

## **True North Community Church** **Core Beliefs - Extended**

### **1. God**

#### **A. God's attributes and qualities.**

##### **1. God knows who He is.**

One thing that is clear from the scriptures is that God knows who He is (Gen 1:23, Ex 3:14). This may seem like an elementary point, but it's also a necessary one. There's no ambiguity at all about any passage where God reveals His identity (the phrase 'I am the Lord' appears more than 45 times in Leviticus alone!). He is omnipotent (Ps 24:8), He is amazing, He spoke the whole universe into existence by the sheer force of His will (Gen 1:1-2:4). He is the ultimate thing in all of the cosmos, and He knows it (Job 38:4-18).

##### **2. God is not an idolater.**

Perhaps the strongest argument against love being the primary motivating factor behind God's words and actions is that this interpretation places us at the center. If love is God's primary intent, and the underlying theme of scripture, then at the end of the day His ultimate attention is placed on us, His creation. This is false (Isa 48:11), but it's a tough notion to let go of because the church has indeed placed itself at the center of the story (Isa 42:8). Our hymns, our prayers, our thoughts all bear out this worldview, but it is as inaccurate as it is firmly entrenched.

The idea that we are loved by God is well borne out in scripture, (Jn 3:16, Jonah 4:2) and we certainly have no intention of arguing against it. Indeed, we revel in it and cherish God's love as a priceless treasure (Matt 13:45-46). But we reject wholesale the idea that omnipotent creator of the entire universe has placed us at the center of His story. Does God love us? Yes (Ps 40:17). Does God love the world? Yes (John 3:16). But God's love for us and for the world are secondary (Rev 14:7).

Again, the question of 'why' is a helpful one here. Why does God love us? Here, the church shrugs its collective shoulders and says 'Because its in His nature. It's who he is. (1John 4:7-8)' We agree, but we qualify our agreement with the following statement: It is in God's nature to love us because in loving us, in choosing us, and in drawing us to Himself, God is glorified (Eph 1:11-12). To place us at the center of the story, to have as His ultimate goal our reciprocation of His affection is to set us up as an idol for God. God is *not* an idolater (Ex 20:4). God keeps the second of the two greatest commandments – thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:30). He knows that He is the ultimate thing in all the universe and so He sets His ultimate affection right where it belongs – on himself (Isa 48:11). To place this emphasis on anything else in all creation would be to worship it, and God does not ascribe worship - He is ascribed (1 Chron 16:29, Ps 96:7).

### 3. God's glory is paramount.

This notion is also difficult to swallow because it can tend to make God look like He's egocentric. Certainly, in our culture, it is a bad thing to be centered on oneself (Prov 16:18). Conceited, arrogant, self-centered people are an annoyance to us; they are looked down upon (Prov 21:4). We much prefer humble, self-deprecating folks who deflect compliments and give credit to others rather than trying to hog all the accolades for themselves (Isa 66:2).

C.S. Lewis had the same observation. In his book 'Reflections on the Psalms,' he shared that when he first began to explore Christianity, his biggest struggles came from the Psalms. It seemed to him that the constant emphasis on praising God made Him seem like an "old woman fishing for compliments." But what is going on when we worship? How does God respond? Is God up in heaven deflecting our praise? Is He playing the role of the humble recipient of undue credit? No. God does not deflect our worship, He absorbs it (Lev 9:7). He receives it (Rev 4:11). He acknowledges that He is worthy of it. In fact, He commands it (Rom 15:11). Believing in the inspiration of the scriptures, we must conclude that when David says 'Praise the Lord' (Ps 103:22, 104:35, 117:1), that God Himself is saying 'Praise the Lord' (Ps 33:2, 68:26). To God, His glory is paramount.

#### B. The Glory of God revealed in the Trinity

We believe in one God, existing in three distinct persons. God's glory is revealed in the Trinity in that each distinct person of the Trinity has it as their goal to bring glory to the Father (Ex 14:7, Jn 17:2, Heb 2:4,9). There are

arguments that God's triune nature is the ultimate example of his love, and a model for us as a community of faith. No problems here. But the common goal of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to glorify God (John 13:31, Rom 1:4-5) is what ultimately reveals His nature in the trinity. More on the second and third persons of the Trinity in sections V and VI.

