SELECTED CASE STUDIES ON CHURCHES WITH A MEMBERSHIP PROCESS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE DISCIPLESHIP

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of
Dallas Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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October 2011
Accepted by the Faculty of the Dallas Theological Seminary in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry

Examing Committee

[Signatures]
ABSTRACT

SELECTED CASE STUDIES ON CHURCHES WITH A MEMBERSHIP PROCESS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE DISCIPLESHIP

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The thesis of this dissertation is that membership processes that enhance discipleship exist and can be discovered in selected churches. The body of the dissertation is divided into three portions. A literature review examines the biblical foundation for membership along with an historical account of the development and transitions of membership within the church from the first century to today. The literature review will also explore the correlation between discipleship and church engagement along with key practices for a membership process that can enhance discipleship. The research procedure communicates the rationale for choosing the case-study research, the selection of the case-study churches, and the means of studying the selected churches. The case-studies demonstrate the membership processes that enhance discipleship.

Church membership in America is rapidly declining and many church leaders are wrestling with the place and role of membership within their own organizations. While Christian leaders would agree that a key component of their God-given responsibility is to make disciples, many are overlooking the role that a membership process can have in the development of disciples. The case-studies included in this paper are just two examples of churches that are seeking to use their membership process to enhance discipleship. These churches have a robust process that clearly communicates the expectations of the church with systems in place for accountability and follow-up. Churches that adopt these practices have the opportunity to develop, enhance, or transform a membership process with the goal of better accomplishing Jesus’ command of making disciples.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Project’s Rationale

The rationale for the research project arises out of the author's responsibility of transitioning the membership process at Grace Bible Church of La Vernia, Texas. In the opinion of the author, the membership process at Grace Bible Church was minimalistic and contributed very little to communicating the church’s values or enhancing discipleship within its congregants. At that time, a congregant could become a member during a short meeting with one of the pastors whereby the governance of the church would be explained and the participant agreed to the doctrinal statement of the church. These subjects usually could be covered in less than one hour.

After becoming the Senior Pastor of Grace Bible Church, this researcher determined that a disconnect existed between the church’s membership process and discipleship. For many people at Grace Bible Church, they were baptized after salvation and encouraged to attend a membership class. If that person did decide to become a member, there was no follow-up with that person concerning their spiritual growth and many would drop off over time. The pattern that this researcher observed at Grace Bible Church seems to be present in many other churches in America. Given the struggle that churches and church leaders are having with the place, role, and function of church membership in an American culture that devalues membership to organizations in general, the need for further study became apparent to this researcher.

Therefore, in an attempt to better communicate the church’s values with the end goal of discipleship, this researcher made the decision to transition the membership
process at Grace Bible Church to include more deliberate discipleship. In the process of transitioning, this researcher discovered that other church leaders had made a similar transition. Other church leaders were considering such a transition in their church’s membership process as well. The foundation for this research project is derived from the interest and experiences of this researcher, as well as from two case study churches.

The examination of a membership process that could enhance discipleship proved to be insightful to the researcher. The study has proven to be helpful to this researcher’s church, which has already begun the transition to a more discipleship oriented membership process.

Research Problem
This project’s research problem to be addressed is simply stated: The researcher desires to examine how selected churches use their membership process to enhance their discipleship.

Research Question
In an American culture that devalues membership combined with the fact that, as the research demonstrates, membership within the Christian church has been declining. Church leaders are having to make decisions regarding the adequacy of the membership process, whether to drop membership completely from the church organization, or to retool and rethink the membership process altogether. It is the later consideration that this researcher decided to study further. The questions are raised, “What if churches began to rethink the role that membership could contribute in the life of a church? Knowing that Jesus has commanded disciples and churches in Matthew 28.19 to
“…make disciples,” what if there was a process that could be used to enhance not only membership, but ultimately, discipleship within the church?” In an effort to answer these questions for the benefit of his own congregation, the researcher examined the membership processes of two case study churches.

**Research Hypothesis**

The answer to this research question led to the development of the hypothesis that the membership process can enhance discipleship. Two churches were assessed in order to evaluate their membership process as it relates to discipleship. Research was gathered primarily through personal interviews with those who directly oversaw the membership process within their church. Secondary information came from interviews by those who have gone through their church’s membership process and through empirical data gathered or provided by the churches themselves.

**Anticipated Benefits of the Research Project**

In addition to the personal benefits to this researcher and his church, the applied research project has the potential to benefit other churches wishing to enhance discipleship by means of their membership process by providing not only various transferrable principles, but practical steps that have been adopted by the case study churches.

Senior Pastors may benefit from the depth of exegetical research on discipleship combined with the findings of at least two functioning membership processes. Making any wholesale changes to an organization is difficult and risky at best. The present research seeks to highlight the benefits of a discipleship-based-membership process thereby reducing risk to the organization.

Associate Pastors of large, multi-staff churches often are responsible for the oversight of the church membership process. The practices and principles discovered in
this project will provide practical examples for a minister to consider while examining his respective membership process.

Other ministry leaders and volunteers may be responsible for applying the principles provided through this project. Through the literature review and the processes laid out by the case-study churches, lay leaders and volunteers will be provided with a rich pool to draw from and use at their church.

For churches that have not made the decision to transition their membership process but are considering their options, this project could be used as a resource in their consideration. This project will provide churches with some steps for developing a membership process that enhances discipleship. Combined with the sources cited in this applied research project, church leaders will be able to make more informed decisions regarding membership process and how it could be used to enhance discipleship.

**Chapter Preview**

The second chapter of Doctor of Ministry research projects at Dallas Theological Seminary provides an examination and analysis of previous research and literature review. The research begins by briefly stating the problem of declining church membership in America. This is a problem because it is the Church’s responsibility, as commanded by Jesus, to “make disciples” while fewer and fewer people are joining churches, the most favorable setting in which disciples can be made. A brief assessment of how discipleship effects church engagement follows. The research shows that discipleship, as it relates to the individual Christian, is expressed in community. The research will also prove that the Christian community, or the local church, also shares a responsibility for discipling the individual. From this foundation, the research will show that a correlation exists between a spiritually growing disciple and church engagement. Finally, the research will demonstrate that a church’s membership process can enhance discipleship within the church. While it may seem antithetical to be researching the role a
church membership process can have within a church while statistics show that membership is declining in America, this research will show that discipleship within the church can be enhanced by an effective membership process.

Chapter 3 presents this researcher’s methodology. This chapter expresses the means and criteria that this researcher used in selecting the case study churches. Additionally, the instrument used to evaluate the case study churches is presented. This includes the research done prior to arriving at the selected churches and the interview questions used during the discussions with the case study church’s staff members.

Chapter 4 is the presentation of the two case-study churches used for this project. In this chapter, this researcher will provide the answer to the research question with supporting data. The case-studies will provide a detailed report of their membership process, including how the process is implemented, in what ways the membership process lines up with their respective church values and discipleship principles, along with any materials that were used by the churches at the time of the interview. Additionally, the case-studies provide verification of this researcher’s hypothesis. Specifically, each of the case-study churches does use their membership process to enhance discipleship.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions and implications for further study. Included in this chapter is a review of how the two selected case study churches implemented the six qualities of an effective membership process that enhanced their discipleship. The conclusions observed will serve as timeless, transferable examples for churches to use in their own ministry setting. This chapter will also include other topics for further research.

