

Core Curriculum
for the Elders and Congregation of Saratoga Federated Church
- September 2007 -

“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:11-13

Our primary goal as a church body is to be the kind of community where the above verses find fulfillment in the lives of its people on a regular basis. The following curriculum is offered as an important ingredient in assuring that such a goal is met with success. The verses that follow those above, in the book of Ephesians, speak of equipping people in such a way that they move from “infancy” in their faith, to a fully developed “maturity” that both protects them from errors of doctrine and propels them into active service on behalf of others, binding the community of believers together in a palpable bond of love.

A focal question was kept in mind as a guide for shaping the content of the curriculum – “What do we need to understand, and what do we need to do in order to be fully developed and established in our faith?” **IMPORTANT: Classes, such as those presented below, are only part of a person’s spiritual formation. True discipleship involves much more than Sunday school and small group teaching alone. The curriculum addresses only a piece of the process.**

We also have attempted to set the curriculum in a schedule that accommodates the natural rhythms of our congregation. Basically, our church is best served with a teaching focus that runs from September through mid May. This means approximately 31 Sundays are available to deliver the curriculum (accounting for holiday weekends such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter and Mothers Day) in a Sunday school format. The two other primary formats for teaching the core curriculum could be the small group setting, and the more personal triad or one-on-one discipleship formats.

Some topics also lend themselves well to conferences or seminars as another format for further learning.

This plan was developed with adults in mind, but it is obvious that a broader scope of spiritual development needs to be planned for in the near future that addresses the training of children and youth.

Jesus Christ had a way of viewing the world; he had a way of relating to people and institutions; he had a way of interacting with God; and he had a way of dealing with life in all of its various forms – triumphs, conflicts, responsibilities, obligations, goals, surprises, making money and spending it, laughing and grieving, you name it... If we are going to learn the *ways of Christ* and practice them in our lives we need to flat out know certain things about God and how he designed the world. What is the culture of the kingdom of God? The core curriculum is designed to give the most foundational answers to understanding the Christian life and the Kingdom of God. The point however is not just for you to be a learner, the curriculum is going to be taught with a goal that you will know it well enough to teach someone else the content. It may be across the kitchen table with your kids or a friend that you have opportunity to teach what you know, or it may be over beer and pizza with the boys, or on a long walk with a neighbor, whatever the circumstance the goal is that you will be able to tell another person who God is, what he is like, and how they may come to know him personally.

Finally, if the teaching is good, and if it bears fruit in your life it will lead you to experience God in the most critical and practical areas of your life. You hold the key, however, for what you learn and experience. What is it you really want?

CORE CURRICULUM

<p>1. Why Jesus preached a core message of repentance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The nature of God <input type="checkbox"/> The nature of Man 	<p>9. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> In relation to other religions <input type="checkbox"/> In relation to non-religious philosophies <input type="checkbox"/> In relation to modern science <input type="checkbox"/> In the context of competing Judeo-Christian claims
<p>2. <input type="checkbox"/> The power and importance of confession.</p>	<p>10. The importance of understanding and participating in core Christian traditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Baptism / Confirmation <input type="checkbox"/> Communion <input type="checkbox"/> Common (corporate) worship
<p>3. Becoming a Genuine Christian - Our new identity in Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stages of faith development <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding discipleship <input type="checkbox"/> The inevitable need for renewal 	<p>11. Developing a personal ministry and mission (12)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual Gifts <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring (discipling) <input type="checkbox"/> The outreach of faith – Global and Local
<p>4. <input type="checkbox"/> The power and importance of forgiveness and reconciliation.</p>	<p>12. Becoming like Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Who He was and IS. <input type="checkbox"/> The teachings of Jesus Christ (wisdom from the Gospels) <input type="checkbox"/> Apprenticeship to Jesus (Understanding Discipleship review)
<p>5. <input type="checkbox"/> From Bad-to-the-Bone to Christ-like-to-the-Core, how to change bad habits into good character The importance of developing spiritual habits (disciplines).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The importance of prayer. <input type="checkbox"/> The importance of reading scripture and pursuing instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> Worship, solitude, fasting, service, celebration, others. 	<p style="text-align: center;">APPLIED</p> <p>13. <input type="checkbox"/> Critical Relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marriage / Dating (for teens) - Parenting / Relating to Parents (for teens) - Single life - Caring for aging parents - Grandparenting - Being a Good Samaritan (neighbor)/and a good friend. - Work life relations – as an employee - Work life relations – as a manager/business owner <p>14. <input type="checkbox"/> Faith and Economics (personal & public)</p> <p>15. <input type="checkbox"/> Christian responsibility to the poor</p> <p>16. <input type="checkbox"/> The Ethics of Faith</p> <p>17. <input type="checkbox"/> Faith and politics</p> <p>18. <input type="checkbox"/> Faith and culture (arts, media, other social arenas)</p> <p>19. <input type="checkbox"/> Christian Classical literature – the power of story</p> <p>20. <input type="checkbox"/> Critical issues of our day that challenge faith (Apologetics)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Christians, Theist, Agnostics – a dialog of mutual respect (Arvin) <p>21. <input type="checkbox"/> Faith and technology</p> <p>22. <input type="checkbox"/> Science and Faith, compatible or not?</p> <p>23. <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming addictions</p> <p>24. <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with the deadly “D’s” – Depression, Difficulties, Dying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The Grieving process <p>* There are key concepts that will get conveyed in the first year of training that are woven into the core curriculum: Heaven, Eternity, Social Justice, Will of God, The Trinity, Creation, (and others).</p>
<p>6. The Bible. It is really trustworthy anymore?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How it came to be <input type="checkbox"/> What it claims to be <input type="checkbox"/> It’s content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Overview of Old and New Testaments <input type="checkbox"/> Gospels <input type="checkbox"/> Epistles/Letters <input type="checkbox"/> Pentateuch <input type="checkbox"/> Kings / Chronicles <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom Literature <input type="checkbox"/> Prophets / Revelations <input type="checkbox"/> Sermon on the mount <input type="checkbox"/> The parables of Jesus <input type="checkbox"/> Strategies for studying scripture <input type="checkbox"/> Scripture as meditation <input type="checkbox"/> Interpreting the Bible <input type="checkbox"/> The hard questions of Scripture (and the hard answers, too) 	
<p>7. The Church community and “The Kingdom of God</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What is the Kingdom of God? <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding Church history, and why you should care <input type="checkbox"/> Church Unity (Theologically) <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration with other churches (practically) <input type="checkbox"/> Church dynamics – How the local “church” really works <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership in the church <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Servant Leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Being a “peace maker <input type="checkbox"/> Initiating faith in my family <input type="checkbox"/> The importance of practicing “community” to the non-churched 	
<p>8. <input type="checkbox"/> The importance of talking about our faith – for your own benefit, and for the benefit of others. Evangelism 101-301</p>	

