

WHAT'S THE POINT OF OUR CHURCH?

The movement is unmistakable. People are leaving the church, the average age of our congregation is going up and we don't even know if we are relevant any more. In

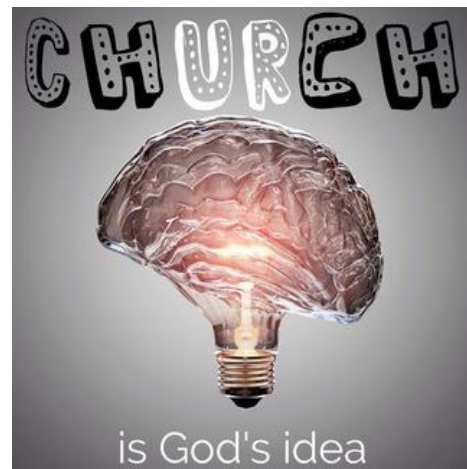


fact, this movement away from church has been going on for decades. I completely understand why a growing number of people are bailing on church. Even people who used to lead in the church often stop attending. The church is far from perfect. Life is complex. There are growing options and the post-modern mind distrusts most things organized or those things

considered institutional. However, as trendy as the idea of writing off the church may be, I believe it's a mistake.

First, if you're a Christian, church is not something you **attend**, it's something you **are**. You can't disassociate from the church as a Christian any more than you can disassociate from humanity as a person. You don't **go** to church because you **are** the church.

Second, the church was not a human invention. The New Testament leads me to the inescapable conclusion that the church was **God's** idea. In fact, most of the New Testament is not about the teachings of Jesus. Instead, it's about the work of the church that Jesus initiated and called into being through those who followed his Way. If you want to get rid of the church, you also need to get rid of Jesus. You can't have one without the other.



I understand that the idea of the church being imperfect makes some people despair. Rather than making us despair, I believe that the fact that Jesus started the church with imperfect people should make us marvel at God's incredible grace. That God would use ordinary, broken human beings as vessels of grace – and delight in it – is awe-inspiring. I am convinced that God is proud of how grace is beating through our imperfect-but-cherished community of faith. The idea that God is using you and I is pretty amazing. There were other options like speaking to the world directly as a voice from on high, but instead, God chose to use broken people like all of us to showcase unconditional grace to a world in need of transformation.

God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display divine wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was God's eternal plan, carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.
-Ephesians 3:10-11.

For sure, community is messy. People mess up and make terrible and wrong choices. Leaders are broken and similarly make mistaken decisions. In fact, most of the New Testament is not a story of an idealized church where everything worked perfectly all the time.¹ Most of the New Testament is a story of Jesus using his followers to spread his love *in spite of* themselves – all while they attempt to overcome obstacle after obstacle as broken people in a broken world.



The fact that Christ uses flawed people like us to accomplish his mission of self-giving love on earth is actually a sign of grace – not a sign of the living Christ’s absence. The church’s story, as twisted as it gets at times, is a beautiful story of God’s grace, God’s power, and God’s redemption. So, by the way, is your life, which reflects the story of the church more than you might want to admit. The church gives the world a front-row seat to the grace of God.



There are certainly many who criticize the church today as being consumeristic. To some extent churches like ours cater to consumerism. We seek out what the “market” is looking to consume – musically, pastorally, theologically, programmatically – but that often leads us from the Way of Jesus as our mission. Instead of people looking to serve one another in community – and not just our community of faith but in the wider community – we too easily look inward. We smile in satisfaction while thinking, “Here I am, all on my own, worshipping God when it is convenient for me, accessing the podcast, YouTube channel, streaming service or television evangelist at *my* leisure.” However, disconnecting ourselves from community is actually less faithful than connecting ourselves to a flawed community.

¹ Consider what is written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth in 1st Corinthians....

As we continue to slowly get used to gathering in our building once more, we know how important it is to gather as individuals woven into **one** by the Way of Jesus.



We need to gather because we need one another – probably now more than ever. In fact, our community needs us, too, perhaps now more than ever. We make a difference in this community as Christians working together graciously to spread the good news of giving joyfully of oneself out of love. Kincardine United Church is not dead. Far from it. In fact, maybe it's just beginning to take shape for a brand-new era that desperately needs it.

I believe this is our mission in Kincardine – to be a catalyst for grace in a world too often polarized and divided. Why would anyone want to support our community of faith with their time, their talent and their treasure? Because through our faithful discipleship, brokenness is transformed through love and structures are changed by working together as one. Such a mission has been the proud tradition we carry from the past, into the present and share for the future. What a challenge and what an opportunity!

To encourage you to become an active part of that challenge and wonderful opportunity, you will be receiving a package in the mail or by e-mail before the end of this month, inviting you to consider how God is calling you to give to the ministry and to the mission we share as a church. I hope you are inspired by how we connect, how we support and how we are transformed, collectively making a difference in our community. May the Spirit whisper to your soul as you prayerfully ponder what to do with all you have been given. That divine whisper includes the words, "Thank you, my good and faithful servant."

