

## Hope Community Church

### Week 11 - Statement Of Faith: Church Cooperation

#### Learning Objectives

- Discuss our assumptions about what makes a valid and effective church body.
- Read what the Bible has to say about the value of interchurch cooperation.
- Explore ways we can support and encourage people who serve God in a style that differs from ours.

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#### **Pray for your time together!**

#### Statement Of Faith: Church Cooperation

We believe that local churches can effectively promote the cause of Jesus Christ by cooperating with one another in a denominational organization. Such an organization, whether a regional or district conference, exists and functions by the will of the churches. Cooperation in a conference is voluntary and may be terminated at any time. Churches may likewise cooperate with interdenominational fellowships on a voluntary basis. Acts 15:36, 41; 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:1; Galatians 1:1–3; Revelation 1:4, 10, 11

**?** What are the benefits of church cooperation? Why do you think it is a part of Hope's statement of faith?

*Possible Answers: We're able to contribute to something we wouldn't be able to do on our own. We learn and grow from people who are different from us.*

**?** How would you define Hope as a church? How is Hope's culture different from other churches you have experienced?

*Possible Answers: Hope is a Christ-centered church that focuses on encouraging community, Bible study, and accountability in its members. Hope places value on worship of God, on taking communion together, on serving the community both of believers and the surrounding area of Minneapolis, and in reaching out to unreached and underserved groups and students. Unique aspects of Hope church culture include Hope Hymns, a casual preaching style, baptisms on stage in a horse trough during worship, LDI (Leadership Development Institute) offerings, not taking an offering during the service, no Sunday School, etc.*

**?** What is the important distinction between being a follower of Christ and a person who attends church?

*Possible Answers: It's important to think about your relationship with Christ as your center and motivator. Your relationship with people at Hope and with Hope as an institution are different things. You can serve Christ within the context of Hope – but you can serve Him in many other contexts too!*

*Leader's Note: It might be useful to take time to talk about church cultures in an outside meeting time with the small group. A prevailing American attitude is the idea of the build-a-church, where you can sample many places and pick and choose which pieces you like and want, letting you mix and match to make a comfortable experience. If the core of your belief in Christ and your motivation to grow and serve Him is solid: great! If the core is rotten with self-centeredness, even if the outsides look good: No! Different people will have different experiences with this, and it could lead to valuable interpersonal understanding and enriched relationships.*

**Read Out Loud: 2 Corinthians 8:1–5,13–15 (NIV)**

And now, brothers and sisters, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. <sup>2</sup>In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. <sup>3</sup>For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, <sup>4</sup>they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. <sup>5</sup>And they exceeded our expectations: They gave themselves first of all to the Lord, and then by the will of God also to us.

...

<sup>13</sup>Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. <sup>14</sup>At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, <sup>15</sup>as it is written: "The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little."

**?** How did the Macedonian churches respond to the needs of God's people (specifically the Corinthians)? How did Paul challenge the Corinthians to respond?

*Possible Answers: The Macedonian churches gave generously. The Corinthians were blessed by this, and relieved of financial stress. The Corinthians were also challenged to give generously to supply the needs of others outside their immediate church, as they all belong to Christ together.*

**?** Have you seen church cooperation modeled well? In what ways?

*Possible Answers: These will vary by group and person.*

**?** In what ways should we feel encouraged or challenged to contribute to other churches or Christian organizations beyond Hope?

*Possible Answers: These will vary; leaders, please have an example in mind from your own life, or be ready to brainstorm some with the larger group.*

**Read Out Loud: Ephesians 4:2–6 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. <sup>3</sup> Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

**?** What does this passage say about unity?

*Possible Answers: This passage focuses on the things that tie us together as believers: the body of Christ, the Holy Spirit, hope, one faith, one baptism, and God as the ultimate unifier and connector.*

**?** Practices related to baptism, communion, worship, ministry focus, use of technology, and Bible study can vary widely between churches. How does this passage fit with or challenge your perception of other churches or denominations that are different from what you're used to?

*Possible Answers: This follow-up question encourages people to think about this in their own lives and explore their own preconceptions or biases.*

**?** How can we value and encourage churches that are different from our norm? How might those differences be strengths?

*Possible Answers: We can value and encourage other churches by recognizing the ways God is working in their unique contexts. We all have to eat, but many of us prefer different foods. Likewise, different styles of preaching and Bible study will nourish and encourage different believers while being healthy and good. One church is good at evangelism and outreach; another church may be good at equipping and sending missionaries; another church may focus on the spiritual and physical needs of elderly people; yet another church may focus on alternative music that speaks to unbelievers more effectively. Just as we don't expect ourselves to be Olympians, scientific geniuses, psychiatric whizzes, skilled artisans, and emotional sensitives all at the same time, so we don't have to expect every church to meet the taste of every person.*

**Read Out Loud: Acts 15:5–11 (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

<sup>6</sup> The apostles and elders met to consider this question. <sup>7</sup> After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them: "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup> God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. <sup>9</sup> He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup> Now then, why do you try to

test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup> No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

? In this passage, some Jewish believers felt that Gentile believers should conform to Jewish customs.

What was the root of that desire?

*Possible Answers: The Jewish believers felt that God had called them as His people from the beginning. They'd lived their lives under these rules, and initially their concept of following God led them to feel everyone should follow the Law's commands, because that was what they'd always done.*

? How did Peter challenge this assumption?

*Possible Answers: Peter pointed out that the whole point of Jesus saving them was that no one could earn salvation. Only God could save through grace; following rules and doing works, including the sign of circumcision, wasn't the crucial step. For more about what the believing Jews decided, read verses 22–29.*

Peter was a devout Jew, following God's commands. God knew this, and gave Peter a special vision to let him know that what was once “unclean” was no longer forbidden. You can read this passage in Acts 10:9–16. A related passage in Romans 14:1–15:3 talks about how believers can encourage and protect one another without being judgmental.

? How might differences and diversity of His people glorify God?

*Possible Answers: Different things cause different people to worship God. Diversity displays God's creativity.*

? In what ways do you need to joyfully embrace the differences between our church community and other church communities?

*Possible Answers: Observe what each shows about God. Embrace an attitude of learning.*

### For Discussion and Accountability

? Examine how you talk about and perceive other denominations and believers. What are your own unbiblical biases?

? How can you better show honor to other believers who express their love for Christ in their own ways?