



Charter
2023

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to communicate the reason for our existence and unite our collective sense of identity. Being clear on this helps us respond confidently to our critics and keep us accountable for our behavior.



History

In the Spring of 2012, a small group of friends and families were yearning for a healthy and spiritually-safe Christian community. We were passionate about a faith grounded in historic Christianity, but we were also questioning the traditional practices and teachings of the church in light of our commitment to the Way of Jesus. Many of us had been hurt by the institutional church through teachings or burnout, and as “church refugees” we needed a life-giving community to care for our wounds and nurture our faith. We also recognized the world was changing rapidly, and we wanted to wrestle deeply with all the intersections of faith, life, and culture.

As we began to share this idea with others, Rabbi Ari Cartun of Congregation Etz Chayim offered to us the use of their building with a significantly reduced rent schedule. In addition, the church where Pastor Danielle was then employed blessed and commissioned us to plant. For the close friends and families that participated in those early conversations, these two events facilitated and confirmed our calling.

Our opening service was October 14, 2012.



Why do we exist?

Our Mission:

*To Inspire People to **Live The Way of Jesus***

Our Core Values:

The following five words encapsulate the very life-blood of who we are, how we live, and the work that we are striving to accomplish in the world. Distinct from a "statement of faith" or a "doctrinal creed," we do not simply believe in our core values, they shape our very lives. They are, for us, the essence of what it means to be a follower (a disciple) of Jesus ([Matthew 28:16-20](#)).



Love



Reputation



Reconciliation



Rescue



Resurrection

LOVE

Love God, Love People



One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31)

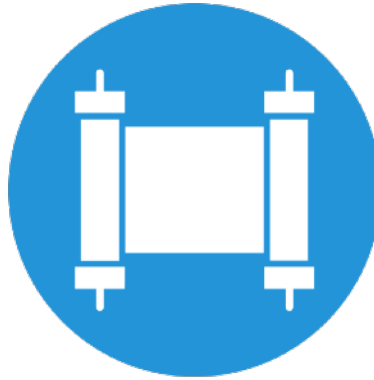
We believe that love of God ([Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#)) and love of neighbor ([Leviticus 19:18](#)) summarize all that is meant to be a follower of Jesus, and what it means to be fully human. We love because God first loved us ([1 John 4:7-21](#)), modeling for us what true, sacrificial love is. We strive to express the fullness of God's love to our communities ([John 13:34-35](#)), our neighbors ([Romans 13:8-10](#)), and even our enemies ([Matthew 5:43-48](#)).

We believe love works ([1 Corinthians 13](#)), love wins ([Romans 8:38-39](#)), and love absolutely changes everything ([1 Peter 4:8](#)).

Being Spark means you will *be loved, be challenged to love, and be transformed by the love of Jesus.*

REPUTATION

Reputation Of God



But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.'" ([Exodus 32:11-13](#))

The central character in the story of our faith journey is God. Like Moses, we care deeply about what others think about God, and the repute that God has in our culture and community. We desire to elevate that reputation in our hearts and our relationships so that the world will know of God's love, grace, and redemption from the beginning all the way to the very end ([Deuteronomy 7:7-9](#); [Psalm 145](#); [Micah 7:18-20](#); [John 17:20-23](#)). And as we heal and restore our image of God, we heal and restore the image we have of ourselves.

We believe God's name and reputation really are great. We believe the world needs to hear of this greatness ([Acts 20:24](#)).

Being Spark means *healing our image of God, discovering a God of great repute, and carrying that reputation to the world ([Acts 1:8](#)).*

RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation Of All



So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. ([2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#))

Our existence consists of three main relationships: our connection with God, our community with one another, and our care of the Creation ([Genesis 1-2](#)). Therefore, in our attitudes and behaviors, we want to heal broken spirits ([Psalm 51](#)), mend broken relationships ([Colossians 3:1-17](#)), create harmony with those with whom we have differences and distinctions, and reconnect the soul to the Creator. We embrace and work towards racial, and cultural reconciliation ([Galatians 3:28](#)), and we advance religious and ideological education between faith communities ([Acts 10:28; 17:17-21](#)).

God is drawing all people to himself, and we are in partnership with that reconciliation in and through our very lives ([Acts 26:29](#)).

Being Spark means becoming both restored and a restorer, healed and a healer, mended and a mender, comforted and a comforter, all in being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ the ultimate reconciler.

RESCUE

Rescue Of The World



“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.” ([Isaiah 61:1-3](#); [Luke 4:18-21](#))

The good news found in the Bible is God's rescue of the world from the sins of poverty, injustice, disease, despair, and oppression. We believe that all are called to bring that rescue plan to reality, to leverage our blessings for the salvation of others. God freed, released, redeemed, and took the Israelites out of Egypt ([Exodus 6:6](#)), and God is doing the same in and through us today by providing food for the hungry ([Deuteronomy 8](#); [Proverbs 14:31](#)), justice for the victim ([Isaiah 30:18](#)), healing for the sick ([Psalm 103:2-4](#)), and a future for the lost ([Micah 6:8](#); [Matthew 25:31-46](#)). This is the salvation of God ([Isaiah 40](#)), the gospel of Jesus ([Matthew 4:23](#)), the religion of Christianity ([James 1:27](#)), and the heartbeat of the human spirit ([Ephesians 2:10](#)).

We believe that rescue can and does happen. We believe there is no greater human identity than to participate in this rescue.

Being Spark means *being rescued* from your "Egypt," and *partnering* with God in working towards *rescuing others* from their "Egyptyts."

