



THE WESTCITY WAY

VISITOR HANDBOOK

WESTCITY CHURCH



TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
—————	
WELCOME	3
—————	
WESTCITY WAY	4
—————	
WESTCITY VALUES	10
—————	
FAITH & LIFE	11
—————	
PILGRIMAGE	13
—————	
HEALTHY CHURCH	15

WELCOME

Hello and welcome to you.

This handbook has been collated to share with you what we feel to be the key foundations that have underpinned, moulded and shaped the Westcity Vision and Mission. Also included, are the core values we as a church community feel we must share in order to grow and function together as a body (albeit a flawed one), that seeks to be a healthy community of welcome, reflective of Jesus in all we do.

We trust that this Westcity Way Handbook will merely put words to the experience you have had thus far in our Westcity community.

Thank you for joining us on this journey, we look forward to growing with you in our love for Jesus and our desire to let the world know just how amazing He is.

The Westcity Team



COME FOLLOW ME - JESUS



VISION

Westcity Vision in six words: Love God. Love People. Follow Jesus - The Jesus Creed.


The Westcity Way - His vision our mission

God has a vision for this world; He always has. That it be good, that creation be free from the ravages of sin and violence that have resulted from our rebellion. That God is working through a people united in Jesus to show the world what it will fully become one day.

By way of introduction to the Westcity Community, we are keen to communicate our foundations. We cannot separate our theology into a list of statements or words as our theology permeates who we are, what we practice, and what we hope to see as we become Christ in our community and the world. We understand in terms of theology, there are many differing interpretations and positions, however with regards to Westcity, our core statement remains

“In the essentials, unity; in the non-essentials, liberty and in all things, charity.”

Augustine of Hippo/ Alexander Campbell



LOOKING BACK IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD

Christianity is a passed-on faith. Discipleship has its foundation in first looking to Jesus who has modelled through his words, life, death and resurrection who God is and what he wants. But it's not just Jesus we are called to look at. The Christian faith is to be practiced in community. The Bible tells us to observe others who are following Jesus, (follow me as I follow Christ, observe their lives). We are to imitate those who exhibit God's character and follow Jesus' way (as seen in the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospels). These men and women become examples who we get to 'look over their shoulders' as it were, in order to learn the way of Jesus.

So, at Westcity we do just that, we look back in order to move forward. We look back in history to men, women and communities who took seriously the call to follow Jesus. As we do this, we believe, we become more grounded in the story of God rescuing the world first through Abram and the Israelites then His Disciples and now including us His Church.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST MOVEMENT

Church of Christ History

Westcity is part of the Church of Christ (COC) movement. The Churches of Christ came out of the restoration movement which swept through the US in the 1800s. Some of the key foundations of our movement were around unity. There was a deep desire to break down denominational walls, to make Jesus, His teaching and table central to church life as well as make the New Testament church the model for discipleship.

Because of the open and inclusive nature of the COC distinctives, we feel our movement acts as a container flexible enough to hold a generous orthodoxy. We feel free to learn from church history and adopt truth and spiritual practices from outside the COC movement if they help us to follow Jesus and make him central.

A good way of seeing this might be to view the Church of Christ movement like a wine skin that is both flexible enough to receive the good wine of what God has shown His church throughout the ages, and grow with what He will continue to show us in the future.

The following are, we believe, the rich wine of Christian community and practices we have discovered, that help us to live as Jesus' community.



