

2023

POSITION PAPERS

Word Community Church

WORD
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Introduction

Why Position Papers?

We believe these papers have an essential unity about them: they have to do with administering discipleship, in a known community, by recognized leaders. This includes those who are welcomed (by baptism, members induction), those who are served and disciplined (communion and church discipline), including those who eventually leave or are removed.

It must be kept in mind, however, that these papers are not meant to be a comprehensive exploration of all that one topic might entail (ie, a full exploration of the beauty and glory of communion, for example). Given the church is in a replanting phase, we are defining boundary points that were previously left unclear and unaddressed. The papers then, will necessarily be focused on the limitations of what we believe is and is not permitted according to the Scriptures. We have sought to prepare our papers in this manner.

Purpose

These Position Papers are written to clarify Biblical parameters that reflect commands given by Christ and His apostles for the protection and purity of His church.

Biblical Perspective on Eldership

01



The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7 (ESV)

ELDERSHIP AND BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Biblical discipleship is a commitment to be shaped by the Word. It is to be taught the Word, reproved by the Word, corrected by the Word, and trained in righteousness by the Word. Its aim is Christian maturity ([Colossians 1:28](#)), so that God's people are equipped for every good work ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)), so that their witness serves as lights in the world, a city set on a hill ([Matthew 5:14-16](#); [Philippians 2:15](#)). **Biblical discipleship involves hard "word-work"**.

For this word-work, Christ has given His leaders, to serve, teach, protect, as they live by the Word in service to His people. They have been given as gifts from His heart, and their multi-faceted role to God's people, is described by the many different titles used to refer to them: shepherd, pastor, teacher, overseer, **elder** ([1 Timothy 3](#), [Titus 1](#)).

These are not separate roles given to many different individuals, but rather are different facets of one role that reflect the care and provision Christ has made for His people. For our purposes, we refer to the **office of the elder** as comprising this multi-faceted role. The role of the elders serve as the highest authority in the New Testament church. ([Acts 20:17-35](#), [Hebrews 13:7-17](#)).

Having a defined list of members committed to the church, is what practically allows the church's elders to exercise their calling to shepherd and lead the flock in the caring and intimate way Christ wants.

1 Peter 5:1-3 - Shepherd the flock of God “that is among you.”

There is a specific people whom they live amongst, whom they know, whom they are accountable for, and the extent of the sacrifice they are called to bear in the lives of the people. They live close enough to be a living example that commends Christ to them.

Acts 20:28-31

The Holy Spirit entrusts God’s people to elders who are able to shepherd them in the truth, protect from error, and care for their needs.

Hebrews 13:17

There are a specific group of leaders that Christ expects His people to submit to, and a specific set of people of whom those leaders will give an account to Him.

Church eldership cannot be viewed as a status or board position in the church that is open to anyone. It certainly cannot exist in an atmosphere of nominal Christianity. If a biblical eldership is to function effectively, it requires men who are firmly committed to living out our Lord’s principle of discipleship. It is for men, who have presented themselves as living and holy sacrifices to God and are willing to work hard as slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ. Inherent in this is a willingness to sacrifice self for the sake of others; men who have taken up the cross and are willing to suffer for Christ.

FIVE ATTRIBUTES OF BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

In essence, there are 5 distinguishing attributes of a New Testament Christian eldership that are to be adhered to: pastoral leadership, shared leadership, male leadership, qualified leadership, and servant leadership.¹

Word Community Church takes seriously the New Testament commands for elders to be biblically qualified and to actively pastor the flock of God. The elders of this church are to provide strong leadership, loving pastoral care and church discipline, sound Bible teaching, and humble, sacrificial examples of Christian living. Word Community Church elders are to exhibit these distinguishing marks if they are to be entrusted with the stewardship of God’s possession, which is the church.

1) PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

Elders are to lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the members of the church in sound doctrine. They are also expected to visit and pray for the sick, lead prayers and judge doctrinal issues. In biblical terms, they are to essentially shepherd, oversee, lead and care for the local church.

¹ *Strauch, Alexander. Biblical Eldership – Restoring the Eldership to its Rightful Place in the Church. Lewis and Roth. 2003*

a. Protecting the Flock

An elder must have enough knowledge of the Bible to be able to refute false teachers.

Acts 20:28

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

The essence of Paul’s charge to the elders of the church in Ephesus is this: guard the flock—fierce wolves are coming.

b. Feeding the Flock

An elder must be able to teach, to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

Titus 1:9

“He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Since elders are commanded to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28), part of their shepherding task is to see that the flock is fed God’s Word.

c. Leading the Flock

An elder is an overseer, signifying that they are to supervise and manage the church.

1 Peter 5:1-2

“So I exhort the elders...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.”

Peter combines both shepherding and overseeing when he exhorts the elders to do their duty. Therefore, we can submit to the elders’ overall function as being the pastoral oversight of the local church.

d. Meeting the Flock’s Practical Needs

An elder bears the responsibility for meeting the practical and diverse needs of the flock.

Acts 20:35

“In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he Himself said ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders to care for the weak and needy of the flock. This responsibility includes visiting the sick and comforting the bereaved; praying for all the members; visiting new members; providing counsel for couples who are engaged, married or having an annulment.

e. Hardwork and Sacrifice

For biblical eldership to function effectively, it requires men who are firmly committed to living out our Lord's principles of discipleship.

Romans 12:1

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

R. Paul Stevens sets us on the right track when he writes: A significant ministry in the church and the community can only come by sacrifice.

2) SHARED LEADERSHIP

It is a highly significant but often overlooked fact that our Lord did not appoint one man to lead His church. Jesus Christ gave the church **plurality of leadership** when He personally appointed and trained twelve men.

The apostles made up the first leadership council of the church and jointly led and taught the first Christian community. The New Testament reveals that the shepherding of several of the first churches was committed to a **plurality of elders**.

By definition, the plurality of elders is a collective leadership in which each elder shares equally the position, authority, and responsibility of the office.

First Among Equals – although elders are to act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the church, all elders are not equal in their abilities, experience, biblical knowledge, and giftedness (1 Timothy 5:17).

There will be elders who are particularly gifted leaders and/or teachers that stand out among other elders within the leadership body. As a reference, we can refer to our Lord's dealings with the twelve apostles. Jesus selected and empowered all of them to preach and to heal, but He placed special attention to Peter, James, and John. This can be observed as a principle of "first among equals." Even among the three, Peter stood out as the most prominent. In spite of this, Peter possessed no legal or official rank or title above the other apostles. They were not his subordinates nor was he the "senior pastor" to the apostles. He was approved by the Lord to be simply **first among equals**.

The principle of "first among equals" allows for functional, gift-based diversity within the eldership team without having to establish a superior office over fellow elders.

3) MALE LEADERSHIP

Ephesians 5:24

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church.

A biblical eldership must be an all-male leadership. The central and foremost example of male leadership is found in the person of Jesus Christ. He came into the world as the Son of God and his being male was a theological necessity and was absolutely essential to His person and work.

Jesus chose, trained, and appointed twelve men to be his apostles (Luke 6:13). This choice affirms the creation order as presented in Genesis (Genesis 2:18-25). Likewise, the choice of twelve men by Jesus was in complete obedience and submission to His Father's will. It was a choice based on divine principles and guidance, not on local customs or traditions.

The biblical pattern of male leadership is seen throughout the New Testament. Paul teaches the divine order of the husband-wife relationship (Ephesians 5:22-24), male headship in the family and in the local church (1 Timothy 2:8-3:7). Since the family is the basic social unit and the man is established as the family authority, we should expect that men would become the shepherds (pastors, elders) of the larger church family.

4) QUALIFIED LEADERSHIP

Many churches that are eager to implement biblical eldership make the common mistake of appointing biblically unqualified men. They are unmindful to the biblical requirements for their spiritual leaders and fail to examine candidates for leadership in light of biblical standards.

A biblical eldership requires biblically qualified elders. From the New Testament perspective, any man in the congregation who desires to shepherd the flock and meets the apostolic, biblical requirements for the office can be a pastor elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7). The same applies to those of the office of deaconship (1 Timothy 3:8-10).

The biblical qualifications fall into three broad areas relating to moral and spiritual character, abilities, and Spirit-given motivation.

a. Moral and Spiritual Character

The first, overarching qualification is that of being "above reproach." Each elder is to be the "husband of one wife," – above reproach in his marital and sexual life. This character virtue is the first and specific one itemized in Scripture. This is followed by integrity, self-control, and spiritual maturity. As overseers of the church body, each one must be self-controlled in the use of money, alcohol, and in the exercise of his pastoral authority.

As a model of Christian living, an elder must be spiritually devout, morally above reproach, hospitable, gentle, stable, sound-minded and a lover of good. He must be a spiritually mature, humble, and faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.

b. Abilities

An elder must be able to manage his family household well, provide a model of Christian living for others to follow, and be able to teach and defend the faith.

2 Timothy 3:4-5

He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

The family household is referred to as "little church" by the Puritans. A man's inability to oversee his "little church" disqualifies him to oversee God's church.

1 Peter 5:3

So I exhort the elders among you...be examples to the flock.

The greatest way to encourage and guide people for God is through personal example. It is so important for an elder to be a living imitator of Christ in order to shepherd God's flock in God's way.

Titus 1:9

He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

An elder must firmly adhere to orthodox, historic, biblical teaching. They must be rock-solid pillars of biblical doctrine for "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)."

c. Spirit-given Motivation for the Task

An elder must have a personal desire to love and care for God's people. A true desire to lead the family of God is always Spirit-led. It is the Holy Spirit that places elders as overseers in the church to shepherd the flock of God. It is the Spirit who plants the pastoral desire in one's heart, the compulsion and strength to do the work and the wisdom and appropriate gifts to care for the flock of God. In God's church, it is not man's will that matters but God's will and arrangement that matter.

A biblical eldership is a biblically qualified group of shepherd leaders. A plurality of unqualified elders provides no significant benefit to the local church.

"Better have no elders than the wrong ones." – Jon Zens

5) SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The Gospels show us that the principles of brotherly community, love, humility, and servanthood are at the very heart of Christ's teaching. Thus, New Testament, Christlike elders are to be servant leaders, not rulers or petty, self-serving dictators ([Matthew 20:25-28](#)).

Elders make that choice of living a life of service on behalf of others. They are to sacrifice their time and energy for the good of others. Elders who are loving and serve humbly can genuinely manifest the incomparable life of Jesus Christ to the church and a watching world.

Peter exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock of God willingly and “[not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.](#)” (1 Peter 5:3). He also charges the elders to clothe themselves in humility just as Jesus clothed Himself in humility, “[for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.](#)” (1 Peter 5:5).

The humble-servant character of an elder doesn't imply an absence of authority. As shepherds or stewards of the church, elders have been given the authority to lead and protect the congregation ([Acts 20:28-31](#)). The key is the attitude in which elders exercise that authority. They must never think that they are unaccountable to their fellow brethren or to God.

“True elders do not command the consciences of their brethren but appeal to their brethren to faithfully follow God's Word.” – Alexander Strauch

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

In order to be exposed to the congregation that an elder seeks to serve, he must involve himself in the rhythms and various aspects of church governance. Some of the practical ways of doing so would be to:

- 1 | Create and adapt ministries to serve the brethren and church missions. Preach and teach classes to set spiritual direction.
- 2 | Lead a Life Group(s) as part of administering life and care to the body of Christ. Participate in the preparation and celebration of Sunday worship services (ex. presiding, Lord's table, reading) and congregational prayer activities (ex. Overflow).
- 3 | Initiate and investigate cases for church discipline.

DISQUALIFICATION OF ELDERS

While the church takes every care to qualify and appoint an elder based on biblical standards supported by reasonable judgement, there may be instances whereby an elder may find himself being disqualified.

The grounds for disqualification may vary and should find as their basis failure to adhere to any of the attributes and their implications as described in this document. **Any accusation or complaint raised by a member must be supported by 2-3 witnesses in order to establish the credibility on the burden of proof to a much higher standard.**² It will be the collective role of the eldership to determine the qualification of such complaint or accusation as grounds for possible disqualification. Needless to say, should there be an absence of 2-3 witnesses but the gravity of the complaint or accusation is severe in nature (ie. sexual misconduct, physical abuse, etc.), it will fall upon the elders to determine and establish the burden of proof for such cases. As such, an investigation will be conducted.

