

## Belonging to Believing

At Church of Ascension, we are seeking to model Jesus' approach to loving and reaching out to others with the message of Christianity. We do that by ensuring that those in our midst will feel a strong sense of belonging prior to believing or behaving as Christians.

Jesus allowed people to belong first by spending time with all kinds of different people, despite their belief or behavior. He ate with inside traitors and call girls, rich corrupt lawyers and marginalized men and women who had left a string of relationships in their path. He also spent time with upright leaders and those who were contributing greatly to society. Yet, whenever folks encountered Jesus, they were constantly being challenged with their beliefs and their behavior. You see, Jesus didn't say, "If you do not believe the right things FIRST, I will not associate with you." Instead, to the outsider, we hear him saying things like, "Come and see, be with me, and remain in me." Jesus allows those who are "not in" to belong and in the midst of that relationship, he challenges our beliefs and our behavior.

As People living in a post-Christian post modern world, we know that the people of our city are longing to belong. We live in a city full of deeply spiritual people. Yet, so many have never been introduced to the Living God. In Doug Coupland's novel *Life after God*, he says, "We are the first generation raised without God. We are creatures with strong religious impulses, yet they have nowhere to flow in this world of malls and tv, kraft dinners and jets. How do we cope with loneliness? Anxiety? The collapse of relationships?"

As Christians, we feel that the people of this great city need the hope of believing in Jesus as the "Way, the Truth, and the Life." That is why we invite people to be a part of what God is doing here whether they "Have their act together" or not. Whether you are a committed believer in Jesus or someone seeking to get answers, know that we believe that Jesus has called us to include all who come into our midst. It is within an understanding of acceptance and belonging that our entire worshipping community will find ourselves being challenged to follow Jesus and His ways as we move from belonging, to believing to behaving in the way that God fashioned us.