

Introduction to the Arlington Church of Christ

When you start attending a new church, people naturally have questions. They want to know what kind of a church it will be. Every church has their own “personality” that is determined by the beliefs and actions of it’s members. Some matters are spelled out quite clearly in the Bible, and we have listed some of those in “Our Faith Summary” at the conclusion of this document. Other matters are open to interpretation, and church leaders must make decisions about how they think we should best follow the example of Jesus. While no one can say with absolute certainty what any congregation will do or will become in the future, we would like to share our current thoughts.

A Question of Identity – A People of Restoraton Spirit

The Arlington Church of Christ is an independent congregation that is not affiliated with any denominational organization. That does not mean, however, that this group has no identity with other Christians. There are many important things that the Arlington Church of Christ shares with all who call themselves “Christians.” On specific matters of doctrine and practice, the roots of this congregation are firmly planted in what historians have called the “Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.” This movement started in the United States with the hopes of uniting all Christians. That goal was to be reached by letting go of a wide variety of competing church structures and creeds and returning to (or “restoring”) the simple pattern of the church found in the New Testament. Among the heirs of this movement, church statisticians have identified a group of around 13,000 congregations in the United States that are called “Churches of Christ.” There is a lot of diversity among these churches because they are independent, with no central denominational organization and no formal written creed to impose conformity. However, 75 percent of the churches with more than 85 percent of the members are similar enough that no significant barriers to fellowship exist among them. The Arlington Church of Christ is in this category. On all essential matters of faith and doctrine, it is similar enough to the other Churches of Christ that there should be no barriers to fellowship, although we plan to exercise the freedom given to us by God to try different ways of reaching our community, so we may not be doing the same things that other congregations are doing.

There are some sayings of the movement that speak to the spirit of restoration: “We have no creed but Christ, no rule of faith and practice but the Bible;” “We speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent;” “We are Christians only, but not the only Christians.” Some people view the Restoration Movement as something that was completed almost 200 years ago. We consider the Restoration Movement an on-going process that will need to continue until the Lord returns.

We want all our beliefs to be nothing more or less than what the Bible teaches. That is why we have “no creed but Christ.” By following a simple Biblical pattern of autonomous congregations governed by elders under the authority of Christ, we avoid the layers of hierarchy that many denominations add.

We pray that what you will find at the Arlington church is a group of Christians who are humble enough to confront human limitations. We believe that absolute truth is possible, knowable, and revealed to us through God’s Word, but we do not claim to be perfect in our understanding of God’s absolute truth. We hope you will find us to be the kind of people who are life-long students of the Bible.

Our Immediate History

Arlington Church of Christ had its beginning in 1943. Laurel Avenue Church of Christ had become overcrowded, and its leadership encouraged the formation of a new church in this area, partly to relieve the congestion at Laurel, and partly to strengthen the gospel in Knoxville by establishing another congregation. As a result, a small group with 25 to 30 members started meeting in the old Broadway Theatre, in the 3400 block of Broadway, N.E. This group was known as the Arlington Church of Christ. The church continued to meet in the old theatre, undaunted by any obstacles they encountered. They purchased land for a building on Fairmont Avenue; but this was later disposed of, and a larger tract of land was purchased on the corner of Clearview Avenue and Tecoma Drive. The land on Fairmont Avenue was later sold.

On February 1, 1948, the Arlington congregation rejoiced as they held opening services in Phase 1 of their new building. Phase 1 is what is currently the hallway of older classrooms that connects the auditorium to the hallway of the newest classrooms. By April 1957, the congregation – with a membership totaling approximately 175 – completed Phase 2 of its building program, which is the auditorium we have today. In 1983, the Arlington and Halls congregations merged. The building the Halls congregation used was sold; and with the monetary gain from the two congregations merging, Phase 3 was completed which includes the new classrooms, hallway, and fellowship hall. These three phases of construction have formed the worship place for the Arlington Church of Christ.

We are thankful to God for the faith and love of those who opened the doors of the Arlington Church of Christ on that day in 1943 and for our on-going restoration spirit. We look forward to all that God has planned for the future.