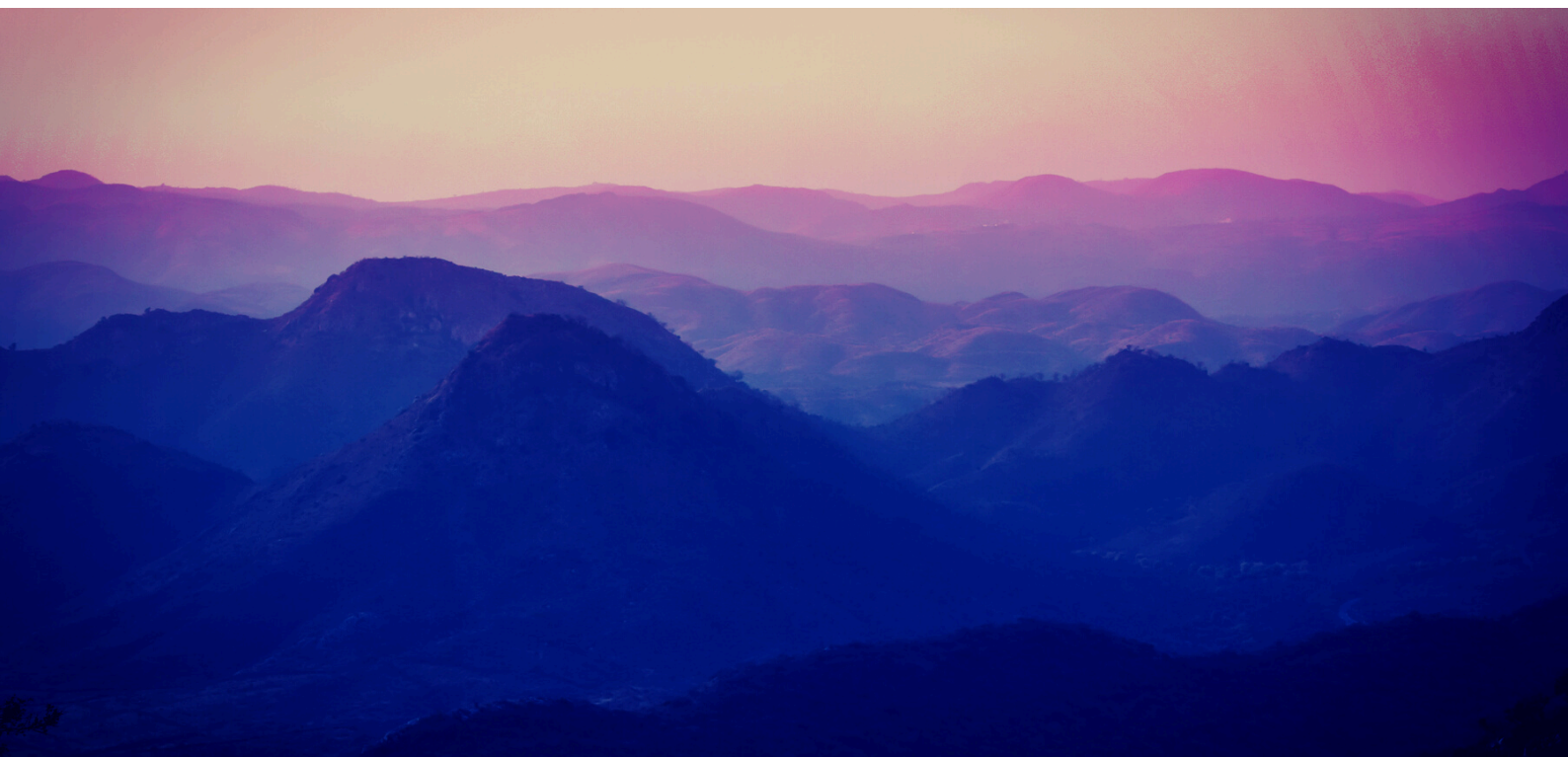
A GENEROUS ORTHODOXY

The top image shows the silhouettes of several people standing on a beach at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that fades into a deep blue sky. The people are positioned at various distances from the camera, some standing and some sitting, their forms dark against the bright background.

THE ANABAPTIST EXAMPLE

Ana Baptists while celebrating Martin Luther's emphasis of justification by faith, believed that the reformation that swept through Europe wasn't reformed enough. There was a strong emphasis amongst the Ana Baptist, that faith in Christ needed to be coupled with faithfulness to Christ, and His way, along with a deep commitment to being peacemakers. Consequently, they formed communities focussed on how they could live out Jesus' words as seen in the sermon on the mount.

As a community we believe and practice the cross shaped love we see at work in our Lord's life and death. So, we commit to being peacemakers and believe this is central to our mandate as Christ followers.



SACRAMENTAL PRACTICES

The word Sacrament means 'Mystery', it speaks of the practices that Jesus established to be undertaken by his people. These practices act as a 'means of grace', or spaces in which God's grace gets to us and transforms us. We need to point out here that we don't believe these practices are Holy in themselves, but rather act as conduits where a Holy God can speak and move towards us and where, if we do them trusting in Jesus, we encounter God and are transformed in that encounter.