The bibliography will aid future researchers in their study of a membership process that enhances discipleship. Appendices follow the bibliography. The appendices contain examples of the membership materials used by the case-study churches which may be useful when considering a membership process that enhances discipleship.
CHAPTER 2
PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Dr. Seymour Lipset, in 1991, the United States, “with the exception of a few agrarian states such as Ireland and Poland, has been the most God-believing and religion-adhering, fundamentalist, and religiously traditional country in Christendom.”¹ Robert Putnam, in his book titled Bowling Alone, added that,

Regular worshipers and people who say that religion is very important to them are much more likely than other people to visit friends, to entertain at home, to attend club meetings, and to belong to sports groups; professional and academic societies; school groups; youth groups; service clubs; hobby or garden clubs; literary, art, discussion, and study groups; school fraternities and sororities; farm organizations; political clubs; nationality groups; and other miscellaneous groups.²

According to Putnam, churches have played a large role in American civil society. But, according to the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) taken in 2008, “the findings confirm the conclusions…that Americans are slowly becoming less Christian and that in recent decades the challenge to Christianity in American society does not come from other world religions or new religious movements (NRMs) but rather from a rejection of all organized religions.”³ Based upon the 220,000 interviews used for the 2008 ARIS study as compared to previous ARIS studies, Catholic, Baptist, and other mainline Christian Churches experienced declines in membership between 1990 and

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2008, from 3.5 percent in Baptist churches to 6 percent in other Christian churches.\textsuperscript{4}

While the purpose of this applied research project is not to discuss the impact of a declining church membership upon American civil society \textit{per se}, the point can be made that church membership in America has been in decline. In 2001, two surveys were conducted of various congregations in the United States showing that only 10 percent of the people who attend church more than six times a year were members of any congregation.\textsuperscript{5} These numbers have been declining since the 1950s.\textsuperscript{6} Putnam states, “In the 1950’s roughly one in every four Americans reported membership….By the late 1980’s and 1990’s comparable studies found that figure had been cut in half to roughly one in eight.”\textsuperscript{7}

Membership is a hot topic today. Some denominations are wrestling with what membership looks like, who can be a member, what prerequisites, if any, should be required of membership and what is a member expected to do. Some denominations and some churches within denominations have strict standards while others have a lenient policy regarding membership. In the ongoing debates surrounding church membership, people often toss around the Bible and early church history as arguments to support their position. Therefore, a basic understanding of the biblical foundation for church membership along with a brief presentation of church history with regard to membership is in order.

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., 7.


\textsuperscript{7} Putnam, \textit{Bowling Alone}, 72.
Biblical Foundation for Church Membership

Old Testament Foundation for Membership

In Genesis 12, God established a covenantal relationship with Abram. This covenant would serve not only as the foundation of God's redemptive plan for the world, but it also established the means by which God's plan would be completed. This covenant involved three primary promises to Abram:

- A Promised Land for Abram and his descendants (Gen 12:1)
- A promise that God would make Abram's descendants into a great nation (Gen 12:2)
- A promise that God would bless Abram and make Abram's name great (Gen 12:2)

It is this third promise that would enable Abram to “be a blessing” to the rest of the world. According to Walvoord and Zuck, this third promise “takes on its greatest fulfillment in the fact that Jesus Christ became the means of blessing to the world (Gal. 3:8, 16; cf. Rom. 9:5).”

From the time that God established His covenant with Abram, the Old Testament reveals that God has a special purpose for this people and that the Jewish nation would be separate from all others peoples who would be categorized as “Gentiles.” God would emphasize His motivation for this distinction in Exodus 19:6 when He said, “and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). Walter Kaiser, when reflecting on this verse, states,

The whole nation was to act as mediators of God's grace to the nations of the earth, even as Abraham had been promised that through him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). The last title designated

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8 Unless otherwise indicated, the New International Version of the Bible will be used in this dissertation.

Israel as a separate and distinct nation because her God was holy, separate, and distinct, as were His purpose and plans.\textsuperscript{10}

Not only were the people to be distinct, but so too was God's purpose for them and the rest of the world.

Following the establishment of God's covenant with Abram, circumcision was adopted as a sign that one “belonged” to that covenant relationship. Genesis 17:10–14 says,

\begin{quote}
This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.” (Gen 17:10–14)
\end{quote}

God, in this passage, makes clear that circumcision served as an outward sign of one's belonging to the Jewish community. Failure to become circumcised meant that that person was not to be included in the Jewish community, regardless of their heritage.

Of particular interest to this research is that belonging to this community included engaging in certain responsibilities. In Deuteronomy 6, prior to entering into the Promised Land, Moses gives the people a command that they are to remember for all times. This command would later become known as the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9,

\begin{quote}
Hear, O Israel: The LOR\textsubscript{D} our God, the LOR\textsubscript{D} is one. You shall love the LOR\textsubscript{D} your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Walter Kaiser, \textit{The Expositor's Bible Commentary with New International Version: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 416.
between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. These verses serve as the foundation of what it means to belong to the Jewish community.

Paul House, in his book *Old Testament Theology*, makes three distinct truths that shaped what belonging to the Jewish community meant based upon this passage. The first truth contained in this passage is that God exists, that He is unique, and that He “possesses a unified character.” The second truth commands Israel to “love Yahweh with their whole heart, soul, and mind.” Such a devotion, according to House, requires emotional volition (heart), spiritual personality (soul) and mental and physical vigor (strength). Thus it includes the entire range of human essence. No division of loyalty or segmentation of life or personality will do...It also amounts to an obligation to obey the truth. The third truth, according to House, is that God commands the people to internalize the covenant and teach their children to do the same (6:6-9). Each new member of the holy community must be taught God's ways. Faith does not occur automatically. It must be understood and owned (6:6), so each parent must teach his or her children, just as Moses has been teaching them. Instruction must be purposeful, even to the point of becoming public (6:9).

Based upon the verses given in Deuteronomy 6, it is clear that God's intent for the Jewish community was more than an inherited rite, but also spiritual development engaging in the spiritual community.

In Exodus 12:48, God also provided a means by which a Gentile could become Jewish when He says, “If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land.” The Passover, a unique feast of the people of Israel...

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.
celebrating God's deliverance from the enslavement by the Egyptians, was not meant to be celebrated by those outside of the Jewish community. However, God provided an avenue for the Gentiles to participate if they would be willing to be circumcised.

However, being a true Jew was more than just simply being born to a Jewish family and / or being physically circumcised--either for the Jew or Gentile. Take, for example, in Leviticus 26:41–42, many Jews are pictured as “uncircumcised in heart.” Thus, even though they are Jewish by physical birth, they would not inherit the covenant unless “then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity...” Moses would later emphasize this point in Deuteronomy 10:16–17 when he commands the people, “Circumcise, therefore. the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.”

Isaiah would also pick up on the condition of one's heart as entrance for a foreigner into the Jewish community in Isaiah 56:6–7 when he says,

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Clearly, in this passage, a foreigner (Gentile) could not just come to God on his own terms or by simply going through a surgical procedure. According to this passage, there must be a willingness by the foreigner to “hold fast” to the covenant of God, to serve Him, and to keep the Sabbath. All of this was to be done from a heart of love for the Lord.

Later, Paul, who considered himself a devout and true Jew (2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:4–6) whose mission was to the Gentiles, stated in Romans 2:29, “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” Based
on this passage, Paul is not seeking to reinterpret the Old Testament, but simple to highlight that being a Jew was more than a birthright or sharing in the external marks of circumcision, but that belonging included a “circumcised heart” or a heart that was fully devoted and humbled to God and His ways.

Paul would later describe in Romans 11:17 the Gentiles process of finding access into a relationship with God as being “grafted in among the others.” Paul would also say in Ephesians 2:11–13,

> Therefore remember that at one time you were Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands—remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Paul continued in verses 19–22,

> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

From these passages, Paul draws upon the Old Testament sense of membership within the Jewish community and applies it to a new convert's belonging to the Christian community.

**Jesus Teaches His Disciples that They Have Authority over their “Members.”**

J.E. Eubanks states in his book, *Grafted into the Vine: Rethinking Biblical Church Membership*, “In recent generations, membership in the local church has simultaneously become undervalued, over-complicated, and severely misunderstood. These troubling developments all lead to struggles and difficulties for pastors, leaders, and congregants alike.”14 When a broad study is done of Jesus’ teachings to His disciples,

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as they would serve as the foundation for building the Church in Jesus’ earthly absence, one can conclude that He gives the Church multi-faceted authority. For example:

- Jesus, when asked why He was speaking to the crowds in parables replied in Matthew 13:11, “The knowledge of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them.” Essentially, Jesus was communicating through parables in order to continue to reveal truth to His disciples by making known to them the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” These mysteries were made known to the disciples and not to others. As a result, Jesus would give His disciples the authority to represent the Kingdom and the Kingdom life.