Procedures and processes for disqualification will be contained in a separate document.

PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY: ELDERS AND MEMBERS

There is no upper limit given in the New Testament as to the number of elders a church may have. As long as God gives genuine growth to the local church through the addition of new members, then by conviction, He has also provided the raw material of godly men necessary for the proper leadership within the church already. It is thus the duty of the existing leadership base to identify, develop, test, and empower its potential leaders, so that the body can be properly served and cared for.

In the case wherein there are too many people to be served properly by the existing eldership base, then one of two extremes may have taken place:

- I | If there are too few leaders serving genuine Christians in the membership, then the work to train the next group of leaders has not been done.
- II | If there are too many members, underserved by the existing qualified leaders, then the standards of membership have been too low, such that non-Christians have been added into the membership.

There is never a time when God adds to the number of the flock, that He does not expect for them to be cared for.

There is also never a time when the great commission is to be treated as optional, or at odds, with the call to care for the existing body.

This is because the call to “teach all that Christ has commanded”, is given in the same sentence as “go and make disciples.” (Matthew 28:19-20).

² 1 Timothy 5:19-20

CONCLUSION

An eldership patterned after the New Testament model requires qualified elder candidates that meet the qualifications for overseers before they serve (1 Timothy 3:1-7). Selected elders must also be examined by the church (1 Timothy 3:10) and must be publicly installed into office (1 Timothy 5:22). One must be motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work of an elder (Acts 20:28).

And finally, they must be acknowledged, loved, and honored by the church they serve. Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” And in verse 17 that follows, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

In other words, those who are over you in the Lord who minister among you, you should know them, you should love them, you should esteem them for the work which they render. Love them, esteem them, protect them, know them, remember them, follow them, obey them, submit to them and do it all with joy so that they may have joy. Otherwise, their ministry will be unprofitable for you.

Members of a biblically faithful church are to celebrate the leadership, and seek the flourishing, of qualified male eldership. They are gifts of the ascended Christ to serve them, and are a direct expression of Christ’s loving care for his church.

REFERENCES:

Biblical Eldership Resources at www.biblicaleldership.com

Dever, Mark. Nine Marks of a Healthy Church. 3rd Edition. Crossway. 2013.

Strauch, Alexander. Biblical Eldership – Restoring the Eldership to its Rightful Place in the Church. Lewis and Roth. 2003

Biblical Perspective on Membership

02



Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...

MATTHEW 28:19A

We are disciples of Christ.

Having been baptized into the name of the Triune God, we owe our ultimate allegiance to Him alone, who called us out of the darkness of sin, to bring us into His kingdom of righteousness and light.

In full gratitude for the free forgiveness received, and the privilege of being made sons of God, we now offer up all our lives, by the power of God's Spirit, as living sacrifices to Him, which is our spiritual worship.

As disciples, we thus seek to learn, teach, and obey, all that Christ has commanded us, as an ongoing expression of who we now have become — His people. We do this while living in community with each other— learning to love one another, serve one another, pursue each other's good and welfare, knowing that this is what commends the gospel and honors Christ before a watching world.

We do this humbly, because we are justified sinners: knowing that we will continue to sin, even as we have already been forgiven by the grace of justification.

We do this lovingly, as those being sanctified from our sin: knowing that God is making us new, even while we still live with remnants of the old and live in the midst of a fallen world.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

With this grounded approach to discipleship in mind, Word Community is thereby committed to the biblical practice of church membership.

The local church is not an undefined mass of people. It is a particular group of people that has a unique character, mission, and purpose. As the body of Christ, it is the local collection of Christians committed to Christ and to each other.

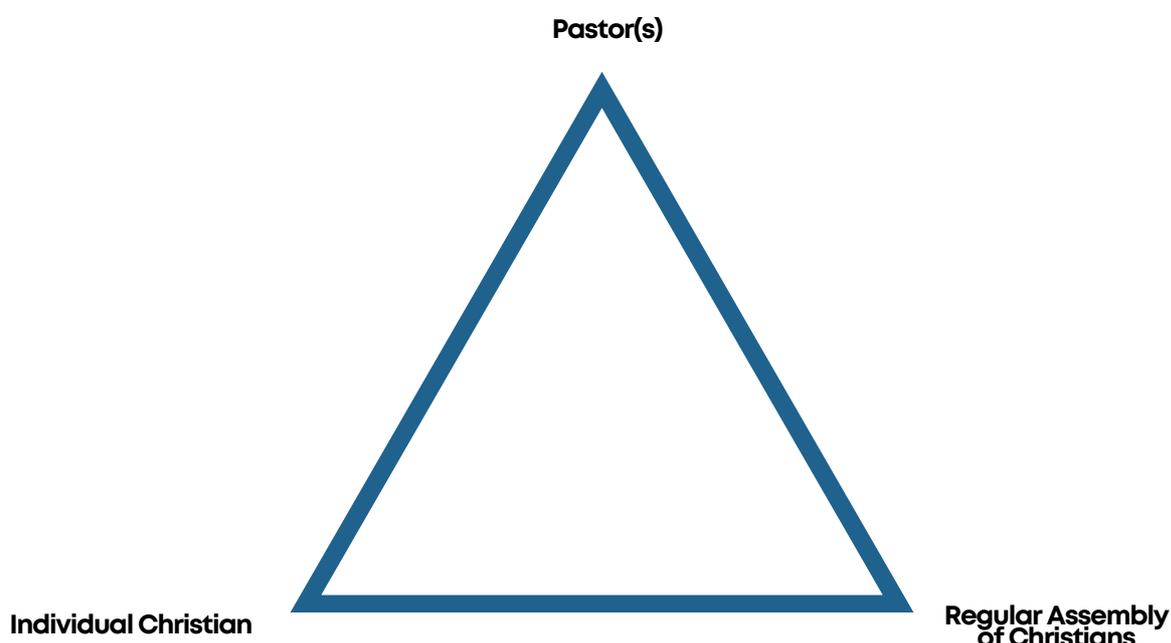
The church has an identity that is to adhere to sound biblical doctrines, from which constitute the life of the church. Thus, those who seek to be part of our local church need to be administered into the body in such a way that ensures conformity to the essence of what our church is built upon.

Church membership is not a human innovation that one can opt to forego, something that is a matter of style or preference. It is actually a biblical tool for the pursuit of true discipleship.³

It is a formal relationship between a local church and a Christian characterized by the church's affirmation and oversight of a Christian's discipleship and the Christian's submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP & DISCIPLESHIP

MEMBERSHIP TRIANGLE



Source: Nine Marks of a Healthy Church

Church membership puts into practice the personal commitments that should exist within a church as taught in the Bible. This is identified as the commitments between an individual Christian, his or her pastors, and a specified gathering of Christian brethren.

The responsibilities and duties of members of a Christian church are to be baptized and to regularly attend the Lord's Table. As Christians, we are to hear God's Word and to obey it. We are to regularly fellowship with one another for mutual edification. We are to love God, one another, and those outside our fellowship, and we are to evidence the fruit of the Spirit. We are to worship God in all the activities of our home, work, community, and life.⁴

³ Excerpted from *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the name of Jesus* (Crossway 2012)

⁴ Excerpted from *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Crossway 2013)

A summary reading of the New Testament will reveal that the early disciples practiced church membership, in order to facilitate discipleship.

They knew who was added to the church ([Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 11:24](#)). This meant they could account for the genuineness of the professions of faith, process the details of their conversion, and accommodate their participation in the local community.

They knew who to care for, and how to care for them ([Acts 6:1-6](#)). They were in touch with the specific needs of their people and could distribute the load appropriately across their ranks in the congregation.

They knew who was part of the church, and who wasn't ([Acts 19:8-10](#)). When the Ephesian Christians needed to move out from the synagogue, they were able to move into the school of Tyrannus and continue teaching the disciples.

They knew who needed special admonishment in the church, or whose life no longer commended their discipleship to Christ ([1 Corinthians 5](#); [2 John 1:10](#); [2 Thessalonians 3:14-15](#); [Titus 3:10-11](#)). Whenever gospel-denying behavior made its way into the community, they lovingly dealt with it so as to protect the people, admonish the backslidden, and awaken the offender.

In the simplest of terms, the early disciples practiced church membership, and kept track of their members using lists. There were those in the lists who held good standing, those who were in need of special care, and those who were in need of specific admonishment or exclusion.

Principally, the individual says to the church body, "Insofar as I recognize you as a faithful, gospel declaring church, I submit my presence and my discipleship to your love and oversight."

PROCESS OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The formal relationship between the local church and the individual Christian is consummated with three distinct activities:

a church body formally **affirms** an individual's profession of faith and baptism as credible;

it promises to **give oversight** to that individual's discipleship;

the individual **formally submits** his or her discipleship to the service and authority of this body and its leaders⁵.

Church membership begins with the Christian's request to be part of the local church. At Word Community Church, we begin this relationship by having the prospective member fill out the **Membership Information Form (see Appendix A for link)**. We add a Preparation stage to the process of membership.

⁵ Excerpted from *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the name of Jesus* (Crossway 2012)

1) FOUNDATION (PREPARATION)

In order to affirm the member candidate, the church conducts a series of seminars on key theological matters and a background of Word Community Church to serve as the foundation for membership consideration. These need to be completed before the candidate can proceed to the step of affirmation. It is also at this point that the member candidate needs to be part of a Word Comm Life Group (if he/she is not yet part of one).

Seminars to be completed are as follows:

- What is the Gospel?
- Statement of Faith of Word Community Church
- Word Community Church History, Structure and Rhythms
- Word Community Membership Covenant
- Church Discipline and Fencing the Table
- What is Baptism? (if necessary)

2) AFFIRMATION

Once a member candidate has completed the foundational phase of this membership process, the church can then begin its affirmation through the following:

Membership Questionnaire

Each candidate needs to respond to carefully prepared questions that focuses on the Gospel, Word Community Church Statement of Faith, Personal Testimony, and Church aspirations.

Elder Interview

Each candidate will be interviewed by no less than 2 elders. The interview focuses on the responses given in the Membership Questionnaire.

Deliberation

Elders are then to meet on an appointed date to discuss the candidate for membership. Included in the meeting will be the candidate's life group leader.

3) OVERSIGHT

Upon the approval of the church elders, a member candidate will be formally notified and met by at least one elder to signify the acceptance of said candidate's application for membership. It is at this point that Word Community Church commits to oversee the member's discipleship. Elder to discuss the role of the eldership and the responsibility they hold in overseeing a member's growth in the church.

4) SUBMISSION

The new member will then have to formally submit his or her discipleship to the service and authority of the Word Community Church body and its leaders. This will be consummated by the signing of the Word Community Church Membership Covenant and a formal induction to the church body at an appointed date.

Current members are not required to complete any of the foundation seminars that they have not undergone in the past. However, they are encouraged to do so as these are determined to be beneficial for their involvement as members of Word Community Church.

ABOUT THE COVENANT

Church membership is intentional discipleship. It consists of both privileges to enjoy, and responsibilities to fulfill, all in submission and obedience to Christ.

As part of Word Community Church, members enjoy the privilege of being part of a local church and community of believers where they can grow and serve under the care of its leaders.

Responsibilities of members also include humble submission to Jesus, the head of the church, and its leadership while faithfully growing in their personal walk as a Christian.

A sample of the Membership Covenant and its contents can be found on the next page.

MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

As a member of Word Community Church, I understand that I **have the privilege to:**

1. Uphold the Gospel before a watching world as a representative of Word Community Church.
2. Serve in leadership, teach, and do the works of the ministry.
3. Partake of the ordinance of the Lord's supper.
4. Enjoy the benefits of Congregational care.