The three main Sacraments we identify and practice intentionally together at Westcity are:

1. **Communion or the Table** - Which is the unconditional welcome of God to all. Where we remember Jesus' victory at the cross and his resurrection. Where we hear the invite to be in relationship with Him, to have our sins forgiven and to receive the enabling of the Spirit of life.
2. **Water Baptism** - Which is our response to the call of Jesus to be His disciple. It's where we die to our old ways and rise to live Jesus' way, in His resurrection life.
3. **Foot-washing or the Towel and Bowl** - This is the 'Go of Christ', the sending to serve the world rather than trying to rule it. Where we serve others with the cruciform love that we see in Jesus' life and death.

CHARISMATIC EXPRESSION

And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He proceeds from the Father and the Son, and with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified. - Nicene Creed

The first thing to say is that the Holy Spirit is God, not a “presence”, or even as some have suggested, the “love” between the Father and Son. He is the third person of the Trinity, identified in the beginning Genesis narrative and active throughout scripture. In both the Old and New Testament, the metaphor of wind is used to describe His freedom and majesty, the Hebrew word *rauch* in the old and *pneuma* in the new. He is unfettered, powerful yet gentle.

The second, as John 16 attests, is that He is deeply involved in life in all its aspects and complexities. He is with us and is working on our behalf even when we don't fully understand how. And when He works, He is unlimited.

The baptism in the Spirit which is also referred to in scripture as the Jesus' baptism (water being John's baptism) can be seen in the book of Acts. We see that for the disciples who knew about prayer and living a life of surrender to God, following baptism in the Spirit, all of those practices became somehow energised and different. The key characteristic of the baptism in the Spirit seems to be that God was present in deep, meaningful, and powerful ways.


As a church, we look to the Spirit of life to fill our lives as well as to lead us to where God is at work in the world. We join with Him in his magnificent re-creation project, inaugurated by Jesus at his resurrection.



WESTCITY VALUES

When we put all of these influences and practices together, we see a difference between believing in God and knowing the God of Jesus. We learn through Jesus that we are called to be a reflection of God in the world.

So, as a Church we commit to becoming and being a community that is:

- **Welcoming** by finding ways to ensure people find their place and discover friendship.
 - **Inclusive** by demonstrating wholehearted acceptance of others irrespective of our points of difference and challenge.
 - **Loving** in overlooking offence, extending friendship, offering care and support, being truthful and practicing at all times the radical welcome of Jesus.
 - **Compassionate** towards those less able, less willing and less empowered to represent themselves and their needs.
 - **Kind** as an active practice of love; always putting forward and looking for ways to show people their value and worth.
 - **Peace-seeking** in every situation (non-violent). This is not passivity, nor fight or flight, but the third way of fighting back with radical love that gives dignity to the oppressed while at the same time holding onto the hope of transformation for the aggressors.
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FAITH & LIFE

At times, people make contact with Westcity and ask if we have a position on a particular issue or belief, and often our response is that we don't. That is usually because we are a diverse community of Christ-followers and hold a diverse range of views. Sometimes those views converge, sometimes they change and sometimes they remain unresolved. It seems to us that this is part of being a robust and loving community. Lately, we are also concerned at the worrying trend of the so-called "culture wars".

This seems to be linked to a polarising lobbyist mindset, which can take us away from being apprentices on a life-long journey of following Jesus. It is self-evident that churches don't maintain static positions on numerous issues. In fact, throughout church history, Christians have routinely and robustly debated all sorts of challenges as they settled on priorities. Martin Luther was doing just that as he ignited what we now call The Reformation, but many examples could be mentioned. Slavery, the status of women, the ethics of going to war, and whether the creation account should be considered literal are a few that spring quickly to mind.

Ancient times were no different, as the fledgling church came to grips with deciding what really mattered. For example, leading up to the famous church councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, there was fierce debate on what should be considered foundational for Christian life and practice. As they prayed and talked together, they penned creeds that have stood the test of time. Ever since, the Nicene Creed (325AD) and others like the Chalcedonian (451AD) have provided a "compass point" for Christians to help navigate the challenging issues that crop up in life and culture. That's also why many years ago many churches like ours adopted the maxim:

In essentials unity.

In non-essentials liberty.

