



The Main Thing is to Keep the Main Things the Main Things

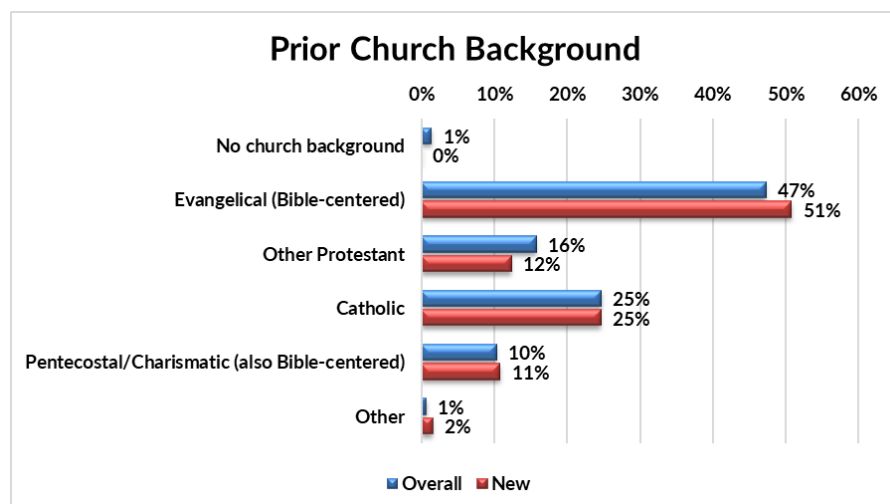
I. INTRO

A. Today and next Sun are the final sermons that I will be sharing with you as the Intentional Interim Pastor since Sept 1, 2019. There are two distinct topics I'd like to cover with you today. Both are the result of my time here...

1. The first has to do with keeping the main things the main thing (some of you will be familiar with this saying). **What are the main things?**
2. The second has to do with CCC's budget.

II. BODY

A. One of the things I have enjoyed the most during my time here is the diverse collection of Christian backgrounds that we enjoy here at CCC. Here is a chart from the online survey from the Fall of 2019...



1. According to this graph, CCC would seem to attract the vast majority of attenders from **churched backgrounds** (99% Overall, 100% New Attenders).

- a. Historically, CCC has been what's referred to as a Transfer Growth church – although we have witnessed several new conversions over the last couple of years.
 - b. Overall, we are a church with diverse Christian faith backgrounds. This is something that I have come to appreciate—and I would even say that this has been God's intention for CCC, that He is the Author of this diversity.
2. When there is significant diversity of **Christian faith backgrounds** it is important that we see and begin to wrestle with the distinction between biblical doctrines that **are essential to the orthodox¹ Christian faith** and those that are **not essential**.
1. As we'll see, when we speak of essential biblical doctrines, we are speaking of doctrines related to the deity of Jesus Christ and what constitutes salvation.
2. Another way to say it is to distinguish between **Primary and Secondary** doctrines or **Closed Fisted and Open-Handed doctrines**. An example or illustration of this would be the difference between international and state boarders...
3. Here is a well-regarded and well accepted description of how we as Christians can talk about what is essential and what is not essential:
In Essentials [we must have] Unity [/Agreement], in Non-Essentials [there is] Liberty, [and] in All Things [we must have] Charity.
4. Where did this statement come from?
 - a. For years many theologians assumed it was Augustine, others thought it was from the Puritan theologian Richard Baxter, but Philip Schaff, the distinguished 19th century church historian, writes that the saying comes from a little-known German Lutheran theologian of the early 17th century, Rupert Meldenius. Schaff describes the saying as, "the watchword of Christian peacemakers."²
 - b. The first known time the phrase occurs was in a tract on Christian unity written around 1627 during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648),³

¹ We believe in and seek to abide by and teach the historic creeds and catechisms.

² *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 7: 650.

³ Considered one of the most destructive conflicts in European history, estimates of military and civilian deaths range from 4.5-8 million, while up to 60% of the population may have died in some
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a bloody time in European history in which religious tensions played a significant role.