As a member of Word Community Church, I **covenant the following:**

1) I am a Christian, saved by grace through faith. I have repented of my sins, received God's forgiveness and trust Jesus with my whole life. *(Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:3-7)*

2) I have read, understood, and affirm the Word Community Church's Statement of Faith. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace. *(Ephesians 4:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7,17)*

3) I will seek to grow in my relationship with Jesus Christ:

By regularly practicing spiritual disciplines (Bible reading, prayer, regular gathered worship attendance, community group participation and fellowship with other Christ-followers);

By serving the Word Community family; AND

By sharing the Gospel to others. *(Psalm 119:97; Mark 16:15; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25)*

4) I will steward the resources God has entrusted to me—time, treasure and talents—for the glory of God. I will regularly give my tithes and offerings sacrificially, generously and cheerfully. *(Proverbs 3:9-10; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8 & 9; Ephesians 4:1-16; 5:15-18)*

5) I will fulfill Word Community Church's missional purpose to both serve and share the Gospel and to help people find true life in Christ. *(Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15)*

6) I will serve the church using my spiritual gifts to edify the Body of Christ. *(Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-31; Ephesians 2:19-22; 4:12-16; 1 Peter 4:7-11)*

7) I will practice Christlike humility by considering the needs of others, and invest in authentic and vulnerable relationships in Word Community Church. *(Proverbs 16:28; 17:17; 27:17; Matthew 18:15-17; Philippians 2:1-11)*

8) I commit to be faithful in serving Word Community Church, and I will not function in leadership or be a member of another church. *(Hebrews 10:25; 1 Peter 4:10-11)*

9) I agree to submit to godly authority as represented in the recognized Body of Elders. I will submit myself to accountability at all times and to the Biblical process of Church discipline when necessary (Biblical Perspective in Christian Church Discipline Position Paper). *(Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1-5; Hebrews 13:17)*

10) I will submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. *(Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Hebrews 4:12)*

CONCLUSION

While this practice of membership (and its implications) might come as impractical and polarizing in our religiously pluralistic and sin-affirming society, we must remember that we ultimately submit to God's Word, and that His rule in the church is fully expressed when we pattern our practices to what He has prescribed in His word.

We don't practice church membership because it will make us popular or acceptable in society. We practice church membership, because we are serious disciples of Christ, committed to making other disciples of Christ.

We do not see any other way to practice biblical discipleship, where the continuous instruction and shepherding of God's people are equally held in tension. Church membership is what allows for true discipleship to take place.

The context where true discipleship is fleshed out is in the local church. God has given us each other, to help us in each other's walk. While friendly and cooperative efforts with other Christians help realize the broader unity we have in Christ, it is truly in the midst of a localized, identified body of people, that true discipleship is lived out most fully.

In the local church, we learn to love our neighbor and practice the "one another" commands of the New Testament. In the local church, we learn to live out a life of discipleship, with others who are still being transformed, as we are being transformed.

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APPENDIX A:

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Biblical Perspective on Fencing the Table

03

[Keeping the holy things of worship holy]

INTRODUCTION

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are two ordinances that are essential in the practice of our Christian faith. An ordinance, simply put, is a God-ordained ceremony. We observe these practices in obedience to God because they were ordered and commanded by our Lord Jesus Himself ([Matthew 28:19](#); [Luke 22:19](#); [1 Corinthians 11:24-25](#)). That being the case, our observance and practice of these ordinances must be rooted in the Word and bereft of any man-made conceptions of how they must be practiced. Surely, we cannot fully know the mind of God on these matters, but He has left us with His Word so that, to the best of our abilities and with His help, we can remain faithful to His original intent in instituting these ordinances.

In this position paper, we shall be discussing the following:

- | The meaning & importance of The Lord's Supper, also known as Communion or The Lord's Table.
- | The implications on how we live the Christian life in relation to The Lord's Supper.
- | The phrase "Fencing the Table" and how a church that "fences the table" takes deliberate steps prior to communion in distinguishing between those who ought to come to the Lord's table and those who should not.⁶
- | The teaching of the Apostle Paul regarding the observance of the Last Supper as it relates to the lax spiritual condition of the Corinthian Church.
- | The impetus for Fencing the Table and a biblical position that will inform our practice at Word Community Church.

⁶ Rev. D. W. B. Somerset, "Fencing the Lord's Table", *Free Presbyterian Magazine* October Edition (2004).

THE LORD'S SUPPER: MEANING & IMPORTANCE



Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

MATTHEW 26:26-29 ESV

A MEMORIAL OF JESUS' DEATH

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus Christ celebrated the Passover with His disciples, as was the custom of all Jews at that time. The Passover is an important feast for the Jews, for it commemorates the sparing of the firstborn of Israel from the final plague that struck dead all the firstborn of Egypt, both man and beast. In order to be spared, they were to kill the Passover lamb, take its blood and put it on their doorposts. All the houses that had blood were "passed over" thereby keeping them from being struck. Then they were to eat the Passover lamb together with unleavened bread. God commanded them to celebrate this feast for all generations to come (see Exodus 12 for the Passover account).

It is not a coincidence that Jesus instituted a new ceremony during Passover, the night before He was to be sacrificed as God's final Passover lamb. In the first Passover, the Jews learned to commemorate God's rescue of their nation from their bondage in Egypt. In the Last Supper, Jesus taught us to remember what it took (i.e. Christ's death) for us to be rescued from the bondage of sin. He did so by taking familiar symbols used in the Passover celebration and infusing it with new meaning. At the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup and said, "This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." (Luke 22:20). Right before this, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (Luke 22:19). In so doing, Jesus institutes the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, effectively establishing the "better covenant" that the writer of Hebrews speaks of (Hebrews 7:22); a "new covenant" which Jesus states was in His blood "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

In the old covenant, blood sacrifices were repeatedly required year in year out in order that sin might be dealt with. But they could not provide the final solution for sin, for "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:4). The old covenant was God's temporary provision for the forgiveness of sin and pointed to that day when sin will be dealt with once and for all time. "For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second" (Hebrews 8:7).

Jesus shed His blood on the cross to take away the sin of the world ([John 1:29](#)). We receive the blessings of the new covenant when we believe, by faith, that Christ's broken body and shed blood alone are sufficient to atone for our sin. Each time we partake of the elements of bread and wine, we affirm our faith in Christ's finished work on the cross which is the only means for our sin to be forgiven and the only way for us to be restored to a right relationship with God and enjoy continued fellowship and eternal life with Him.

A PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

The Last Supper also serves the purpose of proclamation. In Paul's account of the Last Supper, he builds on the tradition he received from the Gospels and adds the following statement: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" ([1 Cor 11:26](#)). The observance of the Last Supper was not only to be a memorial of His death, it is also to proclaim the Gospel message found in His once-for-all sacrifice on the cross ([Hebrews 7:27](#)) until that future time when we will have that wonderful fellowship meal in the presence of our Savior as forgiven sinners, no longer able to sin, and enjoying our restored relationship with God.

This future time was alluded to by Christ Himself when He said: "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." ([Matthew 26:29](#)). This day is written about in the book of Revelation: "The angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" ([Revelation 19:9](#)). So, there will indeed be a time where we will partake of this meal together with our Lord, and it will surely be a time of great rejoicing even as we sit in awe and reverence of His glorious presence.

But in the meantime, we gather at the Lord's Table and partake of the elements together as a body of born-again believers, grateful that God still condescends to receive us not because we are worthy, but precisely because we are unworthy and recognize our need for His mercy and grace and that we are able to participate based solely on the merits of Christ's sacrifice and nothing else.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Having presented the meaning of the Lord's Supper and the reasons for why our Lord Jesus instituted this ordinance, a crucial question naturally flows from it: must it be administered to all who would like to partake without consideration?

Again, let us look at the words of our Lord in Matthew: "for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." ([Matthew 26:28](#)). The Lord's Supper ushered in the new covenant where Jesus, God's unblemished Passover Lamb, was sacrificed once and for all to take away our sin. Further, those who believe by faith that Christ's broken body and shed blood are sufficient to atone for their sin appropriate the blessings of the new covenant for themselves, i.e. the forgiveness of their sin, their restoration to a right relationship with God, and life eternal. If a person has not embraced this by faith, then they are still in their sin and incur the wrath of God. They have no remembrance to observe because the Spirit has not regenerated them. They are spiritually dead and unable to see with the eyes of faith ([Ephesians 2:1](#)). Such a person who has not been spiritually regenerated has no union with God ([Ephesians 2:3](#); [Colossians 1:21](#)) and would therefore be practicing hypocrisy if they partake of the Lord's Supper ([1 Corinthians 11:27-30](#)).

Now let us look at the phrase “**poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**”. Those who are invited to the Lord’s Table are forgiven sinners who acknowledge their need for God’s grace and mercy. If a person lives with open, unrepentant sin, such a one is living in clear defiance of the Good News that the Table proclaims: that through Christ’s death on the cross, our sins have already been atoned for, we are forgiven and have eternal life simply upon receiving, by faith, Christ’s finished work. It would again be hypocritical for someone to take part in the Lord’s Supper who does not show, with one’s life, the reality of Christ’s forgiveness in their lives (**Hebrews 10:26**).

Therefore, there are two types of people who cannot participate in communion:

- 1 | the unregenerate (those who have not been born-again), and;
- 2 | those living in open, unrepentant sin.

FENCING THE TABLE

Fencing the table is a practice done whereby a minister, prior to Communion, distinguishes between those who ought to come to the Lord’s table and those who should not. While this practice may sound exclusive at first, it serves two important purposes:

- 1 | It is to guard God’s honor by ensuring that no one partook of the Lord’s Supper without understanding its significance. Such a precious gift by our Lord must not be taken lightly by anyone.
- 2 | It is to keep those who lack faith in Christ or understanding of the ordinance from “sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” by partaking “in an unworthy manner” (1 Corinthians 11:27). Ultimately, it is an act of tender love.⁷

While the phrase may have emerged and used more often during the 17th Century, the idea of fencing the table dates back to Old Testament times. We go back again to the institution of the Passover in Exodus 12 where we find God giving explicit instructions on who should and should not eat of the Passover:

Exodus 12:43-48

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. No foreigner or hired worker may eat of it. It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it.

⁷ Hills United Reformed Church, *Encountering the Reformation: Close Communion*, http://www.hillsurc.com/RD_Communion.pdf.

The Passover was instituted as a memorial to the Jewish people's rescue from slavery in Egypt. This was reserved for the Jews alone because they were to be a distinct nation set apart unto God. They were to be holy, as He is holy ([Leviticus 19:2](#)). Those who are not part of the Jewish nation are kept from the Passover because they would have no appreciation of the significant event that the feast celebrates. But then, God does not keep all such people from the Passover and makes an interesting distinction: "If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised." ([Exodus 12:48a](#)).

In Old Testament times, circumcision was a ceremony that signified God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants ([Genesis 17:9-14](#)). Therefore, a foreigner or stranger who bears the mark of circumcision binds himself to the covenant that God made with the Israelites through Abraham as if he were part of the Jewish nation himself.

In the New Testament, the mark of our being bound to God's covenant is not circumcision, but Baptism. It is an outward sign of an inward change. Paul talks about this parallel between circumcision and Baptism in Colossians:

Colossians 2:11-12

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.

Therefore, the visible sign that we are part of God's new covenant with His people accomplished through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross is with the rite of Baptism.

In the Passover we see that God is clearly concerned with the pure observance of it because it is an integral part of the Jews' worship life. There are many other "holy things of worship" mentioned in the book of Leviticus (the ark of the covenant, priesthood, sacrifices, etc.). The idea of keeping the holy things of worship holy is quite evident in the Torah where extensive instructions were given in preserving their sanctity. We even read of a Levite named Uzzah who, after seeing the ark of the covenant about to fall to the ground, touched it in order to steady it and was immediately struck dead by God. ([2 Samuel 6:1-7](#)).

Batzig (2015) writes:

If we are to take our Lord's ordinances seriously, we recognize that the same God who demanded absolute holiness with regard to His objects of worship in the Old Testament is the same God who has ordained the holy ordinances in the New Testament. The warnings about not partaking unworthily lest you incur the judgment of God ([1 Cor. 11:29-30](#)) are one and the same with those about the holy things in the Old Testament. When we understand that the Supper is no mere memorial, but a holy thing that either brings blessing ([1 Cor. 10:16](#)) or judgment ([1 Cor. 11:30](#)), we can understand why the phrase, "fencing the Table," is used.⁸

⁸ Nicholas T. Batzig, "On Fencing the Lord's Table", *Feeding On Christ*, July 12, 2015, <https://feedingonchrist.org/on-fencing-the-lords-table>.

