

Galileo Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

June 2016 • Mansfield, Texas

Missional Priorities

Galileo Church's Mission: Why Do We Exist?

Galileo Church seeks and shelters spiritual refugees, rallies spiritual health for all who come, and fortifies every tender soul with strength to follow Jesus into a life of world-changing service.

“Spiritual refugees” are any for whom church has become boring, irrelevant, exclusive or even painful, especially LGBTQ+ neighbors and those who love them. Millennials (born 1980-2000) are Galileo's particular focus, and all are welcome.

“A bruised reed [we] will not break,
and a dimly burning wick [we] will not quench;
[we] will faithfully bring forth justice.” (Isaiah 42:3, modified)

Galileo Church's Mission: What Do We Do?

In our life together we have found many ways to “follow Jesus into a life of world-changing service.” Broadly, we remember the words of the prophet:

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

But some of those ways draw out our best gifts, inspire our deepest passion, and challenge us to reach for heights that require and testify to God's ongoing presence among us. We have identified these as our Missional Priorities, and are committed to using these priorities to lend direction to our future life together. We believe God is calling and equipping Galileo Church to:

1. Do **justice** for LGBTQ+ people.
2. Be **kind** to people with mental illness or in emotional distress, and offer welcome to the non-neurotypical.
3. Make **beauty** for our God-Who-Is-Beautiful.
4. Do **relationship** for real, no bullshit, ever.

It is our intention to sort out communal opportunities for service, collaboration, invention, and usefulness according to whether they help us accomplish one or more of our Missional Priorities. We encourage individuals in our church to serve in ways that are outside our Missional Priorities.

Galileo Church's Mission: What Have We Done, for example?

Our Missional Priorities have grown out of experiences we've shared in our life together so far. For example:

1. Do **justice** for LGBTQ+ neighbors: We adopted the Pride flag for use in worship and public appearances, including Mansfield's Pickle Palooza parade; we walked in Tarrant County's Pride parade and hosted a booth there; we sent co-conspirators to the Reformation Project training event in Washington, DC; we gained recognition as an open-and-affirming congregation with the GLAD Alliance of Disciples of Christ; we have a presence on Gay Christian Network and gaychurch.org; we diversified our leadership team and staff to include non-hetero people.
2. Be **kind** to people with mental illness or in emotional distress, and offer welcome to the non-neurotypical: We have found, perhaps by adopting a non-judgmental stance toward LGBTQ+ people, that our church is characterized by neurodiversity. In other words, individuals and families can sense that we are gentle, curious, open-minded, and soft-hearted. In worship, in our G-Groups, and in our ministry to kids, we cheerfully include all the diagnosed and undiagnosed emotional and developmental differences among us. Our servant-leaders have discerned that this is more of an *ethos* than a *project* for Galileo Church – more about *being* rather than *doing*. We are happy to be a collection of friends helping each other get comfortable in our own quirky skins.
3. Make **beauty** for our God-Who-Is-Beautiful: We devote substantial resources to planning worship that is intentionally image-based, multi-sensory, narratively coherent, excellent, and participatory; we host concerts with musicians who are exploring spiritual themes; we hosted a panel of musicians to discuss theological aesthetics; we have hosted several "Hymns & Libations" hymn-sings at local restaurants; we have begun G-String, a fledgling fiber arts friendship group; our online presence is curated for aesthetics as well as content.
4. Do **relationship** for real, no bullshit, ever: We host several mid-week micro-groups for adult friendship, meal-sharing, prayer, and study; we encourage (and our leaders model) a way of talking that is the same "in church" as elsewhere; we built a Prayer Wall for the sharing of intercessory prayer; we have a Facebook Group that allows a running conversation about real life; we hosted a forum on Soul Repair in order to better understand and care for returning veterans; we heard from Jerry Moore, abbot of the Epworth intentional communities; we send our kids to camp and conference several times a year; we hold 24-hour retreats for adults to intensify relationship; we celebrate life events with parties; we include kids in most everything we do, sometimes tailoring parties to their interests; we throw a lot of parties; we cultivate a wide vocabulary of inclusion for all who come and state God's welcome for all explicitly every week in worship.

Galileo Church's Mission: Biblical-Theological Rationale, and Resources

Our Missional Priorities have strong support from the life and work of Jesus.