- Jesus tells Peter, based upon his confession of Christ in Matthew 16:19, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Jesus gives Peter, the other disciples, and representatives of Jesus’ Kingdom the authority to bind or loose, forbid or permit.

- Jesus, in Matthew 24:4–5, would warn His followers to “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.” In so warning His followers, Jesus gives the authority to determine that which is true verses that which is false teaching.

- In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands His disciples to travel to the ends of the earth to make more disciples and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as Jesus had the authority to disciple others (28:18), Jesus passed on that authority to His disciples prior to His departure from earth. Not only were the disciples of Jesus to make more disciples, but they were given the right to baptize them in His name. Jesus’
disciples, then, became His representatives to the world as they sought to expand the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Jesus, through His disciples, gives the church authority. This authority is important to the concept of church membership because, as Leeman states,

"Christ authorizes the local church to proclaim and protect the gospel, to recognize or affirm those who belong to Him, to unite them to itself, to oversee their discipleship, and to exclude any imposters.\(^\text{15}\) He gives the local church this authority in order to protect and display His gospel in a fallen world which continually misunderstands and misportrays His gospel love.\(^\text{16}\)"

To whom is the church to proclaim and from whom is the church to protect the gospel? Who is the Church responsible to disciple? How can one proclaim or protect the gospel, oversee discipleship, or exclude imposters without authority? Without the authority to determine these things, the Church will simply cease to exist. And if a church is not able to protect the gospel that leads to salvation, oversee discipleship that leads to a life that is honoring and pleasing to God, or exclude imposters who would deceive and lead people astray, is this kind of authority really worth having?

**Further New Testament Passages Regarding Church Membership**

When doing a survey of the New Testament, there appears to be no formal membership or membership process mentioned. However, while it is not explicitly stated, it is implicit throughout. For instance, Paul’s letters to the various churches in Corinth, Thessalonica, Philippi, Ephesus, and Colossae, while they are useful for Christians of all time, were written to a local church body with a specific purpose in mind. Throughout Paul’s writings, along with the other writers of the New Testament books, instruction is given on how to treat those who are in the church verses those outside of the church.

\(^\text{15}\) A good example of this kind of love is given to us by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5. In this passage, Paul, acting on the authority given to him by Jesus, commands the Corinthians church to expel the immortal person in their midst.

along with how to establish offices that are present within the church organization. All of these things are contingent upon some sense of who is considered “in” or “out.” For example:

- Hebrews 10:24–25: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” In this passage, commitment to a local church is associated tightly with “spurring one another on toward love and good deeds.” This kind of commitment is important because, as Thabati Anyabwile says, “The local church is a place where love is most visibly and compellingly displayed among God’s people. It’s where the ‘Body of Christ’ is most plainly represented in the world.”

  This kind of love was put on display at the beginning of the church in Acts 2:42–47 where, by the way the people conducted themselves towards each other, “everyone was filled with awe…,” and “the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” Commitment to a local church where love is expressed is just one of the reasons why membership is important.

- In 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9, Paul lists out qualifications for leadership within the local church. In addition to these qualifications, there are explicit commands for leaders to shepherd the flock and for Christians to submit to their leaders. Hebrews 13:17 says, “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 of no advantage to you.” Church leaders have the

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responsibility of ministering to and leading the church. Yet, if that group is not attached to the leaders in some way and there is no identifiable boundary by which leaders are to lead, Hebrews 13:17 cannot be aptly applied in the church. With membership, there is an obligation of obedience to the church leaders.

- Paul, in 1 Corinthians, when dealing with their sinful behavior, wrote, “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. Expel the wicked man from among you” (1 Cor 5:12–13). Boundaries are important because it helps church leaders and church members know who falls under the umbrella of church discipline. Part of the reason the Bible commands the practice of church discipline is so that church members would be held accountable to living their lives in a Christ-like manner. Anyabwile, when reflecting on Matthew 18 and 1 Corinthians 5, states, “If there is no practical, visible way of determining who belongs to the church and who belongs to the world, this distinction is lost, and ‘putting out of fellowship’ is an impossible feat since there is no real way of being in the fellowship.” Church discipline makes sense only in the context of belonging and, as these passages point out, assumes that it is important for not only a church leader, but a person himself to know that he is a member of the church.

**Summarizing the Biblical Foundation for Membership**

Based upon the passages that have been used, the Old Testament serves as a foundation for membership within the Church in that a sense of belonging in the Jewish

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18 Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?*, 66.
community existed not simply through physical birth, but through a heart that was “circumcised”—a heart that was humble before God and spiritually engaged with the teachings of God (Deut 6:4–9; 10:16–17). The Old Testament provided a means by which Gentiles, those who were not born of Jewish decent, could become a member of the Jewish community by being physically and spiritually circumcised (Exod 12:48). Paul would then pick up on this sense of belonging to the spiritual community of God in Romans 2, 11 and Ephesians 2 but that this belonging was achieved through the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:13).

Jesus, in His establishment of the Church, would clearly indicate that the church would have authority to protect and proclaim the gospel, to oversee discipleship of its members, and to expel those who disobey. All of this authority is given with the understanding that there are some who would be considered “in” while others would be considered “out.” For those who were “out,” not belonging to the Body of Christ, the Church has no authority over them.

The early church is derived from Jesus’ instructions to His disciples. Paul would talk about belonging to the “Body of Christ” once a person has accepted Jesus as Savior and that part of being a member of this community involved spiritual support, accountability, and even discipline (Heb 10, Matt 18, 1 Cor 5). The responsibility for this community would fall to the Elders and other spiritual leaders of the Church (1 Tim 3, Titus 1).

**Biblical Benefits of Church Membership**

When the Biblical foundation for Church Membership is juxtaposed with our culture’s set of values based upon individualism, consumerism, anti-authoritarianism, and skepticism, the benefits of Church membership become even more pressing. In the face of those who advocate for no church membership, it is noteworthy that without church membership, church participation, authority structures, and discipline are rendered
meaningless, as well as faithfulness to Jesus’ command to “make disciples” in a culture that views commitments as binding and unloving. This poses an ongoing threat to the effectiveness of the church. While at times throughout history the Church has been tempted, as Dulles expressed in his book, *Models of the Church*, “…to allow the institutional elements of its corporate life to be treated as primary, to allow its rules and hierarchies to become more important than the people and their relationships; to let the traditions of men trump the commands of God,”\(^{19}\) the church must maintain a sense of responsibility and accountability that is in harmony with the message of grace and forgiveness. The threat of responding to our current cultural state requires not just a loving community, but a structured institution consisting of rules, hierarchies, and boundaries.

It is with these healthy rules, hierarchies, and boundaries that several benefits of church membership can be discovered. Looking through Scripture, at least five benefits to belonging to a church can be identified. The first benefit is that a Christ-follower becomes committed to love and serve others. Paul reminds the Christians in Galatia by saying, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love” (Gal 5:13). As a result, Christians have “a greater opportunity to grow as a Christian as you commit to encourage, build up, strengthen, serve, rebuke, and pray for other Christians.”\(^{20}\) This naturally results in the second benefit being that one who joins a church makes a commitment to an entire group of Christians who have now covenanted to watch over their own spiritual growth and encouragement.

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The third benefit to church membership is that of Elder protection. Church elders and pastors should care for their members, pray for their members, and personally counsel and teach their members in following the example and teachings of Jesus. As a leader of a church, Elders become accountable to God for how they lead their members. Hebrews 13:17 states, “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 of no advantage to you.”

The fourth benefit is mutual accountability. In his book, Stop Dating the Church, Harris points out that it is “comforting to know his church would kick him out rather than tolerate his unrepentant sin.” Being a church member means that an entire church community is committed to helping its members live a life is pleasing to God, even to the point of church discipline for unrepentant sin. While this sounds harsh, Hebrews 3:12 states, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Due to the deceitfulness of sin, church discipline can become a comforting and encouraging reality as long as it has the purpose of lovingly correcting and restoring those who have fallen into sin.

