



Membership Class

by

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True Life Membership Class

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SALVATION

Introduction: This is the starting point of our faith. Therefore, it is the proper starting point for this class. It is imperative that we put first things first, and the first thing spiritually is a proper understanding and personal experience of salvation through Jesus Christ.

I) How to be Saved

- 1) **What is salvation?** Salvation is to be delivered or rescued from something. Spiritually speaking, it is the deliverance from sin and spiritual death and the deliverance into eternal life that comes through Jesus Christ (Example – a drowning person who is totally hopeless and helpless being rescued).
- 2) **Why do we need salvation?** There are at least five reasons why we need salvation:
 - A) Because we are sinners (Romans 3:23)
 - B) Because sin brings spiritual death (Romans 6:23)
 - C) Because sin brings eternal death (Revelation 20:11-15)
 - D) Because our sins separate us from God (Isaiah 59:2)
 - E) Because we cannot save ourselves (Ephesians 2:8-9) {If we could have saved ourselves, Jesus would not have died on the cross.}
- 3) **How do we receive salvation?** Salvation is a free gift of God. As Pastor Jim Fanning said, “Salvation is by grace through faith, plus nothing, minus everything.” We do not deserve it. We cannot earn it. We can only receive or reject God’s offer to come to Him and be saved. How do we receive the gift of salvation?
 - A) By Acknowledging Our Need For Salvation (Isaiah 59:2)
 1. Admit we are sinners (Romans 3:23)
 2. Acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves (Ephesians 2:8-9, Isaiah 64:6)
 3. Ask for forgiveness (1 John 1:9)
 4. Actually repenting (Acts 3:19)
 - B) By Believing in Christ (John 6:29)
 1. Jesus is God who became man also (John 1:1, 14)
 2. Jesus died on the cross for our sins in our place (1 Peter 3:18)
 3. Jesus was raised from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
 - C) By Calling Upon Jesus (Romans 10:13)
 1. Must be done in sincerity
 2. Must be done in repentance
 3. Must be done in faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)
 4. Must confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9)

*If you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, I encourage you to do that. If you are willing to repent of your sins and confess the Lord Jesus Christ in faith, I encourage you to pray a prayer something like this:

Dear God, I know I have sinned, and I ask you to forgive me. I believe Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead. Please save me. I confess that Jesus is Lord and give Him control of my life. In Jesus' name, amen. *

4) What Happens to Us When We Receive the Gift of Salvation? The following are a few of the blessings that come to us when we get saved:

- A) The forgiveness of all our sins and redemption from our previous spiritual condition (Ephesians 1:7).
- B) Justification (Romans 5:1) {Means that we are given a righteous standing before God through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ; Billy Graham says it means “just-as-if-I-had-never-sinned”}.
- C) Peace with God (Romans 5:1) {We can also have the peace of God (along with the other fruit of the Spirit) if we will walk in the Holy Spirit.}
- D) Adoption into the family of God as His sons and daughters (Romans 8:15-16).
- E) God becomes our Father (Galatians 4:6).
- F) We become joint-heirs with Christ who receive an inheritance from God (Romans 8:17).
- G) We receive eternal life (Romans 6:23, John 10:10).
- H) We are indwelt and sealed by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 1:13-14).
- I) God gives us every spiritual blessing through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:3).
- J) We will spend eternity in heaven with God (John 14:1-3).

II) How To Know You Are Saved

There are two commonly asked questions in regard to knowing if we are saved that are very important for us to have settled in our hearts. One is, “How can I know for sure that I have truly been saved?” The other is, “If I have been saved, can I lose my salvation?”

1) Evidence of Salvation: How can we know for sure that we have genuinely been saved? Well, the Bible promises us in Romans 10:13 that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” This is objective, absolute truth, and we can be sure that if we have done this in sincerity that God will keep His part of the promise and give us salvation. Then, according to the Bible, there are at least **seven** characteristics that are present in the life of a genuine believer. They are:

- 1) Witness of the Holy Spirit: 1 John 4:13 says, “By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” God the Holy Spirit who resides in the heart of every true Christian lets us know if we truly have been saved.
- 2) Correct Doctrine of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ: A person cannot believe anything they want to believe about Jesus Christ and be a Christian (1 John 4:1-6). We must believe what the Bible says about Him if we want Him to save us.
- 3) Continuing in the Faith: 1 John 2:19 says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.” The

Bible teaches that he who continues to the end will be saved. These verses do not mean that a person can stop believing and lose their salvation because the Bible teaches that God keeps those who are His, but these verses are saying that if someone decisively and permanently leaves the faith that they were never genuine believers in the first place.

- 4) Love For One Another: 1 John 4:20 says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?"
- 5) Obedience to God: 1 John 2:3 says, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."
- 6) Spiritual Fruit: Jesus said, "Therefore by their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20). This does not mean that everyone will have the same amount of fruit or that we can fully judge a person's salvation based on what we see (because God only really knows), but it does mean that every true believer will be changed by the power of God and produce fruit to some degree (2 Corinthians 5:17).
- 7) Discipline from God: Hebrews 12:3-11 teaches us that all true children of God are chastened by the Lord in order for them to be provoked to obedience and restored fellowship with God.

2) Assurance of Salvation: Can a genuine believer ever lose his/her salvation? According to the Bible, the answer is no. Why?

- 1) God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24)
- 2) God gives us eternal life (John 5:24)
- 3) We cannot be taken from God (John 10:28)
- 4) Salvation is the work of God in us instead of our works (Philippians 1:6, Ephesians 2:8-9). Therefore, if our works do not save us, they cannot cause us to lose our salvation.
- 5) We are sealed by the Holy Spirit who abides with us forever (Ephesians 4:30, John 14:16).
- 6) We are adopted children of God (Romans 8:16, Galatians 4:4-7). In biblical times an adopted child could not lose his inheritance. The same is true spiritually.
- 7) God guarantees that we will be glorified someday (Romans 8:30). The Holy Spirit is given to us as a down-payment on the future glorification and inheritance that we will receive in heaven someday (Ephesians 1:14).
- 8) There is no more condemnation to those who are in Christ (Romans 8:1).
- 9) Our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).
- 10) It is not the Father's will that Jesus lose any that He has been given (John 6:39-40).
- 11) We are perfected forever by the blood of Christ (Hebrews 10:14).
- 12) God will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5). He is faithful even when we are not (2 Timothy 2:13).
- 13) Hebrews 7:25 says, "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him since He always lives to make intercession for them." "Save to the uttermost" means that God saves us completely and forever. Also, we cannot lose our salvation because Jesus is *always* interceding for us.

As we think about these questions, keep this quote by John MacArthur in mind. He says, “Security is the Holy Spirit revealed fact that salvation is forever. Assurance is one’s confidence that he possesses eternal salvation.” In other words, security is an objective fact based on our relationship with Christ while assurance is a feeling or belief based on the quality of our walk with Christ. It is possible to be saved and not feel assurance at a particular moment or to feel like you are saved without truly being saved.

III) Symbols of Salvation (Ordinances of the Church)

A. Baptism

Introduction: Most religious groups practice some type of baptism. Baptists were given their name because of their method of baptizing people. There are different viewpoints in various denominations regarding the method and meaning of baptism. However, the issue is to be biblical-not denominational. Therefore, we will attempt to come to a correcting understanding of baptism by studying the Scriptures. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” **Let me share with you in a nutshell what True Life believes the Bible teaches regarding baptism and then attempt to illuminate this statement.**

***We believe in believer’s baptism by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a symbolic act, which is the means by which a Christian publicly and unashamedly bears witness to his faith in and commitment to Jesus Christ. ***

I. The Method of Baptism

3 Elements:

- 1. Confession of Faith in Jesus Christ-Acts 2:38:** New Testament scholar Craig Keener says, “This phrase simply means that the person being baptized confesses Christ. (Acts always uses this phrase with ‘be baptized’ – the passive, never the active; it does not denote a formula said over the person being baptized, but rather indicates the confession of faith of the person receiving baptism.)”
- 2. Baptism in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit-** Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
- 3. Baptism by Immersion (which means being made fully wet or placed fully into water)-**

Reasons:

A. The New Testament Example – Every example of baptism that is recorded in the New Testament is of this type. Let me share two examples of this. First, when John baptized Jesus in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17), “Jesus immediately came up from the water,” and this clearly pictures immersion. Second, when Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch after his conversion (Acts 8:26-40), they “went down into the water, and he baptized him.”

B. The Meaning of the Word – Baptism is the English transliteration of the Greek word, *baptizo*, which literally means “to make fully wet” (*Strong’s Comprehensive Concordance of the Bible*). According to Dr. Gerald Cowen, examples of the use of this word in secular Greek literature include sinking a ship, sinking into sleep or intoxication, a person drowning himself in wine, drawing

water from a vessel by dipping a cup in it, someone who is head over head and ears in debt, and someone who is drowned with questions. Therefore, if a person has not been made fully wet when baptized, he or she has not been baptized in the biblical sense.

C. The Symbolism of the Act – According to Romans 6:3-5, baptism is a symbol or picture of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and it is also a picture of the fact that the believer has died to sin and been raised to walk in the newness of life through Jesus Christ. Only the act of being taken under the water and raised up again can accurately symbolize these biblical truths.

II. The Meaning of Baptism

In other words, why should Christians be baptized and what does it mean when a Christian is baptized?

