

Dear Chapel Family,

As we approach the end of what has been a year of crisis at the Chapel I would like to share my heart with you. I watched the church I served for 23 years in Virginia Beach fall away to a shadow of what it was because the wrong man was chosen to be their senior pastor. After he was gone their search committee asked to meet with me. They told me they had “blown it” and asked me how they could be sure they were not going to make the same mistake again.

I told them they had called someone who did not know the distinctive dimensions of their church. That was not fair to him or to their church. When they asked what those demographics were, I spent an entire Saturday morning describing those distinctive features for them.

This is a year when the Chapel simply must know the distinctive principles that have made and do make the Chapel what it is. When I was called to the Williamsburg Community Chapel in 1979 one of the first series I preached as a vision caster was what I called “Ten Fingerprints of a Healthy Church.” (I have written this series out in a booklet by that name.) The main thrust of the series was the question: “How do we know the Church we are building is part of the Church Jesus Christ proclaimed He was going to build?”

Based on Acts 2:42 I taught that the fingerprints on the right hand of the Church Christ is building are; **evangelism** or outreach here and around the world. We believe in local and foreign missionary ministry. The index fingerprint is **teaching**. The middle fingerprint is **fellowship**, the ring fingerprint is **worship**, or the way we express our love for Christ, and the little fingerprint is **prayer**.

“The Great Commission is the charter of the church. Like any other organization the church must fulfill the terms of its charter or it should cease and desist.” -Robert S. Glover We believe this here at the Chapel and that’s why our thumbprint is **evangelism**. From the very beginning of the Chapel, **teaching** has been a critical index fingerprint that makes us who we are.

Beginning in September 1980 the Mini Bible College was taught every week to several hundred for five years and reached out to people all over this community. Many who attended became the early members of our church. Teaching has always been a vital part of who we are as a Church. This not only applies to the teaching done by our pastors but throughout our Christian Education department right down to the youngest children. It involves the teaching done in small groups or any teaching approved by our leadership in this spiritual community.

**Fellowship** has always been a high priority here at the Chapel. Long before our congregation became large we trained leaders and formed small groups so believers could have the opportunity to form deep relationships with other believers. This is another vital fingerprint of our church. The larger we grow the more critical it is that we have fellowship and prioritize small groups.

We have refused to let **worship** divide us into two churches. We rather have a blended worship style that involves an extraordinary choir and organ in traditional expressions of worship. We also

have outstanding musicians who present a contemporary style of worship. It is not either/or but both/and. We want our worship to meet everyone where they are on their spiritual journey and present worship forms that have deep meaning for as many people in our community as possible.

Consistent with our conviction that we're not, we can't and we don't even want to do the work of God, we believe **prayer** is a vital function of the Church. Paul wrote that because God wants all to be saved, **first of all** prayers should be prayed in the Church for all. Because the work of God always involves the supernatural prayer is therefore a critical fingerprint of the Church Christ is building.

Based on the twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians the fingerprints on the left hand are; **unity, diversity, plurality, empathy** and **equality**. As vision casters, our pastors have accepted and proclaimed these fingerprints over the 34 years that I have been here at the Chapel. They have continuously reinforced them as the distinctive dynamics of our church.

**Unity** without diversity is uniformity. That is not the unity of which Paul wrote. We are a blending together of people from all the major denominations and theological persuasions. We do not attempt to resolve **diversity** but to celebrate the beauty of the diversity Christ is placing in His Church. Believers can be one with us without giving up their diversity.

**Plurality** is important to us especially in our leadership. Anytime the words for pastor are found in the Greek New Testament they are plural except when the Scripture is speaking of Christ. Although one person must have the leadership authority and responsibility, strictly speaking it is not biblical for one person to be designated as **the** pastor of a church. So many pastors are burning out today that a strong trend is growing in the direction of a pastoral team where no one pastor has 100% of the pressure. In this context we believe all the Elders are pastors. Some "make tents" and some do not, but they are all pastors.

The ring finger on the right hand represents our love for Christ and the ring finger on the left hand represents **empathy** or our love for each other. It was said of the New Testament believers, "Behold how they love one another!" If we were accused of that kind of love may there be enough evidence to convict us of the charge.

**Equality** means the value of every believer in the sight of God. In our spiritual community we have many people with doctor's degrees. You will notice they are not referenced that way in our community. This was a distinctive put in place by our founding Elders who were professors at the College of William and Mary. We are not equal in gifts and ministry, which creates the beautiful diversity that makes the body of Christ so very functional, effective and fruitful.

This is a time of crisis when we should all think of those three characters that make up the word crisis in the Chinese language: danger, opportunity and responsibility. This is a time of danger for the Chapel but also a time of opportunity. We must all seize the opportunity to step up and accept our responsibility to support this great Church and pray for its search committee while they are prayerfully seeking the lead pastor who will lead our staff and Church.

*Dick*

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