### C. God's works

#### 1. God's glory revealed in general revelation

God's general revelation is available to all mankind (Rom 2:19). The earth and skies speak of who He is, and they declare His glory to all who see them (Ps.19:1-4). It is built into the heart of every human to sense that there is something bigger than themselves involved when they see the wonders of nature or when they look into the sky at night (Rom 2:20). A beautiful building displays the work of the architect (Ps 111:7). A moving piece of music places on exhibit the giftedness of the composer. In the same way, the heavens and the earth were created by God for His pleasure and they are the general revelation of His glory to all humanity (Rev 4:11).

#### 2. The providence of God.

The providence of God – the manifold ways in which He provides for His children is another way in which His glory is displayed (Deut 11:14-15). God's providence includes not only the obvious things we think of, like the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and whatever meal we may be about to consume (Matt 6:11), but also the less thought of things like the air we breathe, limbs and senses and

organs that function, and a warm pair of socks on a cold day (Acts 17:28, Ps 23:1-3).

## **2. Mankind**

### A. Humans as a display of God's glory.

The most obvious argument for humans as a display of God's glory is that we were made in His likeness (Gen 5:1). God (referring to Himself in the first person, plural), makes man in his image so that we might be a visible reflection for who He is (Gen 1:26). God has created many things, all of which display His glory (Ps 19:1-3, Rom 11:36). Man, however, is the greatest of God's creations (1 Cor 11:7). And while all creation displays God's glory, mankind is alone in bearing the title 'Made in His image.' God's goal in making mankind was not love. God loves his creation (Jn 3:16). But God didn't make man because He was lonely, nor was he just so full of love that He had to make a creation to dote upon. God creates because His creation will bring Him glory (Isa 43:7, Isa 44:23). Indeed, it is in bringing Him glory that his creation finds its ultimate purpose (Isa 43:21, 1 Cor 10:31).

### B. Man's ultimate purpose: to glorify God

Another question that man has asked throughout the centuries is "Why are we here?" "What is our purpose?" (Ecc 1:13-14) Some would argue that our primary purpose in life is to serve God. This view, however, is difficult to square with a clear teaching in scripture, which states that God is not served by human

hands (Acts 17:25). This notion betrays the worldview behind it – that we are at the center and that God is in need of our help. Indeed, that God is consumed with love for His creation, but is simply not capable of reaching them Himself. So we, the rescuers, assist our brokenhearted but ailing father in the task of bringing his lost children home.

The overstated presentation makes it sound ridiculous, but there is a reasonable facsimile of this view running rampant through the body of Christ and it comes within a hairsbreadth of blasphemy (Prov 14:12). God is not impotent (Ps 19:4). He is well capable of getting done whatever He pleases in the universe (Ex 14:31, 1 Chron 29:11, Job 26:14). Our service is not necessary but God, has given us the opportunity to play a part in His great plan to bring glory to Himself (Isa 49:3, Isa 61:3).

And how exactly does man achieve his ultimate purpose and glorify God? By making God the thing on this earth in which we are most satisfied and most excited, and by conforming ever increasingly to His likeness that we might reflect Him to the world around us (Ps 16:11, 43:4, 119:16,24, Phil 4:4).

### **3. Sin**

#### A. The distortion of God's reflection

##### 1. Original sin

Every creature and thing in all of creation reflects God's glory (1 Cor 10:26). A tree cannot one day choose to not glorify Him, and a wave cannot

crash into the shore without reflecting who He is (Isa 44:23). Only humans have the option of distorting the reflection and reflecting Him less.

Adam's disobedience in the garden was a sticky affair and the residue is with us even today (Gen 3:17-19). This one man's sin was enough to condemn all mankind (Rom 5:18) and so now all creation groans for the day when it will be set free (Rom 8:19-21). Every living person bears the image of God and reflects His glory. But every living person also bears the sin of Adam – what theologians have come to refer to as 'original sin.' (Rom 5;12, Eph 2:3)

## 2. Ongoing sin

The 'original sin' alone was enough to condemn Adam and its effects are enough in and of themselves to condemn the rest of humanity. Sadly, the depravity of man does not stop with original sin (Rom 2:28,29). Original sin, which we had no choice in, is compounded by ongoing sin, which we choose (or permit via our indecision) (Isa 44:20, Rom 3:23). Sin is something that hounds us every day and distorts the reflection of God in us (Num 29:6, Ezek 43:25).

