



a description

Mission Statement of Believers Church

Our mission in life is to glorify God by seeking to know the Lord Jesus more fully and intimately, to worship Him as He desires, to grow together in love and unity, to instruct and equip the people of God for the work of the ministry and to fulfill the Great Commission given to us by our Lord.

We want to thank you for taking time to visit the ministry in the sub-continent. While there, you will experience and learn of the work of God among some of the neediest people in our generation.

Obviously, there is no better way to learn what is going on in the mission field other than first-hand experience.

It is true, any time we cross cultures there will be some difficulty in adjusting to the new environment—sometimes it can be painful, both physically and emotionally. But it is worth doing for the sake of our Lord, who left the glory of heaven and came to earth for our sake.

That said, we put together this booklet to help you with some basic information that will make your trip easier and more meaningful. Please know a lot of people are praying for you during this trip.

Yours for His sake,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K.P. Yohannan', with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr. K.P. Yohannan
Metropolitan

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History of Believers Church

The Church at large was born out of the obedience of God's people to the Great Commission given by the Lord Jesus to His apostles (Matthew 28:18, Acts 1:8). In AD 52, one of the apostles of Christ, Saint Thomas, came to India to preach the Gospel. He baptized those who believed and established seven churches in the state of Kerala. He then appointed ministers to continue the work he had started. Later, he traveled to the neighboring state of Madras and was martyred for his faith. From that small beginning, we now have 2,000 years of Church history in the Indian sub-continent.

Believers Church, with over 2.3 million members scattered throughout 13 nations, is another proof that what Jesus said is true: "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Believers Church was born out of missions and continues to follow in the footsteps of Saint Thomas in both faith and tradition.

In the early stages of Believers Church, the leaders met for several councils to decide on the faith and order of the church. We did this to avoid the mistakes and pitfalls which have been repeated over and over by so many church-planting movements in history.

As a result, we discovered that for any movement to continue in the orthodox faith, with godliness and stability, there must be: 1. a strong emphasis on God's Word (a systematic teaching of the Word with practical application) 2. a church governance that helps maintain order, discipline, unity and accountability. 3. godly traditions of faith (sacraments) regularly practiced. 4. an all-out commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission.

We are part of the holy catholic (universal, apostolic, orthodox in faith) church and are deeply committed to fulfilling God's call, which is to know Christ and to make Him known.

What We Believe

Today there are over 33,000 denominations worldwide, each with different practices, teachings and traditions. Yet as we individually adhere to the non-negotiable doctrines of Scripture, we remain united in the body of Christ. In the same way, a branch is considered part of the tree as long as it is still connected to the root. We consider Believers Church as part of what the Lord is doing around the world.

It is good to keep in mind that the only command Jesus gave us to obey, and the evidence that we belong to Christ, is *love* (see John 13:34-35).

We as a church adhere to the Spirit-filled, orthodox faith of the Church which has not changed for 2,000 years.

Believers Church accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, 66 books containing all things necessary for salvation, as the supreme and foundational standard of faith. We believe in the inerrancy of the Scripture, that the Bible, Old and New Testaments in the original autographs, is the inspired, infallible Word of God, a complete and final written revelation of God.¹

We believe in all the fundamental doctrines of evangelical Christianity. We believe in one personal, transcendent and holy God, the Creator of all who is eternal and who manifests Himself in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

We believe that Jesus Christ, though fully God, became a human, and that He is the promised Messiah, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, provided for the atonement of our sins by His vicarious death on the cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21; Matthew 5:18; John 16:12–13.

² Deuteronomy 6:4; Matthew 28:19; John 1:1–2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:6.

back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to make intercession for us.³

We believe that after Jesus ascended to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfill His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.⁴

We believe that all people are by nature separated from God and responsible for their own sin but that salvation, redemption and forgiveness are freely offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

We believe that when people repent of their sin and accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, trusting Him to save, they are immediately born again and sealed by the Holy Spirit, their sins are forgiven, and they become the children of God.⁶

We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who indwells, seals and empowers all believers, uniting them into the Body of Christ. We believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit for all believers who ask in faith, enabling them to be witnesses and preach the Gospel in power.⁷ We believe that the truest mark and sign of a spirit-filled life is a life marked by love.

