

## PASTOR'S NOTES

*So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another... Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear... Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

-Ephesians 4:25, 29, 31-32, 5:1-2

What kind of church does Maple Street want to be? What kind of church does our community need Maple Street to be? These are key questions for our future (and present) as a church. While every church has the instructions above (among other directions in the Bible), each church has its own kind of personality, and no two are exactly alike. You might hear people talk about a group's DNA or their core values. Like other groups, Maple Street has a unique blend of traits that make it different from others.

But it is one thing to recognize the current personality of the church. A more important issue is our goal as a Christian group. What do we want to be? How do we want to be known? It is probably obvious to you who know Maple Street that we are not everything we want to be. Every church could look at the verses above and other Bible verses and see that we still have a ways to go to be the church we want to be (what God wants us to be).

So how do we start focusing on what we are to do? I have suggested that we can begin by looking at the community outside of the church, especially the younger generations who are less and less involved with church life. The book unChristian (published in 2007) studied persons outside of the church and found that outsiders typically see the Christian church as *hypocritical, insincere, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental*. Some of these impressions are unfair; and many people assume things about this church because of their experience in *other* churches. Still, this is the reality of what people outside the church believe, and so it makes sense that a starting point for us is to be intentional about being different.

With this in mind, a few of us have come up with this list of Maple Street core values. Remember, some of these we already do well, but this is our list of what we want to grow to become. Also, this is a draft... we can add statements to the list and we can rewrite some if we come up with a better way to say it. But for now, I want to commend these to you for your prayerful consideration. Does this describe what you believe that Jesus wants from Maple Street?

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**Christians are typically seen (rightly or wrongly) by people outside of the church as *hypocritical, insincere, anti-homosexual, sheltered, too political, and judgmental.***

**Admittedly, there are Christians for whom some or more of these perceptions are accurate. In contrast, Maple Street aspires to be a church known by these values:**

- 1. Maple Street people seek to be transparent about their flaws, and act first, talk second.**
- 2. Maple Street people are nonjudgmental listeners who don't expect to fix anyone—God and the individual have to do that.**
- 3. Maple Street people show compassion and love to all people, regardless of their lifestyle.**
- 4. Maple Street people are engaged, informed, and offer sophisticated responses to the issues people face.**
- 5. Maple Street people respect people, think Biblically, and look to find solutions to complex issues.**
- 6. Maple Street people find the good in others, and see their potential to be Christ-followers.**

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I am your pastor (at least today), but here I think “pester” might be a better term. I believe that this church is ahead of many others in making these statements a reality. I also believe that part of my job is to keep reminding you of this until we really become the church that God wants us to be. I look forward to being that kind of pest.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kam".