Is it all overkill?

Upon viewing the curriculum in its entirety one would be tempted to say “does a person really need to know all of that to be established in their faith?” The quick answer is ‘no’. There are essentials within the core without knowledge of which one would be hard pressed to come to a saving faith in Christ, but, clearly, history has proved out that countless people who had never been to a Sunday school class, who did not know how to read, and who had done nothing more than believe deeply the testimony of others about the person and work of Jesus Christ had a vital and active faith. Their faith may have been simple and limited, but it was genuine.

That fact does not, however, relieve the leaders of the church from the clear responsibility to “feed the sheep” of God. We live in a highly distracted time and culture with an enormous amount of competing ideas and philosophies. Helping someone get “grounded” and “established” in their faith is unfortunately not done with simple formulas or check box lists. The knowledge element is only one piece of the task, but it is a crucial and foundational element. Of course modeling good worship, mentoring people in acts or commitments of service, and just being physically present with people enough to catch those teachable moments where a word, a look, or an embrace can change a person’s perspective (or life) is critical in a Christian’s true discipleship. We need to be careful to do it all – the teaching, the modeling, the mentoring, the celebrating, the praying. This plan is offered to help those who are in our midst gain a better understanding of their calling and purpose in Christ.

Discipleship

The above curriculum is didactic by nature. It begs to be taught verbally, through classroom instruction like Sunday school, or through a small group setting, or even through one-on-one conversations. We know from experience and scripture, however, that learning is a more complicated process than that. The wisdom of Christian discipleship is that it acknowledges and embraces a fuller form of education. It incorporates life activities into the learning process and elevates “knowing” to a higher more practical level.

A major thrust, if not *THE* major thrust, of what we want to be about as trainers of Gods people is assisting in the process of their spiritual growth to the point of their being able to apply the truths they *hear* about in their daily routines. Dispensing information is not enough. Character change is what we are after. Knowing what Jesus said about anger management and where to find it in the book of Matthew is fine, and helpful, but knowing how to consistently live in that teaching is a whole other thing altogether. Mentoring (discipleship) is a proven way of helping people get there.

A significant amount of time and energy will be focused next year on training the trainers. Men and women who are both capable and confident (willing) to pour their lives into another person for the purpose of their spiritual growth in Christ is a great need in our church.

Therefore, a plan is developing for training mentors on how to disciple men and women (and youth and children) in both knowing and applying the content of the core curriculum.

Parallel documents are being drafted to explain our approach to training disciplers (mentors) in a way of discipleship that takes advantage of a mentor’s normal life flow patterns and activities rather than pulling him or her out of his or her normal routines to spend time with another person who wants to learn how to live the Christian life. Discipleship needs to happen in the workplace, in the home, at the club, on the golf course, in the neighborhood, and every other place we routinely find ourselves, because if it doesn’t happen there the chances of significant numbers of people being disciplined will drop off tremendously. Both mentors and apprentices of the faith will burn out and drop out.

The challenge is conveying good content (core curriculum) in organic settings (real life routines). Jesus did it well, and he assures us that we can do it too. With his help we will find the way.