The Mission

All churches seek to glorify God through worship, service, teaching, and evangelism. Each congregation, however, has its own unique mission. Our mission, simply put, is to “connect people to our Lord and one another.” You will find this statement repeated often at the Arlington Church of Christ.

We believe that evangelism is and should continue to be the most central mission of this church. The focus of the church is reaching the “un-churched” (those not claimed by any congregation of any religious group in the area). Closely related is the emphasis on restoring Christians who have dropped out of the existing congregations. Another important focus is on involving Christians who now are only passive spectators.

The Worship Assembly

The first thing that people notice when they attend a new church is the style of its worship assembly. One of the things people are likely to notice about the assembly is that it is celebratory. Life is difficult and people need encouragement. You will not get beat up at our public worship. Rather, you will feel encouraged and challenged to take Jesus with you into your world (job, marriage, community). The singing will be uplifting and the Bible lesson clear and practical.

We offer Bible classes for all ages on Sunday morning. This is a great time to dive deeper into the Word of God. We highly encourage our new members to be involved in a home church that meets the second Sunday night of each month. On Wednesday nights we have Bible classes for all ages as well. At various times throughout the year we will offer specialty classes dealing of specific topics from a Biblical perspective. These would include classes on marriage enrichment, parenting (Growing Kids God’s Way curriculum), Divorce Care (a class for those divorced or

separated), Grief Care (a class for those who recently lost loved ones to death), and handling finances (Dave Ramsey classes).

A time of giving is set aside at each worship assembly. This is something the members of Arlington get to do as we give toward the work of the Lord as He has prospered us (2 Corinthians 8:7; 9:7-8). As a visitor, please do not feel obligated to give as the plate is passed.

Some visitors will notice that the atmosphere at the Sunday morning worship assembly at the Arlington Church of Christ is more casual. We hope that those who prefer to dress up when they go to worship assemblies will feel comfortable dressing up or if you prefer to be more casual but modest in their manner of dress, that is fine as well.

When you attend the Arlington Church of Christ you may hear people say "Amen" out loud, as they did in 1 Corinthians 14:16. Some may lift up their hands when they sing or pray (after the pattern of 1 Timothy 2:8). You may see some people who take literally the language of Psalm 47:1, "O clap your hands, all peoples." No one will judge you or look down on you if you do or do not prefer to express your feelings in that way.

At Arlington, we celebrate the risen Savior at each of our assemblies as we break bread together in communion. Whenever the early church of the New Testament met, they took communion so we do likewise (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20). We believe that Jesus is the host of our communion so all are invited to feast and share in the meal that have made Jesus Lord of their lives. We do ask each person to examine themselves before taking of the meal as to have a clean conscious. There might be some unconfessed sin that needs to be repented of. The Lord's Supper is a great time to examine the heart and mind of the worshipper and make things right with God. On the third Sunday night of each month, we gather again in the evening at 6 p.m. During this time of worship, we offer communion again to everyone so as not to exclude or isolate anyone who was unable to partake Sunday morning.

Some churches teach and practice the miraculous working of the Holy Spirit as exhibited through people in the public assembly speaking in tongues and performing miracles of healing. You will not find this practice at this congregation. With that said, we do emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit indwelling the life of each Christian. The power of the Spirit is essential in our daily walk as we are being transformed into the image of Christ.

We hope you will find a joyful atmosphere in our worship assemblies. The essence of worship is to praise God. True authentic worship is a life-changing event. We hope that what you will find at the Arlington Church of Christ is an atmosphere where people can experience the transforming power and presence of God.

Ministry

We believe that many churches are far too clergy-oriented (paid or professional ministers). The New Testament, as we understand it, teaches the priesthood of all believers. We believe that all Christians are ministers. We hope that those who become members of the Arlington Church of Christ will find that this congregation helps them discover their gifts, find appropriate areas of ministry, and become actively involved in the work of the church.

The Arlington Church of Christ is not a place where you can be a passive spectator and feel comfortable about it. You will be encouraged to get involved.