The holiness of the ordinances is so important to the early church fathers that they list “the pure administration of the sacraments” as the second mark of a true church. The Belgic Confession states:

The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin. As for the false Church, it ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does it administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from, as it thinks proper; it relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry.⁹

Therefore, it is clear that the Lord is concerned for the holiness of His ordinances and objects of worship. In the case of the Lord’s Table, we must take care that His honor is not profaned when we observe it and take steps to preserve its sanctity. When we are lenient on these matters, we incur judgment upon ourselves if we partake of it in an unworthy manner. **Proper fencing of the table ensures that no one does so and shows that we bear the mark of a true Church.**

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH AND THE NEED TO FENCE THE TABLE

The Corinthian Church that Paul pastored during his day was certainly a problematic one. There were many issues that needed to be resolved such as: spiritual superiority over one another, divisions, suing one another in courts, abuse of the communal meal and sexual immorality among others. The church at Corinth had become too lax and tolerant, so Paul wrote them a pastoral letter to rebuke them for these misdeeds and wake them up from their spiritual stupor.

KEEPING THE PURITY OF THE CHURCH

One of the problems Paul addressed was the abuse of the communal meal. In Paul’s day, the Lord’s Supper was observed alongside “love feasts” or simply, fellowship meals. During these meals, it was reported that some went ahead to eat their own suppers while others were left hungry. Some even got drunk. They were not sharing their provisions appropriately and so leaving the poor with nothing. The division between rich and poor has become so evident, and this, in no way, demonstrates the unity they have with Christ and with one another which the Lord’s Table proclaims. Because of the division and excess surrounding the Corinthians’ observance of communion, Paul rebukes them by saying that they were not really eating the Lord’s Supper at all (1 Corinthians 11:20). It has become just a ritual that they have to go through. It was stripped of its meaning and significance because of the way they celebrated it. Paul’s solution to addressing this was to remind them of the sanctity of The Lord’s Supper and what it represents.

He then issues a warning to those who would approach the Lord’s Table without examining oneself. Scriptural justification for fencing the table is rooted in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 which reads:

⁹ Guido De Bres, *The Belgic Confession of Faith (Rouen, France: 1561)*, p. 21.

1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

What Paul is essentially saying here is that before we partake of the bread and cup, we must have examined ourselves.

Do I truly know what the bread and cup represent?

Do I embrace, by faith, what Christ accomplished for me on the cross?

Does anything in my life show that I have not truly repented of my sin, which Christ gave His life for?

Does my life show I am truly joined to Christ and His people?

This self-examination helps us determine the genuineness of our faith and repentance. What these verses also show is that there is a way to partake of communion that will bring judgment on ourselves and there are actual consequences that represent the discipline of the Lord in these instances (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

The Lord's Supper is both a "cup of blessing" and a cup of judgment – depending on whether or not it is partaken of in faith.¹⁰ This is precisely why we need to fence the table. A faithful church endeavors to keep the sanctity of the Lord's Table and keep from it those who would partake in an unworthy manner lest they bring judgment upon themselves.

PRACTICING CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Another problem that Paul addresses that further gives us guidance in our practice of fencing the table is found in 1 Corinthians 5. A man has been caught having an incestuous relationship with his father's wife. We read of it here:

1 Corinthians 5:1

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

¹⁰ Nicholas T. Batzig, "On Fencing the Lord's Table", *Feeding On Christ*, July 12, 2015, <https://feedingonchrist.org/on-fencing-the-lords-table>.

From this one verse we can deduce that this concern was no secret. It involves an incestuous affair, one that would have been considered scandalous during that time. Even the Gentiles (or pagans, as they are referred to here), ones whom the Jews considered godless, were repulsed by such a sin that it is actually punishable under Roman law. But apparently, the church at Corinth was so complacent that it kept happening right under their nose. They were no longer repulsed. The immorality amongst them has been happening for so long that they have become desensitized to it.

This is a picture of what happens when a church is lax in exercising discipline among its members. Paul had to step in to rebuke them of their tolerance of such an act and proceeded to outline what needs to be done (1 Corinthians 5:2-5). Firstly, Paul exhorts them to apply discipline in the name and power of Christ. Failure to do so will only incur further degeneration and affect the spiritual purity of the congregation. They are to “hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh”, not to condemn him, but so that his soul might be restored (1 Corinthians 5:5). The aim of discipline is not punishment, though painful, nor condemnation, but of loving restoration (Hebrews 12:11).

Then in the succeeding verses, Paul makes the point that we are all joined to Christ's body and that being the case, we affect one another whether we are aware of it or not (1 Corinthians 5:6). Leaven, when it is mixed with dough, affects the whole lump and so it is with sin, when it is not addressed, corrupts the whole church. Paul then goes on to say:

1 Corinthians 5:7a

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

Paul encourages the Corinthians to live their new life in Christ. They must be motivated toward holiness, because Christ paid dearly with His life to free them from sin.

Then Paul says something interesting, and this is where we draw a link between this event to the Last Supper: “For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” (1 Corinthians 5:7b-8). Christ is the Passover lamb sacrificed for our sins, and He has made this clear during the institution of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the festival referred to here is the Lord's Supper, and we are to celebrate it in sincerity and truth so that sin will not pollute us. It is quite clear in these verses that this moment in the life of the Corinthian Church has direct applications for how we are to observe the Lord's Table.

In the succeeding verses, Paul makes a very important distinction as to who shall be the recipient of discipline. He mentions not to associate with the sexually immoral together with other types of people but then adds the qualification: not those “of this world”, meaning those who do not profess faith in Christ (1 Corinthians 5:9-10). These people are not subject to discipline but are under God's judgment (1 Corinthians 5:13). What he tells the church not to associate with is anyone “who bears the name of brother”, meaning someone who professes faith in Christ and member of the Corinthian Church but belies his profession by being guilty of sexual immorality, greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or swindler (1 Corinthians 5:11), then he adds “not even to eat with such a one.”

Paul warns the Corinthian Christians they cannot continue in Christian fellowship with a notorious sinner who calls himself a Christian. Commentators see this statement as a reference to the Lord's Supper, some think it goes beyond just its observance. Either way, since the Lord's Supper is an expression of our union with Christ and with one another (1 Corinthians 10:16-17), such a statement would most definitely include it. In that case, Paul is expressing a form of fencing the table, which serves two purposes in this instance: that of preserving the purity of the church and the other as a form of church discipline.

The Westminster Larger Catechism gives us a ground for keeping someone who professes faith in Christ from the Table:

Q: "May any who profess his faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it?"

A: "Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, until they receive instruction and manifest their reformation."¹¹

Westminster Larger Catechism Question 173

Two things are thus far clearly important to Paul from the verses that we have just covered: he is concerned about the purity of the church, and church discipline plays an important role in ensuring that.

Discipline is reserved only for those who profess faith in Christ but are found to be guilty of unrepentant sin. Fencing the table serves a vital part in carrying out that discipline. We are left with one other matter to address: Who is tasked to carry all these out? Paul ends his exhortation in this way:

1 Corinthians 5:12-13

For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Paul here talks about judging those who are inside the church and of purging the evil person from among you. Firstly, it is a task undertaken for those who are already part of God's Church, not for those outside. Secondly, there are people who are supposed to carry these out. Elsewhere in his epistle, Paul describes who those are: "This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:1). Carrying these out rests in the hands of faithful servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

¹¹ The Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)*, p. 43.

These faithful servants are sometimes called Elders. They have a weighty responsibility on their shoulders. They are called to guard carefully those who come under their care (Acts 20:28-31), they are entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 16:19; 18:18-20), and they must answer for the watch they have kept over the souls entrusted to them (Hebrews 13:7).¹² The Church must be able to watch, guard, and keep the purity and holiness of the congregation through its properly ordained officers.

Thus far we have established the need for fencing the table and that is to keep the sanctity of the Lord's Supper and prevent people from incurring God's judgment upon themselves if they are to take it in an unworthy manner. We also see that our observance of the Lord's Supper entails self-examination, and spiritual oversight and discipline carried out by the church's ordained officers.

FENCING THE TABLE AT WORD COMMUNITY CHURCH

In keeping with our desire to be as faithful to the true intent of our Lord Jesus in instituting the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as possible, we make the following position clear:

1 | Anyone who is unregenerate (i.e. not born-again) and / or living in open, unrepentant sin may not partake of the Lord's Supper.

An unregenerate person is spiritually dead and unable to see with the eyes of faith (Ephesians 2:1). Such a person who has not been spiritually regenerated has no union with God (Ephesians 2:3; Colossians 1:21) and would therefore be practicing hypocrisy if they partake of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:27-30).

A person living in open, unrepentant sin is in direct defiance of the Good News that the Table proclaims i.e. the forgiveness of sins accomplished by Christ's sacrifice on the cross (Matthew 26:28). It would again be hypocritical for someone to take part of the Lord's Supper who does not show, with one's life, the reality of Christ's forgiveness in their lives.

2 | A communicant must be a baptized believer.

Baptism is one of two ordinances that our Lord commanded us to obey (Matthew 28:19). He also went through it Himself, so certainly His followers must not be exempt (Matthew 3:14). Obedience to His commands is the mark of a true disciple (John 8:31-32). The visible sign that we are part of God's new covenant with His people accomplished through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross is with the rite of Baptism (Colossians 2:11-12).

¹² Hills United Reformed Church, *Encountering the Reformation: Close Communion*, http://www.hillsurc.com/RD_Communion.pdf.

3 All members in good standing at Word Community Church are welcome to partake.

All members and prospective members of Word Community Church go through an involved membership process which includes undergoing an interview with an Elder in order to ascertain two things: that they have a credible profession of faith by demonstrating a clear understanding of the Gospel ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)) and that there is evidence of genuine repentance ([Matthew 3:8](#)).

Since the Elders are the ones exercising spiritual oversight over the flock ([1 Corinthians 4:1](#)), they are the ones entrusted with matters of church order and church discipline ([Hebrews 13:17](#), [1 Corinthians 11:27-29](#)).

4 If a member is under church discipline, said member shall be kept from the Table until they receive instruction and manifest their reformation. (1 Corinthians 5:5; 12-13)

5 A professing Christian who is either a casual visitor or a regular attendee of Word Community Church but is not a member of any local church shall be requested to go through membership (including but not limited to Word Community Church) before they can partake of the Lord's Supper.

The Elders, being the ones tasked to guard those who come under their care ([Acts 20:28-31](#)), are the ones who know the flock well and can vouch for a person's walk. A visitor or regular attendee who is not a member of any church has not submitted himself/herself to the spiritual oversight of the Elders and therefore, there is no way to credibly vouch for such a person's walk. This is not in any way a judgment on the credibility of a person's profession of faith. It is simply an acknowledgment that at present, there is no way to determine whether one's profession of faith and repentance are in keeping with the Gospel. Thus keeping such a one from the Table is a loving act to prevent them from incurring God's judgment should they be found partaking in an unworthy manner.

Batzig (2015) makes a helpful comment on this point: "As a church planter, I have been on the receiving end of criticism for intimating—at the institution of the Supper—that those who are not members of any local church (who were also not currently seeking membership in a local church) should not come to the table. I have always been baffled as to why someone who isn't trusting Jesus or who isn't willing to commit themselves to the body of Jesus would want to partake of a sacrament in which believers spiritually feed on Jesus!"¹³

¹³ Nicholas T. Batzig, "On Fencing the Lord's Table", *Feeding On Christ*, July 12, 2015, <https://feedingonchrist.org/on-fencing-the-lords-table>.

6 All visitors who are members of another church may partake of the Lord's Supper, provided that:

a. they are members in good standing in their own church (i.e. they are not under church discipline),

b. their church preaches the pure doctrine of the Gospel. Said visitors shall be exhorted to examine themselves in these when the verbal (see Appendix A) and written (see Appendix B) fencing of the table is done during the administration of the Lord's Supper.

The condition that a visitor is in good and regular standing in their own church is given to prevent such cases where a visitor is under discipline in their own church and is only trying to escape sanction. Said visitors are exhorted to examine themselves. It is up to the visitors' conviction if they will heed the warning or not after the minister has explained the consequences of partaking in an unworthy manner. The rest of the members also share the responsibility of properly fencing the table as they partake alongside the visitors.

Scripture commands us that we must be united in the same mind and the same judgment ([1 Corinthians 1:10](#)). Our unity with other churches is seen in that we share the same conviction that Scripture is God's Word and is sufficient to accomplish all that God wants in His Church.