- 1. Jesus set an example for us by being baptized (Matthew 3:15), and we should follow His example.**
- 2. The Holy Spirit baptizes the believer into the Body of Christ, the universal church (1 Corinthians 12:13), at the moment of salvation, and water baptism pictures this truth.**
- 3. Water baptism pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.** In a sense, we are preaching a visual gospel sermon when we get baptized. W.A. Criswell said, “The gospel message is portrayed in the ordinance of baptism.”
- 4. Baptism pictures the fact that when we were born again we died to sin and were raised to walk in newness of life in Christ (Romans 6:1-6).**
- 5. Baptism pictures the washing away of sin that comes through the blood of Jesus (Acts 22:16).**
- 6. Baptism is the way we make our public confession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see the book of Acts).** It is a piece of evidence that we are not ashamed of Jesus (Matthew 10:32-33).
- 7. Baptism is a time for the church to celebrate new life (Luke 15).**

III. Making Ready For Baptism

How do I know if I am ready for baptism and how do I know if I have been properly baptized? This is where believer’s baptism comes into play. Proper baptism occurs after salvation. A truly born again person is ready for baptism because baptism is the outward expression of the reality of knowing Christ. That is the only way a symbol can have true meaning. However, it is important that a believer be baptized as soon as possible after salvation because it is our first act of obedience as Christians and is **the biblical way** we make our public confession of faith in Christ. In addition, the Book of Acts shows us that people were baptized very soon, sometimes even immediately, after their conversion. **Here are four reasons that biblical baptism is only for believers:**

- 1. The Work of the Holy Spirit:** 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” According to John 3:5, we are born again by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, if the Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ at the moment of salvation, water baptism, while important, has nothing to do with salvation. We receive the Holy Spirit at the moment we trust Christ and not when we are baptized. Water baptism only pictures what took place at the moment of salvation.

2. The Nature of Salvation: Ephesians 2:8-9 says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Jesus Christ paid the full price for our sins on the cross. We can add nothing to that. His blood is totally sufficient (1 Peter 1:18-20). We have absolutely no merit before God, no matter how many good works we do. Baptism is a work, and according to the Bible, we are not capable of earning or even helping to gain our salvation by working for it. We work because we are saved (Ephesians 2:10).

3. The New Testament Example:

A) The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43): Jesus promised one of the men that were crucified with him that “today you will be with me in Paradise” (v. 43). However, this man did not realize the identity of Jesus, repent of his sin, and request that he be saved until he was on the cross. Therefore, it is impossible that he could have been baptized. Yet, Jesus promised Him that he would be in heaven (paradise and heaven are synonyms) after his death. The only possible conclusion is that baptism was unnecessary to his salvation.

B) The 3000 Saved on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47): Verse 41 says, “Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.” “Received” is the Greek word, *apodechoma*, and it means “to take fully.” James 1:21 says, “Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” I believe, therefore, that when we compare Scripture with Scripture it becomes clear that they were saved before they were baptized because they had fully received God’s Word, and that brings salvation according to James. Furthermore, in verse 38, Peter said, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.” The word translated “for” means “because” in this instance and some other instances in the New Testament. Also, “repent” is 2nd person singular and “everyone” is third person plural so Peter was telling everyone to repent and then those that repented were to be baptized because of the remission of sins.

C) The Ethiopian Treasurer (Acts 8:26-40): The Holy Spirit led Philip to the Ethiopian who was reading from the book of Isaiah. This man did not understand what he was reading so Philip took the Scriptures and preached Jesus to him. The Ethiopian then asked Philip, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” However, Philip did not immediately baptize him. He first said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” After the Ethiopian responded, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,” Philip baptized him. The Ethiopian had to confess Christ and be saved before the man of God would baptize him.

D) Paul’s Salvation Experience (Acts 9:1-19): Paul was saved on the Damascus Road when he encountered the risen Christ and confessed Him as Lord (v. 6). Ananias baptized him over three days later.

E) The Gentiles Saved in the Home of Cornelius (Acts 10): God sent Peter to begin the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter preached in the home of a man named Cornelius. Verse 44 says, “While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word.” The Jews who were with Peter were amazed that Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit. Peter answered them by saying, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” They were baptized with water. Therefore, it is obvious that these people were saved before they were baptized.

F) The Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:16-34): Paul and Silas were in jail. God sent an earthquake that opened the doors and loosened the chains, but they did not escape. The jailer was trembling as he ran to Paul and Silas and said, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” They answered

him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (v. 30-31). This is the only time that question is directly asked in the New Testament, and the answer called for faith and did not involve baptism in any way.

G) The Believers at Ephesus (Acts 19:1-10): Paul encountered a group of false disciples at Ephesus. They had been deceived. They had been baptized into John’s baptism, but they had not truly believed on Christ and received the Holy Spirit. After Paul explained the truth to them, “they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (v.5). Therefore, they had been baptized once, but they still needed to have believer’s baptism after their salvation.

4. The Nature of Sinners: 2 Peter 2:22 says, “But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit’, and ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire’.” It is possible to take a pig away from mud, wash it, and dress it up. However, that pig will always return to the mud because that is its nature and cleaning up the outside does not change the inside. By the same token, it is possible to take a sinner and baptize him, but the sinner will always return to sin because it is his nature. Regeneration is the inward cleansing and changing brought about by the Holy Spirit. It is not an external act accomplished by baptism.

Conclusion: Baptism is a very important act. All Christians should be baptized by immersion; in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and as a public testimony to what Christ has done in their lives. It is hard for me to conceive how a truly born again Christian would not want to be baptized. However, the act of baptism itself has absolutely no saving power. Jesus and Jesus alone paid the price for our sins. He is sufficient for salvation. We “are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10). It is a slap in the face of Christ for us to attempt to add anything to His finished work on the cross.

B. The Lord’s Supper

Introduction: True Life Church (along with most other Baptist churches) has two ordinances. These symbols of our salvation are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In the New Testament, the Lord’s Supper is pictured as being observed in the life of the local church. Because the Lord’s Supper is a symbol of salvation, only those who have been saved should participate in it. True Life practices open communion which means that any true Christian who is in fellowship with God and the local church, regardless of what church they are a member of, is welcome to participate in the Lord’s Supper when we have it at church. The observance of the Lord’s Supper is a very serious and important time in the life of an individual Christian and the life of a local church. Let’s examine what the Bible has to say about it.

- (I) **The Instituting of the Lord’s Supper (Mark 14:22-26):** It was started by Jesus Christ himself the night He was betrayed. The disciples and Jesus were having their last meal together to celebrate the Passover, and Jesus, knowing He was about to be crucified, presented the bread as a symbol of His body that was about to be broken, and the wine as a symbol of the blood He was about to spill for the sins of the world.
- (II) **The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:18-34):** When we observe the Lord’s Supper, it is a time of:
 - 1) **Unification (v. 17-22):** God does not want any divisions in His Body, the Church. Observing the Lord’s Supper should remind us that we are the body of Christ that

He purchased with His precious blood on the cross, and we should be motivated to restore any broken fellowship we have with a brother or sister in Christ. A lack of unity kills churches. However, according to verse 19, this unity must be rooted in doctrinal truth.

- 2) **Thanksgiving (v. (24-25)):** Notice that Jesus gave thanks when he was taking the Passover meal with his disciples. If He gave thanks, how much more should we express thanksgiving? When we take the Lord's Supper, we are to thank Him for the wonderful, incredible sacrifice He made on our behalf.
- 3) **Remembrance (v. 24-25):** The Lord's Supper is a memorial feast. We are being reminded of what Christ did for us on the cross. This teaches us that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic act. Dr. Paige Patterson has written, "The Lord's Supper is purely a symbolic feast established as a memorial to the most significant event ever to transpire in the history of the race – the atonement of Jesus."
- 4) **Proclamation (v. 26):** By observing the Lord's Supper, we proclaim the truth of the atonement. The Lord's Supper is evangelistic because it pictures the sacrifice of Christ. It is a visual sermon.
- 5) **Identification:** The fact that we are internalizing the elements pictures to us that we are identifying ourselves with Christ and His crucifixion. It shows that we are trusting in His death and nothing else for our salvation.
- 6) **Examination (v. 27-32):** We are not to take the Lord's Supper flippantly or with sin in our hearts. Paul tells us that taking the Lord's Supper wrongly will bring the discipline of God upon us. He tells us that some people have become sick or even died because they took the Lord's Supper wrongly. We should confess all known sin before we participate in Communion.

True Life Church Statement of Beliefs

Statement of Beliefs:

1. We believe that all of the Bible is the inspired Word of God that is without error and totally true in everything it affirms (Psalm 138:2; Matthew 5:17-18; Mark 12:26, 36; Luke 24: 27, 44; John 5:39-47, 10:33, 16:13, 17:17; Acts 1:16; Romans 15:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:16-21; Revelation 22:18-19).

2. We believe that the Bible is the authority for our lives that is sufficient to guide us in what we believe, how we live, and how this church functions (Luke 6:46-49, Acts 15:15, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22).

3. We believe that there is one God who eternally exists in three distinct but equal persons who have the same essence, nature and attributes: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 11:33-34; Isaiah 45:21; 2 Peter 1:17; John 1:1, 5:17, 8:58, 10:30-33, 20:28; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 1; Revelation 1:8; John 14:16-17; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 4:16; Hebrews 9:14).

