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We Believe in the Local Church

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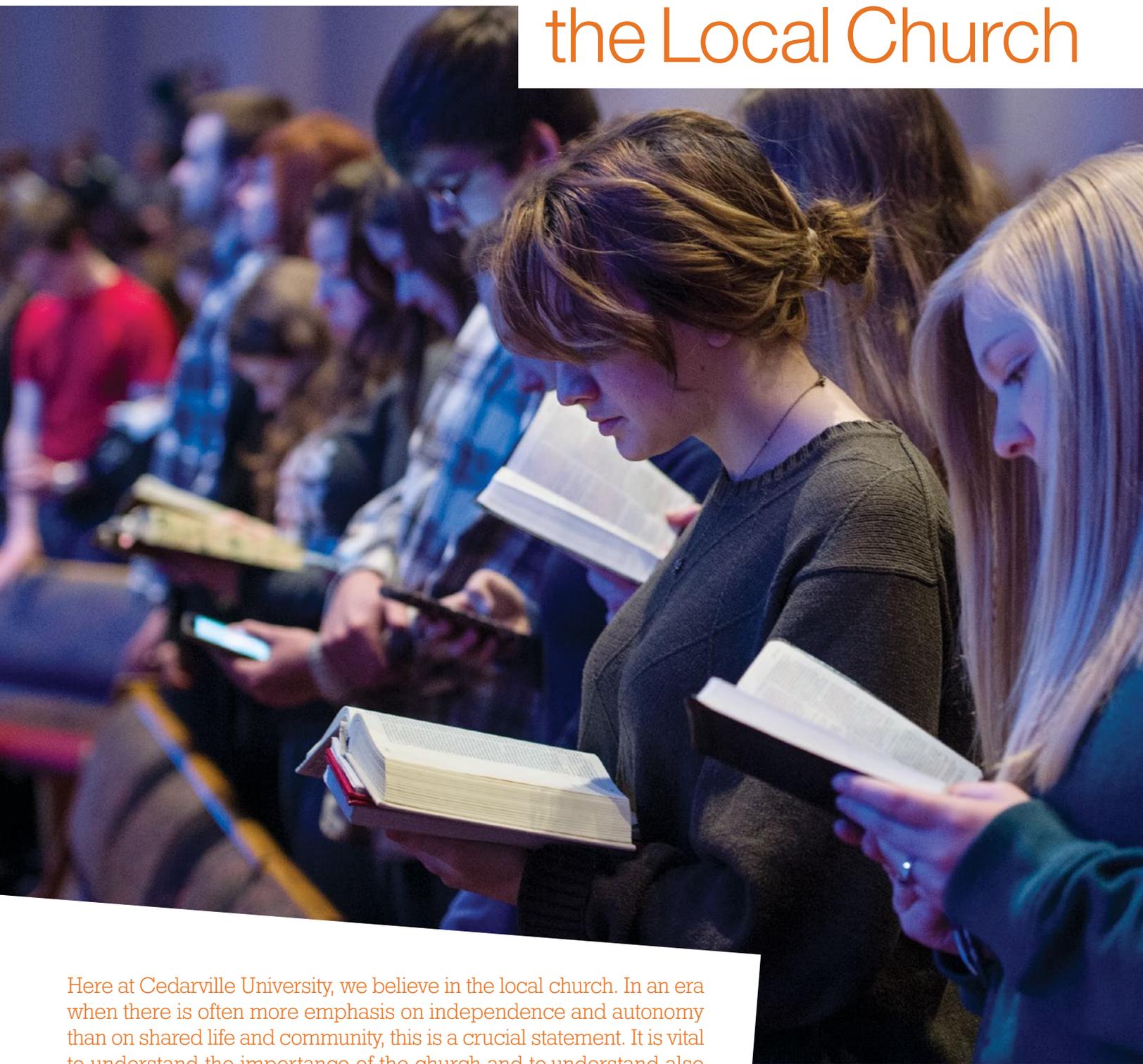
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We Believe in the Local Church



Here at Cedarville University, we believe in the local church. In an era when there is often more emphasis on independence and autonomy than on shared life and community, this is a crucial statement. It is vital to understand the importance of the church and to understand also how we seek to involve and prepare students for lifelong service in the church, regardless of their vocations.

by Jeremy Kimble

CRUCIAL ROLE

The doctrine of the church has not held a priority position compared to other doctrines. The deity of Christ, justification by faith alone, the inerrancy of Scripture, and the atoning work of Christ are just a few examples of issues that are more tightly tethered to the realities of the Gospel. However, in spite of a lesser spotlight, the doctrine of the church is crucial. In fact, one should recognize that this doctrine, often referred to as ecclesiology, is connected to the doctrines of God and salvation and should be factored into our understanding of theology and redemptive history.

The doctrine of the church is part and parcel of (1) the eternal purpose of God in redeeming His fallen human creatures; (2) the Father's mighty work in regard to the exaltation of His humiliated and crucified Son; (3) the eternal divine counsel with regard to the revelation of Himself and His ways; and (4) prophetic Scripture that assigns an important role to the church in the outworking of salvation. As such, while ecclesiology may not be the doctrine that holds highest importance, it is a necessary area of study due to its close connection to other crucial doctrines (e.g., God, salvation).

