



Building a Christians Engaging the Public Square (C.E.P.S.) group in YOUR Church

*For further information, contact Robin Dugall, Pastor and Facilitator of Immanuel Lutheran Church's C.E.P.S. Ministry (rdugall@immanuelloveland.org)
C.E.P.S. website – publicsquarechristians.org*

WHAT IS C.E.P.S.?

“Christians Engaging the Public Square” is a gathering of Jesus’ followers (in our context a “Ministry Team”) at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colorado who are passionate about understanding and speaking to issues that we all face in our rapidly changing world. This team was formed in 2022 as part of the congregation’s overall ministry. The members of this group are a composite of teachers in both parochial and public schools, members of Immanuel and other faith communities, former Business Executives, an Attorney, others in related fields of Commerce, four Christian Pastors, a retired DCE, along with people from other walks of life. The team doesn’t seek to be sectarian, nor does it have any political agendas. C.E.P.S. are not striving to be social activists. Many of the participants in this ministry have had a head start in surveying and speaking to the prevailing cultural pressures, realities, and diverse, secular worldviews that surround us. Overall, C.E.P.S. is dedicated to being “Salt and Light,” (Matthew 5:13-16) difference makers for God’s Kingdom in our world.

WHAT C.E.P.S. DOES

The team is dedicated to researching and discussing pertinent cultural issues, giving people in our church (as well as the others associated with our Team) access to this conversation, equipping them with information regarding the pressing issues of our day, providing resources to back up what you are learning, and giving them encouragement in how to ENGAGE the public square faithfully as a follower of Jesus. That information is available through our meetings, website, events, classes, etc. We are also in partnership with other Christian churches (through Winsome Ministries <https://winsomeministries.churchcenter.com/home>) and other grass roots movements) in Northern Colorado who share our vision of engaging the public square. C.E.P.S. has developed a safe and secure website that highlights specific public square issues and provides free downloadable resources for people to investigate a thoughtful, decisively Christian response to the public square. C.E.P.S. also hosts educational events targeted at not only providing information but action steps in engaging issues that affect our lives and world.

“Christians Engaging the Public Square” is an open ministry team. We welcome other Christian people to contact our team and join our conversations and attend the events that the team facilitates on a regular basis. This is a new ministry that is GROWING, trusting in God’s leadership as we listen to the voice of His Spirit of truth, taking the truth with the love of Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:15) to the world.

ENCOURAGEMENT ON HOW TO BUILD A C.E.P.S. Ministry in YOUR church

We believe the following are some of the key steps we utilized in beginning our C.E.P.S. ministry at Immanuel Lutheran Church. We believe these steps are transferrable to other churches and parachurch contexts, albeit with the warm encouragement to make any modifications that will help accomplish the objective(s) in those locations.

1. We began our C.E.P.S. ministry by coalescing several individuals who had expressed a specific passion for issues related to the public square as well as those who had already been active in engaging the community on a wide variety of pertinent concerns. We initiated informal conversations over meals and social times in our congregation's ministry to gauge people's interest in forming a ministry team that would discuss social issues as well as brainstorm faithful engagement opportunities and strategies.
2. We set a date to have an initial formal meeting to discuss whether a group could be formed around a common vision. During the course of several meetings, we had open discussions regarding issues in the public square that were alarming and those that called for a specific, Christian response. We discussed and concluded that a group could be formed around a common, articulated vision: We are a gathering of Jesus followers who are passionate about understanding and speaking to issues that we all face in our rapidly changing world. We not only want to learn about the cultural challenges, societal changes, and spiritual "evil" that is engulfing our communities but set strategies on how we can together begin to challenge these cultural ideas that are in opposition to a Christian Worldview and God's Word, the Bible.
3. Our story - We began our Christians Engaging the Public Square (C.E.P.S.) ministry with that informal group making a presentation to one of the organizations of the church (in our case it was the "Young at Hearts," Senior's Ministry at Immanuel). There are several transferrable principles that came out of this aspect of our experience in starting our C.E.P.S. ministry.
 - a. First, we encourage such a presentation to be done in several different contexts, e.g., a special one-session or two-session special lecture or a segment of an adult Sunday or Wednesday class that is related to outreach, mission, or addressing social issues.
 - b. In this presentation, accompanied by a handout containing most of the lecture, it is important to establish the Biblical basis for this educational ministry, including that it is God's will and command that his people engage the stewardship he has given us to care for his creation.
 - c. A list of largely local issues to monitor should be included with suggestions for how to engage the public square, and those suggestions lie along a continuum from easy to do challenging to do, with the encouragement of everyone to select at least one that is compatible with his or her comfort level, interest, and sense of God's calling to address.
 - d. A sign-up opportunity should occur at the end of the initial presentation. For example, one of our key leaders in C.E.P.S. was asked to speak on this subject at the Senior's ministry gathering. He concluded his lecture/discussion by saying, "If any of you would like to learn more about what is involved in how God's people can engage in this means of being salt and light to our community, please see our member with the clipboard with a numbered sheet where people can sign their names and supply their contact information." This member then called them and invited them to a meeting with the two of us at his home. We had at least 10-12 people come, learn more, indicate a willingness to continue to meet, and identify at least one way he or she would be interested in engaging the public square.
4. As your team initiates a meeting schedule, we believe that there needs to be a deliberate plan of action to underscore the importance of prayer during every meeting. We purposely include beginning and ending every meeting with prayer for this vital work for the Lord.