- c. The saying has found **great favor** among subsequent writers such as Richard Baxter and has since been adopted as a maxim by several denominations, church networks, as well independent churches.
5. As Christians, there are interpretations of Scripture that are distinctive, just as there are international borders as well as state and territory borders. And like every denomination or network of churches, there are certain doctrinal distinctives. Some denominations or networks will describe themselves “big tent,” meaning that they provide latitude on the secondary doctrines of the Christian faith.
 6. So, what are the essentials, or primary, or closed handed doctrines of the Christian faith?
 - a. John MacArthur summarizes it well in what he calls “**the drivetrain of the gospel.**” Here’s how he describes the essentials of the Christian faith: “**The belief in a Triune God, [which includes the] deity of Christ, deity of the Holy Spirit, [and the] deity of God the Father; the virgin birth, the sinless life of Christ, substitutionary atonement, [a] literal resurrection, salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.**” [If you don’t believe these essential doctrines, you’re NOT a Christian.]
 - b. I personally disagree with MacArthur on several of his theological conclusions in the non-essentials (as well as the ways and the manner in which he communicates those conclusions), yet this is an outstanding description of the essentials of the Christian faith.
 - c. Let’s take a quick look at the essentials (with representative verses)...
 - 1) **The Trinity** (Mat 29:18) – While the word Trinity or Trinitarian is not mentioned in the Bible, the concept of the Trinity and representations of the Trinity are very clear. One such passage is Matthew 28:19: “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”

areas of Germany. One aspect of the war was three denominations vying for dominance: Roman Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism.

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- 2) **The Virgin Birth** (Gen 3:15; Isaiah 7:14; Lk 1:27) -- The virgin birth of Jesus, which is more accurately labeled the **virginal conception** of Jesus, teaches that Jesus Christ was born apart from the normal process of procreation, and was supernaturally conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The virgin birth is implied in the OT as early as Genesis 3:15, which promised that *"the seed of woman"* would be the victor over Satan and sin and is expressly predicted in Isaiah 7:14: *"Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."*
- 3) **The Sinless Life of Christ** (Heb 7:26) -- The Bible expressly declares that Jesus was sinless. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus was *"holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners"* (Heb. 7:26). Our redemption rests upon Christ's sinless life and (what's called the) substitutionary death of Jesus.
- 4) **Substitutionary Atonement** (2 Cor 5:21) -- According to the Bible, God is holy and perfect holiness is required to be in the presence of God. So, when Jesus Christ came out of heaven and lived a perfect and sinless life and then was crucified, He suffered as a substitute in the place of and on behalf of fallen humanity. Jesus' death made it possible for people who surrender to God's grace to be declared perfectly holy and righteous. It's quite important to keep in mind, it's not our righteousness but that we are **cloaked in the righteousness of Christ** (imputed righteousness vs. imparted righteousness⁴); *"He [God the Father] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him"* (2 Cor 5:21).
- 5) **The literal resurrection of Jesus** (1 Cor 15:14) -- Perhaps no other event in the Bible, is as significant to the Christian faith as the literal resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This historical event is what separates the Christian faith from all others. *"And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain"* (1 Corinthians 15:14)

⁴ "Resume Righteousness."

6) **Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.** We are all sinners separated from God and deserving of eternal punishment for our sin. Jesus' death on the cross paid for the sins of humankind and provides access to heaven and an eternal relationship with God as we surrender to His supreme act of love and sacrifice. This is grace, and it is most definitely undeserved favor. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast"* (Ephesians 2:8-9). There is nothing we can do to earn God's favor or gain access to heaven apart from His grace.

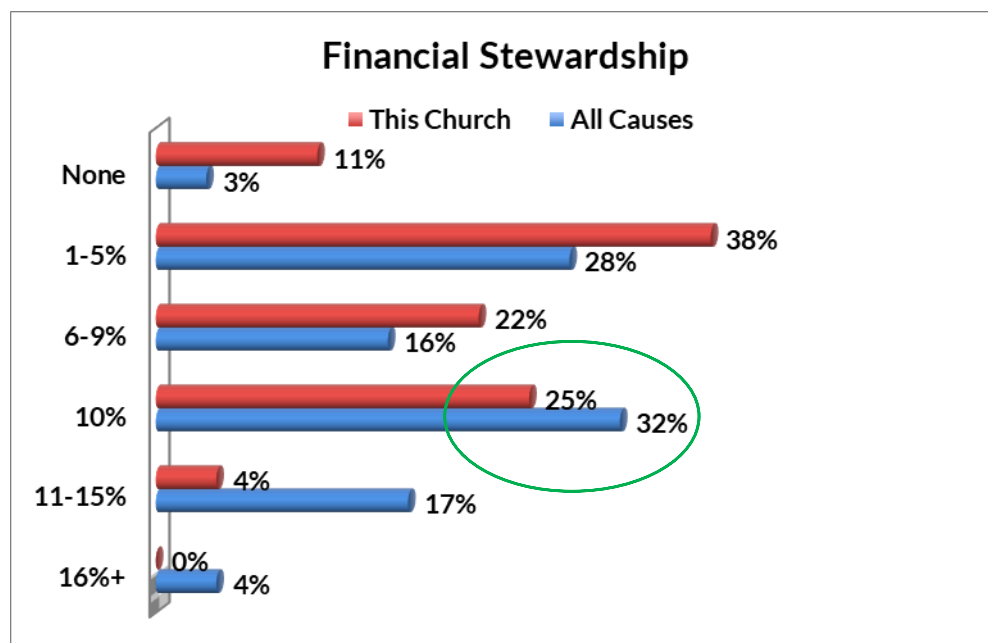
"You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary." — Jonathan Edwards