If you believe that God has called all Christians to be ministers and priests; if you seek a "ministry lifestyle" - then the Arlington Church of Christ may be the place for you.

Leadership

Elders are selected by the entire congregation to shepherd (be spiritual guides) to the flock (congregation). Some congregations have a tradition of “lifetime tenure” for elders, but the Bible is silent regarding tenure for elders. The essential difference between “leaders” and “lords” is that the authority of leaders is based on the consent of the members, while the authority of lords is based on their position. These men are servant leaders, not lords. They are “teaching shepherds” and not a self-perpetuating board of decision-makers. When additional elders are selected, they will be selected by the entire congregation and not just by the present elders. It is very important that the leaders have the consent of the members.

Diversity

Some people believe that agreement on issues is the basis of Christian unity. Our understanding, based on Romans 14:1-15:7, is that our common relationship with Jesus is the basis of our unity. We believe, therefore, that we can have unity in our diversity. We can differ without dividing. We can have discussion without having discord. Diversity is not bad. God gave us different gifts (Romans 12:6).

Role of Women

One issue on which Christians differ today involves the role of women in the church. Our understanding is that the Bible teaches a principle of “male spiritual leadership.” We do not have women elders, but believe they have gifts to be used in various ways. In the Arlington Church of Christ, therefore, we expect to see women taking an active role in serving, sharing their faith, and using their God-given talents. Women freely share in adult classes and small groups. The small group time, in particular, is a place for all to share together in the study of God’s Word and in prayer for one another.

You will not find women elders and preachers in the Arlington Church of Christ. But what you will find is a church where women have meaningful roles where they can use their God given talents to serve.

Instrumental Music

One of the ways we praise our God together in corporate and private times of worship and devotion is through the medium of song. The Arlington Church of Christ does not use instruments in our worship assembly. We have chosen to use our voices to praise Him, giving an offering from the heart. A common question from those visiting a non-instrumental church of Christ is why we sing without instruments. Many think this a bit strange and wonder where this idea comes from.

Surprising to many people is the fact that the early church did not sing with instruments. In fact, instruments were not used in Christian churches until the later Middle Ages (for at least the first five hundred years and continuing predominately for most of the next millennium). It just was never thought that instruments were needed to accompany Christian worship, whether it was in a small house church of the first century or in larger church buildings of the centuries to follow. Due to the associations of musical instruments with immorality in the pagan world, the church fathers did not view them favorably and were very slow to be accepted within churches.

Even today, Orthodox Jews, who follow the tradition of the synagogue, along with millions of Russian Orthodox and Eastern Orthodox fellowships do not use instruments like the early church. In fact, the music of the early church was so distinctly non-instrumental that it became referred to as *a cappella* which means “in the manner of the church”.

The early church was not focused on the beauty, style, or beat of its music. They were focused on the words being sung from the heart and being filled with the spirit. But today, for us to settle for simple antiphonal refrains would be boring or unmoving. Perhaps we need to do a heart check (both those in non-instrumental churches and instrumental churches). Worship is not about us, about being entertained, or about our favorite type of music. It is about God.

Some of us take an “anti-instrumental” position based on our conscience, believing the use of instruments to be a sin. Others take a “non-instrumental” position based on their judgment, believing the use of instruments is just not necessary to the kind of worship God seeks. Others have a “pro-instrumental” position and would not mind in the least if we used instruments in our worship assembly. In spite of this diversity, however, we have managed to work together. Those who insist on using instrumental music in the worship assemblies have left us and formed their own fellowship of congregations.

The Arlington Church of Christ has members who hold different views on this topic, but if you are looking for a congregation that uses instrumental music in the worship assemblies, you will not find it here. You may be surprised, however, at how beautiful acappella singing (using our voices only) sounds.

Fellowship

Christians also differ on how we should view those with whom we differ. Some use the King James Version of Amos 3:3 to prove that we must agree on issues in order to walk together. Other translations, however, ask “How can two walk together unless they have agreed to do it?” All that two have to agree on in order to walk together is that they want to walk together. “Fellowship” in the New Testament means sharing, not approval. Fellowship in an activity implies approval of that activity, but it does not imply approval of the people with whom we share in that activity. Christians are not supposed to be in the business of approving or disapproving. That is God’s role, not ours.