- a. We believe it is important to hold regular meetings and begin each meeting with a passage from God’s Word and prayer. Doing so will provide what educators call “an advance organizer,” or an overall perspective, a framework for the meeting, which, together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will keep the Lord’s work in your public square ministry clearly in mind as you meet and carry out your plans. It’s vitally important to seek God’s Word and will to guide your deliberations and actions so your ministry doesn’t devolve into a secular political action group.
 - b. Following the reading of a brief passage of Scripture the meeting should begin with prayer asking the Holy Spirit’s guidance for the meeting. It is good to close the meeting in prayer asking for God’s help to implement our plans in an effective witness for Christ Jesus and that the community, which belongs to him, may prosper—and us with it—wherever he leads us in the public square. Again, feel free to improve the wording of the above in any way you would like.
5. While it is necessary sometimes to engage some policies and people who are partisan, we don’t do so as Democrats or Republicans or any other political party; we do so as the people of Christ whom he has called to seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which he has led us (cf. Jeremiah 29:7), being salt and light pointing to the Light of the world (Matthew 5:13-14), by speaking the truth in love. (Ephesians 4:15).
 6. In the development and initial progression of the building of our C.E.P.S. ministry, not only did individual action take place, but so did corporate action. Shortly after the beginning of our C.E.P.S. ministry, our city council received a request from the LGBTQ+ activists to form a commission on DEI (with an added B [for Belonging]) that would become part of the council’s official services. Several of our C.E.P.S. members attended the meeting at which the council’s consideration of this commission took place, and several of our members spoke to why this proposal was counterproductive and harmful, even destructive, to hurting people who bear God’s image and whom he loves; thus, we urged the council to not approve such a commission. Please contact Robin Dugall (email address above) if you are interested in viewing the documents from this presentation).
 7. We believe that any C.E.P.S. team or ministry be deliberately included as part of your congregation’s education ministry. In a very deliberate manner, we developed our own C.E.P.S. Website (branded to tie into our host congregation’s ministry).
 8. We also began an intentional effort of networking with other church congregations of like mind. Our work is largely with other church congregations and individuals who share our mission and Biblical orientation; we’re glad to talk with all people about what we are doing and why. Our meetings are open to guests from our congregation as well as others who are interested in our process and ministry strategy/objectives. We have developed through ample discussion as a team a list of objectives that we seek to accomplish in any given season of ministry. That list is available to any interested party upon request (email Robin Dugall, address above).
 9. Meeting structure - We structure our meetings to include the following:
 - a. Prayer and Bible reading

- b. Discussion of articles and/or media experiences that individuals have experienced through the week, and open conversation regarding public square issues.
 - c. We then begin our work on team objectives having conversation and deliberate strategic planning in an effort to accomplish our objectives.
 - d. We meet for an hour and a half weekly on Tuesday afternoons (occasionally meeting every other week given people's personal schedules).
 - e. We are careful about extending invitations to this central planning team to our programs so that we do not become sidetracked and lose valuable time arguing with opponents, which would be counterproductive for accomplishing the Lord's calling to and work in our community. At our meetings we often invite special guests to address our team about local, state-wide and national issues. We have hosted Loveland City Council members, Thompson and Poudre School District officials and Board members, leaders from the Winsome Ministry Board, as well as others. We invite them to share their perspectives on the issues they are facing in the public square as well as their personal understanding as Christian people how they see their faith engaging the world at large. Currently, our C.E.P.S. team is having monthly Zoom meetings with a leading State Representative at the Colorado State Legislature who is informing us on upcoming bills and political initiatives that could have an impact on our families, churches and community at large.
10. Our team recommends that a person from the church leadership, a Pastor, or significant staff person/leader act as a facilitator of the C.E.P.S. ministry. That facilitator can also be a catalyst to invite like-minded persons he or she might know, to a group meeting to discuss how to become better informed or educated on these movements in our community and our culture.
11. In short, doing a C.E.P.S. ministry will feel sometimes like "herding cats." There is a plethora of issues to discuss, insights to curate, strategies to develop, intense prayer to be engaged, as well as feelings to allow the surface of any group meeting process. You need to have strong leadership, allow broad discussions on issues that will continue to happen in real time, have members of the team that are inquisitive as well as sufficiently informed on public square issues (being committed to researching topics/cultural challenges), have a willingness to determine consensus around team objectives and strategies of action, and incorporate all members of the team to participate in reaching the objective.
12. Most importantly, people in the team must be committed followers of Jesus and have a passion for His Kingdom, His redemptive and empowering reign in our lives and in our communities. People in your team must be committed to God-honoring relational development, have a passion for God's Word as well as a deep and abiding focus on prayer.

Special Invitation - If you would like to visit us and sit in on one of our meetings to see how all this works, you will be most welcome. Please email Robin Dugall (rdugall@immanuelloveland.org) and ask to join a future meeting. He'd be happy to give you some options for you to visit at one of our upcoming C.E.P.S. meetings.