### B. The effects and consequences of the distortion of God's reflection

As a result of this distortion of God's reflection, humanity has lost its true reason for existence and has settled for a counterfeit version of what God truly intended (2 Thess 2:9-10). We wrestle and struggle with this disease, longing to be freed and in a constant search for the one thing that will satisfy our souls – the one thing worth living for (Ps 145:16, Isa 58:11, Jer 31:25,). Namely, the glory of God (Gal 2:19).

#### **4. Jesus Christ**

##### A. Fully human for God's glory

Mankind's only hope for salvation from its depraved state comes in the person of Jesus Christ . Jesus left the glory of heaven and came to earth as a human being – human in every sense of the word (Rom 1:3, 9:5, Phil 2:7). It was Jesus' fully human state which allowed him to become the sacrificial lamb and take the sins of the world unto himself (John 1:29).

##### B. Fully God for God's glory

Jesus was also fully God (John 1:1, Tit 2:13). Divine in every sense of the word (2 Pet 1:3). It was also Jesus' divinity that allowed Him to become the sacrificial lamb and take the sins of the world unto himself (John 1:29). Not just any person would do to meet these requirements. It was Jesus' blood and his blood alone that would allow him to fulfill his ultimate purpose (Eph 2:13, Heb 9:14, 1 Pet 1:19).

##### C. His ultimate goal: to bring God glory

Many throughout history have summed up Jesus' motives in dying on the cross by saying 'He came to die for our sins,' or 'He came to redeem the lost.' These definitions are not wrong (Gal 1:4). On the contrary, they are correct (1 Jn 2:2). However, according to John 17, they are not fully correct. Yes, Jesus came to seek and to save what was lost (Lk 19:10). Yes, he came to die for our sins (Rom 4:25). And he accomplished those things. But there is another, overarching

reason why Jesus did what he did – an explanation that keeps us out of the center of the story and allows God to maintain his rightful place at the center: Jesus came that God might be glorified (John 17:1-5, 10, 22-26).

## **5. Salvation**

### A. Union with Christ

God's saving work on behalf of humanity is an awesome display of His glory (Heb 1:3). God would have been just and right to allow his creation to remain separate from Him for all eternity (Isa 5:16), but His work on the cross made union, or better said, re-union with Him possible (1 Tim 2:5-6). The union with God is our salvation, and it is only possible because of His grace and mercy to us, made possible by the Son's obedience (Phil 2:8).

### B. Grace as a display of God's glory

God loved the world and sent His Son (John 3:16). The Son obeyed to glorify the Father (John 17:1-4). Because of the Son's obedience, the Father can show grace to His wayward children and His glory can be known (Isa 43:25). We certainly get a pretty amazing deal here. We receive the forgiveness for all our sins. We are welcomed into God's family and instead of receiving the punishment we deserve, we are met with love (Ps 32:5). But again, we are not the center of the story. God's love for us displays His glory to all the world (Isa 43:21).

### C. Faith and repentance

Faith and repentance compose, on the part of humanity, the reasonable response to what God has done. It is God who is the initiator (Acts 16:14). God

has begun the dance (Heb 12:2). We don't have faith to earn God's favor (2 Cor 6:2). It is God's favor which allows us to have faith (1 Pet 1:18-21). We don't repent to earn God's love. It is God's love which leads us to repentance (Rom 2:4).

## **6. The Holy Spirit**

### A. The person of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is far and away the most difficult person of the trinity to nail down and describe. Certainly, there are verses that help us paint a picture of who He is and what He does, but summarizing the Holy Spirit is somewhat slippery. This is due to His specific role in the trinity. The Holy Spirit is not in the business of drawing attention to Himself. His goal and his role is to draw attention to the Father. Thus, his actions and work are primarily a behind-the-scenes affair. He visits the early church in the book of Acts (4:25), and manifests Himself visibly in tongues of fire (Acts 2:3). But He never steps into the limelight and says "Here I am, study me!" His role is specifically to be less visible than God might be more visible.