The fifth benefit to membership is that of assurance. Membership is the church’s affirmation of the validity of someone’s profession of faith. The local church has the unique opportunity to look at a person’s life, hear their explanation of the gospel and how they came to believe it, and affirm with the Christians that their faith experience was true. And, while membership in a church does not guarantee that someone is a Christian, it should assure believers of the genuineness of their faith.

The impact of these benefits can be felt not only within the church, but, according to Leeman, with non-Christians as well.

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Harris, Stop Dating the Church, 94.
Our non-Christian neighbors, colleagues, and friends hear us profess the name of Christ with our mouths and with our church affiliations, yet they watch us and wonder, ‘If Jesus is all that you say He is, why does your life look like mine? Can the born-again gospel you talk about really be true?’ More than the headline makers [who stumble], it’s the daily life of the average Christian that ultimately forms the world’s perception of Christ and His gospel.22

Belonging to a local church can serve as an incredible witness to a watching world that is desperately looking for a place to belong and something (Someone) in which to place their belief.

**History of Church Membership**

**Membership in the Early Church**

It is important to note that at the very beginning of the church, all of the converts were members. Peter stood before the crowd in Acts 2 saying, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38). The passage continues, “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41). “Converts” were made at this point which launched the first official “Christian Church.”

Two factors are important in the early days of the church with reference to membership. The first Christians were Jews and thus already were “members” of the Jewish faith and, secondly, Christianity was not considered a separate religion. Becoming a Christian was, for them, a matter of belief—believing that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah of Israel. Notice in Acts 2:36, Peter concludes his message by saying, “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” By using the terms “Lord and Christ,” Peter was clearly declaring Jesus as the long awaited Messiah and Savior for the Jewish people and all the peoples of the world. Upon hearing this declaration, many in the crowd were “cut to the heart and

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said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37). Peter’s response was for them was two-fold. The first was to repent—not from their unholy lifestyle as much as from their lack of belief in Jesus. According to Keith Drury, “For the Jewish people, they already had a strict behavioral code and thus candidates needed little ‘cleaning up.’” The second directive was to be baptized, to publically declare belief in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). It would be at this point that they would receive the Holy Spirit.

As a result, the new converts began to meet together, ironically, in the Temple. They did this because they believed they were still very much Jewish. According to Henry Chadwick,

The first Christians were Jews. They differed from their fellow-countrymen by their faith that in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah of the nation’s expectation had now come. They took it for granted that His coming, being a fulfillment, must be continuous with the past revelation of God to His people and could not mean a break either with the old covenant made with Abraham, symbolized by circumcision, or with the Law given to Moses on Mount Sinai. If something new had happened, it was the action of one and the same God,…the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs. His new word to His people must be consistent with that spoken in the past by the prophets.

Therefore, at first, this group of Christians acted like a Jewish sect with the hope of convincing all Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. As a result, a “convert” at the very beginning had a short trip to “membership” in the Christian group—believe and be baptized—both of which could be accomplished in one day (Acts 2:41).

As the early Christian church teachings began to spread, many devout Gentiles, also known as “God-fearers” began to surface (Acts 10:22, 13:46, 13:50, 17:4). As a result, several problem began to arise. The first problem with the Gentiles was a “belief” problem in that most Gentiles were polytheistic. According to Drury, the

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Gentiles “were inclined toward an add-a-god religion.” Paul would use this to his advantage in Acts 17 as he addressed the Gentile people at the Areopagus, when he stated, “For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). When a Jewish person made the choice to believe, it was simply a matter of accepting Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. When the apostles evangelized the Gentiles, it was a matter of getting the Gentiles to not believe in their other gods and to believe in the One, True God.

The second problem with the conversion of Gentiles was a “behavior” problem. Jewish converts, because of their Jewish upbringing and cultural norms, already knew how to behave. But, for the Gentiles who were coming from an immoral culture that included temple prostitution, conversion was more difficult. It should be no surprise that Paul writes a lengthy letter to the Church in Corinth explaining to them the reasons why they should quit going to the temple prostitutes (1 Cor 6:15–16). As a result, according to Drury, “the Apostles and missionaries to the Gentiles had to slow the process down to filter out the easy believism of add-a-god people and to clean up the lives of the gentile ‘dogs’ before taking them into the church.”

With the influx of Gentiles into the Christian movement, the church began delaying baptism among the Gentiles and introduced the first membership training. According to Justo Gonzales,

As increasing numbers of Gentiles sought to join the church it was found necessary to provide for them more extensive periods of teaching and training before they were admitted into the church by baptism. Thus, the catechumenate arose. As part of this process, the service came to be divided in two parts: the ‘service of the Word,’ and the ‘service of the table.’ In the former, extensive portions of Scripture were read and interpreted both to guide those who were

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26 Ibid., 12.
already baptized and for the instruction of the catechumens.\(^{27}\)

Using a mentoring approach, early church leaders emphasized a system of teaching to help believers understand Christianity. The reason for formulating such a catechism was the tendency of new converts to become apostate, causing many new Christians to fall back into a sinful lifestyle.\(^{28}\) Tom Nettles gives further insight by saying,

> The period of instruction and catechizing served two purposes: it allowed the candidate (catechumenate) to decide if he still wanted to submit to Christian baptism and gave the church opportunity to discern (as far as human observation can do this) the genuineness of his, or her, conversion.\(^{29}\)

It was during this period that church leaders formalized their teaching by writing a manual of practical Christian instruction called *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*,\(^{30}\) which would also be known as the *Didache*.\(^{31}\)

> The *Didache*, written by an unknown Christian, became a manual of guidelines for Christian life and worship.\(^{32}\) The first section of the Didache was called the “two-ways,” from the opening chapter where it states, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death, and there is a great difference between these two ways.”\(^{33}\)

According to J. B. Lightfoot, the *Didache* “appears to have been intended as a summary of basic instruction about the Christian life to be taught to those who were preparing for baptism and church membership. In its present form it represents the Christianization of a


\(^{29}\) Ibid., 16.


common Jewish form of moral instruction.”

This training would last up to two years before a candidate would be able to be baptized and partake in his first communion, becoming a full member from then on. According to Chadwick, this process was continued throughout the first three centuries of the Christian church.

In AD 313, under the leadership of Constantine, Christians were given the right to follow their faith without fear of persecution. This served as a turning point for the Christian church, making it more main-stream. As the church became more organized, so did their teachings for new converts. Over time, the catechisms of the church would develop into a more formalized title called the Catechisms of the Catholic Church.

According to the Catechisms of the Catholic Church, these teachings were for “the education in the faith of children, young people and adults which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine imparted, generally speaking, in an organic and systematic way, with a view to initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life.” According to Walter Elwell, the development of the catechisms would reach their heyday in the fourth and fifth centuries, incorporating quasi-liturgical ceremonies like the oral transmission (traditio) by the catechist and rendition (redditio) by the catechumen of the Creed and Lord's Prayer. The system was designed to safeguard the integrity of the church and the secret discipline (disciplina arcum) of its inner life.

As a result, it was the teachings of the catechisms along with the insistence of infant baptism that served as the basis for membership within the Catholic Church.

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36 Chadwick, The Early Church, 11.
38 Walter Elwell, Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 211.
39 The catechisms would be used for thousands of years within the Catholic Church until eventually, in 1969 during the Second Vatican Council, a vote was made to use the teachings of the
During the sixteenth century Cardinal Robert Bellarmine gave a definition of who belonged to the Church when he declared,

According to our doctrine, the one and true Church is the assembly of men, bound together by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by the communion of the same sacraments, under the rule of legitimate pastors, and in particular of the one Vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff.\(^ {40}\)

Pius IX, in 1854, would deepen the importance of belonging to the Catholic Church when he stated,

It must, of course, be held as a matter of faith that outside the apostolic Roman Church no one can be saved, that the Church is the only ark of salvation, and that whoever does not enter it will perish in the flood. On the other hand, it must likewise be held as certain that those who are affected by ignorance of the true religion, if it is invincible ignorance, are not subject to any guilt in this matter before the eyes of the Lord.\(^ {41}\)

Belonging to the Catholic Church was paramount and membership into the Catholic Church would be, and still is, effected by baptism: “the child of a believer is baptized as a member of the church with all the rights and privileges compatible with his years attendant thereto.”\(^ {42}\)

It was during the 16th century that the doctrines of the Catholic Church began to be challenged. During the Middle Ages, a reactionary group described as medieval evangelicals came on the scene of Christianity. As Christian preaching and teaching was being replaced with liberal arts, the Waldenses desired to translate the Bible into common catechumenate as the process for membership into the Catholic Church which is now called the Rite of Christian Initiate of Adults. Chris Sloan, “The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults,” http://catechumen.org.uk/rcia/ (accessed May 6 2011).


language for people. Combined with the corruption of the Catholic Church during this time, the Reformation began along with its dramatic turning point for Christianity.