4. We believe that God is the sovereign Creator and Ruler of the universe (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:10-11, 66:7; Isaiah 45:5-12; Daniel 4:17, 32; John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17; Revelation 19:6).

5. We believe that Jesus Christ is fully and eternally God who entered this world through the virgin conception and birth as a genuine human being with a human body and sinless human nature. He is fully God and fully man at the same time (wording amended 12-4-13).
 Jesus lived a sinless and perfect life, died on the cross as the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins, bodily rose from the dead, ascended to heaven where He is now making intercession for us, and He will someday literally, bodily, and visibly return to set up His kingdom on the earth (Isaiah 7:14; Zechariah 12:10; Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 4:14-16; Luke 19:10; Romans 3:20-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2; Matthew 28:7; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 4:25; Acts 1:9-11; Mark 16:19; Hebrews 7:25; John 14:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 19:7-20:6) (wording amended 12-4-13).

6. We believe the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who baptizes, seals, and indwells every Christian at the moment of salvation. He is the person, presence, and power of God in the life of a believer. The Spirit teaches, guides, comforts, empowers, and develops the character of Christ in believers as they are filled with and walk in the Holy Spirit. He also distributes spiritual gifts to believers. These gifts must be used in accordance with Scripture (John 14:16-17; 16:5-15; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 12:1-14:40; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 1:13-14, 2:22, 5:18).

7. We believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. Only those who receive Christ are children of God who know God personally as their Heavenly Father. We are made right with God only on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus (John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 3:24-26, Galatians 4:4-6, 1 Peter 1:18-19).

8. We believe that all men are created in the image of God and not evolved from a lower order of beings. However, all people are born in sin and are sinners by nature and conduct. Our sin has separated us from God and results in spiritual and physical death (Genesis 1:1, 26-27; Psalm 51:5; Isaiah 59:2, 64:6; Romans 3:9-23, 6:23; Ephesians 2:1-3).

9. We believe that all who receive Christ through genuine repentance and faith are born of the Holy Spirit and permanently become children of God with all of the blessings and responsibilities associated therein (John 1:12, 3:16, 5:24, 10:28; Acts 3:19; Romans 3:21-4:8, 5:1, 8:1-17, 10:9-10, 13; Galatians 2:16-21, 3:10-14, 4:4-7; Ephesians 1:14, 2:8-10, 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; Jude 24).

10. We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ is His Body of elect believers who have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ at the moment of salvation. The church is comprised of the universal body of all believers and is expressed in self-governing local churches where the people of God gather together. It is the mission of the church to make disciples of all nations until Christ returns for us. The ordinances of the church are believer's baptism by immersion in water and the Lord's Supper which are symbols of our salvation (Matthew 16:13-19, 28:16-20; Acts 2:42-47, 9:31, 20:28; 1 Corinthians 11:17-12:31; Ephesians 2:19-20; Colossians 1:18; Hebrews 12:23; 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 2-3) (wording amended 12-4-13).

11. We believe that sanctification (a setting apart unto God) occurs positionally when the believer is placed into Christ at the moment of salvation, continues progressively as the believer grows spiritually throughout the rest of life, and is completed permanently and perfectly when the believer is glorified in heaven (John 17:17; Romans 8:18-30; 2 Corinthians 3:18, 7:1; Ephesians 4:17-24, 5:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 10:10, 14).

12. We believe that it is the calling of every Christian to live a holy life, love God and other people, grow spiritually, use his or her God-given spiritual gifts to glorify God and build up the church, and to be a witness for Christ in the world (Matthew 22:34-40; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 1:15-16, 4:10-11; 2 Peter 3:18) (wording amended 12-4-13).

13. We believe in the reality of angels, who are spirits created by God. They continually worship and serve God and also minister to believers. We also believe in the reality of Satan and demons, who are fallen angels. However, we also believe that Christ defeated Satan on the cross and believers have authority over him today (Isaiah 6; Hebrews 1; Genesis 3; Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Ephesians 6:10-18; 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Peter 2:4; 1 John 3:8; Jude 6; Revelation 12).

14. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the righteous and unrighteous, the eternal blessedness of the saved in heaven, and the eternal punishment of the lost in hell (Matthew 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; John 5:29; John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 1 John 3:13; Revelation 19-22).

15. We believe that God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. The husband and the wife are equal before God, since both are created in God's image. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously and voluntarily to the servant

leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. In other words, husbands and wives are equal persons with distinct, God-given roles. They are to work together to manage the household and nurture the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing from the Lord. Parents are to raise their children with a godly example, loving discipline, wise teaching and training, and proper affection. Children are to honor and obey their parents (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25, 3:1-20; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 127; 139:13-16; Malachi 2:14-16; Ephesians 5:21-33, 6:1-4; Colossians 3:18-21; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-7) (wording amended 12-4-13).

We believe that Jesus Christ is Lord over everything (Matthew 28:18, 1 Corinthians 15:27-28, Philippians 2:9-11, Colossians 1:18).

Core Values (Guiding Principles)

1. We believe in the anointed, accurate, and practical teaching of the Bible with a focus on life transformation and conformity to the character of Christ.
2. We believe that worship is not just ritual but a real encounter with the living God who is worthy of our worship.
3. We believe that full devotion to Jesus Christ characterizes the normal Christian life and that God deserves excellence and sacrifice in all we do for Him.
4. We believe that the church should be both doctrinally pure and culturally relevant through the use of current mediums such as a contemporary style of music, the arts, and multimedia.
5. We believe that prayer is to be the basis of all that we do as a church and that praying in faith will be the foundation that enables us to take bold risks in obedience to the will of God.
6. We believe that pastors should lead the church by example and according to Scripture and that every believer should be equipped to minister and be given significant opportunity, responsibility, and accountability.
7. We believe that lost people matter to God and therefore should matter to the church.
8. We believe that this church should always demonstrate love and meet the needs of people.

Mission Statement

(revised and reworded on 12-4-13)

True Life Church is here to meet people where they are and help them become fully devoted followers of Christ.

In order for this to happen, we believe that people need to be involved in four particular environments:

1. Closets

Jesus used this as picture for spending time alone with God, which is necessary for close fellowship with God and spiritual growth. We will encourage and equip the people of True Life to spend time with God in prayer, Bible study, and the practice of other spiritual disciplines.

2. Rows

Rows are a picture of corporate worship gatherings. Hebrews 10:25 tells believers to not forsake the assembling of themselves together. In regard to rows, we will seek to:

A. Focus on lifting up Jesus and the gospel of grace. We will preach repentance both from rebellion and religious self-righteousness so that the lost can be converted and believers be built up in their faith.

B. Be a place where people genuinely connect with God in dynamic corporate worship.

C. Have high-quality children's and youth ministries and be a place that helps people prepare for marriage, have godly marriages, and equips them to raise children who have a heart for Jesus.

D. Pay off our debt as quickly as possible and expand our facilities in the future in order to be able to more effectively minister to more people.

3. Circles

Circles are a picture of small groups, and it is our philosophy of ministry that we are a church of small groups. Small groups are environments where people love each other and experience life together, grow spiritually through study and prayer, support and challenge one another, and reach out and minister together. The groups will multiply through evangelism, intentionally developing leaders, and birthing new groups.

4. Streets

This word pictures Jesus' mission that He gave the church of making disciples of all the nations. We believe every church should be a "glocal" church, which means that it is attempting to reach its local community and ministering internationally at the same time. We will do this by:

A. Equipping and encouraging the members of True Life to share Jesus with people during the course of their daily lives and through the outreaches of this church.

B. Being a place where the hurting and struggling can find love, acceptance, guidance, forgiveness, hope and restoration.

C. Sending groups out on mission trips every year and sending ministers out all over the world as God calls people out.

D. By reaching out to students at Carson Newman College, particularly international students in the Global Education Department.

E. Continuing to plant churches in areas of Honduras that have almost no evangelical churches, to continue to support the planting and development of Prince of Peace Baptist Church, to be a part of planting an English-speaking international church in our area, to plant other churches in our local area as God leads, and train and assist other church plants and church planters as the Lord opens doors.

STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION

It is the intention of True Life Baptist Church to be a cooperating entity with the Nolachucky Baptist Association, Tennessee Baptist Convention, and Southern Baptist Convention. True Life will support missions through the channels provided by these entities.

1) Why We Do Not Advertise Baptist In Our Name

The legal name of the church is True Life Baptist Church. However, we only use True Life Church for advertising purposes. This will be reflected in the Constitution and Bylaws. This is different than most churches. Why are we doing it in this manner?

1. We believe that God has led us through His Spirit to name the church in the way that we have.
2. We believe it is proper to focus on reaching people for Christ first and then educating them about the Southern Baptist Convention.
3. We do not want the name to be a barrier to considering the claims of Christ for people who have a negative perception of the SBC.
4. We believe that denominations are overemphasized (especially in this area) and believe that God is leading us to deemphasize denominationalism while still affiliating with the SBC. Proper priorities are: Christ 1st, Scripture 2nd, people 3rd, and denomination 4th.
5. We believe that the only reason to start a new church in this area is if it is going to be intentionally different, and this is one of the ways we are going to be different.

