

Focused on Formation April 2025

A Word from Karl

Centennial Family,

I want to take a moment to repeat myself. I shared this a couple of weeks ago in my weekly email and a few weeks before that during a sermon. Based on my understanding of this church's history, the years-long discernment process of the Council, and my personal conviction, I am confident in this:

We are a formation-focused church.

Our first and highest priority is to help people be transformed on a shared journey of following Jesus. This formation is the firm foundation of joining God's mission to our broken world.

I've received a lot of feedback about this idea, so I wanted to address some of the questions—both stated and implied—that have come my way. If we are truly a formation-focused church, it's critical to make this vision clear, compelling, and meaningful to everyone in our community. Here we go: a FAQ about CCC's focus on formation.

Is this a new focus? Did we just recently decide this?

Great question. While the language might feel new, this focus has always been part of our DNA. Our current mission statement, which we've had since 2008, states that we are on a "shared journey of transformation." That journey of transformation is exactly what we mean when we say we are "formation focused."

An earlier mission of Centennial was, "Gathered to grow, scattered to serve." Formation is the work of growing together. Our long history of life

groups, the great work of our discernment team years ago, the commitment of our staff and elders to lead by shared discernment, and our years of mentoring and spiritual direction—all of this is evidence that our focus on formation is not new. The phrase may be updated, but it describes a long-standing reality.

What do you mean by formation? Isn't that just focusing on yourself, on 'me and Jesus'?

I'll admit that, throughout the history of the Christian church, spiritual formation has sometimes fallen into a troubling pattern. It has occasionally been used as an excuse to ignore the world and focus solely on oneself. That is decidedly not what we mean by formation. We can think about formation in two ways: biblically and practically.

Biblically, formation comes straight from scripture. Jesus said, "Remain in me, and you will bear much fruit." Our mission statement captures this idea: we glorify God on our shared journey of transformation **so that** we can join God's mission to our broken world. Formation is the work of remaining attached to Jesus, and the evidence of true formation is service in God's mission.

Practically, formation means we invite people to practice prayer in ways that foster life and relationships. It means we prioritize formation in church ministries so that people are empowered by the Spirit to go out and build the kingdom.

How do you measure formation? Isn't it too abstract?

This is a tough one, but here's how I'd answer: we measure formation through stories of life change, the creation of authentic community, and the building of God's kingdom.

1. **Stories of life change.** While it's hard to measure formation the way businesses measure their work, we look for evidence of life change. For example, we've heard stories like the woman who said, "This is the first time I've felt the freedom to admit my faith was mostly in my head." Or the individual who shared, "I've been following Christ my whole life, but I've grown more in the last year than in any year before." Or the handful of people who said, "I've never been in a church where I actually heard God's voice or experienced his presence." While we can't assign a numerical value to formation, we can absolutely celebrate these stories as evidence of God's work.
2. **Creation of authentic community.** True formation always results in authentic relationships. Growth happens in the fertile soil of a community. We've seen Growth Groups in the Growth Challenge

decide to keep meeting because their connections are so strong. Long-standing life groups have stayed together for decades, and new ones are forming regularly. The creation of authentic community is a key marker of true formation.

3. **Building God's kingdom.** To me, this is the most biblically significant evidence of true formation. Jesus said, "Remain in me, and you will bear much fruit." What is the fruit? Throughout scripture, the fruit of formation includes loving justice, showing mercy, and walking humbly with God (Micah 6:8). It includes feeding the hungry, housing the homeless, clothing the naked, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. It means pleading the case of the immigrant, orphan, widow, and wanderer, as demonstrated by the prophets and Jesus. If these things aren't evident in our church, we have cause for concern. If they are—and they are! —then we can know formation is happening.

The people of CCC are serving with ministry partners like Love INC, Master's Apprentice, and North Littleton Promise. We are traveling the world to serve those in need. We are praying for and giving to ministries of benevolence and relief locally and globally. May this work continue and multiply!

What about reading God's word and knowing the truth? Shouldn't we emphasize that more?

I believe that focusing on formation is an increased emphasis on God's word. Why? Because even the devil could quote scripture to Jesus. Knowing scripture is critically important, but only when it's rightly applied to our lives. The purpose of scripture is to form us.

Jesus said we need to build our lives on the rock, not on shifting sand. What is the rock? According to Jesus: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). The rock isn't just knowing scripture; it's living it out. Focusing on formation is focusing on being formed in the way of Christ.

Similarly, Jesus said, "The truth will set you free," but before that, he said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32). The truth sets us free not when we merely understand it intellectually, but when we apply it practically.

What if I'm hurting and this all feels overwhelming?

This is such an important question, and it underscores the value of a focus on formation. One of the first steps in any journey of formation (and a regular stop along the way) is an honest appraisal of your current location.

If you don't know where you are, it's almost impossible to get where you're going.

Here's the good news: God meets us exactly where we are. If you're hurting and need healing, God wants to heal you. If you feel lost or disconnected from your identity in Christ, God wants you to be found in him. If you have strength but don't know how to use it, God wants to guide you to use it gratefully. Formation creates space for each of us to discern our location, direction, and destination and to walk that journey together.

I pray that we all continue to make this shared journey of following Jesus the central reality of our lives.

Much more could be said, but I hope this is one more step toward Centennial Covenant Church becoming the community God is calling us to be. When I dream about the future, I see new communities of faith being born out of Centennial, just as they have in the past. I see new ministries of compassion, mercy, and justice coming to life. I see people hearing the good news of the kingdom and finding new life in Christ. I see hurting people finding healing, lonely people finding community, lost people finding direction, and hopeless people finding the hope of Christ.

Thank you for being part of this journey!

Grace and peace,
Karl