We also believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are for today and should be exercised within the scriptural guidelines for the edification of the body of Christ.⁸ We believe that agape love is more important than all the gifts, and without this love, all exercise of spiritual gifts is worthless.⁹ As a priority,

³ John 1:1; Matthew 1:20–23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 1:3, 10:12; John 16:7–11; Matthew 19:28, 25:31; 2 Timothy 2:8.

⁴ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8, 4:8, 4:31.

⁵ Genesis 3; Romans 3:23, 5:12; 1 John 1:8; Ephesians 2:3–10.

⁶ Ephesians 1:7, 2:1–10; John 1:12.

⁷ John 16:7–15; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; Matthew 28:16–20; Acts 1:8.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 12, 14.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 13.

Believers Church seeks to guide each believer into an intimate walk with Jesus, being conformed into His image.¹⁰

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Body, His Church, and that church governance should be simple rather than bureaucratic. We desire to be led by the Holy Spirit in all the functions and directions for the ministry of the church.¹¹

We believe in the rapture of the Church before the Tribulation and in the second coming of Christ with His saints to rule on the earth. It will be personal and visible. This motivates us to holy living, heartfelt worship, committed service, diligent study of God's Word, Christian fellowship, believers baptism, Holy Communion and mission involvement.¹²

We seek to teach the whole counsel of God's Word in such a way that its message can be applied to an individual's life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.¹³

We believe in the resurrection of the body unto eternal life for the saved and unto eternal punishment for the lost.¹⁴

¹⁰ Romans 8:29; Philippians 2:1-7; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

¹¹ Ephesians 1:22, 4:1-16; 1 Timothy 3:1; Acts 14:23.

¹² Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51-52; Acts 2:38-47; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:2-3; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

¹³ Isaiah 28:13; Acts 20:27; Nehemiah 8:8; Matthew 7:24; James 1:22-24.

¹⁴ Revelation 20; Acts 24:25; John 5:28-29; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17; 1 John 3:2.

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Church Government

In order for any society or nation to function properly, there must be rules, guidelines and disciplines established, along with quality leadership to implement and exemplify these practices. The same is true of the Church. When there is no governance, discipline, organization or systems, eventually things will degenerate into anarchy and chaos (Judges 21:25).

From the Scriptures, we can clearly see that the only form of government God ever endorsed and established was theocracy—a government under the immediate direction and administration of God Himself.

Although God ultimately ruled, He made Moses the first human leader of His people. Whenever a decision needed to be made, Moses asked God and He spoke to him, giving him direction to lead the people. However, Moses was not alone—he had many elders to assist him (Exodus 18:13-27; Numbers 11:16-30).

In the New Testament, we see a revised form of God's established government for the Church. The chain of authority begins with God as the Head of Christ and Christ as the Head of His Body, the Church. Under Christ the Head, there are *episkopos* (ἐπίσκοπος) and *presbuteros* (πρεσβύτερος), (bishops and elders,) who give servant leadership to the Church (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 3:2).

Believers Church is established in accordance with this biblical foundation for church governance.

With this foundation in mind, there were also some very practical reasons that Believers Church needed to be established the way it is. When the Constitution of India was being written after India's independence from England, the government retained the English definition and criteria for what constitutes a church. These criterion have nothing to do with doctrines, but are an assurance to the government that the church will not threaten the peace and unity of the country.

A church established according to the constitutional standard receives some governmental protection and rights. These rights include protection against attacks on church buildings and a quick response when missionaries are mistreated.

Another advantage of following this structure is that all properties, church buildings and Bible colleges cannot be sold or exchanged by an individual, ensuring a very high level of financial integrity. The constitutional church structure simply does not allow for any one person to own any of the assets of Believers Church. Instead, all property belongs to the church as a whole.

The rights gained simply by having a structure that meets the criteria of India's Constitution enable us to do more ministry, outreach and evangelism than ever before, and it is all under the protection of the church.

There are also several other laws in many of the nations where Believers Church operates which could adversely affect the work if they were not followed. For example, one very serious struggle for many independent churches in India is the Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872. This requires that a minister must be ordained and licensed by a bishop from a church that meets the constitutional criteria in order to legally conduct a wedding. Specifically, the bishop must come from a church with the "Constitutional Episcopacy" style of government. You can imagine the dilemma we would have in trying to perform marriages among our 2.3 million believers if none of our 16,000 pastors were licensed!

So, in keeping with the biblical foundation for church governance, as well as abiding by constitutional criteria, Believers Church has an episcopacy church structure, including a council of bishops, many local ministers, and a metropolitan who gives guidance to the ministry. This type of church structure and leadership is very common among evangelical denominations in Asia and has served to strengthen biblical discipleship, accountability and succession into the future.

