

A Religious Foundation for Maple Grove United Church: Principles to Build On

I **GOLDEN RULE CHRISTIANS**

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and . . . love your neighbour as yourself;”
or the short version:

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

Christians who follow the Golden Rule aim for the ‘Good Life:’

- 1 Care for relationships: family, friends, neighbours, congregation;
- 2 Doing good deeds;
- 3 Looking for opportunities to provide care and comfort for people in need.

As individuals our biggest concerns include

stress in family life
caring for partners and children
the demands of our jobs and the challenge to balance work and family life.
the excesses of materialism
the well being of our families.

“Love your neighbour” means welcoming newcomers and being a good neighbour; it means investing in relationships:

Being open and vulnerable
Working through difficulties
Being there during the hard times.

“Love your neighbour” means building relationships on honesty, openness and caring.

Our faith gives us principles to make ethical decisions at work. We may not talk much about religion, but we try to put Christian practices to work in economic and civic activities.

We believe in a loving God who protects and comforts, who is most present in times of difficulty. We see God working good even in the midst of sorrow.

II **A GOLDEN RULE CHURCH**

In our church, I see us working hard to be a ‘Golden Rule church’, living out a ‘Golden Rule’ morality and sense of compassion for those in need.

Step 1: WORSHIP

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”

We gather for worship to deepen our love for God, to raise our souls in praise of God and to increase our knowledge of God through a clearer understanding and familiarity with scripture.

HOW THAT PLAYS OUT IN OUR CONGREGATIONAL LIFE:

As God parents us, and we understand that relationship through the life of Christ, our faith is inextricably linked to the role of parent and child. Our commitment to the religious formation of children and youth, particularly through Sunday School and Confirmation, is a fulfilment of our obligation to the world.

We foster spirituality through prayer and opportunities for learning more about our faith.

Step 2: SERVICE

“Love your neighbour as yourself.”

What defines us as Christians, what makes us recognizable as members of Maple Grove United Church is our behaviour in the world. When we gather to praise God we call that a ‘WORSHIP SERVICE’. Once we gather to worship, we experience the call to serve the world. Service to others is our mission, our calling, our mandate.

HOW THAT PLAYS OUT IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE:

Through our church we are able to live out the golden rule in the wider world. We have done our part to alleviate suffering through our gifts to the Mission and Service Fund, and to our Outreach projects.

Step 3: HOSPITALITY

Romans 15.7: “Welcome one another . . . as Christ has welcomed you.”

In all that we do, we try to be a place where people care for each other and reach out to strangers.

We seek to practice hospitality. This is the primary motif for our church. If we are hospitable, people are free to join us for worship and/or service. Hospitality is biblical; it recurs as a motif for the people of Israel in their relationships with strangers and foreigners throughout the Old Testament. When the people of Israel practice hospitality, God is able to do great things. (For example, the foreigner Ruth is welcomed into the family and becomes the great grandmother of David) Jesus spends much of his life receiving or extending hospitality. (For example, Jesus turns water into wine to improve a wedding party; Jesus receives hospitality from Mary and Martha; Jesus hosts the Last Supper).

HOW THAT PLAYS OUT IN CONGREGATIONAL LIFE:

For those who have not been drawn to a community of faith, we extend the hand of fellowship, hoping that they too will join us to become Golden Rule Christians.

Christ's imperative to love one another challenges us to be tolerant of diversity. This tolerance has led to an opening of relationships with members of other faith communities.

Our building has its own mission of service to the community, demonstrating our love of God by serving community groups.

CONCLUSION:

The litmus test for any proposal for transformation of our church:

DOES IT ENHANCE OUR WORSHIP?
DOES IT ENABLE US TO SERVE OTHERS BETTER?
IS IT GOING TO IMPROVE OUR HOSPITALITY?

Personal Reflection:

I think we do a pretty good job of worshipping and serving, but I believe that our ability to extend hospitality is hindered most by our building.

Barriers to hospitality (mentioned by many):

- stairs
- inadequate sound system
- poor lighting
- secretary's office hard to find
- lack of a cosy place for meeting
- unacceptable kitchen facilities (to provide food safely)
- tired washrooms