GLORIOUS MISSION

More practically, we need the local church. She is the bride for whom Christ died (Eph. 5:25–27) and the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–26). The assembling of God's people into local communities is crucial for the oversight of one another's discipleship, mutual exhortation, worship, ministry, and mission. The church is God's plan for seeing the spread of the Gospel to every tribe, tongue, nation, and language (Matt. 16:18–19; 28:18–20).

As a confessional institution, Cedarville maintains the following regarding the doctrine of the church: We believe that the local church is a gathered congregation of believers, associated by covenant, practicing self-governance, and observing the ordinances of believer's baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper. The church is to be committed to the authority of the Word of God in matters of doctrine and practice. God calls certain men to be pastors, providing spiritual leadership for the church. Deacons, likewise, minister to the church body through specific acts of service.

We believe that the universal Church consists of all who have saving faith in Christ. As the body of Christ, the Church is to fulfill His mission of making disciples throughout the world (Matt. 18:15–17; 28:18–20; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:12–28; 7:17; 11:16; Eph. 1:22–23; 2:14–15; 4:11–16; 5:23–32; 1 Tim. 2:12; 3:1–15). This statement

puts us on sure and specific footing as we speak about the importance, nature, and mission of the local church.

STUDENT SERVANTHOOD

Beyond our statement of faith, Cedarville University works intentionally and strategically to train students to be lifelong members and contributors to their local churches. First, students are encouraged to join and minister in a specific local church. This is promoted especially through the Involvement Fair, which offers a number of on- and off-campus ministry opportunities, including many with local churches. For example, a number of students work with either children's or student ministries at churches in the area. Cedarville students also have the opportunity to serve in worship ministries, participate in small groups and, for students studying to go into full-time vocational ministry,

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will preach. Alongside ministry involvement, many churches also offer "associate membership." This allows students to continue as members of their church back home, but also receive the shepherding they need at school.

Cedarville students will continue to receive encouragement to join and minister in a local church from their resident assistants, resident directors, and other leaders on campus. Cedarville values the church, and accountability for church involvement is a priority. Chapel is a platform used to promote the ministry of specific churches. Students are able to hear from top-tier preachers serving as pastors in local churches. This allows students to hear what is going on around the world in terms of the Church, which produces a passion and resolve to be joined with the people of God. A specific example of this can be found in the 9Marks conferences that are hosted on campus each fall. Based on the book, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, this conference gives students (as well as faculty and local pastors) the opportunity to hear from speakers who give hearers strategic ways to foster health in their own churches.

Beyond these avenues for student involvement, Cedarville also provides more strategic opportunities. Global Outreach at Cedarville equips students for lifelong leadership and service through partnerships with local churches, community organizations, and missions. These volunteer ministry opportunities

provide a context where students apply what they learn in chapel and the classroom and make a powerful impact for Christ as they meet real needs in our surrounding communities and the world. Students serve locally through weekly volunteer ministry teams or through short-term mission trips, taken over spring break or in the summer. In all of this, students learn to value the local church, long-term ministry endeavors, and a call to reach the nations with the Gospel.

COMPELLING WITNESS

All students also take the Bible minor, and in Theology 2, the final course in the Bible minor sequence, there is a specific unit on the doctrine of the church. In this section of the class, professors stress the importance of the church as we talk about the nature of the body of Christ, its mission and ministries, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Some Christians mistakenly believe that the church

God made us for community to submit to qualified church leadership, serve one another, and be on mission in the world.

is completely optional in terms of their involvement and membership, but that would be a mistake. We teach that the church is crucial because we exhort one another day after day, so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12-13). God made us for community, to submit to qualified church leadership, to serve one another, and to be on mission in the world. By our love for one another, the church witnesses to the

truth that Jesus is the unique means of salvation for all. As such, we make clear to our students the beauty of the church and the importance of their service for the health of the church.

I am overjoyed to be working on a campus and in a church where I see students valuing the local church. Each Sunday as I gather with God's people, I look around and see a host of college students in our midst. When I pick up my children from their respective classes, I often see Cedarville students working in various ways in those classes. As I have assisted with the student ministry at my church, I see our Cedarville students involved in leading small groups and discipling middle and high school students. I see our students in the choir, orchestra, praise teams, and a number of other areas. And I often hear the testimonies of students who join our church through associate membership so they receive pastoral oversight while they are here on campus. Here at Cedarville University, we believe in the local church, and we expect to see our students graduate and continue to join and be involved with their local churches, where they will serve, spread the Gospel, and glorify God's name in Christian community.

Jeremy Kimble is Assistant Professor of Theology at Cedarville University. He earned his Ph.D. in theological studies.

 To watch Thomas White's chapel message on this topic, visit cedarville.edu/localchurch.

Master of Ministry Goes Online

by Ched Spellman

The Cedarville University seal contains these words: "For the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ." Taking our vision from these words, the School of Biblical and Theological Studies seeks to provide a biblical and theological foundation for our understanding of God, ourselves, and the world.

A recent development in our School resonates with this overall vision. Our one-year Master of Ministry program, which before had only been offered on campus, will now be available completely online as well.

This new online option for the Master of Ministry will be available fall semester 2016.

The M.Min. program equips students to know and love God more deeply through a close reading of the Scriptures and thoughtful reflection on the theological truths found in God's Word. Students in this program dig into the textual features of the biblical literature and examine the way that all Scripture fits together. This involves grappling with what the Bible says, what churches have believed, and how it all fits together.