1. Do **justice** for LGBTQ+ people: We remember that Jesus sought out people who were ostracized and oppressed. He was especially compassionate toward those whose differences distanced them from religious institutions and family life. He critiqued the religious establishment for exclusionary practices. He valued individuals as he found them, often naming them “son” or “daughter” as a sign of familial welcome. Just as his presence embodied “God-With-Us,” so his daily ministry exemplified “God-For-Us.” He called people into his Kingdom-of-God vision irrespective of their societal acceptability as colleagues and friends.

Realizing that LGBTQ inclusion is a complex ethical question, and believing firmly that the resolution of that complexity supports full inclusion, we continue our own study of the biblical-theological warrants for inclusion. We recommend the following resources for further study:

Gushee, David. *Ending the Teaching of Contempt Against the Church’s Sexual Minorities*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2o3ZGwzZvk>

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Scripture & Discernment: Decision-Making in the Church*.

Johnson, William Stacy. *A Time to Embrace: Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics*.

Price, Reynolds. *A Serious Way of Wondering: The Ethics of Jesus Imagined*.

Vines, Matthew. *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*.

While there are many oppressive systems and personal bigotries that are exposed and excised by God’s reign, this is the specific area of injustice to which Galileo Church has been called. So we believe, and so we do justice for LGBTQ+ people.

2. Be **kind** to people with mental illness or in emotional distress, and offer welcome to the non-neurotypical: We remember that Jesus showed compassion to people who exhibited differences that were cause for ostracism and fear in his culture (as in ours). He was not afraid of the persons he encountered in all their diversity. He blessed the sadness and longing of those who were especially sensitive to the world’s brokenness (Matthew 5:3-6). He restored to health those for whom mental illness presented a barrier to relationship (Mark 5:1-20). He praised children and urged that his followers adopt childlike qualities – perhaps including the purity of heart exhibited by some with developmental delays (Mark 10:13-14).
3. Do **beauty** for our God-Who-Is-Beautiful: We remember that Jesus found beauty in simple things: the lilies of the field, the birds of the air. He enjoyed partaking of the world’s gifts with his senses, labeled by some as a “glutton and a drunkard” for the pleasure he took. He harshly critiqued, however, beauty for the sake of covering up emptiness or even ugliness.

Jesus inherited worship practices from his ancestors in faith, who knew that God is the aesthetic standard by which all other beauty is measured. They wove and embroidered, sanded and smelted, wrote and sang, danced and played, in order to

present beautiful worship to their Creator. Jesus participated in the memorization and singing of hymnic psalms that were handed down from generation to generation, reappropriating the traditions of his fathers and mothers in faith to fit his new context.

Early followers of Jesus shunned gaudy displays of wealth and adornment, preferring simplicity as a demonstration of their humility before God. They continued worship practices that encouraged the offering of simple, beautiful gifts to honor God. It was assumed that any and all would be able to participate in the offering of worship to God On High, with reverence but without restriction on participation of all who came.

We believe that God enjoys our best efforts to re-create and participate in the beauty that begins and ends with God, especially (but not only) in worship. We are exploring the wide range of artistic gifts that help us honor God with beauty, believing those gifts to come from the Holy Spirit among us. So we believe, and so we do beauty for our God-Who-Is-Beautiful.

4. Do **relationships** for real, no bullshit, ever: We remember that Jesus could smell fakery and superficiality from a mile away. He quickly zeroed in on the core of a person's identity and insisted on talking about their hunger, their sorrows, their failings, their hopes. He relentlessly demanded that people tell him the truth, or acknowledge the truth that he told them, or they could not travel alongside him. He was not always "nice." He often was not polite. But he was always honest, self-disclosing and fully present, with friends, with strangers, and even with his enemies.

The early followers of Jesus, empowered by his living Spirit, learned a frank way of talking that did not always make their communal path smooth. Their leaders frequently exhorted them to temper their tongues in order to more gently love each other. We postulate that "no bullshit" relationships are, in some ways, more difficult than superficial relationships. But we believe that relationship with Jesus and Jesus' family requires the extra effort to be both completely real and completely loving. So we believe, and so we do relationships for real, no bullshit, ever.