CONCLUSION

The Lord's Supper is a beautiful memorial to our Lord's sacrifice on the cross that paved the way for our sin to be forgiven and for us to have eternal life. It is a ceremony rich with meaning and significance that when celebrated in faith, provides us with the blessings of spiritual nourishment and refreshment.

When we gather at the Lord's Table and partake of the elements together as a body of born-again believers, we are grateful that God still condescends to receive us not because we are worthy, but precisely because we are unworthy and recognize our need for His mercy and grace and that we are able to participate based solely on the merits of Christ's sacrifice and nothing else. When we come together at the table, we proclaim to others in a visible way the beautiful message of the Gospel.

While we recognize the blessings that the Lord's Supper bestows upon humble repentant believers, it can also bring judgment upon those who would partake of it in an unworthy manner. This is why we need to fence the table.

Since it is our Lord Himself who instituted this ordinance, it is incumbent upon us not to take this precious gift lightly. We are to responsibly take steps to ensure that we preserve the sanctity of the Table and at the same time keep those who lack faith in Christ or understanding of the ordinance from sinning against the body and blood of the Lord and incur judgment upon themselves. This is not an act of exclusion. Ultimately it is an act of tender love.

May the words of the Puritans help remind us of the beauty and weight of this most sacred ordinance:

*“The sacrament was ordained so that where there is decay of grace in your heart, you may go to this fountain and fill the cistern again to recover strength. It is to knit the knot stronger between Christ and us. If, however, a man comes to the Lord’s Table with a load of sin without intending to repent of his sins, he ought not to receive it. If you have no purpose of repentance, you lose the purpose of the sacrament. Everyone, therefore, who goes to the sacrament must examine the purpose he has in his heart.”*¹⁴

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Biblical Perspective on Family Discipleship

[A Look at Parent Commissioning]

PREAMBLE

In a Baby Dedication Ceremony, Christian parents come for a special blessing of dedication where a minister prays over the child and asks God to bless the child's life. Beyond this well-intentioned ceremony of dedicating the child to God (which is great!), we at Word Community Church ("WordComm") want to go further.

We want to recognize that the true blessing to a child is found in the dedication of the parents to live as devoted disciples of Christ.

More than a prayer for their child during a ceremony, we want to enter into a partnership with the parents, to equip them to follow God's Word and model their discipleship to their children.

Thus here in WordComm, we seek to practice what is called Parent Commissioning (in lieu of Baby Dedication).

INTRODUCTION

Though all Christians are commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:18-20), Christian parents are specifically instructed to disciple their children (Eph 6:4; 2 Tim 1:5; Deut 6:4-9).

The home is the primary mission-field to which we send our people. It is the sphere intended by God, where our dearest and closest relationships first-experience the life-changing message of the gospel of Christ.

Thus while we aim to bring the truth of the gospel and its implications to bear in our workplace, social life, and relationships, we embrace the truth that the most significant thing we may ever accomplish is not found in what we do, but in who we raise.

Plainly stated, our aim is to equip each member of WordComm, to serve as an ambassador of the gospel to the most immediate sphere—the family. The family is the first place of our mission. The family is the primary place of discipleship.

"A gospel-centered church is a healthy church, and a healthy church is made up of healthy families."

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP DEFINED

Family discipleship is the important and mostly ordinary spiritual leadership of your home. Put simply, family discipleship is leading your home by doing whatever you can whenever you can to help your family become friends and followers of Jesus Christ. Christians not only ought to disciple, but they must disciple if they are to truly follow Christ. This is the quintessential role of every Christian parent. You cannot be a Christian family if you are not a disciple-making family, because your family can't truly follow Christ if you are not doing what Christ commanded—trying to become more and more like him and leading others to do the same. (Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 2020)

The priority of family discipleship is found all throughout the Scriptures. Three examples will make this clear —

THE NATION OF ISRAEL

It is stated most prominently in the inception of the nation of Israel. In *Deuteronomy 6*, God commissioned the Israelites to love him, follow his commands and teach their children to do the same —

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gate.

Moses was very clear as he addressed the people about the commandment of the Lord. They were to observe His commands, and pass them on to their children and to their children's children (v.1-3). This necessity of perpetuating the teachings of the Lord across generations shows the unique role of parents. Parents were given the charge of discipling and leading their children to inherit the faith.

THE EPHESIAN CHRISTIANS

We hear the command of Paul to parents in his address to the Ephesian church — *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4*

THE DISCIPLE OF PAUL: TIMOTHY

We see this reality play out in the life of Timothy, the disciple of Paul the Apostle — *I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 2 Timothy 1:5*

Timothy had an example for his faith. It was a legacy that spanned generations, something which he benefited from and inherited. It was a faith that Paul could trace in his family relationships — from being the faith of his grandmother, to being the faith of his mother, it finally became his own faith.

All these commandments and encouragements to parents imply a clear principle: God expects discipleship to be a lifestyle. Our attitudes, efforts, and commitments, are to be examples worth emulating, so that our faith in Christ and worship of God is literally passed on to the people closest to us, who live amongst us.

A. Parents Discipling Their Children

According to research performed by Reggie Joiner and the Think Orange organization **“On average, the church has about 40 hours of influence in the life of a child in a given year. However, parents have around 3,000 hours of influence in the life of a child in a given year. (Joiner, 2019)”**

The ratio of the church influencing the child as to their parents influencing them is 1 to 75. In other words, on average, the amount of time that the church can impact kids is just 1.33% of the available time that the parents have.

These statistics bring home a most important realization: the discipleship of our families cannot be outsourced. Because parents are tasked by Scripture to assume responsibility in raising up their children in the ways of the Lord, we believe that is the church’s priority to prepare them for this most serious and joyful task.

Family discipleship assumes two essential truths... First, parents have the potential to be the most influential person in a child’s life. Second, God has clearly commanded that the highest priority of parenting is helping children know, follow, and trust him. (Chandler and Griffin, Family Discipleship, 2020)

This is how discipleship at home is designed according to the Scriptures.

With these truths in mind, it is our desire at WordComm to provide an environment where our kids grow up in the ways of the Lord, because of the influence of their parents, in partnership with the church.

We want to equip our parents to lead their families: to learn the Word, to live by the Word, so that they can partner with us, to teach the Word to their children, in fulfillment of the Great Commission.

The role you hold, “parent,” is one commissioned by God himself. It is no accident that you are your child’s mom or dad. Whoever your children are, born to you or brought into your family, God has knowingly chosen you to train and care for them, to teach them all that he has commanded. If you are a parent, you are automatically in the position of disciple-maker in your child’s life. A disciple-maker is not, as some might believe, a role reserved for so-called super-Christians. Making disciples is the job of every follower of Jesus. This is your purpose in your home: making eternal deposits in your children. Your faith is more influential than you think. Your family is the primary instrument and environment for discipleship in the life of your child, and your calling in this life is to give the discipleship of your home your unique best. (Chandler and Griffin, Family Discipleship, 2020)

PARENT COMMISSIONING CELEBRATION DEFINED

Parent Commissioning is an opportunity for parents to commit themselves to gospel-centered parenting, and to dedicate themselves to follow the ways of the Scriptures in raising their children.

We use the term “Parent Commissioning” to reflect the church’s recognition and support of the essential work that parents are appointed to do in Scripture.

By partnering with our parents, we equip them and send them out as disciplemakers, to bring up their children in the ways of the Lord. It is only as parents submit to the authority of the Lord in their lives, and commit to the ways of the Lord in parenting, that they can model to their children how to take into heart the Word of the Lord.

Through this commissioning, the parents are publicly acknowledging to the church that they are choosing to commit themselves in raising their children in a way that reflects what the Scripture teaches about family and faith.

We acknowledge that it is God who saves the lost, but it is our prayer that as parents and the church partner in this journey together, we may be able to see the fruits of our submission to His Lordship- godly children.

Like the example of Timothy and his family, we want our children to be well positioned to follow the Lord as well, having seen in us the example of following Jesus as our Savior and submitting to Him as our Lord.

On the other hand, it is also an equal opportunity for WordComm to come alongside them as a spiritual family, to walk with, pray for, and support them on this family discipleship journey.

A. Parent Commissioning Is A Foundational Starting Point In Sending Parents To Help Fulfill The Great Commision at Home

The Parent Commissioning Celebration marks the beginning of a formal partnership between parents and the church. In this celebration, both parties agree to do each other’s role to fulfill God’s command and design in raising up godly children.

We want to help our parents answer the following questions:

- How will I raise godly children?
- What available resources do I have to make this happen?
- How can Word Community Church (Wordcomm) partner with me to raise my children in the ways of the Lord?

Although we cannot control the responses of our children, we acknowledge that there are things we can do to influence them as prescribed by Scriptures. It is therefore fundamental for parents and the church to work together from the Scriptures, so that both can grow in their mutual understanding and service to those entrusted to them.

B. Parent Commissioning Process

a | Parent Commissioning Orientation

This is an orientation about the role of the parents in raising up godly children, and the role of the church as partners in this family discipleship journey. As parents understand these intersecting roles, parents can then decide to agree and commit to these roles. This is a prerequisite for Parent Commissioning Celebration.

b | Parent Commissioning Celebration

This is the time when parents will publicly acknowledge their commitment to raise their children in the ways of the Lord. It is also a time when the leaders and members of the church pray for the children. Moreover, this is a time for the children to be presented to the church community so the church can get to know them and for the church to celebrate with the parents for this wonderful gift.

Since this is a partnership between parents and the Church, it is important that this commitment be made before the Church. Parent Commissioning will be done during Sundays, right after Sunday Worship so that Wordcomm leaders and members are there to witness the commitment of the parents. As the parents commit to disciple their children, the church also will express their commitment to disciple the parents and to help in the discipleship of their children.

This may be a celebration but this is not just a celebration! This is a public declaration of commitment of partnership between the parents as primary disciple makers, and the church as their partner. This means that the work is not finished when the Parent Commissioning Celebration is over, rather, it marks the beginning of a formal and expressed parent and church partnership in child discipleship.

- c |** This partnership is a serious commitment that entails different roles that are outlined in the next section. This will happen beyond the Parent Commissioning Celebration. Our goal is to prepare and establish the necessary foundation so children can transition to receiving God's Word from the pulpit together with the parents the soonest time possible.

C. Commitments Done Between The Parents And The Church

The following are the roles and responsibilities that parents and the church will commit to in Parent Commissioning that will serve as a common ground for the partnership. We intend to make these commitments from the place of love for our children and desire for them to experience the blessing that comes from parents who obey God's Word and from a church that cares for their souls. Because our children are dear to us, we want to do our part to let them experience this blessing.

a | COMMITMENT OF THE PARENTS

- i. To live and teach under the grace and lordship of Jesus Christ.**

Colossians 2:6-7

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Parents' professions of faith and lifestyle should be consistent if we are to influence children to faith. We want to be able to model and teach our children that our change in behavior is out of a heart that was transformed

by grace and is continually being changed by grace. They have to see Jesus in our lives and in our words. We teach the gospel of grace and not self-discipline.

ii. To prioritize being with God's people.

Hebrews 10:25

not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Part of training our children in the way that they should go is to prioritize the meeting of God's people. Children will see this as a priority if they see this as the priority of their parents. Generally, children will not go to church on their own. We start them young while we can still decide for them. When they grow old, they will decide for themselves, and it will be harder for us to influence them to make the meeting of God's people a priority.

iii. To grow in the knowledge of God by reading God's Word.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

We cannot give what we do not have. If we assume the responsibility to teach our children, we need to be the student of the word first. If we want to model Christlikeness, we need to allow the word of Christ to teach, rebuke, correct, and train us. It means that parents need to read the Word to the children and commit to review and discuss the materials provided by Kids Church.

iv. To consistently pray for your children.

1 Timothy 2:1,3-4

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all people**,... This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

"Prayer is a mighty weapon to use in the life of your children. It changes the parent's approach to the child and it softens the hard-hearted child." (Schmucker, 2010)

Praying for others is a command from God. If we pray for others, let us pray for our children.

v. To train your children in the ways of the Lord.