### B. The work of the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit is discussed in several pertinent scripture passages. When Jesus is preparing for his death, he tells his disciples that his departure is necessary, so that God might send 'The Counselor. (John 14:26)' So clearly, the Holy Spirit counsels us, and can therefore be understood to offer guidance to believers as they seek and discover their true purpose. The Holy

Spirit also distributes gifts among believers (Heb 2:4), seals our salvation (Eph 1:13), directs our consciences (Rom 9:1) and sometimes even fills preachers as they bring the Word (Acts 4:8).

### C. His ultimate goal: to bring God glory

While there is no Bible verse which spells out the words "The Holy Spirit's ultimate goal is to bring God glory," we understand this to be true from the very nature of the trinity (1 Thess 4:8). Not three separate wills cooperating and balancing one another out, but one God, one will in three persons. God is referred to as more than one person in many passages (Gen 1:26, Eph 4:4-7, 1 Pet 1:2), but the best snapshot we have of the trinity comes in Mark chapter one, where Jesus has recently been baptized. Here, the Father's voice is heard from Heaven, the Son is visible on Earth, and the Holy Spirit descends in the form of a dove (Mark 1:10-11).

## **7. The Bible**

### A. God's special revelation of his intent and priorities

The Bible is, in its essence, God's revelation of Himself to humans (John 1:1). The very fact that God is revealing Himself is proof that He does not want to remain aloof or hidden (1 Sam 2:27). God wishes to be known (Ex 32:16). This, of course, raises the question 'Why?' Why does God reveal Himself? Why does He wish to be known at all? Why does He create a race of beings to reveal Himself to in the first place?

Some would argue that God's primary motivation here is love. Certainly, there are scriptures that support this argument (1Jn 4:7,8). But the stronger argument is for the less popular case – that God does what He does, and that all that He does, for His glory (Isa 42:8).

The scriptures offer us a clear view into the heart of God. Here, we are afforded a rare glimpse into His intent and priorities. There is a plan (Jer 29:11). There is an agenda (Ps 33:11). The writings of the canon were not put together at random. There is a motive that lies at the bedrock of God's special revelation. God is ultimately about the increase of His glory among the nations (1 Chron 16:24).

#### B. Inspiration

God inspired the writers of the books of the canon (Ez 12:1, 2 Pet 1:20-21). Certainly not that he took control of their limbs and possessed their writing itself – there is enough evidence of the individual writers' styles in their writings to disprove this notion – but that He inspired their hearts as they wrote (1 Cor 3:10). Why? That they might accurately capture his intent and his priorities (2 Tim 3:16). That their writings might properly convey what God wishes us to know about Himself (1Jn 5:13).

### **8. The Church**

#### A. The foundation of the church

As the old hymn says, "The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord." Jesus is the head of the church (Eph 5:23, Col 1:18). His life, ministry

and person form the bedrock upon which the church was built (Eph 2:20). Some might argue that Jesus passed this role onto Peter, and clearly there was a passing of the torch as Jesus prepared for the end (Matt 16:18). But even Peter would profess that Christ is our foundation, and apart from Him, there is no church (1 Pet 1:18-21).

#### B. The members of the church

The members of the church universal (vs. the local church), are those that believe in their hearts that Jesus Christ is lord and confess with their lips that God raised Him from the dead (Rom 10:9). There are members of the church from every stripe, color, background and demographic (Rev 5:13).

#### C. The mission of the church

Jesus established the church here on Earth to carry on the work (1 Cor 12:28) that He began while he was here – the same work that God has been doing since the dawn of time: bringing glory to Himself (Eph 3: 10-11, 21). The church's mission is to carry out the will of God (Mark 3:35). This most certainly does involve caring for the poor (Lk 12:33), standing up against injustice (Isa 58:6-7) and reaching out with the good news that the world may know Jesus (Matt 5:14-15). But the ultimate goal of the world knowing Jesus is not simply that God might be reunited with His lost creation (Matt 5:16). The mission of the church is to assist God in the work He is doing: work that we are not needed for, but that we are privileged to participate in (Acts 17:25). The task of bringing all people from every nation to the throne of God, where every knee will bow and

every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father  
(Phil 2:10-11).