Some Christians insist that the only saved people in all the world are those who agree with them on all issues that they define as being essential. You will not find that teaching in the Arlington Church of Christ.

Some Christians act as though doctrines and practices taught in the Bible do not really matter. They insist on judging that others are saved in spite of what we see as serious errors in what they teach and practice. You will also not find this teaching in this congregation.

We hope that what you will find in the Arlington Church of Christ is a group of Christians who teach the Bible as they understand it and expect to continually find deeper truths. We desire to teach the Bible plainly in a spirit of love, but who can then leave it up to God to decide who is saved and who is lost.

The pioneers of the Restoration movement used to say, “We do not claim to be the only Christians, but in humility we cherish the hope that we may be Christians only.” That is what we believe.

Church

The members of some churches make the claim that “we are not a denomination.” However, when they define the word “we,” they do so in terms that are clearly denominational. Textbooks on the Sociology of Religion have more technical definitions for the word “denomination,” but most people use that word to mean “a group of people who see themselves as a group that can

be identified by name.” In that sense, it would be very difficult for members of any religious group to argue that “we are not a denomination.”

There are, however, some claims about non-denominational Christianity that we can establish. The New Testament church was not denominational. It is possible for a congregation to be independent and thus not affiliated with any denominational organization at all. In the New Testament the word “church” was applied to a local congregation or to the universal spiritual fellowship of all the saved. Denominationalism affirms that the universal church is made up of all the current denominational organizations. Those of us who advocate a non-denominational approach do not need to deny that we are a group that can be identified by a name. But we can and do deny that man-made church organizations above the level of the local congregation are a part of God’s plan. That is the kind of non-denominational approach that you will find in the Arlington Church of Christ.

There are some other claims that the members of some churches from the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement (1810-1860) like to make (whom our church was highly influenced by). The following are just a few examples: “We have no creed but Christ; no rule of faith and practice except the Bible;” “We speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent;” “We have restored the New Testament Church.” In the Arlington Church of Christ, we believe that these things are more likely to be expressed as our purpose, but not as a claim about what we have achieved. Some people view the Restoration Movement as a product, something that was completed more than 100 years ago. Our view is that the Restoration Movement is an on-going process that will need to continue until the Lord returns. We have a set of shared beliefs, and that is what some people mean by the word “creed.” We want all of our beliefs to be nothing more or less than what the Bible teaches. However, if we confront our human limitations, we must recognize that there is always at least a potential difference between the absolute truth of God’s word and our perception of that truth.

In the Arlington Church of Christ, we pray that you will find Christians who are humble enough to confront their human limitations. We believe that absolute truth is possible, knowable, and revealed in the propositions of ordinary language such as we read in the Bible. But you would not find many people in this congregation who believe that they are perfect in their understanding of God’s absolute truth. Instead, they are the kind of people who are life-long students of the Bible – people who go to the Bible to discover God’s will for their lives and not just to find some way of proving what they already believe. We believe in the transforming power of God’s Spirit at work in each believer. If you are a child of God, you will grow and mature but never fully arrive.

Attitude toward Seekers

You do not have to be perfect in your understanding or in your life in order to get a warm welcome at the Arlington Church of Christ. If that is what it took, those of us who are members would not be welcome. We are people saved by the grace of God, not by our own merit. But we are also people called by God to become more and more like Christ. There is, therefore, a constant tension between openness and the need for growth.

Some churches do not seem to recognize the difference between their church membership directories and “the Lamb’s Book of Life.” At this church, we believe that a list of people who regularly attend our assembly is just a list. Of course, we have our beliefs about what people must do to become Christians. We have our beliefs about how Christians should live. On the one hand, therefore, our purpose is to extend a warm welcome to anyone who wants to share with us in this work. But on the other hand, we believe that we have been called by God to encourage one another, teach and admonish one another, and constantly challenge one another to grow.