Ephesians 6:4

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Scripture is clear about the roles of the children and parents. Children are supposed to obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1), Fathers (parents) are supposed to bring their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

b | COMMITMENT OF THE CHURCH

i. To provide opportunities for children to know and follow Jesus.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

The church acknowledges that we can only provide the environment and teach our children the Word of the Lord but we cannot control their decisions. Nevertheless, we would like to plant seeds of God's word in their young hearts and give them meaningful memories in the church and through the church. This is done primarily through Kids Church where we teach lessons and give activities to establish them in a strong biblical foundation. To further facilitate this partnership, the church will have meetings with parents to discuss how we can make the best use of Kids Church materials in discipling our children. Other opportunities may be made available as we organize ourselves, and as we grow in our capacity as a church.

Our prayer and our hope is that these deposits will make sense to them when they are old enough to respond to the call of Christ.

ii. To equip parents to grow in the Lord and do the work of the ministry.

Ephesians 4:11-13

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,

The role of the church, specifically the leaders of the church, is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. Since part of the ministry of the parents are their children, the role of the church is to equip the parents to do this ministry to their children.

This ministry to parents is expressed through expository preaching of God's Word on Sundays, life application of God's word through our Life Groups, systematic teaching of God's word through Equip Classes, access to elders for personal consultation, Parent Commissioning Orientation, and other equipping activities that may be made available as we grow together as a church.

iii. To help in the discipleship of children. ministry.

As part of a spiritual family, the members of the church will also commit to help in the discipleship of the children by living a life that upholds the gospel, by helping provide a godly community for the parents and for the children, and by helping teach the children in the ways of the Scriptures when opportunity arises.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, parent commissioning is the beginning of the parent and church partnership in discipleship. Parents assume their role as those primarily responsible for their children, and the church assumes its role to equip and pastor them as they disciple their children.

It is through this partnership that our children are best served, to grow in their identity as image-bearers who are in need of a Savior, and experience their belongingness in his body. In this way we prepare the next generation to inherit the faith, and reach their generation with the gospel of Christ.

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Biblical Perspective on Christian Church Discipline

[A Ministry of Safeguarding and Restoring Christ's People]

INTRODUCTION & PROCESS OVERVIEW

- | What should the local church do when a member is caught in sin?
- | Does the Bible give us provisions on how such a matter should be dealt with?
- | Should the offense be known to the entirety of the congregation, or should the matter only be dealt with privately?
- | Who decides on how sinful behaviors should be dealt with?
- | What happens to a member who is unrepentant?
- | What happens to a member who is living in sin but heeds warning and repentance?

These are just some questions that may arise when the local church is faced with a scandal, a member who is disrupting the unity of the Body of Christ, or a member who is living in outright disobedience to God's Word.

Blessed be the Church since God has given us instruction on how to conduct ourselves, and how to deal with such matters as enumerated above. This paper would do its best to address such questions, and give guidelines on how we are to conduct ourselves as we look into Biblical passages and explain Biblical church discipline.

Biblical church discipline is a ministry of reconciliation for the erring members. It is a call for repentance for members of Word Community Church who have fallen into a lifestyle of sin. It aims to protect the members of the local church as well as to warn the church of the seriousness and gravity of sin. It is also to be a witness to the watching world how we want to honor God's holiness.

A GOOD PERSPECTIVE

Church discipline is a difficult topic to discuss because:

- 1 | there are a lot of Christians who do not know what it is since most of local churches have neglected practicing this ministry;
- 2 | the word "discipline" gives a negative connotation, and people immediately think about punishment and shaming; and

3 | those who have an idea about what church discipline is have seen its abuse.

We must first then understand some basic concepts regarding church health and how we believe God has designed the church in training people in righteousness. We believe that God has given us His Word so that we may be guided by it.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

This means that by practice, we study Scripture, preach it, and live by its commands. It is **profitable for teaching**. We learn the truth from it and get to know who Christ is. We learn what is pleasing and honoring to God from it. We find models of people to follow from it.

We are taught by Scriptures that when we make mistakes, the Scripture is also **profitable for reproof** – for rebuking us and convicting us in our sin. It is profitable for convicting us in our error, for setting how we are to be **corrected** and how we are restored to the truth. It is **profitable for training us in righteousness** and guiding us in living a life that is honorable to God.

The church is God's. The Father disciplines those who are His (**Hebrews 12:7-9**). The Father disciplines those He loves (**Hebrews 12:6**). He disciplines us for our good so that we may be holy (**Hebrews 12:10**).

Discipline may be painful for a moment but it yields righteousness to those who have been trained by it (**Hebrews 12:11**). Discipline results in righteousness, it is not merely confined in punishments, but the whole process of **teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training** as though raising a child encapsulates the idea.

A local church that adheres to the preaching and teaching of God's Word, truth, and redemptive plan must be able:

- 1 | to rebuke and convict people when they sin;
- 2 | to set them straight on the right path that is glorifying and honoring to God, and;
- 3 | to help train people in living a life of holiness.

DEFINING BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. Church Discipline is Restorative & Redemptive

The goal of church discipline is restorative and redemptive. It is leading the erring person into a path of repentance, of reconciliation to God and the Church, and of restoration to holiness. Jesus outlines a process of loving restoration for those in the church that have sinned against each other (**Matthew 18:15-17**).

This is not to say that the erring brother has not offended God. **Psalms 51:4** still holds true since it is God's law and His character that we violate ultimately when we sin against each other.

Matthew 18:15 begins with a personal confrontation, which if unsuccessful, proceeds into a wider group of people of the local church. This is not meant to shame or ridicule, but to take seriously the command of the Lord for us to love one another and to allow no bitter root to spring up (**Hebrews 12:15**).

As instructed by Christ Himself, if the admonishment is left unheeded, it will result in the removal of the person from the recognition of church fellowship (**Matthew 18:17**). To be treated as a Gentile and tax collector is to be treated as someone who is outside of the kingdom, thus this person is one who still needs to respond to the message of the gospel.

Though the person may deem his or her response to the gospel as adequate, the lack of repentance in pursuing peace with their fellow believer is not in keeping with behavior of one who has truly come to know Christ. The person has denied the gospel with his or her actions.

This doesn't mean they are to be shunned and not allowed to go to Sunday Service. It does mean that they must be distinguished from other unbelievers who truly have never heard the message, or are still considering the claims of Christ. The message to them must be one of a sober call to repentance from their sin and unbelief, one in which they may be deceived as to its existence.

B. Church Discipline is a Ministry of Reconciliation

Biblical church discipline is a ministry of reconciliation. It is a call for repentance for those members of Word Community Church who have fallen into a lifestyle of sin. It is reminding them of the covenant they agreed with:

- 1 | in upholding Word Community Church's Statement of Faith;
- 2 | the importance of submitting to church leadership, and;
- 3 | preserving unity and peace among the congregation, when they joined Word Community Church as members, as stipulated in our church Membership Covenant.

In **1 Corinthians 5**, Paul heard of the sin tolerated in the Corinthian church. A man was living in unrepentant sexual immorality. Paul expected mourning in the community for the sin as well as removal from the church of the erring person. He addressed them on three levels:

- | Firstly, they are to deal with his sin for his sake. (**1 Corinthians 5:3-5**);
- | Secondly, they are to deal with his sin for Christ's sake (**1 Corinthians 5:6-8**);
- | Thirdly, they are to deal with his sin for the church's sake (**1 Corinthians 5:9-13**).

This means that while formal church discipline is a ministry of reconciliation for the erring member, it is a ministry that aims to protect the flock and restore Christ's people.

SCOPE FOR BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

While we cannot predict all the sins that may take place, there are certain sins or patterns of sin inherent in our culture. These sins are of such a character that they hinder one's discipleship and damage one's participation in the community. Examples include: gossip, sexual immorality, being unequally yoked with an unbeliever, perennial non-attendance of the Sunday service (Hebrews 10:23-25), being unresponsive to discipleship efforts (Hebrews 4:11-13), divisiveness, and unruly or unsubmitive behavior to leadership.

As one would say, "There are sins that we all struggle with and are repenting of daily, and then there are sins that are more serious and seem to show a deeper root." The sins that "are more serious and seem to show a deeper root," make one think of the validity of the person's profession of Christianity, especially when the erring person is unrepentant of such sins.

A guiding principle is that we're not looking into a list of sins that qualify for formal discipline, but we're driven by the single question of whether Word Community Church could continue to publicly affirm a person's profession of faith as credible.¹⁵

ADMINISTERING BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1 Corinthians. 5:1-2

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.

We are to note that Paul held the whole church responsible for failing to discipline the man living in sin in their midst. The apostle cites that they have become arrogant and have not mourned, so by their actions the one who is in sin was not dealt with properly.

Matthew 18:5 tells us that church discipline starts at a personal and private level, where individual members of the local church are accountable. The first step of church discipline is not to gossip about one's failing to the leaders and Elders, but for individual members to keep watch of one another and confront the sin they encounter, privately, firmly, lovingly, and graciously. Every member of the local church is held accountable for keeping the peace, unity, and purity of Christ's body.

That being said, **Galatians 6:1** tells us, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." Paul encourages the spiritually mature to lead in the rescue of the erring member's soul. As God has given Elders the responsibility to shepherd and protect the flock as under shepherds (**1 Peter 5:1-3**), they are to exercise their authority, and to call upon the erring member to repentance. They are to help them deal with sin and restore them to the congregation when they heed God's call. They are to be excommunicated when they choose to run away from God's call of repentance.¹⁶

¹⁵ Leeman, Jonathan. *Church Discipline (9 Marks: Building Healthy Churches)* (p. 49). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.70

In [Matthew 18:17](#), Jesus instructs the believers that if the erring professing Christian refuses to listen to the people who have tried to call them to repentance, they are to tell it to the church. The role of the congregation, e.g. the covenanted members, then is also to heed the call and authority of the Elders and their decision. Publicly reading the verdict for the member in question in front of the local church members is for the benefit of the congregation. It is not an excuse to gossip or judge the sinner, but that all may evaluate themselves in light of Scripture and walk carefully in their sanctification lest they perish (Luke 13:3).

Note that in [1 Corinthians 5:4-5](#), “4 When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, 5 you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Therefore, the congregation is not gathered to make a decision and have the person in question face a trial, but so the verdict of the Elders can be read publicly to them. This practice of letting the members know of such disciplinary actions also holds the Elders accountable, as John Calvin writes:

“Paul’s course of action for excommunicating a man is the lawful one, provided the elders do not do it by themselves alone, but with the knowledge and approval of the church; in this way the multitude of the people does not decide the action but observes as witness and guardian so that nothing may be done according to the whim of a few.”¹⁷

If the Elders could excommunicate someone privately and take them off the local church’s manifest then they are at risk of abusing the authority Christ has entrusted them.

RESULTS OF PRACTICING CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. Regarding the Erring Individual:

- 1 | Biblical church discipline calls the erring church member to repent – the church and its leaders, in love aim to restore the erring church member into the right relationship with God ([Matthew 18:15](#)).
- 2 | Biblical church discipline helps the erring church member in his or her walk with sanctification, since it aims to call the member to repentance and rightly deal with the sinful behavior with the help of church leaders when needed.
- 3 | Biblical church discipline helps the individual stand against the corrupting influence of the world as the member is encouraged to turn away from their sin and continue in his / her walk with Jesus, turning away from the shame and the call of the world ([Matthew 16:24](#)).
- 4 | Biblical church discipline helps protect the individual from the hardening effects of sin ([Hebrews 3:12–15](#)).

¹⁷ Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Book IV, Ch. XII, § 7, p. 1235.

B. Regarding the Church:

- 1 | Biblical church discipline reminds the congregation about its position regarding the authority of Scriptures, the cost of sin, and the beauty of God's redeeming work.
- 2 | Biblical church discipline helps protect the purity of the church against sin that may distort biblical values (Hebrews 12:6-11).
- 3 | Biblical church discipline helps build the unity of the local church as it looks to the erring individual with love but firm in its stance on the truth of Scriptures.
- 4 | Biblical church discipline helps the local church be a witness to the world by upholding God's standard of holiness (1 Peter 2:12).

C. Regarding God:

- 1 | By practicing Biblical church discipline, the church upholds God's honor and standard of holiness (Matthew 5:48).
- 2 | By practicing Biblical church discipline, God's love and glory is revealed in His redeeming work and sanctification (Matthew 18:15).
- 3 | Biblical church membership and discipline are both God's gift to His church, in order to experience the loving care of God, and the shepherding protection for His children (1 Peter 5:1-5).

