

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH, A COMMON GROUND CHURCH?

Common Ground Church is currently one church, made up of many congregations. To date, this has been a great blessing to us and we are so grateful to God for his leading in this regard. However, as we go forward and multiply more and more congregations, we need to keep asking the question “*What makes a church a Common Ground congregation?*” What’s the difference between a Common Ground Congregation and another church in our city (even one with which we partner closely)?

To answer this question, we asked ourselves if another autonomous church based in Cape Town were to become a Common Ground Congregation, what would they need to say ‘yes’ to, in order for them to become a Common Ground Church? It would take far more than signage and letterheads, but rather an alignment of theology, conviction, vision, DNA, relationship and heart.

The below is an attempt to try and articulate the things on which there would need to be alignment and agreement.

DOCTRINE. Every Common Ground Congregation agrees with our Statement of Belief on all the major doctrines of the Bible. Common Ground believes what all orthodox Christian Churches have preached, taught and believed throughout the ages with regards to the major doctrines of the Bible, regarding the nature and character of the Triune God, sin and the fall of man, the divinity of Jesus, the sinless perfection of Jesus, the necessity of faith in Christ and his atoning work on the cross, the authority, and infallibility of Scripture.

DOCTRINES OF SOVEREIGNTY AND GRACE. Common Ground Church agrees with a Reformed understanding of the gospel and reading of Scripture. This means having a high view of Scripture, a high view of God’s sovereignty in the world and salvation, an acknowledgement of the depravity of mankind, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. Essentially, we each congregation affirms both theologically and by way of emphasis in the inability of man to save himself and that our only hope is in Christ and his incredible grace.

CREDOBAPTISM. Scripture calls all believers – having put their faith in Christ already – to demonstrate Christ’s work in their lives and their commitment to God by being baptized. While we would want to respect other traditions, and understanding of baptism – particularly infant baptism – all Common Ground Churches hold to the understanding that Baptism is an expression of an individual’s faith having come to love and trust God.

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED. Each congregation that is part of the Common Ground family of churches affirms and practices Spirit-Empowered Ministry, affirming and giving room for the gifts of the Spirit, demonstrating high levels of dependence on the work of the Spirit, acknowledging it is the work of the Spirit that ultimately works in the hearts of individuals.

COMPLEMENTARIAN. All Common Ground Churches are committed to both empowering and celebrating women in the life of the church, releasing all women to the fullness of their gifting and calling – including those with the gifting of leadership. Common Ground maintains a conviction that the Bible does clearly call husbands to love, serve and lead their homes, and likewise that the governmental authority of the church, which is carried out by the elders, is something that God calls men to exclusively. However, all the leadership of all Common Ground Churches hold to this Biblical conviction with the utmost grace and tenderness, including wives in many of the roles and meetings of the elders so that there is a real teaming and partnership between husbands and wives in the way that men are called to eldership.

MISSIONAL AND DOUBLE-IMPACT. One of the clearest convictions that we have is that one of our primary reasons for existence, is for those who don't yet know Jesus. We want to help people find and follow Jesus. All churches that are part of the Common Ground family are committed to that mission, and do Sunday meetings in a way that is meaningful to both believers and non-believers. Additionally, our annual calendars reflect the priority of reaching out to those who don't know Christ, by having events which help non-Christians find Jesus (e.g. Alpha). Additionally, we have a heart for *not* having church events seven nights a week to encourage "Missional Me" dynamics in our congregations.

PREACHING TRACK. Generally, Common Ground Churches try to remain on the same preaching track, whereby all congregations are preaching the same overall message each week. While there are times where a congregation might want to focus on something specific to their context, generally congregations agree to preach 'one message' together, by all doing the same preaching series together.

ELDERSHIP TEAM. The church governance structure of Common Ground Church is elder-led, by way of Biblical conviction. Additionally, we are persuaded of the plurality of elders, which means functioning as a team leadership model not overemphasizing the lead-elder role, but rather as a team of men – who like to partner with their wives – leading together. So, while we believe in and are grateful for leadership and captaincy, we believe this exists to serve the team, not the other way around. Additionally, many of our Common Ground Churches are led by a team of elders who are predominantly market-place elders: Any church wanting to

be part of the Common Ground family would need to see these market-place elders are elders in their full-right, not second-rate elders, and be willing to be led by a team which may consist largely of market-place elders.

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS. They would need to be committed to developing and growing authentic relationships (specifically, the congregation leader and his wife with other congregational leaders and their wives) through regular meetings. These authentic relationships ought to be characterized by real friendship and fun, vulnerability and openness, humility, trust and generosity of spirit.

FINANCIAL MODEL. Any church that is part of the Common Ground story would need to understand and whole-heartedly and joyfully agree with the financial model whereby each congregation contributes certain percentages towards shared-services, Remember the Poor and Gospel Advance. Congregational Leaders should be able to understand this and explain the benefits of such shared services to both the elders and their congregations. Additionally, salaries, operational and capital expenditure budgets would go through the normal budgeting channels with the Common Ground Finance Team, which would sign off budgets and hold congregations accountable for their use and stewardship of resources.

CALENDAR. While each Common Ground congregation gets to populate their own annual calendar, there are several times and events when all the Common Ground congregations come together. These events include things such as DNA, City-Wide Elders Meetings, Advance Gatherings. Any church that is part of the Common Ground Family is committed to such calendar events over the course of a year.

STAFFING/BASE DYNAMICS. Currently the Common Ground staff is based at the Rondebosch Church offices in Friends First House. While various staff members get to work 'remotely' this is the base from which we operate, including having Congregational Leaders meetings, staff meetings, Ops Team Base etc. All staff from all congregations would need to come to the Rondebosch base for the relevant meetings.

APOSTOLIC INPUT/ADVANCE. Each church that is part of the Common Ground story would need to biblically understand and appreciate the need for Apostolic partnerships and embrace our relationship with Advance, including our financial contribution to such, as well as the calendar rhythms that such a partnership requires.

MISSION AND VISION. Finally, all churches belonging to the Common Ground family, agree with the vision of 'filling Cape Town with the message, life and faith of Jesus Christ' and the mission of giving five big gifts to our city between now and 2022: The planting of churches, seeing thousands of people coming to Christ, multiplying compassion and Justice, contributing to the re-threading of society's DNA and partnering with and strengthening other churches in Cape Town.