members to rank themselves/the church in the following seven mission-related marks of a faithful church, to assess their faithfulness to the God-given mission and identify strengths to celebrate as well as areas for improvement.

1. *Evangelism*: Members help others experience God's grace and find a spiritual home by inviting others to church.
2. *Social Action*: The congregation expresses God's love by serving the poor, conducting ministries of social justice to improve communities, responding to emergencies (such as natural disasters and refugee needs), and caring for the environment.
3. *Global Mission*: The church supports vocational missionaries, has a sister relationship with a church from another country, and engages in short-term cross-cultural mission trips.
4. *New Church Planting*: The church is connected to a new church, serves as a host church to a new church, or is giving birth to a new church.
5. *Youth Ministry*: The church includes every age group in all aspects of church life (worship, music, education, outreach) and prepares youth for leadership in the church and the world.
6. *Accessibility*: The congregation embraces and includes people with disabilities, providing all people with encouragement in their spiritual growth and opportunities for service and leadership.
7. *Giving*: Members express joy in supporting the ministries of the church and its mission partners, a sacrificial attitude in giving to God's work, and generosity as they share their time, talents, and financial resources.

The faithfulness of a church to its mission is dependent upon the cooperative friendships we form, both inside and outside the church.

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