While all these can be daunting, we must remember that we do these because we want to learn Christ's way and be transformed into His image. We want to obey Him. It means that we only truly follow Him, when we lay down our own agenda for the sake of knowing and obeying Him. We do this fully acknowledging that the way of self-denial (Luke 9:23-25) is the way of true rest in Him (Matthew 11:28-30). He has given us the local church and its leaders to shepherd, lead, and teach us His way (Hebrews 13:17).

PROCESS OF BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. Matthew 18:15

Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." This means there's a time for dealing with an erring brother or sister in private.

If a covenanted member of the church exhibits a consistent pattern of sin, or gospel-denying behavior, then the member will be lovingly pursued by conversation. This will be a slow process. Several conversations will be done with the hope of encouraging and reminding the member of his or her profession of faith and what God has done in his or her life with the hope of restoring them to fellowship with God and His people.

B. Matthew 18:16

Matthew 18:16 tells us, “But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.” If the erring brother or sister has not heeded the talks on a one-on-one basis, Scripture tells us to bring another one or two persons. This may be done with the Elders talking to the erring person and calling them to repentance.

Should the member continue to pursue this pattern of sin, or exhibit an unwillingness to cooperate with the leadership of the church, then the member’s status will be placed under review by the Elders. Depending on the gravity of sin and the ministry they serve in, the person’s ministry involvement may be suspended at this point without waiting for Members’ Meeting.

C. Matthew 18:17a

Looking at Matthew 18:17a, “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church”—a public announcement to the local Church must be made after being talked to by the Elders. His or her status would be under review at this point. For an erring member’s status to be placed under review is a loving corrective step. It involves a period of time where the erring member’s privileges are suspended (participation in the Lord’s table, service in ministry), but his or her membership is still in effect (life group participation, member-only activities).

Regarding the erring member’s inclusion in the Life Group, if the person is disruptive and is sowing disunity among the members, they may be barred from the Life Group at this point. Information about the erring member’s sinful behavior will be handled with Christian charity and sensitivity, so as to protect the erring member’s privacy, and preserve dignity for their hopeful return and repentance. **This process is a serious matter.** It should not turn into gossip.

This also means that we would deal with members of the congregation who are minors (those who are below 18 years of age) differently than how we would generally deal with adults of the congregation. Elders should be discerning and relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to be able to minister to different kinds of people and deal with matters on a case to case basis.

The hope of this process is for his or her realization of the destructive effects of their unrepentant sin, and hopefully there is a positive response to this process. It is the final step prior to removal from membership.

D. Matthew 18:17b

Following Matthew 18:17b, “And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Removal from membership is done only as a last resort, and with a restorative hope, that the member would realize the seriousness of which their sin has grieved Christ’s body. To be removed from membership due to discipline means that the continued behavior has brought doubt over the genuineness of their former confession of Christ. The result is that the Elders are unable to affirm that Jesus Christ is truly Lord over the former member’s life.

Being removed from membership will include notification to the member by an Elder, and to the membership via the Members' Meeting.

The former member may still choose to attend services, but will be regarded as a non-Christian. This means removal from any existing Life Groups or Member-Only activities, but with access to Evangelistic Life Groups (i.e. Starting Point, Christianity Explained, Gospel Class).

Though seemingly drastic, our posture towards them must not be one of affirmation and accommodation for their sin, but admonition and evangelism—calling them to true repentance.

F. 2 Corinthians 2:6-11

The hopeful outcome of removal is exhibited by the example of [2 Corinthians 2:6-7](#), where church discipline and excommunication resulted in the person's restoration in the body, as they exhibited true repentance.

The purpose of putting the erring member out is to protect the fellowship's purity ([1 Corinthians 5:13](#)) and to warn the church of the seriousness and gravity of sin ([Matthew 18:17](#); [Titus 3:10-11](#); [1 Timothy 5:20](#)). This is also a witness to the watching world how we want to honor God's holiness.

When the church **has exhausted every means** to call the erring member back to the fellowship and community but is unsuccessful, the church at this point is just acknowledging what the erring member has been showing in his behavior, and that individual is left to their sin and their shame. If the person is truly a Christian, God may allow that person to experience desperation so that they may turn away from their sin.

The command to not have fellowship or even have social contact with the unrepentant brother ([1 Corinthians 5:11-13](#)) does not mean to never see or have any form of interaction with the person. It means that the church has to take opportunities to admonish the person, to call them to repentance, and to call them back into the fellowship for the purpose of restoration and no other.¹⁸

It would be helpful to remember through [Matthew 18:18-20](#), that our assurance in doing all these things is that our Christ is with us —because our God has given us provisions and direction on how to deal with sin concerns in the church community, Christ also assures His church that He would be with them in difficult situations.

When the erring individual has acknowledged his or her sin, confessed, made a decision to turn away from sin, and submitted themselves to a period of church discipline, the church must publicly restore this person as well ([2 Corinthians 2:6-11](#)). This should be done during a Members' Meeting since the exclusion was made in the presence of the covenanted church members, the restoration should be in the same kind. The church must affirm the person after he or she has properly been ministered to and vetted by the Elders. It should be the goal of the Elders to restore the person into ministry as well when the calling to serve is still being affirmed in his or her person.

¹⁸ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16–23* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988)

WHAT IF WE DON'T PRACTICE BIBLICAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE?

Revelation 2:18-29

“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: ‘The words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and whose feet are like burnished bronze. ‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first. But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works. But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. 28 And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

A. Regarding the individual:

- 1 | By not calling out sin, we hinder personal spiritual growth and discipleship. (James 5:16)
 - a. We hinder the person's discipleship - if they are backslidden, we hinder them to come back. If they are unsaved we hinder them to awaken and turn to the Gospel
 - b. We would not be able to call people to turn from their sin and submit to Christ -- if people are struggling with sin, we hinder their walk into sanctification.

B. Regarding the local church:

- 1 | We would fail to protect the purity of the church.
- 2 | We erode our witness and we sow the seeds of apostasy in the next generation. (2 Timothy 3:1-17)
 - a. We may get away with blurring the lines and easing our conscience by opting for worldly definitions of love but failing to account for the effect of compromise on the next generation.
- 3 | We blur lines defined by Scripture that result in calloused hearts.
 - a. We don't protect ourselves from the hardening of our hearts. (Hebrews 3:13)

C. Regarding God:

We fail to uphold God's honor and standard of holiness.

WHAT POSTURE SHOULD A MEMBER HAVE WHEN GOING THROUGH FORMAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Let us look at [Psalm 51](#) as the basis.

- 1** | A member who is going through formal church discipline must bear a contrite heart while acknowledging that it is God who the person ultimately offended ([Psalm 51:1-6](#)).
- 2** | A member who is going through formal church discipline must be humble and willing to be cleansed and go through the process of discipline itself ([Psalm 5:7-12](#)). Submission to the elders ([1 Peter 5:16](#)) in this context is a mark of submission to Christ's rule.
- 3** | A member who is going through formal church discipline must prioritize his or her heart being aligned to God's delight ([Psalm 5:13-19](#)).

CONCLUSION

Let us end with [Hebrews 13:17-18](#),

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. Pray for us, for we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things.

It is no easy task to plead and call someone back into the fellowship when they have decided to part ways from us and what we believe the Bible is saying. But it is the work of the Elders to shepherd, protect, and take care of the flock. Formal church discipline is a ministry of reconciliation, of safe-guarding the flock and restoring God's people.

The Elders of the church go through a process of vetting and examination of their character and competency as under shepherds ([1 Timothy 3:1-7](#); [Titus 1:5-9](#)). They are approved and affirmed by the congregation to shepherd them. The congregation are able and should be able to trust the Elders. They may not be perfect, but the church believes they are men called to lead, teach, rebuke, correct, train, serve, and protect. The congregation and the leaders have a covenant with each other. God has instructed on how the church should deal with matters of church discipline. The members are to submit also to the leaders overseeing their spiritual health as the Elders would be held accountable when they face Christ.

The caveat as discussed, though the Elders are under shepherds, and though the congregation are the flock who they are responsible for, it is the whole local church, Word Community Church, that is commanded by God in [Ephesians 4:1-6](#):

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

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John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 16–23 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988);

FOR ADDITIONAL READING:

John MacArthur, The Master's Plan for the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991);

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQ

[To be updated as needed]

BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

Q1. How do the elders exercise leadership in WORDCOMM?

Elders seek to follow the New Testament example of Jesus and the 12 disciples. Jesus empowered every disciple but he gave special attention to Peter, James and John. Among the three, Peter stands out. This does not mean that Peter had a higher office than the rest, but we can observe here the principle of "first among equals". This principle allows for functional, gift-based diversity within the eldership team without having to establish a superior office over fellow elders.

In our case, most of the time it's the Lead Pastor who serves as the "first among equals." In some instances, there's an elder who serves as the "first among equals" depending on the task or concern at hand, since elders have different strengths. Even though they have functional strengths and areas of focus, the elders seek to build consensus, as they prioritize unity in the team. Because elders are equals, every elder is accountable to each other and they are able to correct each other.

Our current structure (As of 10 May 2024):

Preaching and vision: Rafael Garcia
Congregational care/assistant cluster head: Jojo Timay
Training and development/ church discipline/ cluster head: Nate Macabasco
Life Group/cluster head: Jun Uy
Membership/ cluster head: Paul Sy Santos
General Ministry/Cluster head: Ruben Ramos
Counseling/ Resource Team /General ministry: Gus Lising
Counseling/ Resource Team /General ministry: Jayvee Dychioco

In any case that members have a concern with one of the elders, we follow Matthew 18 if it is a matter of personal offense. After bringing in a witness and still there is no resolution, he/she may bring the concern to another elder.

As of the current writing, the board of trustees oversee all church business, financial, and legal matters (per the by-laws). There is good harmony between the board and the elders, given that some elders also serve as board members. They also support the elders in other matters, such as fund raising, long-term planning, etc.

Overall, we can rest not on our system of leadership, but rest that the Lord has given his church elders (according to the qualification of Scriptures) who ultimately submit to Him as the chief shepherd and who will give an account to Him.

Q2. What are the requirements and the process for one to be an elder?

An elder must resemble character that aligns to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. He must also be able to teach and instruct in sound doctrine. The overarching qualification of an elder is someone being above reproach. Point of clarification, a husband of one wife means that an elder should maintain marital faithfulness to his wife, and therefore will not have other wives. A single man or a man without children therefore can be an elder so long as he is someone above reproach and fits the other qualifications described in Scriptures.

Based on our current demographics and that of existing elders, 35 years old is a good age for a man to become an elder, but it is not a hard rule. He may serve without a specified term as long as he is able, since eldership is also a calling rather than a term.

As we see members who are exhibiting the characteristics mentioned in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, we give them opportunities for further involvement and they will go through the elder candidate curriculum, much like what we did with the last batch of elders. Being a life group leader is good preparation for being an elder. The vetting period runs for 6 months (to possibly 1 year) as the Elders recognize the man's competence and character, and the congregation affirms.

Q3. How are elders planning to develop themselves and other leaders?

Currently, elders have regular meetings where we go through books and curriculums together. We also have two Masters of Divinity Graduates in the eldership/teaching team with one more currently finishing a degree.

The church is also in partnership with Living Waters to equip our elders in meeting the needs of our flock particularly in counseling our people as they exercise pastoral care.

We also continue to seek regional networks, coalitions, and church families like Resound, which we can collaborate and learn from as we grow and fulfill our mission.

The elders are also planning to have a Deacon Development Program to develop more leaders that will assist the elders in meeting the practical needs of the church (i.e. The chosen seven in Acts 6:1-7)

Q4. What are the roles of women in the church and what are the avenues where the voice of women can be heard?ning to develop themselves and other leaders?

We value women as God has created us equal to men. We value their presence and partnership in the church.

Roles for men and women are different though.

As stated in our position paper - the roles of church eldership and leadership are for men.

Women's roles are varied and essential - in prayer, in discipling other women, in teaching the next generation - the kids, and in various admin roles so that the church may function to do its mission and vision.

Avenues where women's voice can be heard:

1. Members Meeting
2. LG Huddle
3. LG Clusters
4. Personal conversation with an elder

Roles that women can have in the church:

1. Women can lead other women in light of Scriptures and support the church body, embodying feminine strength in support of male leadership.
2. Help with physical arrangement and decoration
3. They can teach children, they can help through administrative support, and other ministry opportunities except for roles which involve instruction of the whole congregation and church leadership (which rests on the elders). *The role of pastor and elder is reserved for qualified adult men.