2) Why We Affiliate With The Southern Baptist Convention

I want to explain why we affiliate with the SBC by explaining why I am a Southern Baptist. We have to decide which denomination or other type of church that we will affiliate with, and it is important that we have reasons and convictions for our decisions. However, it is also important to realize that the primary issue is whether or not we are genuinely born again. All true Christians are part of God's family and are brothers and sisters in Christ who have fellowship with one another in Christ (1 John 1:3) regardless of denominational identity. True believers of all denominations will agree on the fundamental doctrines of the faith (the inerrancy of the Scripture, the Trinity, the virgin birth of Christ, the full deity and full humanity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, the literal return of Christ, salvation by grace through faith alone), the need to love one another, the call to holy living, and the commission of the church to spread the Gospel throughout the entire world.

Our denominational affiliation is a secondary but important issue. A common question is, "Why do we even have denominations?" Well, the basic reason is that there is disagreement among Christians when it comes to peripheral issues outside of those fundamental issues listed above, and it is necessary to have convictions in regard to these issues. Therefore, I am a Christian who is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Church because:

- 1) I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God that is the authority for faith and practice, and this is the traditional position of Southern Baptists. Baptists have been known as "a people of the Book."

- 2) I believe that the Baptist Faith and Message, which is our confession of faith, lines up with what I understand the Bible teaches more than the doctrinal statement of any other denomination.
- 3) I believe that believers baptism by immersion, which is the practice that gained Baptists their name, is the biblical mode of baptism
- 4) I believe that Baptists are correct in their understanding of the Lord's Supper as a symbolic act.
- 5) I believe the Co-Operative Program is the best methodology any denomination has ever used for supporting its missionary work.

3) **The Structure of the Southern Baptist Convention**

How is the Southern Baptist Convention set up? The Southern Baptist Convention is the national organization of autonomous Southern Baptist churches who voluntarily co-operate together to do missions, ministry, and education. Southern Baptist is more of a historic than a geographically correct name at this point because there are Southern Baptist churches all over the country. The Southern Baptist Convention meets once a year to elect officers and appoint trustees who oversee the various agencies during the course of the year. There are four levels of organization that a Southern Baptist Church can be a part of.

- 1) Local church – Every Southern Baptist Church is first and foremost an autonomous, local church
- 2) Local Association – This is a group of local churches in the same geographical area who join together voluntarily to cooperate in ministry.
- 3) State Convention – These are made up of Southern Baptist churches in a particular state or states who voluntarily choose to work together.
- 4) Southern Baptist Convention – This is the national organization. It is important to realize that none of these organizations can force a local church to do anything (although they can disfellowship them if they strongly disagree). The Southern Baptist Convention is supported financially by gifts to the Co-Operative Program from the supporting churches. The following page is a chart taken from “Missions Mosaic,” which is the magazine of the Women's Missionary Union, that details the various organizations of the Southern Baptist Convention and how the convention is structured.

4) **How Being A Part Of The SBC Affects True Life Church**

On a practical level, what does this actually mean to True Life Church?

- 1) **It does not mean anything** in regard to our doctrine, decision-making, structure, goals, or plans because we are a local, autonomous New Testament Church. Local churches are to be led by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit instead of denominational leaders working through a hierarchical structure.
- 2) It does mean that we will support missions by giving to the Co-Operative Program through the budget and by giving to the special offerings for missions.
- 3) It does mean that we can avail ourselves of the resources that are available through the local association, the state convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention.

Church Leadership And Government

Introduction: The Bible teaches that there are two offices in a church (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3). They are: pastors (or they could also be called elders, bishops, overseers, or shepherds and still be biblical) and deacons. Warren Wiersbe writes, “Church organization was quite simple in apostolic days: There were pastors (elders, bishops) and deacons (Phil 1:1). It seems that there was a plurality of elders overseeing the work of each church...” Pastors are to lead and feed God’s church. Deacons are servants who function as pastoral assistants to meet the needs of the congregation. Let’s examine them individually, but please keep in mind that as a new church we are a work in progress, and it will take time to implement this fully.

Elders

It is my conviction that good leadership is essential for having a good church. John Maxwell says, “Everything rises and falls on leadership.” Thus, it is essential for a church to have the proper leadership structure with the right type of leaders. John MacArthur says, “Biblically, the focal point of all church leadership is the elder. It is the elders who are charged with teaching, feeding, and protecting the church, and it is the elders who are accountable to God on behalf of the church.” This is an attempt to state and explain what the Bible actually teaches on the subject of elders and deacons.

This is somewhat of a controversial issue. However, the key is to be biblical. The Bible is the Word of God and the place where truth is revealed. At True Life Church, “we believe that all of the Bible is the inspired Word of God that is true in everything it affirms,” and “we believe that the Bible is the authority for our lives that is sufficient to guide us in what we believe, how we live, and how this church functions.” Human opinions are irrelevant. We must follow the will of God as it is revealed in Scripture.

This is an area where my convictions have changed. A friend of mine challenged me to study this subject when we were in seminary. I really had difficulty getting past my traditions and looking at it objectively. However, I have continued to study the issue over the course of the years, and I have become convinced that the Bible teaches that a local church is to be led by a plurality of God-called, spiritually qualified men. Let us consider their Name, their Number, their Nature (qualifications and role), and some important questions regarding this issue.

Before we examine those items, we should look at a foundational issue in regard to leadership in the church. Jesus Christ is the unquestioned Leader of the Church. He is the Head. We are the Body. (“And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence”- Colossians 1:18.) He is the Lord. We are the servants. The church is not really a democracy. It is a benevolent dictatorship. Majority opinion has never decided God’s will or changed God’s mind. I believe that we have read the American idea of democracy into the New Testament. The words committee, democracy, business meeting, and Robert’s Rules of Order do not appear in the Bible.

The question then is in regard to how Christ’s leadership is mediated and expressed in the local church. The Bible does teach the priesthood of all believers. We all have equal access to God. However, the Bible also teaches that we are to submit to proper spiritual authority. Stephen Olford writes, “Speaking to church members, the writer to the Hebrews exhorts, ‘Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account’ (Hebrews 13:17). Here is an area that is utterly disregarded in most of our churches today. By the infiltration of a false concept of democracy and worldly government, we have nullified God’s purpose in the

local congregation. The consequences are that we have produced a state of anarchy. Like the days of spiritual declension in the Old Testament times when there was no king in Israel, sadly it has to be stated that ‘everyone [does] what [is] right in his own eyes’ (Judges 17:6). There can be no doubt, however, that God’s intention is that the sovereignty of Christ should be recognized in the pastoral leadership of the church.... Only when such divine authority is respected and obeyed will unity, blessing, and abundant life be enjoyed throughout the membership.”

With that said in the way of introduction, let’s examine what the Bible teaches about church leadership, beginning with **elders**. I will begin by sharing several Scriptures that show what the Name and Number should be.

Acts 11:29-30 says, “Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the *elders* by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

Acts 14:23 says, “So when they [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed *elders* in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

Acts 15:6 says, “Now the apostles and *elders* came together to consider this matter.”

Acts 20:17 says, “From Miletus he [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the *elders* of the church.” Verse 28 then says, “Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Philippians 1:1b says, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the *bishops* and deacons.”

1 Timothy 3:1 says, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a *bishop*, he desires a good work.”

1 Timothy 4:14 says, “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the *eldership*.”

1 Timothy 5:17 says, “Let the *elders* who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine.”

Titus 1:5 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint *elders* in every city as I commanded you.” He then begins to list the character requirements for the elders and says in verse 7 that “a *bishop* must be blameless.”

Hebrews 13: 7 and 17 say, “Remember *those who rule over you*, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Obey *those who rule over you*, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* and several translations translate “those who rule over you” as “your leaders.” The point is that the phrase is plural which means that they had multiple rulers or leaders to follow.

James 5:14 says, “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the *elders* of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

1 Peter 5:1-3 says, “The *elders* who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow *elder* and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: *shepherd* the flock of God which is among you, serving as *overseers*, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

(I) Their Name-The name is not really the key issue. We see in the preceding Scriptures that there are five interchangeable biblical terms for the person we generally refer to as pastor. A minister can be called pastor, shepherd, bishop, overseer, or elder according to these Scriptures. Pastor and shepherd are translated from the Greek word, *poimen*. Bishop and overseer are translated from the Greek word, *episkopos*. Elder is translated from the Greek word, *presbuteros*. These words simply highlight different functions of the same office. We see in Acts 20: 17 and 28, Titus 1: 5 and 7, and 1 Peter 5:1-2 that these terms are used interchangeably to refer to the same people. In other words, each of these pastoral leaders is referred to as an elder, overseer, and shepherd. They are the multiples roles of the individual office. I am using the terms pastor and elder interchangeably as I write this.

