

# The Presence Ethos

September 16, 2009

## About Presence

Presence is a church that meets in downtown London. Our vision is to love God by also genuinely loving people. We are a group of people who are passionate about faith, creation, humanity, community and social justice.

The Presence community is comprised of people from many unique backgrounds. Some even call us “eclectic”. We place a high value on learning from those who are different than us (ethnically, religiously, etc). We see a lot of worth in “transcending” the socioeconomic strata of society to be a community rich in diversity.

We have a very focused concern for the intersection of Christian faith and social justice. We believe that religion is alienated from the message of Jesus if it is not exercising compassion and justice for the hurting and oppressed. This value is manifested both by our priorities as a community and equally by our personal lifestyle choices as individuals (although nobody here is claiming to have “arrived” on this by any means). We believe that one of the most foundational reasons for the Church, and gathering together, is to challenge and sharpen one another to be as fully alive and engaged with the world’s social and ecological issues as possible.

Our foundational point of common unity is found in the life and teaching of a Jewish man named Jesus (Yeshua), from Nazareth, who lived in the first century of the Common Era. We also inherit a long legacy and historical tradition surrounding the story of his life, death and resurrection, some of which is profoundly beautiful and some of which is disgustingly corrupt. We believe that “following Jesus” is not merely an experience of conversion but an on-going, daily, reflective practice of choosing love, peace and compassion over selfishness, resentment and pride.

## Beliefs

We believe...

God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

We believe...

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

We believe...

“The most important commandment is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:29-31)

We believe...

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

We believe...

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. (James 1:27)

## Finances

**Charitable Status**

Presence Church is incorporated under Ontario law as a not-for-profit corporation and is registered with Canada Revenue Agency as a charitable organization with charitable registration number 82244 0723 RR0001.

### **Denomination**

Presence is independent. We do not have any denominational affiliation.

### **Operating Budget**

All operating and ministry expenses are covered entirely by personal donations.

If you are interested in supporting Presence financially, please download and read the [Presence Financial Partnership](#) document. Donations can be made by either automatic Electronic Funds Transfer or on a case-by-case donation basis.

### **Accountability**

We believe accountability is important. We maintain a fully transparent accounting system that enables us to make our financial records available online while still maintaining the confidentiality of our supports.

View financial records for year: [2007](#) | [2008](#) | [2009](#)

### **Goals**

Our goal is be able to use only half of our budget for immediate operating functions. We would like to build our support base to the point where we can function month-to-month on only 50% of our donations and invest the other 50% in projects and community initiatives in our city. We call this our 50/50 goal.

To reach this goal, we will continue to keep our operating expenses at a bare minimum, and continue to propose a vision of a church community that spends more “outside” of itself than it does on its own amenities.

We like to think of our bank account as our “Common Purse” – that is a place for us to leverage our resources to accomplish in community more than we could ever accomplish as individuals.

## **Learning Together**

Presence, as a community, exercises an expansive freedom to ask questions. We figure that truth is out there to be discovered, not merely a set of human ideas or doctrines to be defended. As much as we can muster, we exist to nurture a culture of honesty, raising issues and perspectives that (sometimes) severely challenge the status quo of North American comfort, Christianity and our ideas about God. This pursuit is inspired and founded on the life of Jesus, who himself modeled a relentless commitment to push the lethargic out of complacency.

We want to slog through the ambiguity and mystery of faith (and the questions of our own humanity) far enough to discern how truth and justice, the way of Jesus, would have us live here and now. This is our drive and passion for learning. From the ancient stories of a radical teacher from the Middle East who lived two thousand years ago, we constantly find ourselves propelled into a world of intrigue and mystery, as well as passion and purpose.

In short, Presence will challenge you. *Learning* is always a challenge when it demands a reevaluation of how you think, believe and live.

## **Living the Change**

When we thought about starting Presence there was a big question we felt needed to be clearly answered first: does the city really need yet *another* church? Don't we have just about enough already?

This question kept bringing us back to one simple reality: we are here, now, and we believe that we need to live in step with our convictions. In other words, we didn't start Presence just to start another church, we started Presence because we believe there are things that we need to *do* together. Our vision is to be people who are not only learning, growing, and challenging our own presuppositions about life and faith, but *also* people who are living out what we are learning. That is, we want to be people of unapologetic, reflective action.

## Being Presence

Presence was built upon the conviction that to be a "Christian" (that is, to be an imitator or follower of Jesus) means to be actively engaged in community needs and social awareness. We cannot divorce Jesus' words about caring for the wounded and hurting from our day-to-day lives. From the outset we explored where and how we could be most meaningfully attuned to those who were being most ostracized by the rest of society.

In our city, London, Ontario, there is an array of social services for people struggling with homelessness, hunger, mental disabilities and substance addictions. Churches and shelters coordinate together to provide meals every night of the week. There are several high profile social service agencies offering beds to sleep in, employment training, and other forms of emotional and physical support. We realized that to create another "social service" for the downtown core was simply redundant, repetitive, and potentially more divisive than helpful.

However, the fact remains that our city is home to a large (and seemingly increasing) number of very lonely, isolated and disenfranchised people: individuals who, despite months and years in the social service system, remain shunned for their addictive relapses or mental disabilities.

We realized that our purpose here was not to create another "social service" for the city, but to make the streets, ally ways, and public spaces of London a part of *our* lives too. In other words: we call ourselves "Presence" because we are called *to be with people and learn how to be the best friends we can possibly be*. Our role as a church community is to be present with others. To listen and learn from them. We are motivated to do something a social agency or humanitarian organization could never "programmize" into practice: we're here to genuinely love our neighbors, whoever they might be. People are not "projects" to be organized and sorted in priority by their socioeconomic standing.

We engage in our community not only because it allows us to share love, but also because the community invites us to learn and to *be* loved. We expect help, healing, forgiveness and generosity from others in the community as well, seeking to rebalance the power disparity which often exists between "us" and "them." We too are asking to be loved and cared for. This ethos of presence must transcend the hours in our days: our relationships with co-worker, our boss, other commuters, our families, etc. Whoever we find ourselves with during the day offers an opportunity to reflect the same character of care and compassion. People are people wherever you find them.

Within the Presence community you will find people working this out in different ways. Some people focus their energy primarily on being present and available to those in their workplaces, while others carve out and prioritize an evening or two a week to play cards or crokinole at the London Coffee House (a free community coffee house on Dundas Street). Some of us intentionally roam the streets of London and consider "Do you have any spare change?" as the invitation to a conversation (not a nuisance to be ignored). Some of us are running orphanages in Africa. The thing we have in common is a desire to live out the two greatest ideals we know: "Love your neighbor" and "Do to others what you would want them to do to you." We have a long way to go, but we're committed to putting one foot in front of the other to learn the next step.

So wherever we are, we are first called to be "all there" with eyes and ears open to the people, needs and opportunities around us.

As you may have guessed by now, we don't emphasize running "programs" to accomplish this vision. We won't ask you to sign up for a soup kitchen or anything like that. But we will challenge you to peer deep into your soul and ask some questions about what matters most in life. Presence is a "success" if together we are daily, incrementally, becoming a more loving and embracing community of people, wherever we happen to be.