Through the teachings of Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others, two key elements arose: *solo scriptura* (“Scripture alone”) and *solo fide* (“Faith alone”). This group of scholars, began to challenge the Roman church and its doctrine, resulting in Luther posting his *Ninety-Five Theses*. Luther's work of reformation, along with many others, not only led to the Bible being translated into common language, but also contributed to a fundamental split in Christianity between Catholics and Reformers.

Out of the Reformation came another group known as the Anabaptists, whose identifying mark was believers' baptism. They taught that a person was eligible for baptism only if he had professed faith in Jesus Christ. Commenting on the importance of this step, William Estep stated,

If the most obvious demarcation between the Reformers and the Roman Catholics was biblical authority, that between the Reformers and the Anabaptists was believers' baptism. Believers’ baptism was for the Anabaptists the logical implementation of the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*. Almost as soon as the Anabaptist movement could be distinguished within the context of the Reformation itself, believers' baptism became the major issue.

Anabaptists would also make two additional fundamental shifts from the Catholic Church. The first, with their emphasis upon free will, was a renewed desire to train new believers in basic Christian doctrine. Second, Anabaptists promoted the idea of separation of church and state and recognized a Universal Church comprised completely

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of redeemed persons.\footnote{Jesse Fletcher, \textit{The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History} (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 26.}

These two departures from the teachings of the Catholic Church (\textit{solo fide} and “believer’s baptism) would produce a variety of approaches to membership within the Christian Church. On one end of the spectrum, the Roman Catholic Church's criteria for membership would be three-fold:

1. Profess the true Faith, and have received the Sacrament of Baptism
2. Acknowledge the authority of the Church and her appointed rulers.
3. Not be excommunicated as a result of sin.\footnote{Peter Stravinskas, \textit{Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia} (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc, 1991), 664.}

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Reformation churches would place an emphasis upon conversion, a conscious decision of a person to believe in Jesus by faith, as the means of membership. To the Reformer, membership could only be entered into by one of four ways:

1. Through transfer from a church of like faith and practice approved by the Session.
2. Through reaffirmation of faith (previously confessed his faith and united with a church other than a church of like faith and practice)
3. Confession of faith by someone who had not previously been a member of the church.
4. Through baptism either by the parents who are church members.\footnote{United Methodist Church, \textit{The Book of Discipline} (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2008), 141.}

To compound the variances, the Free Church movement, which gave rise to Presbyterianism and the Puritans in the 1600’s, opposed a State or National Church.\footnote{D. H. Williams, \textit{The Free Church and the Early Church} (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2002), viii.}
Because they believed in the autonomy of the local church, developing a uniform standard for church membership quickly presented a dilemma. The Puritans desired to leave a State Church (Church of England), and combined with the desire for a “pure church” that, under the leadership of John Cotton who was the Pastor of Boston Church, they would begin to require a verbal account “that they had a reasonable hope that God had wrought grace in their hearts.”

According to Paul Husband, “before John Cotton arrived in New England, Congregational membership criteria in New England had only two standards: doctrinal orthodoxy and moral lifestyle.” It was this step that would serve as the basis for establishing the Puritan churches from that point forward in America. Mark Noll says that “those who could testify credibly to their redemption in this way joined together to form churches by covenanting with each other.”

Over time, through the theological and doctrinal milieu stemming from the Anabaptists and the Congregationalists (Puritans), would arise the Baptists. A summary of requirements for membership was included in the Charleston Summary of Church Discipline (1773). According to this document, to become a member, individuals had to meet the following qualifications:

1. They should be “truly gracious persons” who have “experienced an entire change of nature,”

2. They should be persons “of some competent knowledge of...God in His nature, perfection, and works; of Christ in His person as the Son of God,...and the important truths of the gospel and doctrines of grace,”

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52 Ibid., 66.

3. “Their lives and conversations ought to be such as becometh the gospel of Christ.”

4. Assuming that the previous qualifications were met, they should then be baptized by immersion for “baptism is essential to church communion and ought to precede it.”

Once these four qualifications were met, the church member would then enter into a “covenant” with the leadership of that particular church body. More specifically,

Upon his promising, covenanting, and agreeing strictly to observe them, as assisted by the Spirit of God, the minister, in behalf of the church, is to give the right hand of fellowship and to receive him as a member into union and full communion with that particular church. Thereby he becomes entitled to all the rights and privileges thereof.

A sample of an early Baptist covenant is supplied in Appendix A.

Over time in America, through many church splits resulting in the birthing of new denominations and sub-denominations in the 19th century, the very idea of “status of membership” became descriptive only of whether the believer chooses to associate himself, or not.” As a result, a steady decline of membership within the mainline churches began which led to many churches relaxing their requirements of church membership. Combined with the emergence of Non-Denominational Churches, membership would become, in essence, almost non-existent. The argument by these non-denominational churches for avoiding any form of formal membership would be an argument from silence. As this researcher has already established, there is no formal mention of membership in the New Testament Church. Therefore, the “process” for

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55 Ibid.

56 Williams, The Free Church and the Early Church, viii.

membership in many non-denominational churches is simply this: an unbeliever asks what to do to be saved, they believe, they are baptized, thus making them “members” of the Body of Christ.\(^{58}\) This process would suit the non-denominational church well, for many within their congregations would come from a variety of denominational backgrounds.

Based upon the research on the history of membership thus far, while being very broad, four general categorical views of membership emerge. On one end is that of the Catholic Church which believes that once one is baptized as an infant, they become a member of the Catholic Church. The more Reformed Churches (Lutheran, Methodist) tend to view membership as a legal contract between the individual and the regional church body.\(^{59}\) Baptists tend to emphasize the verbal profession of faith in Jesus combined with believers baptism and a willingness to submit oneself to the authority of the church leadership. Eventually, membership would take another turn, one towards the “back seat,” with the emergence of the non-denominational churches in America.

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\(^{58}\) Steve Bateman, “Jonathan Edwards’ Pastoral Model of Church Membership Adapted to First Bible Church of Decatur, Alabama” (Ph.D. diss., Reformed Theological Seminary, Marietta, GA, 2004), 128.

Table 1. Various Views of Church Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership Requirements</th>
<th>Catholic Church</th>
<th>Reformed Churches</th>
<th>Baptist Churches</th>
<th>Non-Denominational Church</th>
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<tr>
<td>Membership as belonging to the Universal Body called the “Catholic Church” through observing the Sacrament of Baptism.</td>
<td>Membership as belonging to a regional church body through a profession of faith in the doctrines of the church and baptism.</td>
<td>Membership as belonging to a local church body through a verbal profession of faith in Jesus as their Savior, an agreement to submit to the doctrine and authority of the church leadership, and believer’s baptism.</td>
<td>Membership as belonging to the Body of Christ through a verbal profession of faith in Jesus as their Savior and baptized as a believer.</td>
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**Current Status of Church Membership in America**

Today, scholars are beginning to see a troubling shift taking place within the American culture. For some who attend church, a growing belief persists that “membership to the church universal” is enough and that membership in the local church is unnecessary. This may serve as a reason behind the decline of membership within Christian Churches. Robert Putnam observes, “Over the last three to four decades Americans have become about 10 percent less likely to claim church membership, while actual attendance and involvement in religious activities has fallen by roughly 25 to 50 percent.”

