

Our Philosophy

FOUR FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF OUR PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

1. The Priesthood of Every Believer

At the heart of Fellowship's philosophy of ministry is the conviction that God has called every believer into ministry. As followers of Jesus, we are called to be His hands and feet in this world. We are His ambassadors in our homes, church, neighborhoods, offices, communities, and world (2 Cor 5:20). We desire therefore for all of Fellowship's people to mature in their relationship with Christ, be trained for ministry, and then be released into a ministry that fits their God given gifts and passions. Fellowship is not a staff-driven ministry. Our staff exists to equip our leaders to do ministry.

A couple of key passages for our church on this philosophy are as follows:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...

—Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV)

The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and they stood around him from morning till evening.¹⁴ When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, "What is this you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?"¹⁵ Moses answered him, "Because the people come to me to seek God's will.¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws."

¹⁷Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Large GATHERINGS

not good. ¹⁸ You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. ¹⁹ Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. ²⁰ Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. ²¹ But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. ²² Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. ²³ If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

—Exodus 18:13-23 (NIV)

Implications for this belief in the priesthood of every believer are numerous, but a few important ones are as follows:

- "Every member" ministry. We expect (this includes you!) all of our people to engage in ministry.
- Our staff is an equipping staff. We are here to prepare God's people for ministry.
- We are not personality-driven... there is no rock star at Fellowship. We are a ministry team. Jesus gets the glory and all get their hands dirty.
- The influence of Christ is multiplied. It just makes sense that releasing more spiritual leaders will further extend the touch of Christ.

2. Form and Function

Our philosophy of ministry calls for us to distinguish between ministry functions and ministry forms.

Function—a Biblical responsibility assigned to the church by the Lord. Ultimately there are six functions the Lord calls the church to fulfill:

Functions of the Church:

- Exalting (Worship)—Psalm 95:1-7
- Evangelizing (Outreach)—Acts 1:8
- Establishing (Discipleship)—Matthew 28:18-20
- Equipping (Training)—Ephesians 4:11-16
- Encouraging (Fellowship)—Hebrews 10:24-25
- Empowering (Service)—Mark 10:45

These are non-negotiable and to ignore or fail in any one of these is to fall short of the mission the church has been called to fulfill. The way in which we accomplish these functions will vary over time and circumstances.

Form—the manner in which the function is accomplished.

When Fellowship planted our church, we had the opportunity to sit down with a blank page and ask the question: “What is the best way (form) to accomplish the functions of the church?” We were not bound by tradition or history. We created the ministry from scratch. This is still a value today. Our ministry teams are regularly at the drawing board trying to figure out the best way to fulfill our Biblical mandates as a church.

Many churches, ministries, and individuals have struggled distinguishing between form and function. The problem comes when we become so attached to a particular form of ministry that we begin to consider it a function. For instance, “Sunday school” is a form of ministry used to fulfill the function of “discipleship.” For Fellowship, we do not have “Sunday school” classes. Does this mean we are not a Biblical church? No, it means we accomplish the function of discipleship using a different form of ministry (small groups and mentoring). Pews, hymnals, choir robes, pipe organs, Sunday night services, altar calls, confirmation classes, and community groups are all “forms” of ministry and should be evaluated and brought under careful review. These are flexible while the functions are static. The following passage shows the distinction between the two:

**OUR
PHILOSOPHY**
**Large
GATHERINGS**

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.²⁰ To the Jews I became (form) like a Jew, to win (function) the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.²¹ To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law.²² To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means (forms) I might save (function) some.²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. —I Corinthians 9:19-23 (NIV)

The following chart may help in understanding the difference:

FUNCTION	FORM
Timeless	Timely
Static.....	Flexible
Unchanging	Changeable
Non-Negotiable.....	Negotiable
Mission	Method

A few implications emerge from this principle:

- Our forms of ministry may be different from your background. Departure from traditional form does not mean departure from Biblical standards.
- Forms are not necessarily right or wrong. Biblical functions can be accomplished effectively in many different manners. There may not be a “right” way to do it, but many different ways to fulfill a Biblical mandate.
- Since our forms are negotiable, the Fellowship body of believers should EXPECT CHANGE. We want to maintain that creative spirit that is looking to work out Biblical functions in culturally-relevant ways.

3. Essential Elements of Ministry: Truth, Relationships, and Accountability

In each aspect of our ministry at Fellowship, we look for three essential elements to be present. Without these three ingredients, the ministry risks losing its effectiveness and Biblical fidelity. The three elements are:

- **Truth**—Christian ministry is based on the Scriptures. Biblical truth is essential for any ministry to communicate Christ. (John 8:32)
- **Relationships**—Christian ministry calls us to love one another. (1 Thess 2:8)
- **Accountability**—Christian ministry challenges us to faithfulness and reliability. It urges us to live a life worthy of Christ. (Prov 27:17)

What would the church be like without one of these key elements? Let's do some math:

Truth + Relationships - Accountability =
Country Club Church

Truth + Accountability - Relationships =
Legalistic Church

Accountability + Relationships - Truth =
Cult

4. Fellowship Is a Decentralized Ministry

Fellowship's ministry is not centered on our campus. God has provided beautiful facilities that we utilize for our corporate worship services each weekend, but most of our ministry is done away from the campus. Homes, restaurants, break rooms, gyms, office buildings, playgrounds, parks, coffee shops, and many other places become our ministry locations each week. We gather on the weekends to worship and be refreshed by the Lord, and then we head out into our mission field to live out

OUR PHILOSOPHY

Large GATHERINGS

our faith. Our adult community groups, student ministry cell groups, men's groups, and college and singles groups are all held away from our campus. We have always said that a non-believer is much more likely to come to a home than to a church.

You could say that this philosophy is rooted in being an incarnational church instead of an attractional church. We are not centered on weekly events that are designed to draw or attract people to the church campus. Our desire is to equip the people of Fellowship to be the very presence of Christ in every neighborhood, office complex, and schoolhouse in Northwest Arkansas. Practically speaking, we gather together on the church campuses once a week. We are then freed up to embody Christ in our communities throughout the rest of the week.

- **Centralized Ministry (Attractional)**

Key question: What can we do/offer to get people to come to our church?

- **Decentralized Ministry (Incarnational)**

Key question: What can we do to enable people to live out their faith in their homes and communities?