(II) Their Number-This is really the key issue! We are espousing team leadership through a plurality of pastors as opposed to a single pastor! We see in the verses quoted above that except when referring to an individual's qualifications for the office itself (1 Timothy 3:1) and when Peter referred to himself as an elder (1 Peter 5:1) that these names for the pastoral office are always used in the plural. According to Acts 14:23, Paul and Barnabas ordained elders [plural] in every church [singular]. Paul called for the elders [plural] of the church [singular] at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). Philippians 1:1 refers to "the bishops and deacons" of the church at Philippi. Each of these terms is plural so why should we have a single pastor with multiple deacons instead of a plurality of each? James 5:14 speaks of the ministry of prayer and anointing of oil that the elders are to have to the sick. How can this verse really be followed without having elders? John MacArthur writes, "The biblical norm for church leadership is a plurality of God-ordained elders...Nowhere in Scripture do we find a local assembly ruled by majority opinion or by one pastor." David Horner writes, "Throughout the biblical usage of the words relating to this office, the words are always in the plural. There is no evidence anywhere in the Bible of a church with one elder charged with the responsibility for the flock. They were appointed to serve collectively as a team to function in leadership over the body of believers committed to their care." **That is what we are seeking to implement.** Earl Radmacher writes, "It is interesting to observe that the words 'the pastor,' which we use so often would have been strange to their ears. In fact, the definite article {the} is never used with the term 'pastor' except when referring to Jesus Christ. Truly, He is the Good Shepherd, the Great Shepherd, the Chief Shepherd. No other single human being has the same unique qualities that can merit the definite article in front of the title." Some practical reasons for this set-up are:

- A. The pastoral job is really too much for one man. Elders can be traced historically back through the nation of Israel and the advent of them is found in Exodus 18 when Jethro told Moses to appoint other men to help him because he was wearing himself and the people out by trying to do everything himself.
- B. This avoids a one-man dictatorship.
- C. On the other hand, it protects the pastor from being the lightning rod for all the criticism from the congregation.
- D. It keeps the church from imitating all of a single pastor's shortcomings.
- E. It gives people with different types of personalities multiple leaders with different types of personalities they can relate to and provides balance for the church.

- F. It provides multiple spiritual gifts to the leadership team instead of the limited giftedness of one man. It will provide everything that is needed and allow elders to focus on their particular areas of giftedness and passion instead of having to try to do everything, including things at which they are not gifted.
- G. It provides built-in accountability and godly counsel. John MacArthur says, “Their combined counsel and wisdom helps assure that decisions are not self-willed or self-serving to a single individual (cf. Prob. 11:14).”

III) Their Nature

- A. **Role-In essence, the elders are to lead, feed, and guard the flock of God as they serve as overseers of God’s church. They are charged with the overall oversight of True Life’s ministry and are to serve as guardians of the church. They must be men who are called and biblically qualified to jointly pastor God’s people. While there is a primary Teaching Pastor, the Elders are equal in their authority and are to work together to lead God’s Church. Their decisions must be unanimous. The following are functions of an elder. They especially apply to the Teaching Pastor.**
 1. ***An elder is to be a man of God*** (1 Timothy 6:11). He is to be a spiritual man who walks with the Lord. Godly character is the primary biblical requirement for ministry.
 2. ***An elder is to be a man of prayer*** (1 Timothy 2:1, Acts 6:4). His decisions are to be guided by prayer, and he should pray regularly for his church members and those who do not yet know Christ.
 3. ***An elder is to preach and teach the Word of God.*** His preaching is to be biblical, doctrinally sound, and without compromise (2 Timothy 4:1-5). The apostles said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables...but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:2, 4). The one qualification for an elder than is not a character quality is the ability to teach.
 4. ***An elder is to do the work of an evangelist*** (2 Timothy 4:5). An evangelist is one who spreads the gospel. Pastor/elder and evangelist are distinct offices, but evangelism is one of the primary functions of a pastor/elder.
 5. ***An elder is to equip the believers to do the work of ministry*** (Ephesians 4:11-12). The pastor/elder’s calling is not to do all the work of the church, but he is to teach and train the people to use their spiritual gifts and function together as a team in doing ministry.
 6. ***An elder is to shepherd the flock*** (1 Peter 5:1-4). This is the leading, counseling, caring aspect of pastoral ministry. Prayer for the sick and ministry to the grieving is included also.
 7. ***An elder is to be an overseer of the church*** (1 Peter 5:1). This refers to their role as leaders of the church. Pastors/elders are spoken of as “ruling” in 1 Timothy 5:17 and Hebrews 13:7 and 17. “Rule” means to “preside over,” “to be over,” “to superintend” (according to Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest) and “direct the affairs of the church” (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*). It also refers to administrative duties.
 8. ***An elder is to be an example to the church*** (1 Peter 5:1-4). He is to live out his message in front of people. Actions communicate louder than words.

B. Qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9)-A pastor is required to be a man of godly character with a good testimony who is seeking to emulate Jesus Christ. 1

Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 list the requirements for a pastor. They are:

1. blameless
2. a man
3. husband of one wife
4. self-controlled
5. sober-minded
6. a well-ordered life
7. hospitable
8. able to teach
9. not a drinker
10. not violent
11. not greedy for money or covetous
12. gentle and not quarrelsome
13. rules his own home well and his children are in submission to his authority
14. not a new Christian
15. has a good testimony among non-Christians
16. not self-willed
17. not quick-tempered
18. a lover of what is good
19. just
20. holy
21. holds sound doctrine

(IV) Important Questions Regarding This Issue

1. **How does this concept of church government fit with being a Baptist church?** It is not a problem for a Baptist church to have this type of governmental/leadership structure. Why? There are at least four reasons. First, other Baptist churches have this type of structure. In fact, it is something that is increasing. Second, we are an autonomous (which means self-governing, independent) local church. We voluntarily cooperate with other Baptist churches in order to do more together than we can do apart but there is no hierarchy than allows others to tell us how to function. Third, our ultimate loyalty is to Christ and His Word and not a denomination. Fourth, there is tremendous historical precedent among Baptist churches for this structure. **In fact, I would say that we are going back to our roots by doing this.** Here are a few examples. In *Tennessee Baptists: A Comprehensive History, 1779-1999*, author Albert Wardin Jr. discusses ministerial titles in the 1800's. He writes, "The common term of address for pastor was elder." The Thomas Helwys Confession of 1611 (this came from what many historians consider to be the first Baptist church on English soil) says "that the officers of every Church or congregation are either elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls, or deacons....." The 1660 Standard Confession of Faith speaks of "the elders or pastors which God hath appointed to oversee, and feed his Church." The 1689 London Baptist Confession; chapter 26, #8, says, "A particular church, gathered and

completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ...to be continued to the end of the world, are bishops or elders, and deacons.” The section on the Church, #8, in the 1742 Philadelphia Confession of Faith repeats verbatim what was written in the London Baptist Confession. Edwin Dargan, professor of Homiletics and Ecclesiology at Southern Baptist Seminary at the turn of the 20th century, wrote, “Deacons’ ministries in modern churches tend to encroach upon and absorb that of the eldership. It is greatly to be regretted that there is any decline in the use of so venerable and scriptural a designation of the New Testament office, and a revival of its usage is greatly to be desired.” The original SBC Baptist Faith and Message (1925), section XII-The Gospel Church, says, “Its Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.”

2. **How are the elders and deacons appointed?** The elders and deacons are appointed by the elders, deacons, and the congregation working together. The apostles and the congregation worked together in determining the first deacons appointed in Acts 6. We will follow that model in regard to elders and deacons. However, in the appointment and ordination of elders, the decision-making biblically seems to be weighted more towards the other elders than towards the congregation (Acts 13:1-3; Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:21; Titus 1:5). The process for selecting elders will be that when a man is brought on staff the elders will examine him and make a decision as to whether or not he should be an elder in addition to being a staff person. If they decide that the person is called and qualified to be an elder, they will bring him to the congregation for its affirmation and then ordain the man. In regard to elders being appointed from within the congregation, the elders will determine that there is a need to add an elder or elders. They will solicit recommendations from the congregation in regard to men the congregation believes are biblically qualified and also recommend men themselves. These men will go through a detailed process with the elders to determine their qualification and readiness. We will also be doing training on an ongoing basis in order to prepare men for leadership roles. Out of that process, the Elders will prayerfully determine those men they believe are called and qualified and present them to the congregation for their affirmation. The Elders will then ordain them. Also, at any time, individual members of the congregation can recommend to the Elders that a particular man be considered for this role. This can be presented to an individual Elder who will then bring to all the Elders for discussion.
3. **How are they ordained?** They are ordained after extensive examination through the laying on of hands of the elders [and deacons in the case of new deacons being appointed] (Acts 13:1-3, Acts 14:23, 1 Timothy 4:14, 1 Timothy 5:21, Titus 1:5). Ordination is essentially the human recognition of that which God has already ordained-His call to ministry.
4. **Are they “full-time staff members” or can they come out of the congregation?** It can be either one and probably will be some of each. There will be elders who are “full-time staff members.” However, not every staff member will necessarily be an elder. There will also be elders who arise out of the congregation and serve in that capacity while still working a full-time job in the marketplace.
5. **Is there a special leader above the other leaders?** Various churches handle this issue differently, but I believe that the elders are equal. The idea in a plurality of pastors is team leadership that protects the church from a dictatorship. The elders make decisions unanimously as they seek the mind of Christ through searching the Scriptures, prayer, and obtaining godly counsel. However, I also believe that this does not eliminate the concept of a primary Teaching Pastor [1 Timothy 5:17] (although this can be shared as well) who often

will serve as the point man in communicating to the church. Practically, there can also be leaders among leaders because of differing levels of maturity and giftedness.