Roger Finke in his detailed report on Church Membership in America shows that this declining trend has been going on since the 1950s,

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From 1950 to 2000 the mainline Protestant religions not only continued to lose market share, their membership totals also showed significant declines. When measured as a percentage of the population, the 2000 rates for United Methodists, Presbyterian Church (USA), American Baptists, and the United Church of Christ (including the Congregationalists) were half or less of their 1950 rates. The older evangelical denominations, Southern Baptists and Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, showed rapid growth until 1975 but have now started to plateau and even decline. The Catholics have shown similar trends, increasing sharply from 1925 to 1975 and then leveling off for the remaining 25 years.\textsuperscript{61}

These statistics are troubling to many Christian churches and leaders in America for several reasons. Not only do these statistics indicate that fewer and fewer people are attending church, but, fewer and fewer people view participation within the local church as being important to their spiritual growth. A survey conducted by the Barna Research Group in 2006-found that while nearly half of the adult population attended religious services during a typical week, fewer than one out of every five adults firmly believed that a congregational church was a critical element in spiritual growth. More specifically, “only 18 percent of those surveyed firmly embraced the idea that spiritual maturity requires involvement in a community of faith.”\textsuperscript{62} These statistics demonstrate that not only are fewer people being exposed to discipleship opportunities provided by the local church, but that fewer people are viewing the church as a viable resource for spiritual growth.

When considering these findings, Jonathan Leeman in his book, \textit{The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love}, commented,


Many Christians are happy to attend a particular church indefinitely without formally joining. Others are happy to visit different churches from one month to the next and continue in this pattern for a year or more. Still others don’t attend church at all and try to sustain their spiritual lives through a self-directed use of Christian books, fellowship groups, radio stations, or other forms of Christian media.63

Explaining the importance of church membership to someone with this mentality is understandably often met with indifference. This sentiment is undergirded by Doug Pagitt in his book, *Church Re-Imagined*, who believes that there needs to be “less institutionalism and more authentic community in the church—less structure and more love.” As a result, some will argue that local church membership is irrelevant, unnecessary, or dated and therefore can be dismissed. Essentially, according to Leeman, “our culture has made love into an idol that serves us and so have redefined love into something that never imposes judgments, conditions, or binding attachments.” As a result, some Christians find church doctrines and church membership to be exclusive and unloving. In an interview conducted by Kevin De Young with Tony Jones, an Emergent church leader, Jones shared,

> Statements of faith [in churches] are about drawing borders, which means you have to load your weapons and place soldiers at those borders. You have to check people’s passports when they pass at those borders. It becomes an obsession—guarding the borders. That is simply not the ministry of Jesus. It wasn’t the ministry of Paul or Peter.66

Therefore, according to Jones, having relational boundaries and borders is viewed as being unloving and should be avoided.


66 Kevin DeYoung, *Why We're Not Emergent* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2008), 117.
Cultural Factors Contributing to Church Membership Decline

What leads some to conclude that drawing clear borders around a church is considered unloving? Leeman suggests four cultural reasons for this conclusion: Western Christians are consumed with individualism, consumerism, anti-authoritarianism, and are skeptical towards absolute truth.67 A brief discussion of each of these categories is needed to not only help the Christian leader better understand the cultural struggle, but to also understand how these categories impact church membership.

In recent years, philosophers have proclaimed the vision of the self-reliant, self-made man or woman. Ayn Rand summarizes this sentiment well when she states,

Individualism regards man—every man—as an independent, sovereign entity who possesses an inalienable right to his own life, a right derived from his nature as a rational being. Individualism holds that a civilized society, or any form of association, cooperation or peaceful coexistence among men, can be achieved only on the basis of the recognition of individual rights—and that a group, as such, has no rights other than the individual rights of its members.68

If a group has “no rights other than the individual rights of its members,” then a group’s right to declare boundaries for whom or what is acceptable is unloving because love and acceptance is defined by the individual, according to Rand’s philosophy. Leeman states that this view is present, especially in the West,

…because we have learned in the democratic, capitalistic West that we are free agents and that the purpose of life is the maximization of individual happiness. Local churches, therefore, are simply one more group vying for our personal allegiance, like political parties, lovers, or grocery stores. And as with political parties, lovers, and grocery stores, we have learned to negotiate and renegotiate our attachment to local churches according to how closely they align to our sense of self and its values.69

As a result, “loving” can be defined by the individual as whether or not he can be and do what he believes according to “his nature as a rational being.” If not, then that

67 Leeman, The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love, 42.


69 Leeman, The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love, 50.
relationship, including church relationships, becomes a contract that can be renegotiated or canceled. As one study found:

Individualism lies at the very core of American culture…. We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious.70 This is the heart of an individualist. Joshua Harris observes that this kind of person tends to be “me-centered.”71 This person is “careful to avoid getting involved too much, especially with people.”72 Harris continues by observing that a “me-centered” person tends to be “short on allegiance” and “quick to find fault” in the church.73 This mentality leads to the next factor in low membership.

If life is a series of negotiating attachments and commitments, then the individual will do all he can to maximize his investments and purchases—also known as “consumerism.” When reflecting on the effect of this in the church, Leeman states,

People view churches like products which satisfy us or not… It is not coincidental that the ‘loving’ church believes that size and performance matter… Christians in churches come, listen to the music, listen to the preaching, and then offer an evaluation of everything they saw on the drive home. They evaluate their experience rather than their hearts. They judge the church rather than letting God’s Word judge them. In all this they utterly fail to recognize that they are not loving their neighbor as themselves. The question they ask is not “what style of music helps my neighbor praise God?” It’s “what style serves me?”74 The consumer, then, is constantly evaluating his satisfaction level within the church based upon expectations of what he perceives the church should have (programs,

71 Joshua Harris, *Stop Dating the Church!* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 16.
72 Ibid., 16.
73 Ibid., 16.
74 Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love*, 52.
services, etc.) in order to meet his needs. According to Harris, this person tends to go to church for what he can get—social interaction, programs, or activities—but with the driving question of “What can the church do for me?” Churches become nothing more than “products” that are to be compared, and a church-goer's satisfaction level is dependent upon a sense of “buying in” to a particular good church “product.”

Individualism and consumerism can then lead to anti-authoritarianism. Authoritarianism is defined as a “political doctrine advocating the principle of absolute rule: absolutism, autocracy, despotism, dictatorship, totalitarianism.” Anti-authoritarianism, therefore, is the belief that nobody has the right to have absolute rule over someone. As observed by Matthew Kundert, in a doctrinal discussion blog, “Anti-authoritarianism is a specifically philosophical thesis that says that people are not bound to any non-human authority, be it God, Reality, or Reason.” Practically speaking, no organization has the right to bind anyone to anything that does not meet the individual’s perceived needs or expectations. Therefore, in the area of religious experience, most Americans believe “an individual should arrive at his or her own beliefs independent of any churches or synagogues.” It would be considered as “inappropriate” for any one person or organization to tell an individual what they are to do or think. Those decisions should be reserved for the individual. As a result, for many churches, church membership is not emphasized as much as it used to be, and when it is presented, it is accompanied by

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75 Harris, Stop Dating the Church, 16.


78 Ibid.
few expectations from church leadership and therefore carries little impact on spiritual
growth in the members’ lives. According to Jan Linn, this explains how so many “current
membership practices in most mainline churches are an extension of privatized
religion.”

As much of the social indicators seem to suggest, many people today are
reluctant to enter into binding commitments that could limit their future options of
finding a better “product” available to them or to subject themselves to any group that
seeks to limit what they believe to be their individualized rights. As a result, Leeman
observes that

...individuals within churches will come and go with little care. They join
churches lightly and they exit lightly, since doing so does not violate their sense
of love and its obligations. They don’t stop to weigh the consequences of their
departure on others. They don’t feel the weight of their responsibility to others.
They don’t discuss the reasons for leaving with the pastors. They just go.

If an individual’s commitments are based upon which product is best for his perceived
needs, then binding commitments by a particular authoritative organization becomes a
threat and something to be avoided.