BIBLICAL MEMBERSHIP

Q1. What is included in the membership process and how can one become a member? What should disqualify him/her?

The concept of church membership is seen throughout the New Testament whereby people in the congregation are known, letters are addressed to a specific group of people, and elders can give an account for them as the Lord called them to do. This is the essence or the substance of church membership. But how we practice church membership differs from one church to another.

The spirit behind the membership application process is essentially inviting every Christian in our church to be serious in their discipleship. By becoming a member they are saying that they want to commit their discipleship to the church by committing to other members, and by submitting to the leaders that God has appointed in the church. This is a serious commitment that involves sacrifice hence, it involves a process.

The application process starts by filling up an application form. By filling up this form, member applicants are indicating their interest to be a member of the church. They will then go through lessons that will help them have a clearer understanding of the gospel and what the church.

stands for. The first lesson would be the first module of Starting Point that outlines how someone can become a Christian, the importance of water baptism and church involvement. (We have started announcing this class last November 2023) After this, he/she needs to attend a class to get to know the church including its mission, vision and our statement of faith. It is then followed by elder's interview and then finally, the member's induction. Before induction, a member applicant is expected to be part of a lifegroup.

This process is here to make sure that we only admit genuine believers who subscribe to our statement of faith. When we speak of genuine believers, we mean those who understand the gospel and can give a clear salvation testimony and continue to bear fruits of repentance.

This means that not all applicants are admitted to membership. A person who is not yet a Christian, a Christian who is currently living an unrepentant life, and those who cannot agree to our statement of faith will not be admitted to membership. They may attend services, even join a lifegroup. But for all intents and purposes, our goal towards them is to pursue their salvation and repentance. We want to be clear with respect to the call of the gospel, and don't want to give false comfort and assurance. We hope for them to grow more in their understanding and application of the gospel so they can join the next membership induction.

Q2. What makes church membership important to a Christian's discipleship?

Church membership is the means to administer discipleship as what the early Christians did. This includes commitment to other believers and submission to recognized leaders. We cannot meaningfully disciple someone who is not willing to commit to the body. We cannot discipline/correct someone who is not willing to submit. And the elders cannot give an account of someone who is not known and is not part of the life of the church. Meaningful discipleship happens when there is a mutual commitment to the Lordship of Christ by the members and the elders of the church who are faithful to their respective roles. Having said this, if a person is serious in his/her discipleship, he should seriously consider meaningful membership because this will surely help him/her in his/her discipleship.

What makes meaningful membership for Wordcomm? It is in knowing that as we make our discipleship a serious matter, we know that we can pursue this together with other people who are committed to do the same under the servant leaders that God has qualified and appointed to shepherd the flock- the elders. Being a member gives a Christian confidence that someone is assigned by God (not by anyone else or organizational decree) to watch over his/her soul. The office of the elders is not a man made church management program, but God's design by which God is expressing his care and direction for his flock.

By not having stable membership, a Christian is depriving himself of the ministry of other Christians and elders. He is also depriving other Christians of the ministry that he can give to others according to his/her God-given gifts/uniqueness. By not living and committing to a community, he/she is making himself vulnerable from temptations and attacks of the enemy.

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." Hebrews 10:23-25

Notice the word ""us"". It's a collective work where it is implied that one can be on the receiving and giving end because Christian life is meant to be experienced in community.

Remember, the goal of church membership is to help a Christian grow into maturity in being faithful to his/her walk with Jesus.

Q3. How are members cared for? What is the expectation for membership involvement? What if members are underserved? Are there membership goals or caps in mind?

The reason why we temporarily stopped membership last year was so that we can focus on raising additional elders and focus on serving our covenant members. We thank God for three new elders that God has raised for us. We also thank God for Life Group Leaders who are partners of the elders in taking care of the members. Our desire is that members will feel connected and taken care of in our Life Group environment. If they are constantly showing up for Lifegroup and still feel left out or neglected, we encourage this person to talk to his cluster leader, the elder in charge of the cluster so they can help address the issue.

As a brother or a sister, if we know that a member is feeling left out or neglected, it is our responsibility to encourage and pray for our brother or sister. We can encourage this brother or sister to consider joining a Life Group, and consider how he/she can help the church or other members in the church and not be content to just be a recipient of the ministry of other people.

Our desire is to serve whoever the Lord will give us. This means that we don't set a hard and fast rule as to the cap limit for membership application. The guiding principle is "as many as we can handle". As for Life Group, our cap limit per group is 10. We believe this is a good number for our people to receive care and attention needed. However, we need to consider that the church and our Life Groups are still growing in the area of caring and ministering to our Life Group members. By the grace of God, as we grow together in maturity, we want to be better in serving our members.

There will also be other elements to our ministry such that members are given opportunities for involvement. We will have a men's ministry that will cater to all the men of the congregation and women's ministry for women. This will cover every member of the church since a member is either a man or a woman. Special ministries such as "Faith and Work" will also complement our service to members. The timeline is not yet in place as we are still in the process of building the ground work. Finally, we will provide special focus for those in unique transition points in their life stages (i.e. Parent Commissioning and Premarital Counseling).

FENCING THE TABLE

Q1. Who are the people that can and cannot partake the communion and why? How can we implement it lovingly such that those who can partake will be encouraged to participate according to the Scriptures, and those who cannot will either be moved to consider his/her discipleship seriously or to come to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

A baptized believer who is living a repentant lifestyle is encouraged to celebrate the Lord's supper. Hence, members in good standing are encouraged to partake in the Lord's supper. A visitor from a gospel affirming church who is not under church discipline may also partake of the Lord's supper. This means that baptism done by other gospel-affirming churches is acceptable.

The unregenerate (those who have not been born-again), those living in open unrepentant sin, and those who have not yet publicly declared their faith through water baptism cannot partake in the Lord's supper.

The reason for this is that only confessing Christians share in what Christ has accomplished on the cross. A person who is living in open unrepentance is not actually remembering the death of Christ but he is denying the power of the gospel that saves and sanctifies by the way he/she lives. Baptism is the public declaration of following Christ, it is the entry and confession that they are in need of a Savior and are submitting to the Lordship of Christ. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of that devotion and confession, that we partake in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Because of the sanctity of the Lord's supper, we seek to announce it one Sunday before its observance. We also lovingly remind our people who can and who cannot partake during that Sunday and we give time for our people to search their hearts as they partake.

The paper on fencing the table may have appeared to be leaning on the negative side because the paper is arguing why we need to fence the table. By implication, we have to identify those who cannot do it. In our context here in the Philippines, almost everyone partakes the Lord's table even if others are living a sinful and unrepentant lifestyle. So the point is to let these people know that they are not supposed to partake the Lord's table this way, but they are invited to come to Jesus for mercy- they are called to repent and believe.

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP

Q1. What does family discipleship mean for a church that:

a. has family members who are playing roles akin to parents?

We acknowledge that it takes a village to raise a child and there's a role that grandparents, uncles, aunties and other relatives play in the discipleship of the children. But the focus of the paper is to establish the truth that parents are primarily responsible in raising children to grow in the ways of the Lord. This weight of the responsibility is shared by other members of the family and even by the members of the family of God in the church, but parents are primarily responsible.

b. has a lot of students and singles?

The paper may be targeting a specific group of people in the church but if we are going to look at it on a long term basis, it is a good foundation to bring godly influence to the children who will become our youth, young adults, parents and seniors someday. We believe this gives a positive picture for what roles and responsibilities to pursue and aspire to.

c. has many parents with older kids?

In the meantime, those who are not parents of small children, can help in the discipleship of the parents that do. We believe this will help the discipleship of the children, and they can also help in the discipleship of the children as the opportunity arises.

Q2. What is our stand on the following:

a. Infant baptism and believer's baptism?

We do not believe that infant baptism has scriptural warrant. We practice believer's baptism as reflected in our baptism class. We only baptize people who profess faith in Christ. Our Practice of Parent Commissioning (in lieu of Baby Dedication) is an extension of the right administration of the ordinance of Baptism. We commission the parents to disciple their children so that when they believe, and fruits of repentance and new life become evident, they will be ready for Baptism and the Lord's Table.

b. The role of the church in upholding the family unit?

1. The role of the elders: Equip the saints to do the work of the ministry including their ministry to their children (Eph 4:11-13).
2. The role of the members: As part of a spiritual family, the members of the church help in the discipleship of the children by living a life that upholds the gospel. This is done by giving the children godly models to emulate, by helping provide a godly community both for the parents and for the children, and by helping teach the children in the ways of the Scriptures when opportunity arises.

c. What could be the primary place of discipleship for people who don't have children of their own?

The goal of the paper is to make it clear that parents are to assume responsibility in the discipleship of their children as reflected in the Scriptures. While there may be multiple avenues for parents to disciple, the family is their primary place of discipleship. The same is true for the children- they may be disciplined elsewhere, but if they have Christian parents, their primary place of discipleship should be at home. Having said this, when we say that "the family is the primary place of discipleship", this does not mean to say that singles do not have a family sphere of influence where they can disciple. A single person can either be a brother, a sister, a cousin, an uncle or an aunt in the family, hence, that can be their primary place of discipleship. In addition they can be a friend or a co-worker to others. In any case, they can bear spiritual children by sharing the gospel and disciplining others in the faith.

d. The role of parents with older kids as well as singles in supporting the family unit?

As for parents of older kids, they can still disciple their children but the method of discipleship will be different and it will be more difficult, but nothing is too difficult with the Lord. They can still pray for them, do what is within their control, and trust God to do the work.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Q1. Who are the people that could be subject to church discipline and how does Wordcomm intend to practice church discipline?

The goal of church discipline is restoration. Those who voluntarily confess their sin are more inclined to submit to the restoration process because they personally acknowledge their sin, than those who are forced to acknowledge their sin because they were caught. The restoration process varies depending on the case and the response of the person being disciplined. The posture of church discipline is for us to minister to the person and help them overcome recurring sin patterns in their lives. This is true whether the person is in ministry or not.

If they are ministry members/leaders: they will be asked to pause from serving so that they could focus on their restoration. The more public the ministry is, the process would include more steps/people. (i.e. The route for restoration for an LG leader is different from the route of restoration for an LG member.)

We are looking for fruits of repentance in the restoration process - if the person is willing to go through the process in spite of their struggle, if the person is eager to ask/receive help, if we can see change of direction and progress in the life of the person, these are good indicators of a changed life and repentance.

During the restoration process, LG leaders are tapped so we can better help and minister to the members. What would this look like?

1. We orient the LG Leader with the nature of the concern and to treat it with discretion.
2. We explain the purpose of why we're talking to them so they can help talk to the person in need of ministry.
3. We give them an overview of the steps and plans of restoration we have for the member that needs help.

Following Matthew 18, when a member has been confronted of sin together with another witness, and still refused to turn away from the sin behavior, then the LG leader could bring the concern to an elder.

Persistent unrepentance is what will cause a member to be removed from membership. However the removal will not be outright, it will go through a review process before they will be subject for removal if they persist in unrepentance despite our call and effort to restore them. The elders will decide who will be under review and who will be for removal because it will be the elders who will pursue them and call them back. The names of the members under review would be brought in the members' meeting so that members could help restore and bring them back into the community. If all has been done, but there is no change of direction, then elders will announce before the church members the decision to be.

Announcement will be done during membership meetings, but certain details would be withheld upon announcement so that we could also protect the person's privacy. During our members meeting, we will inform the congregation about members under review, while we continue to pursue them to repent. Should they persist in unrepentance, they will be listed under members for removal. However, our desire is that even before they will be put in the list for members under review, they will repent and so there's no more need to put them under review and ultimately for removal.

As for former members who refuse church discipline, we still want them to attend our church, because they need to hear the Gospel and be convicted of the Holy Spirit. We must however place a boundary where we cannot affirm their sin behavior and lifestyle. This means they are welcome to join, but they can no longer serve, and the primary interaction with them is to call them to repentance and reconciliation

Q2. How do we tackle the issue with gossip and slander in the church? Who do we report gossip to? How would church discipline be applied to them?

If a person gossips, please tell him/her to stop telling you about the other person and tell him/her that you can call the person he/she is talking about so he/she can talk to that person directly.

We will follow Matthew 18 in dealing with this person.