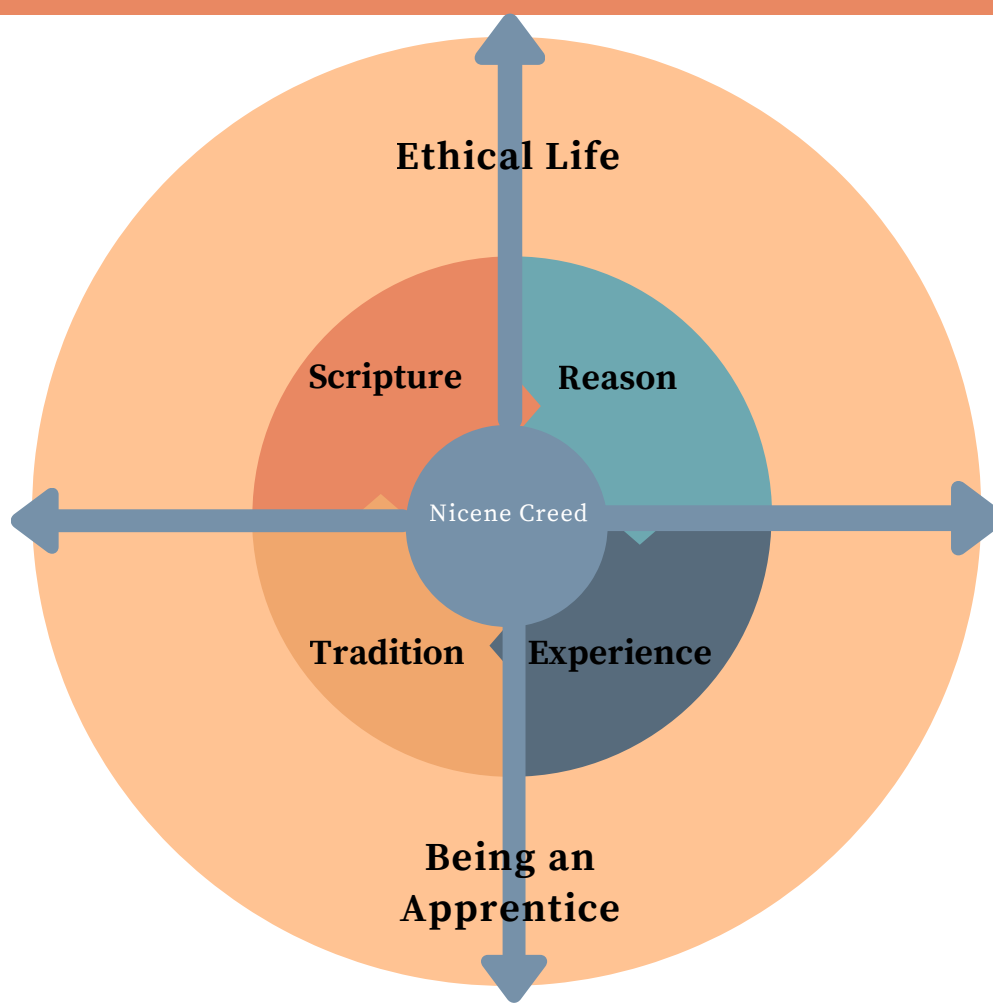
In all things, love.

In the late 18th century John Wesley employed a method of theological reflection for similar reasons, that took four factors into consideration. It has come down to us as the “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” and suggests that reflecting on life and practice should ordinarily include scripture, reason, tradition and experience. These are holistically interconnected (though scripture would be pivotal). Our faith community also looks to these tried-and-true approaches to navigate our 21st century contexts and culture.

As our Faith and Life diagram describes, at the centre of our reflection on life and faith are the creeds. They represent what the church has always considered foundational and we do likewise today at Westcity. Branching out from this “compass point”, prayerful reflection on scripture is linked with church tradition and further knowledge as it comes to hand. These are reflected on contextually, in the lived experience of ourselves and others in community. Our ethical life, being an apprentice, means we are willing to hold fast to what is essential and are willing to hold in tension the many aspects of life and faith that are not.

THE WESTCITY WAY

Faith & Life





PILGRIMAGE FRAMEWORK

Walking together towards loving God, loving people & following Jesus.

At Westcity, we have set out on a pilgrimage; a long journey made to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion. Now pilgrimage is not new, not one off, not all defining but it is an intentional walk in a particular direction with all the accompanying risks, opportunities, and choices.

Where have we been?

In recent years, we have been setting the foundations for gathering and walking together. We have written our mission and theology in the Westcity Handbook and captured our values in mosaics that sit on our chapel walls. We want to be known as a people who “Love God, love people, follow Jesus”. It’s simple really.