Not only is an authoritative organization that asks for commitments something
to be avoided, but it is to be viewed with skepticism. As Michael Sandel states, the
tendency is for “the individual to treat every commitment, every doctrine, every
conception of justice or freedom acquired elsewhere with skepticism.” Skepticism then
becomes a questioning of everything, and in particular, anyone that appears to be
authoritarian or non-accepting of one’s individual beliefs or life-style. Leeman writes,

79 Jan Linn, Rocking the Church Membership Boat: Counting Members or Having Members
that Count? (Danvers, MA: Chalice Press, 2001), 8.

80 Putnam, Bowling Alone, 152.

81 Leeman, The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love, 56.

82 Michael Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (New York: Cambridge University
Press, 1982), 179.
Love becomes unconditional acceptance. If you love me with conditions, you don’t love me…The opposite of love, according to our thinking today, is judgmentalism, intolerance, or exclusivism, like racists, homophobes, and boundary-drawing churches. On the other hand, I know that you love me if you accept me as I am, and tolerate whatever I say or think without condemning it. In fact, loving me means more than just accepting me; it means accepting and affirming my lifestyle decisions as legitimate and good.83

Understandably, those who believe true love is a love without conditions often resist membership when churches and church leaders faithfully teach the absolute truth of God’s Word.

It is not difficult to establish the connection between our culture’s individualism, consumerism, anti-authoritarianism, and skepticism to the reluctance of Christians to join churches. Any form of organizational requirements or obligations that appear binding will inevitably be unpopular. But, as Harris shares in his book, Stop Dating the Church, “….when we resist commitment in our relationship within the church, everyone gets cheated out of God’s best. You cheat yourself. You cheat a church community. You cheat your world.”84

**Spiritual Factors Contributing to Church Membership Decline**

While one can point to the cultural pressure that is being applied to the church as a factor in the decline of membership, an honest assessment of the spiritual engagement of those who are current members of the church can be concerning as well. Some view membership as a right by birth or by “free association.”85 These people equate membership with being born into a family. They believe they are Baptists because their grandfather was Baptist. Or, their parents were Catholic, so they are as well. This kind of

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84 Harris, *Stop Dating the Church*, 20.

free-association creates “a powerless organization made up of disconnected, disengaged, disloyal ‘members.’” Unfortunately, some mainline Christian churches are perpetuating this problem by having the mindset that “church membership is an inherent human right, regardless of how one conducts one’s life or even whether one regularly attends the worship services of the church.”

Another factor for the ineptitude of membership within many churches is that membership means very little to the church and to its people. According to a Leadership Weekly poll of regular church attendees, “38 percent of respondents said they were frequently urged to join their church, 34 percent said they were occasionally encouraged to join, and the remainder—approximately 28 percent of those polled—said that their church placed little or no emphasis on membership.” These statistics seem to indicate that some churches are not making membership an important step in the lives of their followers. Even where membership processes are present, they require little effort by the church and those within the process itself. Nelson Searcy points out that “too many churches think it is better to continually have the same non-members in attendance than to mention membership and risk scaring them away. This backward mindset undermines the power of the Church as established by Christ.” A natural consequence of this kind of thinking by church organizations is that if it does not matter for the organization, then why should it matter for the individual? Take, for example, this blog entry by Keith Furguson, a concerned church attendee:

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86 Ibid.


What in the world does membership mean today in most churches?...it takes so little to be a member that I wonder why we even have membership. If someone simply walks the aisle and confesses Christ or promises to transfer from another church or simply makes a statement that they have been saved and baptized, they're in. We really don't know about their conversion. We don't really know what they believe. They don't know anything about our church. It is absolute madness. And what does it take to lose membership? I'm not really sure - I have yet to see it happen.90

For Furguson, the process and requirements of becoming a church member are all but meaningless. In essence, Furguson questions the meaning of membership at all.

As a result of these cultural and spiritual factors contributing to membership decline, some church leaders argue that church membership, along with all that that entails, “stand in the way of broken and hurting human beings learning to love one another, to care for the outsider, and to bring healing to the larger community.”91 But have these church leaders succumbed to the cultural pressures that have been placed upon them and gone too far by diluting or de-emphasizing church membership? Has love and love’s expectations been redefined to say, “Know that God loves you by not permanently binding you to anything (especially if you really don’t want to be)’ and following from it, ‘Know that your neighbor loves you best by letting you express yourself entirely and without judgment?”92 While some authors, scholars, and pastors struggle with the concept of church membership, not having church membership at all or minimizing the role of church membership can have unintended, and potentially damaging, results.

Elton Trueblood, a mid-20th century pastor and scholar, observed this growing disconnect between membership and discipleship in the late 1970s, when he said,


91 Leeman, The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love, 63.

92 Ibid., 73.
Perhaps the greatest single weakness in the contemporary Christian Church is that millions of supposed members are not really involved at all and, what is worse, do not think it strange they are not. As soon as we recognize Christ's intention to make His Church a militant company we understand at once that the conventional arrangement cannot suffice. There is no real chance of victory in a campaign if ninety percent of the soldiers are untrained and uninvolved, but this is exactly where we stand now. Most alleged Christians do not now understand that loyalty to Christ means sharing personally in His ministry, going or staying as the situation requires.  

While the militaristic language of Elton Trueblood may be strong for some, it clearly identifies one of the most pressing challenges faced by Christian leaders.

**Discipleship and Church Engagement**

Robert E. Coleman stated,

Discipling men and women is the priority around which our lives should be oriented. Why do we say this? Because Jesus Christ Himself said it in His final words before His Ascension into heaven. It shouldn't seem strange that the Master Teacher places such a high priority on discipling. After all, Jesus was simply asking His followers to do what He had done with them.

An assessment of how discipleship affects church engagement is necessary in order to determine appropriate applications of a church’s membership. The present research will show that discipleship, as it relates to the individual Christian, is properly expressed in community. The research will also demonstrate that the Christian community, or the local church, also shares a responsibility for the individual’s discipleship. From this foundation, the research will show a correlation exists between a growing disciple and church engagement. Finally, the research will build the case that a church’s membership process can enhance discipleship within the church.

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How Discipleship Effects Church Engagement

Over the years, much research has been done on the topic of discipleship and the biblical teachings related to it. The purpose of this research project is to explore the relationship of a disciple to the Christian community and the Christian community to the disciple.

Discipleship, as it Relates to the Individual Christian, is Expressed in Community.

Jesus, when meeting with Nicodemus late one evening, made a clear statement of how one becomes a follower of Christ and enters into a relationship with God. “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–16). These verses are critical because a person’s salvation is the beginning of a relationship with God, citizenship within the Kingdom of God, and, for the purposes of this paper, entrance into the Church.

Salvation as one’s entrance into the Church would later be supported by Peter following the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2, Peter stood before a large crowd and explained to them that Jesus really was the Son of God whom the people had crucified, but who had risen from the grave. Feeling convicted, some people from within the crowd asked what they should do in light of the fact that they had crucified the long-awaited Messiah. Peter responded, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38–39). Those who accepted Peter’s message were, “baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41). Concerned that Peter and the other disciples of Jesus were teaching in the Temple of Jerusalem (Acts 4:2), the religious leaders confronted Peter and John, asking them
what authority gave them the right to teach and assemble such a group within the temple courts. Peter’s response was to the point. He claimed his authority came from Jesus Christ, under whom “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

With salvation serving as the foundation for entering into a relationship with Christ and the universal church, at least two external evidences of that spiritual relationship would be given by the believer. The first is found in Romans 10:9–10 where Paul says, “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, as it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” According to these two verses, the order of events is that one believes in Jesus as Lord resulting in a confession of the mouth of that belief.