6. **What about financial support for the elders?** Pastors have the right to be supported financially in their work to free them up to serve the Lord full-time and churches have the responsibility to provide this financial support (1 Corinthians 9, 1 Timothy 5:17-18). However, pastors also have the right to forego this compensation (1 Corinthians 9:12). Therefore, we will have some paid (possibly both full and part time) elders and some unpaid.
7. **What about starting with only one?** This is a practical necessity in many cases. I do not see anything unbiblical about an individual being a solo church planter and leading a church in its beginning stages. However, I do believe that we must have more than one elder in place before we formally constitute as a church in order to be consistent with what I am teaching from the Bible.
8. **What about congregational decision-making?** The elder structure with empowered ministry teams lessens the amount of congregational decision-making. We believe this is advantageous because it is correct biblically and helpful practically. However, there will still be some congregational decision-making. *However, we want to be clear that any decision made by an individual, a ministry team, the Elders, or the whole congregation really should be looked at as prayerfully seeking the will of the Lord in regard to a particular matter.* The following are issues that must be approved by the congregation: (1) The yearly faith financial plan, (2) The final step in church discipline, (3) The selection of elders and deacons, (4) The selection of a primary Teaching Pastor(s), (5) The decision to purchase property, and/or enter into a building program, and borrowing money, (6) The selection of directors/trustees, (7) The approval or amendment of the Constitution and Bylaws, (8) The dissolution of the church upon the elders suggestion, (9) The restoration of a repentant member to church membership, (10) Anything else the elders decide the congregation should make a decision about. Also, in regard to dismissing an elder or deacon, the elders can do it or the congregation as a whole can do it.
9. **What if a pastor needs to be relieved of his duties?** An important element of the concept of elders is the built-in accountability that it provides. Therefore, the “first line of defense” in dealing with problems is among the elders themselves. They need to help a struggling pastor or bring him before the church for discipline and even removal if necessary (1 Timothy 5:19-20). However, the congregation has the right to ask for the church discipline process to be followed against an elder if it believes the elders are not doing their duty in dealing with a situation. The congregation can ultimately ask for a meeting and vote to remove an elder from his position. The process for this is spelled out in the Constitution.
10. **How does the office of elder relate to the other ministries of the congregation?** We believe in empowered ministry teams. In other words, the various ministries of the church, while fitting into the overall vision and structure of the church, are run from within for the most part. The elders do not function as dictators over them. However, the elders do have the responsibility and authority to direct and make sure the overall ministry of the church is on track. Therefore, they will serve as a sounding board and help with problems that the individual ministries are having. Also, they will hold the ministries accountable and make sure they are being biblical and fitting in with the overall vision of the church. They will correct problems as needed.

- 11. Do the elders and deacons serve for a set period of time or for an indefinite and ongoing amount of time?** The Bible seems to teach that a person is ordained for life unless he disqualifies himself in some way. Thus, the elders and deacons at True Life will be appointed for an indefinite and ongoing period of time. However, those who are not full-time, paid staff will be given the option of taking a sabbatical from their positions every five years.

Deacons

1. **Role (Acts 6)**-The role of the deacon is primarily defined by the meaning of the word. The word literally means “one who waits tables,” “servant,” and “minister.” It is a functional role. The first deacons in Acts 6 were appointed to be pastoral assistants, take care of a problem, and provide benevolence type ministry to the widows. David Horner has written, “The deacons were also called upon to serve the body, but their responsibilities are nowhere specifically defined other than the functional role of servant. They were to serve in whatever capacity they were needed to enable the elders to fulfill their ministry responsibilities and to minister to the needs of the congregation.” The focus of the role of the deacons at True Life will be as ministers to the congregation through small group leaders, involvement in the ministries of the church, direct ministry to families in the congregation, helping take care of the church’s property, administration of the benevolence ministry, and other duties as assigned by the elders. Their service is designed to set an example for the rest of the congregation.
2. **Relationship to the Elders**-Elders and deacons are clearly to work together. Deacons are pastoral assistants who are given direction by the elders. Horner writes, “Whereas the elders are called to lead the flock and serve as overseers of the ministry of the church, deacons by the very nature of their position are called to support the leadership of the elders by assuming various aspects of the work load in order to enable them to direct their attention more intently on the priorities set for them in the Scriptures.”
3. **Requirements (1 Timothy 3:8-13)**-As with the elders, the focus is on character. There are very strict character requirements for deacons that are very similar to the ones listed for pastors. They include: **reverence, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, doctrinally sound, tested, blameless, having godly wives, husbands of one wife, and ruling their homes and children well.** This demonstrates that God’s focus in regard to qualifications for leadership is on character.

Summary

1. God-called and gifted men
2. Multiple pastors with different gifts (a plurality of pastors [elders])
3. Team leadership
4. Must meet 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 character qualifications
5. Must also be able to teach
6. The Church is not purely a democracy-it is under the headship of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:18) and following the blueprint of the Bible.
7. People should be seeking God's will through prayer and Scripture study instead of voting based strictly on human opinions and agendas.
8. Elders have a "ruling" position (1 Timothy 5:17) as they shepherd and lead the flock.
9. The deacons function as ministers instead of rulers as they assist the pastors in the work of the church.
10. This cuts down on business and committee meetings.
11. This is balanced in that it follows the biblical teaching regarding pastoral leadership, but at the same time it keeps the pastor from being a dictator or one-man show.
12. It acknowledges that one man is not able to do it all because he does not have all of the spiritual gifts or enough time to do the entire ministry.
13. Part of spiritual maturity is submitting to God-ordained spiritual authority.
14. Leadership is to be appointed based on giftedness and maturity rather than elected based simply on popularity.

Church Discipline

First, It is the sincerely held theological position of True Life Church that membership requires submission by all members to the administration of church discipline as outlined below. Also, while it is understood that each particular case will be different, and that the process will require some flexibility and discretion by the elders, the distinct three-step process outlined by Christ in Matthew 18:15-18 along with other Scriptures, serve as our model of church discipline and will generally govern the administration of church discipline for True Life Church.

Second, 1 Corinthians 6:1-11 clearly tells us that believers are not to settle their disputes in secular courts. Instead, these matters are to be settled “before the saints” (v.1). Paul asserts that believers will judge the world (v.2) and the angels (v.3), and this certainly qualifies us, and not unbelievers who, “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v.9), to judge among the family of God. It is even better to allow ourselves to be cheated, *apostereo*, literally meaning to be “robbed from” (Patterson), instead of taking a brother to court. It is “already an utter failure for you that go to law against one another” (v.7). Only the devil wins in that case because it brings reproach upon the name of Christ. Therefore, we must accept our God-given responsibility to judge matters between Christians, and Christians must go to the church instead of civil court to settle problems.

Third, Galatians 6:1 relates that restoration must be the ultimate goal of church discipline. It says, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” While we must administer discipline at times in order to be obedient to God, we must do it with the desire of lovingly restoring the person instead of angrily punishing them. Remember, God Himself sets this example for us because He chastens those that He loves (Hebrews 12:6), and He cannot set an example for us that is wrong because He is holy. The idea of church discipline is correction and not punishment. The Book of 2nd Corinthians relates that the person disciplined in 1 Corinthians 5 was ultimately restored to the fellowship of the church. The leadership of True Life Church will make every effort to restore a church member who is living in unrepentant sin or who is refusing to abide by the commitments he or she made by signing the membership covenant.

Fourth, Matthew 18:15-20 lays out the steps that are to be taken in situations where one Christian sins (and where we use some form of the word, offend, in this section of the constitution, we are talking about actual sin) against another Christian. The first step is for the wronged person to confront the sinning brother or sister. The second step is for the wronged Christian to take one or two others from the church to act as witnesses in the situation. Finally, if the offender is still unrepentant, he must be brought to the church. Then, if there is no repentance, the sinner is to be treated “like a heathen and a tax collector” (v.17). This would have to be speaking of a disfellowshipping from the local assembly.

Fifth, 1 Corinthians 5 gives guidelines for dealing with public sin that affects the entire church. The sin that occasioned Paul’s response was sexual immorality between a man and his unbelieving stepmother (v.1). However, the admonitions of this passage do not just apply to this particular sin. In verse 11, Paul writes, “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner.” Sexual immorality, *pornos* in the Greek, is the general word to cover all sexual sin. Covetous is defrauding for the sake of gain. An idolater is an image worshipper. A reviler is one who uses abusive language. A drunkard is someone who is consistently drunk. An

extortioner is someone given to extortion and robbery (These definitions came from Strong's Comprehensive Concordance, The New Analytical Greek Lexicon, and Webster's Dictionary).

It is important to note, however, that Paul directs criticism and commands to the church body and not the offender. He criticized them for pride and for not mourning over a sin so serious that it was even illegal according to pagan Roman law (MacGorman). He reminds them that a little leaven, almost always a symbol for evil in the Bible, leavens the whole lump, a symbol of the Church body. In other words, sin that is ignored permeates and infects the entire congregation. Paul's remedy for unrepentant sin was to "deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (v.5). This is hard to understand, but it has to mean something along the lines of disfellowshipping a person from the church in order to ultimately redeem that person.

Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn from this passage:

1. Church discipline is not exercised over gray areas but over clear, continued, and unrepentant sin. (v.1, 11).
 2. The church must realize the seriousness and the corrupting influence of such sin, and humbly deal with the sin (v. 2, 6-8).
 3. The church has the right and responsibility to judge sin in the name and power of the Lord Jesus (v.3-4).
 4. The church is to deal with this sin as an entire body (v.4). [Note also 1 Timothy 5:20]
 5. The ultimate goal is redemption and not punishment (v.5). The discipline is only a means to ultimately redeem and restore the offender while purifying the church.
 6. Unrepentant sin must ultimately result in the exclusion of the member from the church.
- Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Paul called for the exclusion of the sinning member in verses 2, 5, 11 and 13. This is in perfect agreement with Matthew 18:17.

