

Week 2 - Authentic Faith Community (Handout)

Authentic

Including the word “authentic” in the description of our community expresses our understanding of the differences between a worldly value system and God’s value system. Authentic communities strive to adopt God’s view of sin, ourselves, and others. In the world, people are measured and valued based on many different things including their looks, race, gender, influence, position, education, family-name, talents, skills, wealth, contribution to society, and how much of a “sinner” they are. We exalt supreme athletes, talented movie stars, attractive people, powerful politicians, and anyone who is “successful.” These kinds of value judgments are not new, people often measure themselves vis-à-vis others. Everyone casts his or her votes on the “value” of everyone else. We even give ourselves a score. That’s the game and we know how to play it very well.

We pursue those things in life that will yield higher marks. We set our life goals, decide on careers, find friends, and position ourselves for opportunities that will improve our “scores.” We introduce topics into conversations to trumpet our stories and accomplishments. We give advice to friends or try to solve their problems mostly to satisfy our own need to be “helpful.” We campaign for high scores from those around us by hiding our faults and accentuating the things others value. The big problem with this social system is that it is all based on ourselves. As Paul says to the Corinthians, “When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.”(2 Cor 12) The entire system expresses the idea that a person’s worth is determined by the assessment and approval of those around them.

The game can be subtly complicated by two other factors. One, the world actually works that way. Two, we even play it with good goals. We want others to give us high marks as “knowledgeable,” “helpful,” “hard-working,” “sacrificing,” “generous,” etc. Even though the goals are “virtuous” it is still the same game, what matters to us is how others view us. Authentic communities know that God’s approval is the only approval that matters, every other approval system represents ideas that are false, superficial, and inauthentic.(1 Cor 4:3-5) We can never be an authentic community of God’s people when we are concerned about our reputation. Concern for reputation is a form of idolatry. The game is only real in the realm of earthly values, because there is nothing hidden from God. We can’t tip the scales in our favor, gloss over our weak-spots or over-emphasize our strengths. He sees it all just as it really is. Authentic communities strive to stop playing the game between God and themselves (view of Self), but also between one another (view of Others). Authentic communities are counter-cultural, intentionally admitting weaknesses, being open with struggles, doubts, insecurities, sins, and actively resisting the temptation to measure people by worldly comparisons.

Authentic Communities:

- Know how to deal with sin properly
- Have a God eye view of Self that recognizes differences but not distinctions
- Adopts a God’s eye view of Others not measuring by degrees of righteousness or worldly success
- Adopts a transformation-is-always-possible-though-the-power-of-the-spirit perspective of every situation / person
- Values growth more than performance
- Is blind to race, gender, class, education, wealth, etc.

Faith

The term faith in the phrase “Authentic Faith Community” expresses our trust in God’s ongoing role within the congregation. We are people of faith that rely upon God’s provision of resources, blessings, gifts, and purpose. We seek his will in decisions. We walk with courage into situations that appear risky from a pragmatic business perspective. We trust that God, through the Holy Spirit is constantly at work in the hearts and minds of people to the extent that they allow him. We allow our faith to assure our hope that God will fulfill his promises. Being a community of faith allows us to “never be lacking in zeal...joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” (Rom 12:11-12) Our reliance upon God is expressed in our dedication to prayer and pursuit of God’s will for us.

Community

The word “community” expresses that our relationship with one another in the congregation is like a family. We are much more than an organization, social club or community service effort. We are brothers and sisters. Friends who walk side by side through life’s ups-and-downs. We resist our impulse to be independent, self-sufficient and submit to each other out of reverence to Christ. We bear one another’s burdens physically, emotionally, and financially. We rejoice with those who are rejoicing and grieve with those who are grieving. All the while, we recognize that pain and suffering serve a higher purpose of transformation. (Eph 1-6)

Discussion:

1. After reading these descriptions, describe what a visitor might see/hear/experience in such a congregation.
2. Which of these three descriptive words do you find the most challenging? Why?
3. What ideas / experiences make being authentic challenging?
4. What reasons are there for pursuing an AUTHENTIC community vs. just a community?
5. How can a congregation deal with sin in healthy vs. unhealthy ways?
6. How does faith shape the life of a congregation differently than an individual?
7. What are some concrete practical ways that we can support an Authentic Faith Community culture within the church?