Our leaders, following the guidance of the Lord, submitting to the relevant laws of the various nations in which we work and looking in to the future of the ministry, came to this conclusion only after much prayer.

Practices of Believers Church

As you go to our various ministry sites, you may encounter practices, protocols and dress codes that are a little different from what you are accustomed to. Some of them are simply cultural; others are biblical practices which may not be emphasized as much in other nations, while others are just matters of practicality. It is important to note that many evangelical churches in Asia share the same or similar church systems and practices as Believers Church.

Dress Code

You will see that our ministers wear a long robe called a cassock. This is a very common uniform in many Eastern evangelical churches. Our ministers have found that their ministry becomes many times more effective when they wear it. Just as soldiers' uniforms are associated with soldiers, in many nations, cassocks are immediately associated with clergy—it is a part of the normal minister's dress.

This practice has proven to be very useful over and over again. It allows our ministers to deal with the government officials and others in authority during times of intense persecution, where previously they were often not even acknowledged. Their uniform gives them a lot of credibility and respect throughout the nations where we work.

Liturgy

One great challenge has always been the number of first-generation believers. Right now, there are over 2.3 million of them in our churches, representing 324 languages in over a dozen nations. There is a lot of room for false teaching, disorder and confusion to seep in. So, we make use of liturgy in some parts of our worship service in order to strengthen the unity and establish these new believers in faith. Liturgy simply means a systematic order of worship.

Believers Church liturgy includes prayers, scripture readings and a confession of the Creed of the church. These serve to bind us all together in common faith. In all services, there is a systematic teaching of God's Word with practical applications.

All of this is not to the exclusion of spontaneous prayer and worship, which we also enthusiastically encourage and teach.

Traditions of Faith

In our church services, you will see that the women wear head coverings as is commanded in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. In the same way, we adhere to the practice of baptism as commanded in Matthew 28:19, and Holy Communion, which is given to us in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. These are all part of the traditions of faith of Believers Church.

The Sign of the Cross

Along with many Eastern evangelical churches in Asia, the members of Believers Church use the Christian sign of the cross to help identify them as followers of Christ as opposed to followers of other faiths. It is also a powerful visible symbol which says, "The Lord Jesus came from heaven to earth, died on the cross for me, a sinner, to take me from the left, representing the kingdom of darkness, and place me on His right side, representing salvation" (see Matthew 25:31-46). Although often associated with Catholicism in the West, this has been the practice of Christians in the East for centuries.

Receiving a Blessing

You may notice that sometimes, when someone meets a bishop, they often lean forward slightly as a sign of respect, and for him to touch them on their forehead or shoulder and bless them. This is a common tradition in the Eastern Church, where respect of those who are older and in spiritual positions is taken very seriously.

Titles

Our ministers are called by many titles, including pastor, vicar, father, bishop, *episkopos* and metropolitan. This in no way means we are Catholic in our faith or practice, but rather, these are common terms for leaders, as understood within the context of church. The term "father" stems from 1 Thessalonians 2:11, where the brothers are seen as spiritual fathers to the congregations they oversee.

Some cite Matthew 23:9 as a reason against this practice, because it says, "Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." However, if this means we should not call any man father, then we cannot address our earthly fathers this way. Moreover, we

freely use the term “teacher,” whether in school or referring to someone as a “teacher of the Word,” yet in the next sentence, Jesus says not to call anyone a teacher either (see Matthew 23:10).

This then must mean, no matter what title we use, such as prophet, apostle, pastor, teacher, minister, etc., no man should take the place of God and His authority in our lives.

As I mentioned earlier, showing respect to those in authority is a very serious matter in the Eastern Church. Although it is common in the West to refer to people by their first name, even addressing senior pastors as “Brother,” this practice can be very confusing to believers in the East.

Please keep these things in mind as you travel.

The Emblem of Believers Church



We want to remain an organism, living and active, being and doing the will of the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. The emblem of Believers Church is a continual reminder of this objective.

The early Church fathers chose the symbol of the cross as a reminder of all that Christ had done for them. Its two bars were already a cosmic symbol from remote antiquity representing the axis between heaven and earth. Their choice had a specific explanation. They wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus, neither His birth nor His youth, neither His teaching nor His service, neither His resurrection nor His reign, nor the gift of the Spirit, but rather His crucifixion and His death.