Based on these passages, the following should serve as general guidelines for administering church discipline at True Life Church:

1. The church as a whole must ultimately deal with matters where the sinner remains unrepentant. However, the church leadership should deal with the situation first and seek to bring repentance without having to bring the issue before the church body. Until the final step of bringing a situation to the whole congregation, this process falls under the oversight and leadership of the Elders.

2. If it comes to light that a member has wronged a fellow believer or is engaging in the sins mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5 or other sins named elsewhere in Scripture, the church must also practice discipline. The elders are to do this by following the process given in Matthew 18:15-18, which is:

A. One Witness. When sin takes place, the offended person, if offended privately or one elder if the sin is of a public nature shall first correct the offending member in private. If the offending member acknowledges their sin and agrees to turn from the sin, the offending member shall be considered won and the matter shall be considered closed, unless the Elders believe that something more is necessary for the spiritual health of those involved and/or the spiritual health of the church in general (see number 4 below). If the offending member fails to acknowledge and turn from their sin, then the offending member shall be subject to the testimony of two or three witnesses as outlined in the next step.

B. Two or Three Witnesses. The offended person and one or more elders if a private offense, or two or more elders if a public sin, shall attempt to correct the offending member in private, if reasonably possible. If the offending member acknowledges their sin and agrees to turn from the sin, the offending member shall be considered won and the matter shall be considered closed, unless the Elders believe that something more is necessary for the spiritual health of those involved and/or the spiritual health of church in general (see number 4 below). If the offending member refuses to face two or more witnesses regarding the sin, or if the offending member refuses to acknowledge and turn from their sin after being personally corrected by two or more witnesses, then the offending member shall be subject to the witness of the church as outlined in the next step.

C. The Witness of the Church. The facts and testimony of the two or more witnesses involved in step two shall be brought before and presented to the members of the church. The members of the church will then decide by vote whether the offending member should receive a final letter from the elders on behalf of the church (to be sent by certified U.S. mail return receipt requested) informing the offending member that he or she must come to a state of acknowledgment and repentance which includes performing any other act which the elders believe is necessary for the spiritual health of those involved and/or the spiritual health of church in general (see number 4 below). The letter will also say that if the offending member refuses to do those things the offending member will be removed from the membership of the church within two weeks from the date that the offending member receives the letter as shown by the date on the certified return receipt. If the member cannot be found, or will not accept the letter, then the vote of the church shall be final and the offending member shall be removed from membership not more than thirty days from the date of the vote.

3. If a person in a leadership position has to be disciplined and they repent, the church still has the right to remove that person from their position. The reasons for this are the public nature of ministry, the fact that leaders have to set an example, and the stricter standard the Bible sets for them in 1 Timothy 3 and James 3:1, which says, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”

4. It is the sincerely held theological position of True Life Church that the elders have a serious responsibility for the spiritual health of the church. Because of that serious responsibility the elders will use their discretion when it comes to the three-step process as outlined above. For example, the process may require a public and in-person confession before the entire church if and when the offense is of a public nature, or in instances when the elders believe a public confession is the most proper means by which to bring healing to the offending member and the church. In such cases the offending member must submit to the authority of the elders.

Membership is conditioned upon the signed statement of the member verifying that they understand and agree to submit to and support the administration of church discipline as outlined in the True Life Church Constitution. If, at any point in the process, an offending member chooses not to submit to the manner of acknowledgment and repentance approved by the elders (or to take any other action the elders agree is appropriate under the circumstances) that offending member shall not only be subject to church discipline for the original offense, but also for breach of their promise to submit to the elders as demonstrated by their signed copy of the Church Covenant.

Why Membership?

Why should I become a member of True Life or any other church? I'm already a Christian and a part of the body of Christ so does it even matter if I am a member of a local church? Well, it does matter because we do become a part of the family of God when we get saved, and the actual expression of that is found in the New Testament local church (1 Corinthians 1:2). There is not one Christian mentioned in the New Testament who was not connected to a local church. In the *Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren has written,

“Many American Christians are what I call “floating believers.” Anywhere else in the world, being a believer is synonymous with being connected to a local body of believers—you rarely find a lone-ranger Christian in other countries. Many American Christians, however, hop from one church to another without any identity, accountability, or commitment. This is a direct expression of America’s rampant individualism. They have not been taught that the Christian life involves more than just *believing*—it also includes *belonging*. We grow in Christ by being in relationship to other Christians. Romans 12:10 says, “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.”

C.S. Lewis once wrote an essay on church membership, reminding us that the word *membership* is of Christian origin, but it has been taken over by the world and emptied of all its original meaning. Today, most people associate the term *membership* with paying dues, meaningless rituals, silly rules and handshakes, and having your name on some dusty roll. Paul, however, had a very different image of membership. To him, being a member of the church did not refer to some cold induction into an institution, but rather it meant becoming a vital organ of a living body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 6:15; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We need to reclaim this image. *Any* organ that is detached from the body will not only miss what it was created to be, it will also shrivel and die quickly. The same is true for Christians that are uncommitted to any specific congregation.”

There are several reasons to be an official member of a local church. Here are ten of them:

- 1) **Membership counts me in on a great mission.** Our mission at True Life is “to meet people where they are and help them become fully devoted followers of Christ.” Bill Craig has written, “Membership is our way of saying, Count me in. I’m not just a spectator; I’m on the team now. I’m not just a ‘church shopper’ checking you out; I’m ready to get involved now. I want to work with the rest of you by making this mission *my* mission, *our* mission. I want to learn to seek and serve where God wants me, as a follower of Christ. I want to meet people where they are in their point of need and welcome them into our Christian community. I want to connect with God, others, and opportunities to make a difference in our world.”

- 2) **Membership allows the leadership to know who they can count on.** One of the images of the church is an army. Any army must know who is fighting before it goes to battle. This is true of the church. In New Testament times, there were not denominations or multiple

churches in a town so a person was a “member” of the church when he or she got saved and baptized. Now, with multiple denominations and churches, we need a formal way of knowing who is “fighting in the army.” We need to know who can really be counted on.

- 3) **Membership commits me to a community of mutually committed people.** This is part of the purpose of the membership covenant. We believe that people must make a common commitment and be held accountable to that commitment for membership to be meaningful.
- 4) **Membership helps the church family keep expectations clear and gives the accountability necessary for growth.** Once again, let me quote Pastor Craig because what he has to say at this point is so clear and insightful. He writes, “A clearly defined membership helps us to keep clear what we expect of members and nonmembers. On the one hand, we enthusiastically welcome interested, but as yet uncommitted people — people who are not yet Christians — to attend our services. Since these people are not yet Christians, we do not expect them to act like Christians. We offer them an accepting environment, just as they are. On the other hand, we do expect our members to act like Christians... imperfect, to be sure, but genuine, honest, and growing. Membership helps define the expectations we have in this regard. This definition is important in the area of biblical church discipline: only members receive the pastoral oversight, accountability, and protection associated with church discipline.”
- 5) **Membership affirms that we hold to similar values and beliefs.** By defining and asking members to affirm our various statements, we are seeking to assure that we are all “playing from the same sheet of music” and “building from the same set of blueprints.” This gives us a strong, shared foundation of faith.
- 6) **Membership places you under the spiritual protection of godly leaders (Hebrews 13:7, 17; Acts 20:28-31).** God has ordained certain authorities in this world, and our lives are blessed as we line ourselves up under those authorities. This is certainly true in regard to proper spiritual authority functioning in the proper manner.
- 7) **Membership provides a spiritual family to encourage and challenge you in your walk with Christ and share the burdens of life through prayer, love, sharing, and support (Galatians 6:2).** This is an incredible benefit of putting forth the effort to really be involved in and committed to a local church. It is easy to just show up for an occasional service and sometimes difficult and painful to really be involved. However, committed and active membership allows us to build relationships with people who will help us greatly through the course of our lives.
- 8) **Membership opens the door for different leadership roles.** We believe that leadership roles in the church are a privilege that comes with accountability. In order for us to have the

proper accountability, a person must be a member in order to serve in the ministries of the church. Also, it is important that someone be in agreement with the beliefs, vision, values, etc. of the church if they are going to serve and lead so membership is necessary for that reason.

9) Members can participate in the internal affairs and decisions of the church body.

“Family” business needs to be handled by the actual church family. People need to be informed about the church and committed to the church as evidenced by church membership if they are going to participate when we make congregational decisions or even when the various ministries make decisions.

10) Members understand their role and use their gifts, talents, and abilities accordingly. Bill

Craig writes, “In many churches, the members are the customers and the clergy are the staff, hired and expected to meet their needs. At [True Life] we have a completely different understanding of what it means to be the church. Here, the members are the staff... not expecting to be served by the paid staff. Rather, being equipped by the paid staff to serve one another as volunteer staff and to reach out to our neighbors – who are our real ‘customers.’ By having a defined membership, we know who is on the team, and we can be sure they find the best “position” on the team – the place where they will be most effective and fulfilled as we work together to reach our team objective.”

Biblical Basis For Church Membership

A commonly debated issue among Christians is the whether or not it is biblical to have a formal church membership. In properly evaluating the issue, it is imperative to set the proper context. We are in a different setting today because there are many churches and denominations. That was not the issue in biblical times. A person became a “member” of the church by being saved and baptized. There is not a specific chapter and verse that tells us to do church membership (and maybe part of the problem is simply the terminology and some of the baggage that it carries because of some unbiblical traditions surrounding the issue). However, I believe that the New Testament churches had a form of membership and so we are following the pattern of Scripture by having formal membership. Also, there are several scriptural principles that speak to the issue and demonstrate that formal church membership is God’s will.

