

As we've met together and discussed our beliefs and desires for a new Church body we've condensed to a single sentence our vision for the kind of Church we feel called to be a part of:

I want to be part of an anabaptist* church committed to seeking the Kingdom in a cross-cultural manner while remaining theologically orthodox.

We encourage you to read more about what we feel called to. What follows is a brief overview of a few areas that are important to us and that we feel describe the vision we have been given.

We would like to host a series of meetings with those who share a common vision. If you are interested in attending a new Church, if you'd like to help plant a new church as a missionary sent from your current fellowship, if you're happy where you are but want to support us, or if you simply want to hear what we're up to drop an email to:

justin@newchurchmodesto.org or simeon@newchurchmodesto.org

and we'll update you with meeting times.

Our families are meeting together and we would like to begin a regular Sunday morning service open to all. We have a lot of details to iron out but we desire **now** to follow God's call on our lives - and perhaps God has the same call for you.

*We appreciate the theological emphases that sprang from the radical reformation we know as anabaptism. Unfortunately, many people in the brethren traditions we grew up in associate anabaptism only with legalistic cultural practices - we encourage you to read our take on what makes a Church "anabaptist".

Anabaptist

Anabaptist themes and emphases included a focus on the Gospels and the Sermon on the Mount, the necessity of practicing (not just believing) the Bible, a commitment to discipleship and a view of the Church as the the called out body of Christ. Anabaptists have consistently seen the commands of Christ in regards to violence as an integral part of general opposition in the New Testament between "the Kingdom of God" and "the World".

We see anabaptism as a corrective for much that is lacking in the American evangelical church (Rick Warren agrees!). We feel a kinship and affection with our brothers and sisters in the various branches of conservative Brethren Churches we grew up in, and hope to re-express many of the ideas also present in the Brethren movement in new ways.

We will focus on discipleship and teach and preach that following Jesus means following him with our lives. We will take seriously the tie between our lifestyle and our faith - Jesus has a lot to say about money, hospitality, the poor, and status-seeking behavior. We believe that Jesus calls us to a life of peacemaking and a rejection of violence and force and we are committed to following the commands and example of Jesus in loving even our enemies!

seeking the Kingdom

We believe that the Christian life is fundamentally not about the avoidance of sin, but the headlong pursuit of our Father's kingdom. As Christ's brethren we are called to seek the kingdom of our Father, rejecting not just our sin, but the order and systems of this world. "We willingly renounce Satan, and all his pernicious ways and practices of this world".

As such, we see the role of the church is to demonstrate and advance the reality of Jesus' Kingly rule over His people. The church stands as a testimony and witness to his reign that will be established over all things. The local church is an advance outpost of the Kingdom of God, surrounded by the world, ruled by love and loyalty to the King, and seeking the good of the kingdom rather than the glory of the outpost.

In practice this pursuit of the kingdom involves a willful disregard of this world and its systems. The church in America has adopted too much of Satan's system and order, becoming a center of wealth, political power, patriotism, moralism, and polished culture. The church seeking the kingdom of God views these as but the traps of the Satan, ensnaring the people of God.

Jesus said that that Love would be the the identifying characteristic of his disciples. Instead of the spirit of the age we will pursue radical brotherhood - deep and abiding love for our brothers and sisters across cultural, racial, and national boundaries. We will pursue radical generosity and hospitality. We will pursue peace with all men - turning the other cheek rather than responding with force and violence.

cross-cultural

Our experience in Brethren Churches has been that following Jesus is frequently tied to conformity to a particular culture. This is not unique to Brethren Churches of course - many Christians in America assume godliness when fellow believers subscribe to the same general patterns of behavior even if the behavior has no specific connection to Christianity. This might mean assuming that all "good" Christians vote Republican (or Democrat!), wear particular styles of dress or abstain from particular behaviors like listening to "non-Christian" music or drinking alcohol.

Many of these specific behaviors come from Christian values - we are called to be modest and un-extravagant in dress and to refrain from drunkenness and excess. Further we recognize that it is impossible not to have a culture - every church has its assumptions and traditions and this is simply part of being human. We value many aspects of the culture of the Brethren Churches. We intend, however, to be open to people from a variety of cultural backgrounds and to call all members of the Body to examine their lives in the light of Gospel and the Kingship of Jesus.

We won't use culture to enforce a single choice on all members of the body when it comes to doubtful issues. We do intend to strongly teach the Biblical principles which produce lives that glorify God. This means that though we will preach sobriety we won't denigrate believers who consume alcohol in moderation. We appreciate modest dress but aren't going to tell you that the Bible teaches women shouldn't wear pants. And we realise that consuming the products

of "christian culture" are not a substitute for pursuing obedience to Christ.

theologically orthodox

We include this item for several reasons. First it serves as our affirmation of historic orthodox theology - the things all Christians everywhere can claim together. We affirm the historic confessions of the Church such as the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.

We are excited to talk about the Kingdom of God, to discuss the social and economic implications for our lives of Jesus' teachings, to learn together how to live out Jesus' call to peace but we aren't going "emerging" or "liberal" - we will remain solidly within the generous bounds of historic Christian orthodoxy.

Another reason we would like to affirm our commitment to remaining theologically orthodox is that the historic creeds and teachings of the church also function as a corrective to the fads of our own particular time and place. The creeds are not the entirety of New Testament teachings - and we do believe and intend to highlight areas of Scripture not addressed by the creeds. We won't be a Church that focuses on the many of the issues of our day that are important mostly as cultural signifiers.

You won't hear much from our pulpit about the culture wars: talking to Christians about the "war on Christmas" or the "homosexual agenda" is a waste of time in our view. We have no official position on millennial schemes - "pre", "post", or "a". We aren't going to attempt to define inerrancy or demand that you affirm something we can't define. We won't demand a 6,000 year old universe. On these issues of our day we're happy merely to affirm what Christians everywhere have always affirmed: that God created the universe, that Scripture is true, that Jesus is coming back to establish his reign over all things, that all Christians everywhere ought to practice chastity.

Of course we have opinions on many of these topics. And we're might enjoy talking about them in the right context - but as a Church we would like to focus on the centrality of Christ, on His message and calling on our lives. And we are convinced that we will only make an impact on the world around us by living out the life of Christ within us as individuals and as His people together.