

BASIC BELIEFS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)



How do you describe our church to others? As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) we do not have the "brand name" recognition of some other denominations, and to some degree that is good. We never set out to be a denomination in the first place, but rather to be a movement to foster the unity of the church for the sake of Christ's mission. Nevertheless, we evolved into a distinct group within the universal church and as such have a particular identity and culture.

How do you explain this in your evangelistic outreach? Here is a list of ten attributes that identify and clarify the combination of things that are unique to the Disciples.

Note that I said combination. There is no single thing true about our church that is not also true of Christians, but the combination is a distinctive one, and a healthy one too, I believe. The things that together identify the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) include these:

The weekly observance of the Lord's Supper

Disciples' life is centered at the table. Through communion we are connected to one another and to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Believer's baptism by immersion

Following the earliest tradition of the church, we demonstrate our commitment to God by dramatic action, letting the waters of our baptism give witness to God's grace upon us.

Open membership

Recognizing that the traditions of the whole church are many and varied, we do not insist that our baptismal practice is the only one that is valid. We know that baptism is God's action far more than our own.

An attitude of tolerance and a rejection of creeds as tests of faith

We celebrate diversity as strength rather than weakness, and do not expect everyone's interpretation of the Bible or the Christian life to be identical.

The importance of scripture

We believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God and is best heard and understood within the community of faith with the diverse insight that context provides.

Congregational yet voluntarily connectional

We give the local congregation authority over their life and ministries, and yet share resources freely with a connected church, our denomination, knowing that the mission of the church is not just local.

The inclusion of the leadership of women

We believe that God provides spiritual gifts to all and do not restrict any office or role in the life of the church by gender.

An emphasis on lay leadership

Aside from performing weddings which is regulated by the state, lay persons in our church are permitted and encouraged to do all things, including presiding and offering the Eucharistic prayers at the Lord's Table, often restricted to ordained clergy in other denominations.

An educated clergy

We set educational and professional standards for ministers—licensed and ordained, and hold our clergy to ethical accountability through denominational oversight.

A priority on ecumenical life

Disciples earnestly pray and strive for the unity of the church and attempt to work in ways that bridge the separation of Christ's body.

It would be difficult to find this combination of characteristics anywhere but within the Disciples. I hope these ten attributes are valued by you, and that you, too, will use them as you attempt to describe our church to others, inviting them to join us in serving Christ.

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