Yet, there is always the risk that by focusing only on our foundations, we can become CAMPERS. We camp out and even defend territory. Instead, we want to pack up our foundations into our backpack and carry them with us. We want to become PILGRIMS. To set out on a journey that puts us in the position that Jesus can change us and move us.

Where are we going?

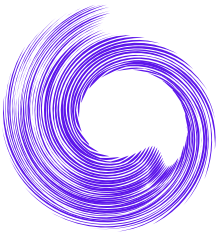
So, to set our compass, we asked ourselves 2 questions:

1. Where do we want to go as a church community?
2. What do we want to look like as a people group along the way?

And we discovered three areas of strengthening listed on the next page as we walk together loving God, loving people and following Jesus. We’d love you to join the long walk...

PILGRIMAGE FRAMEWORK

Walking together towards loving God, loving people & following Jesus.



HEALTHY SPIRITUALITY

—
LOVE GOD

SPIRITUAL RESOURCES & FRAMEWORKS

SPIRITUAL WORKSHOPS

SPIRITUAL RETREATS

PILGRIMAGE & FORMATION PRACTICES

POP-UP GROUPS - SPIRITUAL FORMATION & DISCIPLESHIP



HEALTHY SUPPORT

—
LOVE PEOPLE

REGULAR FINANCIAL GIVING

SERVING OTHERS

INVITING OTHERS TO PILGRIMAGE WITH JESUS



HEALTHY COMMUNITY

—
FOLLOW JESUS

HOME CHURCH

CONNECT GROUPS

WELCOME TO WESTCITY DINNERS

CAMPS

COMMUNITY LUNCHES

TOWNHALL MEETINGS



HEALTHY CHURCH

The meal as a metaphor

Jesus spent most of his time at meals teaching, healing and hanging out with people. Letting them know he wants them in His kingdom. At Westcity we like sharing meals together, we do it a lot. In fact the pinnacle of our Sunday service is the invite of Jesus to His table, the communion meal.

We also like the idea of using the metaphor of sharing a meal to explain what we think healthy participation in church life consists of.

So...
Think about attending a regular meal with others. What are some of the basics that you think would make that time together a success and not a burden on just a few?

We have identified three but there's probably more, they are:

1. Connect regularly

The best way to get to know others, to really see them is to be around them regularly. This is where we learn names, see needs and experience moments together in God's presence.

We think regular connection with others is at the heart of following Jesus together. The 'love people' bit of the greatest commandment.

Whether that's on Sunday, in a home church, connect group, or a spiritual book club. We don't mind where and believe everyone should have the choice to choose how they connect. We just think healthy spirituality needs regular community in order to flourish and we want that for everyone.



HEALTHY CHURCH

The meal as a metaphor

2. Help out regularly

Imagine if you went to a regular meal and just let the host do all the work every week. Preparing the meal. Cleaning up, hosting new people, assisting the kids. It would be exhausting for them. It's no different at church. That's why we see helping out is important to making our get together as fun and manageable for all.

So we ask you to help out regularly. This may be serving in an area, chatting with new comers, joining a team, hosting or running a homechurch, or just offering assistance where you see it's needed. After all the best meals are always the ones where everyone chips in to make it a success.

We have an incredible Volunteer Coordinator, Grace who would love to chat with you around where your passions and gifts are and what opportunities to serve there are at Westcity.

Please note: We understand some people come to Westcity burnt out on religion and need time to recover and heal up. If that's you then we want to carry you until you are whole enough to re-engage in helping out.

3. Support regularly

If you go to a meal as a one off your host might cover the cost for everyone, but if that meal becomes a regular occurrence most of us wouldn't dream of letting the host bear all the cost week in, week out. It's the same at church. We throw the party and visitors come at our expense.

But as church becomes home, becomes our community, then we ask that everyone contributes financially to make sure that we stay in a place of strength and that the ongoing support of the church doesn't get left to just a few.



HEALTHY CHURCH

The meal as a metaphor

Did you know if everyone at Westcity gave \$40 a week we would cover the budget for the year.

Other ways you can support is to pray for the church and it's leaders and by inviting others to come and follow Jesus with us. This isn't just about inviting people to church, although that may be appropriate. This is about inviting others to Jesus!

Good meals are always hard to keep a secret. And we want Westcity to be known as a place where anyone and everyone can come and hear the welcome of Christ.

We think if everyone who calls Westcity home participates in these three ways then it would be such a wonderful foundation for us to thrive.

Who knows, word might get out that we are that church that throws parties for sinners and saints and Jesus likes to attend.