7. **So, what about non-essentials?** This is where liberty should be embraced within the Church. Again, the main thing is to keep the main things the main thing. What would be some doctrinal or theological issues where two Christians (or churches, or denominations) may differ?
 - a. There are various views on **eschatology** (views on the end times or last things). Is Jesus coming back before, during, or after the Great Tribulation?
 - b. There are various views on **ecclesiology** (views on how to do church, including governance, liturgy (rituals), and baptism).
 - c. There are various views on **charismatics vs. non-charismatics** (or, cessationists vs. continuationists).
 - d. There are differing views on **Creation**, including old earth creationists and young earth creationists.
 - e. The **roles of males and females in the home, in the church, and in society** (or complementarian vs. egalitarian).
8. Good and godly people have various views on these and other secondary doctrines based on their interpretation of Scripture.
 - a. It would be unhelpful and unwise to separate over these secondary issues. Why?
 - b. Because humble, studied, thoughtful, and prayerful dialogue regarding these secondary issues will provoke and encourage stronger **biblical literacy** throughout an individual church.

- c. Some are, no doubt, given to more studious endeavors within a church but all should aspire to know and have a working knowledge of the basic biblical doctrines—especially the essentials, but also some of the more controversial secondary doctrines of the Christian faith.

B. There is one more topic that I'd like to address today, and that topic is **financial stewardship**.

1. The first thing I would say is that this is the **most generous church** that I have ever had the privilege of serving. You are extraordinarily generous with your time, energy, and resources. I have been regularly astounded by the generosity of this church.
2. Having said that, our current budget of \$600,000 a year is about half of what it will need to be going forward.
3. The various views of **biblical financial stewardship** is another secondary doctrinal issue.
4. Let's look at another chart from the 2019 diagnostic report (146 survey respondents)...



5. The key metric of this chart, in my opinion, is that only 25% of the survey respondents give 10% of their income to CCC and only 32% give 10% of their income to all causes. (67% don't tithe to CCC)

6. Here's what this chart is saying: As a church, our generosity for special needs is greater than our generosity in consistent giving.
7. One of my parting admonitions to those of you who consider CCC to be your home church – that the 25% of people who give 10% of their income to CCC needs to double to 50%. So, if you're part of the 67% who don't tithe to CCC I'd like to invite you to pray about increasing your giving.
8. We do have a **position paper** on the secondary doctrine of financial stewardship, which distinguishes between a tithe (meaning 10%) and offerings.
 - a. In a nutshell, we understand Scripture to say that a tithe of our income goes to the "storehouse." *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this"* (Malachi 3:10).
 - b. In contemporary language, we would see the storehouse as the **general budget** of the church God has called us to be a part of.
 - c. Here's what I and the elders would like you to prayerfully consider: Joyfully giving 10% of your household income to CCC's general budget – and viewing all other giving, whether it be to missions, benevolence, as well as all other causes to be offerings over and above the tithe.
 - d. If you simply and honestly are not able to give 10% at this time, that you will make it your aim to increase your giving to **at least 10%** over the next few years.
 - e. We have a **Position Paper** that unpacks our theological understanding of financial stewardship. If you'd like to see that, please let our office know and we'll send that out to you.

III. CONCLUSION/COMMUNION

Community Group and/or Personal Reflection Questions

1. Have you ever heard of a church distinguishing between essential doctrines and secondary doctrines before?
2. List some reasons why this is a good idea...
3. The essential biblical doctrines are tied to the deity of Jesus Christ and what constitutes salvation. What do you think makes these “essential”?
4. Why is it important that “liberty” be practiced regarding non-essential (or secondary) doctrines?
5. What might be some guidelines for having a dialogue between two people who disagree on the non-essentials?
6. Is the distinction between a “tithe” and an offering new to you? How about the perspective of the tithe going into the general budget of the church and offerings being over and above the tithe?