Richard Hooker, a 16th-century theologian, applauded the fact that the early Church fathers, in spite of heathen scorn at the sufferings of Christ, “chose rather the sign of the cross than any other outward mark, whereby the world might most easily discern always what they were.”¹⁵

The Cross and the Circle

While the circle in the logo represents eternity, the cross is not enclosed or contained within the circle. It goes beyond the circle, implying that the cross is the centrality of our faith and that its significance transcends eternity. It represents the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive work on the cross.¹⁶

¹⁵ Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, chapter IXV 20, “Of the Cross in Baptism.”

¹⁶ Galatians 2:20, 6:14; Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 2:11–16.

So it is the supreme priority of our church to enable God's people to know Jesus more fully and intimately and hunger to become like Him. Thus they will manifest Christ's life as they die to self through the cross and follow in His footsteps.¹⁷

The four emblems within the circle stand for the emphases we have in Believers Church.

Book

The book represents the Word of God.¹⁸ We believe the Bible is the only and absolute authority for our faith and conduct. No tradition, no matter how good it may be, should ever violate the Word of God. The sole authority for the faith and practice of the church is the Bible and nothing else.

Teaching through the Word verse by verse to feed the sheep is emphasized in Believers Church. We give great emphasis and supreme priority on the teaching of God's Word in our worship services and other Bible study gatherings for believers to grow into Christ's likeness.¹⁹

Dove

The dove symbolizes the Holy Spirit.²⁰ We give biblical emphasis to the working of the Holy Spirit as is described in the New Testament. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, no one can live a victorious Christian life; hence, we give biblical emphasis on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit and fruit of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life.

¹⁷ Galatians 2:20, 6:14; 1 Peter 2:21.

¹⁸ Isaiah 40:8, 55:10–11; Matthew 7:24–25; John 20:31; Acts 2:42, 6:4; Galatians 1:8–12; 2 Timothy 3:15–17, 4:2; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 22:18–19.

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 3:1–18.

²⁰ Matthew 3:11; Luke 11:13, 12:12; John 4:24, 7:38–39, 15:26; Acts 1:8, 2, 4:8, 4:31, 8:15, 11:15–16, 13:2–4, 13:9, 13:52, 16:6–7, 19:2–5; Romans 8:1–27; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.

Heart

The heart represents *agape* love. We believe that love is the most important trait of a follower of Christ, without which we have no right to call ourselves Christians. We give priority to teaching on the unity of the Body of Christ and in living out love in practical terms, thus expanding the kingdom of God.²¹

Fish

During the severe persecution of the early Church, Christians used the noncommittal painting of a fish to identify and greet one another, only known by the believers themselves. The *ichthys* (“fish”) was an acronym for *Iesus Christos Theou Huios Soter* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior). But it did not remain the Christian sign because the association between Jesus and the fish was purely acronymic and has no visual significance.

The fish sign in the Believers Church logo is used with its direct connection and link with the mission of the Church as it was told by Christ Himself, “Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” Therefore, we acknowledge our commitment and passion to fulfill the Great Commission—our call from Christ, who is the Head of the Church.²²

Thus, the unique character of Believers Church is expressed in the design of the logo—a people deeply committed to the faith and practice as revealed in the Word.

²¹ John 13:14–17, 13:31–35, 15:12–13; Romans 13:8; 1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13–26; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:10, 3:11–23, 4:7–21.

²² Matthew 28:19; John 4:35–38, 15:27, 20:23; Acts 1:21, 10:42, 16:4, 18:9–10, 20:28; Romans 10:13–15, 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 9:16–17; 2 Corinthians 4:1–5, 5:14–17, 6:3–10; Ephesians 4:11, 6:20; 2 Timothy 4:1–5.

Our Core Values

1. Knowing the Lord Jesus more fully and intimately
2. Being a people of integrity and excellence
3. Living in submission to God's Word
4. Being a people of faith
5. Being a people committed to prayer and worship
6. Having a servant lifestyle
7. Being a people of grace and love
8. Serving sacrificially
9. Being a people with a passion for souls
10. Being a people who work together with the Body of Christ

To get a more detailed understanding of our faith and practices, we recommend you read our book, *Guiding Principles of Believers Church: Who We Are and What We Believe* (205 pages). It offers a comprehensive view of our ministry and is available at our church offices on the mission field.

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