The church that we read about in the New Testament included people who had been sexually immoral, both homosexual and heterosexual. It included people who had been alcoholics. It included people who had engaged in all kinds of sinful behavior. Once these individuals encountered Christ, they were welcomed into the church and challenged to change and grow.

Our purpose in the Arlington Church of Christ is to extend that same kind of welcome, but also to communicate that same challenge to change and grow.

Marriage

The Arlington Church of Christ is a family-oriented church. We place a high value on the Christian family. One of our common concerns is the way the duties and the responsibilities of the husband and father have so often been neglected in our modern culture. We do not believe that divorce was a part of God's plan for the family. That does not mean, however, that this church has no place for the never married singles or for those who are single again.

Most Christians agree on what God's will is for those who are single and for those who are married. We agree that pre-marital and extramarital sexual relations are wrong. People who are married should do everything they can to build a strong relationship. Our minister does pre-marital and spiritual counseling to equip and encourage our couples at the Arlington Church of Christ. Prevention is very important. People who are having marital difficulties are encouraged to get whatever help they need to work things out. Therapy is very important and we will refer anyone in need to a local licensed counselor who is a Christian and works from a Biblical frame of reference. Those who are separated should remain celibate or be reconciled.

We believe that Matthew 5:31-33 and Matthew 19:3-9 teach that sexual immorality is grounds for divorce and leaves the innocent party free to marry again. When people divorce for some other reason and marry again, we cannot point them to similar passages that show God's approval for their situation.

There is, however, a lot of diversity among equally qualified and equally faithful Christian scholars on the questions about what to do in regard to people who have divorced for some reason other than sexual immorality and have married someone else. In some churches, such people are required to divorce their present spouse and either remain celibate or be reconciled with their original mate before they can be baptized. Other churches will baptize them without such requirements, but will accept them only as second-class members.

However, under the Law of Moses, a man was not allowed to remarry a woman he had divorced (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). Paul taught that the ability to live a celibate life is a gift that not all people have (1 Corinthians 7:7). If a person cannot remarry the original spouse and does not have the gift to live a celibate life, that would give that person no way to be saved. We do not believe that such people are without hope.

We believe that repentance does not always require restoring everything the way it was. Sometimes that is impossible. But repentance does require a firm resolve to avoid making the same mistakes over and over again.

We hope, therefore, that in the Arlington Church of Christ, those who have divorced and those who have remarried would find a warm welcome, but also would find a church that firmly and plainly teaches God's plan for marriage.

You will not find teaching at this church that approves of divorce for any and every cause. We hope that what you would find is a church that hates divorce, but that loves divorced people.

We hope that in the Arlington Church of Christ you would find a church that focuses on building strong marital relationships and correcting the sins that destroy such relationships, rather than focusing on legal declarations concerning relationships that have already been destroyed.

Expectations of Members

We believe there are some commitments that are important for any member of the body of Christ at Arlington to make. Fulfilling these commitments will help each person to experience fully the community-of-faith relationships that are so important for all of us as we grow to love God and each other.

- That you agree with and are willing to study the essential statements of what we believe as presented in “Our Faith Summary” document.
- Commit to personal spiritual growth through Bible study and prayer.
- Commit to following the Spirit’s lead in your life as your life is added to the Story of God.
- Commit to serving others in the name of Christ and participate in at least one aspect of service ministry.
- Attend and participate in the Sunday morning and/or Sunday evening worship assembly.
- Participate in a Bible class (offered Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights for all ages).
- Commit to being a financial supporter as the Lord has blessed you.
- Commit to living a life of holiness and purity.
- Commit to building bridges to the unsaved.

Conclusion

There are many questions that people have about any new church, and many other issues that could be considered. We have not touched on all the issues or questions that people may ask. One of the implications of the Biblical teaching that we are all ministers is the freedom we have to study the Bible and come to our own conclusions. This document was hopefully able to give you a brief introduction to our church, but feel free to study the Bible and come to your own conclusions about the issues mentioned here.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact the minister or elders for more information. And please come and see for yourself.