RESURRECTION

Resurrection Of The Dead



Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ([1 Peter 1:3-5](#))

The historical resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth transforms everything: our perceptions, our hopes, even our understanding of reality. Ultimately, it means that new life can and does emerge from the grave ([Luke 24:5-6](#)). Everything is found in the resurrection: the love of God, God's reputation, the reconciliation of all peoples, and the rescue of the world. It means that the final and ultimate enemy of God—death and destruction—has been defeated, and can be overcome ([1 Corinthians 15](#)). This new life invitation is extended to all, to be experienced now and in the world to come.

We believe new and renewed life is possible through the resurrection of Jesus. We believe there is no condition or person that is exempt from this possibility.

Being Spark means *participating* in the fullness of that possibility, and *embracing* the living hope that new life in Christ brings.

Our Core Commitments

Our core commitments characterize the expression of our faith and ministry and we strive to weave them into all of our decision making.

Intergenerationality

We are committed to the full welcome and participation of every person of every “age and stage.” Each represented demographic shapes and influences the life of our church and gifts us with the opportunity to know and invest in each other’s lives.

- **We are young and we are old.** Developmentally, we understand that the foundation for a person’s identity, faith, sense of purpose, and worldview are well established in the early years of life. Consistent with the ministry of Jesus, we welcome, respect, and embrace the children in our midst. And, we need the wisdom of those in our community with years of life experience, and we work to ensure their legacy flourishes in the generations after them. Throughout the church’s history the elders of the community shared their wisdom, and the young have renewed our spirits, all for the health and preservation of the church.
- **We are students and professionals.** Every vocational journey is filled with blessings and challenges and we value each step along the way. Pursuing an education, a degree, a paycheck, or a mission are all unique life experiences that greatly inform and shape our church community.
- **We are economically diverse.** Everyone’s participation in our community, regardless of their resources, contribute their gifts, passions, creativity, and resources for the healthy thriving of our church.



Radical Welcome

“Welcome” is an ethic that goes beyond simply being “friendly.” We embrace the full person into our community, regardless of sex, gender, orientation, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, creed, or ability. For as we do, we welcome the image of God.

The Jewish phrase, “audacious hospitality,” speaks to the value of welcoming an egalitarian diversity “at the table,” because every person has insurmountable worth and value. A radical welcome is one that is open to God shaping and forming our community through the diversity of people who comprise our congregation.

Learning & Study

We are people who study as a spiritual discipline and an act of worship. Education for us means actively pursuing and seeking out knowledge, wisdom, and challenge. We are disciplined in listening thoroughly to different perspectives and views, going beneath the surface to better understand because we believe intellectual modesty makes us better followers of Jesus.

Fundamentally, this is all grounded in curiosity, the core posture that exemplifies humility, a desire for knowledge, the absence of fear, and the embrace of this beautiful and mysterious world.

Conversations & Questions

Conversations are the avenues by which we wrestle with ideas and knowledge. Conversations provide the context by which we see more clearly, and understand more fully. Questions emerge from curiosity, doubt, wonder, mystery, and a deep understanding.



Questions are not just welcome, they're *required*. Questions not only open the door for greater insight, they challenge us to be better in how we live as followers of Jesus.

We also believe that conversations and questions are catalysts for world change. Through dialogue we can connect, learn to listen with empathy, and behave more humanely. In other words, we love. We believe we can and must elevate the conversation, promoting a civil discourse that is productive, rather than destructive.

From a justice perspective, pursuing holy conversations also means allowing every voice to have a say, especially those voices that have been silenced and squelched. From a redemptive perspective, loving conversations coupled with questions and listening are the most effective way to influence our culture and society. As such, conversations and questions can often make us uncomfortable. However, rather than allowing this feeling to cause avoidance, we value the maturity that comes with "learning to be comfortable with being uncomfortable." This ethic stretches us, and opens us up to others' stories and perspectives, and grows us in ways not available when we are comfortable.

Contribution

The word "contribution" means to bring one's self with a "tribute" to the King. It is to declare that we are in service ultimately to God in our work and in our life. Regarding involvement with Spark, everyone finds a way to contribute to the efforts and work of our ministries. Contribution betters the community, and deepens one's investment in it. Contribution speaks to, and meets, the human need for purpose and meaning, and is the way in which ideas and values become owned.



Our Name

אור | Light | φως

|spärk| n.

- a small fiery particle thrown off from a fire, alight in ashes, or produced by striking together two hard surfaces such as stone or metal.
- a light produced by a sudden disruptive electrical discharge through the air.
- a trace of a specified quality or intense feeling anything that activates or stimulates; inspiration or catalyst.
- a trace of life or vitality.

|spärk| n.

- a sense of liveliness and excitement.
- emit sparks of fire or electricity to kindle, animate, or stimulate (interest, activity, spirit, etc.).
- to send forth gleams or flashes.

Bible, NRSV

- Then God said, “Let there be light” (אור); and there was light (אור). And God saw that the light (אור) was good; and God separated the light (אור) from the darkness. God called the light (אור) Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)
- “You are the light (φως) of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light (λαμπω) to all in the house. In the same way, let your light (φως) shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16)





We recognize that **“we didn’t start the fire,”** that **we are one spark** of the vast movement of Jesus throughout history, across the world.

We believe **every human has the spark of the divine** within them, and our work seeks to fan that spark into a flame of light and hope.

Our work “sparks” conversations, relationships, transformation, dissonance, and life.

We recognize **the brevity of life,** and our existence is short in comparison to the long and global work God has been doing through The Way of Jesus from the beginning. That reality humbles us, and ensures a proper perspective of ourselves.

We wish to **live as light in the darkness** (Ephesians 5:8; 2 Corinthians 4:6) so as to overcome the darkness (John 1:5).



Mailing Address

PO Box 1481
Palo Alto, CA 94302

Office & Services

(@ Congregation Etz Chayim)
4161 Alma St.
Palo Alto, CA 94306

www.spark.church