Church membership that means simply having your name on some dusty roll is not a biblical concept. However, the concept of being committed to a particular local congregation and having a formal process of defining, making, and being accountable to that commitment is a biblical principle. That is what we are espousing at True Life Church. To be clear, I am saying that “becoming a church member” is a process where a truly born again, biblically baptized person affirms the beliefs and mission of a particular local congregation, places themselves under the authority of that church and its leadership, and commits themselves to share in the life and ministry of that fellowship. This is not a cold induction into a dead institution but an induction into a living body. There has to be some type of measurable, practical way to do this.

What is the biblical basis for making this type of commitment and having church membership?

1. 1 Corinthians 14:40 says, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” Church membership is an application of this principle. How can a congregation have people in ministry and leadership roles without knowing who is committed to the congregation? We find a picture of this principle in the Old Testament in the Book of Numbers when God ordered the children of Israel to take a census so they would know who they had in the army. God commanded them to count and organize because that is His nature (see 1 Corinthians 14:33) and our need. His nature and our need have not changed. The church needs to know who is in its army in the spiritual war we are fighting.
2. The church in the book of Acts obviously counted and kept records of who was a part of the congregation (Acts 1:15, 2:41, 4:4). Church membership is simply a way of doing this in our context (see 1st paragraph) today.
3. God writes down in heaven the names of those who are members of His family (Luke 10:20). If God does that in heaven, how can it be wrong for us to write down on the earth the names of those who are a part of our particular church family?
4. 1 Corinthians 12 pictures all believers as individual members of the one body of Christ. This is clearly talking about the universal church in particular. However, I think it applies to the question at hand regarding the local church in the sense that we need to know who are members of that particular body. Once again, there has to be some way to define that or else you are left open to the idea that anyone who walks through the doors is part of the church. However, that is definitely incorrect because someone cannot be a member of a New Testament church without salvation, scriptural baptism, doctrinal soundness, submission to

proper spiritual authority, and the testimony of a godly life. At True Life, we are attempting to get rid of the traditional, unbiblical model of church membership and get back to the biblical model. However, we don't need to throw the baby out with the bath water and get rid of church membership because some people have perverted the concept.

5. In the apostolic days, church leaders sent letters of commendation with believers to endorse them as they traveled from place to place and went to a new congregation (Acts 18:27, 1 Corinthians 16:3). While not exactly the same, it is the biblical foundation for the practice of churches granting membership letters that essentially endorse a person as they go to a new church.
6. The New Testament teaches that believers are to have a relational unity, but it also teaches that we are to have doctrinal unity (a common faith) and unity in our mission. God's desire is that "we all come to the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13). Paul's desire for the church at Philippi was that they were "with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27). How can we ever expect to have a unity of faith without defining it and asking people to commit to it up front?
7. It is *implied* in the Greek word, "ekklesia," from which "church" is translated because the origin of the word referred to an assembly of the **citizens** of a city.
8. We are commanded to submit to proper spiritual authority (Hebrews 13:7, 17). However, it seems apparent to me that we must be committed to a particular congregation in order for this to be lived out.
9. 1 Corinthians 5 and several other passages command the church to practice proper discipline. However, membership is necessary for this to be carried out in the proper manner.
10. Romans 13 tells us to obey the government. Therefore, there can be legal reasons to have church membership. If a church incorporates (and it is foolish not to because of the legal protection it gives individual members), a membership roster is required.

Let me close with this quote from theologian Millard Erickson. He says, "...We must nevertheless not minimize the importance of the visible form of the church. It was apparently the standard procedure for the believer to become a part of the fellowship (see, e.g., Acts 2:47). While we do not know exactly what membership in the apostolic church entailed, it was certainly for the purposes of edification, prayer, service, and as can be seen particularly in Acts 5, discipline. We should therefore emphasize the importance of every believer's becoming an integral part of a group of believers, and making a firm commitment to it. Christianity is a corporate matter; and the Christian life can be fully realized only in relationship to others."

How To Become A Member

What is required for a person to become a member of True Life Church?

- 1) A personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior
- 2) Believer's baptism by immersion as a public sign of one's faith
- 3) A private conversation with a True Life Pastor or other designated church leader regarding your understanding of salvation and baptism
- 4) Talking to your pastor if you are leaving another church and attempting to reconcile any broken relationships and/or resolve any problems at the previous church
- 5) Completion of the membership class
- 6) Signing the True Life Membership Covenant
- 7) Approval by the elders (The elders have the right to refuse to grant membership to a person who does not have a biblical belief system or who is not living a biblical lifestyle.)

Therefore, a person who is not a Christian should get saved and baptized. Then, he or she can join the church.

A person who is a Christian but has never had believer's baptism can join the church after being baptized.

A person who is saved and baptized can join the church by transferring their membership from another Baptist church or by a statement of faith of salvation and baptism if you are not a member of another Baptist church.

***Note* A pastor from True Life may contact the previous church to determine if there were unresolved issues that need to be dealt with at the former church.**

The Mutual Responsibilities Of Membership

I) The Responsibilities of the Church to Its Members

What does a church owe its members? What should you expect from the church as a member?

The following are some of the things you should expect:

- 1) the uncompromised preaching and teaching of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-4:5)
- 2) a godly example from the leaders (1 Peter 5:3)
- 3) equipping for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12)
- 4) the love, support, encouragement, and prayers of fellow believers (Galatians 6:2)
- 5) spiritual accountability (Matthew 18:15-18, 1 Corinthians 5)
- 6) careful financial stewardship (2 Corinthians 8:16-24)
- 7) a serious, corporate effort to fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)
- 8) opportunities for the corporate worship of God and the observances of the ordinances of the church (Hebrews 10:25, John 4:24, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

II) The Responsibilities of the Members to the Church

What do the members of a church owe to the church? **It is important to remember that, according to the Bible, a church is people so we are the church. Therefore, this church will be whatever we make it to be. In other words, if we are godly, Christ-honoring people, we will have a godly, Christ-honoring church. If we are ungodly, carnal Christians, we will have an ungodly carnal church.**

A church member's responsibility to his/her church is to do the will of the Lord by following Scripture. We should encourage and exhort one another in fulfilling those responsibilities. Some of the basic responsibilities are listed in the Membership Covenant.

Reviewing The Covenant

Here are some things to think about and some questions to ask yourself as you prayerfully contemplate the decision regarding signing the covenant and becoming a member of True Life Church.

- Do I understand and agree with the statements (mission, purpose, vision, intention)?
- Do I understand and agree with the core values?
- Do I understand and affirm biblically the statement of beliefs?
- Do I understand and agree with the covenant?
- Am I willing to commit to follow it and really do the things listed in it?
- Am I willing to be accountable?
- Do I believe that I can follow the pastoral leadership?
- Do I understand the other things in the Membership Class booklet?
- Do I feel led by the Holy Spirit to become a member of this church?
- Does this church fit with my biblical convictions?

NOTE #1: We will re-affirm our covenants on a yearly basis.

NOTE #2: Please remember that membership is a serious responsibility and that each member has a responsibility to the Lord and to one another.

NOTE #3: If a person ceases to follow the standards set forth in the membership covenant, the leadership of the church will work with him to get him back on track in that area. If there are no signs of repentance or efforts to live up to the commitment, the pastors will eventually have to recommend that the church body remove this person from the membership roll. The membership covenant provides part of the basis for the practice of church discipline.

The True Life Church Membership Covenant

Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior, having been baptized, having completed True Life Membership Class, and being in agreement with True Life's Constitution; I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite with the True Life church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

1. I will protect the unity of my church

... by acting in love toward other members

... by handling problems in a Scriptural manner and refusing to gossip

... by following the leaders

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35 NKJV).

“Love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22b NKJV).

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs” (Ephesians 4:29 NIV).

“These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him.a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16, 19NKJV).

“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17 NKJV).

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17 NIV).

“Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ...Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest may also fear” (1 Timothy 5:17, 19-20 NKJV).

2. I will share the responsibility of my church

... by praying for its growth

... by inviting the unchurched to attend and warmly welcoming those who visit

... by sharing Christ with those who do not know Him

“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers” (1 Thessalonians 1:2 NKJV).

“Then the Master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled’ (Luke 14:23 NKJV).

“And He said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’” (Mark 16:15 NKJV).

“But in your hearts acknowledge Christ as the holy Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV).

3. I will serve the ministry of my church

... by discovering my gifts and talents

... by being equipped to serve by my pastors

... by developing a servant’s heart

“Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you”
(1 Peter 4:10 PHILLIPS).

“[God] gave ... some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV).

“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who... [took on] the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2:3-4, 7 NIV).

4. I will support the testimony of my church

... by attending faithfully

... by living a godly life

... by giving regularly

“Let us not give up meeting together... but let us encourage one another...”
(Hebrews 10:25 NIV).

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27a NKJV).

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16 NKJV).

“Now about the collection for God’s people: Do what I [the Apostle Paul] told the Galatian churches to do. On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2a NIV).

“Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase” (Proverbs 3:9 NIKV).

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse” (Malachi 3:10a NKJV).

Signed: _____ **Date:** _____