The public statement of faith is vital to the local church that practices biblical church membership because it serves as the basis of entrance into the local church as a member. In requiring and accepting this confession, two results are provided. The first is that a local body of believers affirms that the testimony is true. This point becomes important later in a Christ-follower's life because all believers at one point or another say or do something that is not in accordance to their public testimony of faith. Does this mean that their faith is now suspect? Not if, at one point in time during their Christian journey, they made a public statement of faith before a local church body affirming their salvation experience. The second result is that in essence, by becoming a member of a local church, the Christ-follower also affirms what the local church believes regarding other areas of doctrine such as the Bible, the Trinity, and Eschatology. Therefore, when one chooses not to join a church, it could mean that they do not believe that the Truths presented in the Bible are true, or that being publicly known as a Christian is troublesome for some reason, or that associating with people or the practices of a particular local church body is problematic.
The second external evidence of salvation comes from Jesus’ teachings. Jesus taught His disciples that the evidence of their new relationship would be their love for each other. On the night that He was betrayed, Jesus gave His disciples some last minute instructions, in which He would say, “A new command I give to you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34–35). According to Warren Wiersbe,

The word new does not mean ‘new in time,’ because love has been important to God’s people even from Old Testament times (see Lev. 19:18). It means ‘new in experience, fresh.’ It is the opposite of “worn out.” Love would take on a new meaning and power because of the death of Christ on the cross (John 15:13). With the coming of the Holy Spirit, love would have a new power in their lives. This section begins and ends with love: Jesus’ love for His own (John 13:1) and the disciples’ love for one another. It is love that is the true evidence that we belong to Jesus Christ.95

Wiersbe’s connection between Jesus’ willingness to die on the cross and the disciples’ love for each other is striking. This connection is crucial to better understand the role of a disciple of Christ within the Church. J. Dwight Pentecost states,

As one would never have been recognized as a child of Abraham without circumcision but would have been cut off; and as one would never have been recognized as an Israelite who did not observe the sign of the Sabbath but would have been cut off; and as one would not have been counted a disciple of John who rejected John’s baptism but would have been excluded, so our Lord said, you cannot be My disciple apart from the observance of this sign. Love one another.96

Christ-like love for one another not only allowed Jesus’ disciples to survive as a community in a hostile world, it also served to identify Jesus’ disciples to an unbelieving world.

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An important example of this new community of Jesus followers is recorded in Acts 2:42–48:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In this fledgling Christian community, evidence can be seen of individual disciples who are expressing their newfound faith within the Church community at large. Based upon this passage, there are at least two primary activities to which the disciples devoted themselves within the Church:

- To the Word of God (Acts 2:42).
- To fellowship with the other believers through…
  - Partaking in the Lord’s Supper together (Acts 2:42).
  - Praying for and with each other (Acts 2:42).
  - Mutually caring for one another (Acts 2:44–45)
  - Gathering together regularly (Acts 2:46)

From this early example, the disciples clearly were actively engaged in expressing their faith within the context of the Church community. Paul would later write of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12) and how they were to be used for the purposes of building up the Church (Eph 4:11–12). But, a disciple’s spiritual growth and faith were not to be solely confined to the Christian community. Followers of Christ also sought to fulfill Jesus’ mission as stated in
John 17:18 (“As the Father has sent me, so I send you”) and restated in Matthew 28:19–20 to go out into all the world, reaching, teaching, and modeling Jesus’ love for others. Those who are disciples of Christ are sent out to disciple others, to be “ambassadors for Christ,” as Paul stated it in 2 Corinthians 5:20.

Based upon these passages alone, it is to those who are part of and being discipled by a local church that are called to “go out” in order to reach those who do not have a relationship with Jesus and are part of a local church. Therefore, a healthy balance between ministering to those within and outside of the Christian community needs to be maintained. Bill Thrall would comment,

Within the Christian church, we have tended to define spiritual growth as disengagement from the world rather than engagement with the world. We often measure spiritual growth and formation as an increase in cognitive knowledge about God or religious activities (i.e., greater knowledge of Scripture, a disciplined prayer life, weekly church attendance).”

It is this balance that keeps a follower of Christ or a church from being too inwardly or outwardly focused. Followers of Christ are to grow spiritually for the purpose of reaching out to others who need to experience the love of Christ.

In summary, passages like these, among others, demonstrate:

- The foundation of a disciple’s relationship with Jesus is grounded upon Jesus’ expression of love for people as evidenced by His death and resurrection. This is the means of a disciple’s salvation and entrance into the Church.
- Jesus’ love for His disciples would manifest itself through His disciples’ love for each other and serve as an indicator to a watching world that they were followers of Christ and that Jesus’ claims about himself are true.
- This loving community, known as the Church, would consist of Christ

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97 Bill Thrall, The Kingdom Life (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 191.
followers expressing their faith through their devotion to the Word of God, (Acts 2:42), to the fellowship with other believers, (Acts 2:42’s “one another” passages), and through living out the mission of Jesus (John 17:18).

In light of the research thus far, it can be said that the responsibilities of a disciple cannot be fulfilled in isolation, but must be expressed within the context of the Christian community and with the purpose of expanding the Christian community by leading others into a relationship with Christ.


While each disciple of Christ is responsible for his or her spiritual growth, the Church also has a role in other’s discipleship. This is best summarized in Jesus’ command to His disciples in Matthew 28:19 when He said, “Go into all the world and make disciples….” Paul, in his writing to the church in Colossi, said, “We proclaim him [Jesus], admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me” (Col 1:28-29). Paul enforced this sentiment to the Church in Ephesus when he wrote,

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and 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 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph 4:11–13)

The word “prepare” in verse 12 comes from the Greek word καταρτισμός which means “to make fit, prepare, train, perfect, make fully qualified for service.”

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this medical metaphor that Paul would later say “speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Eph 4:15–16). Paul’s emphasis at the end of this verse is that each part of the Body of Christ is doing its work, and not the church leaders doing all of the work. One of the purposes of the church and of its leaders is to disciple followers of Christ towards Christ-likeness in order to prepare them for works of service. More specifically, it is the church’s responsibility to disciple the followers of Christ so that they in turn are properly prepared to get involved in ministering to others.

James, in his personal letter to the church, challenged his followers to make sure they are living out their faith. He wrote,

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. (Jas 2:14–19)

James makes it clear that a disciple of Christ is not only to be someone who understands what faith in Jesus means, but that his understanding is demonstrated by living out his faith in daily lives. This point is reinforced by Albert Winseman in his book, Growing an Engaged Church, when he states,

Spiritual commitment reflects a personal depth of spirituality. It is individual in nature, and is seen in both behaviors and attitudes…. Spiritual commitment is used to describe a spirituality that goes beyond merely an inwardly focused, ‘feel good’ faith to one that makes a real difference in daily living.100

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100 Albert Winseman, Growing an Engaged Church (New York: Gallup Press, 2006), 50.
Therefore, an individual disciple is not only to express their faith within the context of the Christian community but is to live out his or her faith-mission in everyday relationships and affairs. W. Edward Thiele wrote,

A disciple is a saved person who is learning to live under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That means that every Christian is a disciple. A disciple may remain very immature for a long time after conversion. The Church has the responsibility of others’ discipleship, maturing them in Christ, in order to grow in their relationship with Christ and to live as Jesus lived while fulfilling His mission.\textsuperscript{101}

Responsibility for lack of spiritual engagement and growth cannot be exclusively placed upon a new convert. While teaching about Jesus and the Bible by the Pastors and Church Leaders is important, the Church must, according to Thiele, actively seek to turn converts into disciples of Christ. According to Bill Hull, positive results can come from this process, “When a disciple is made, two good things happen: a disciple is healthy and godly; disciples reproduce themselves, and some become disciple-makers resulting in multiplication.”\textsuperscript{102}

\textit{The Correlation Between Discipleship and Church Engagement}

Since the 1950s Gallup has been researching and tracking the religious trends in America. According to their research, as of December 24, 2009, 78 percent of Americans identified with some form of Christian religion with 56 percent stating that religion was “very important” in their lives.\textsuperscript{103} These statistics seem to coincide with an earlier survey done by Gallup where they discovered that “94 percent say they believe in God, 89 percent state a religious preference, 63 percent say they are members of a faith community, and 44 percent report they have attended a religious service in the past seven


\textsuperscript{102} Bill Hull, \textit{The Disciple Making Pastor} (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 2007), 52.

While these statistics appear to be positive, the research has already demonstrated a general decline in church membership.

Why is there a disparity between those who identify with a particular Christian faith and the steady, even rapid, decline in church membership? If 78 percent of Americans relate to some form of Christian faith, why are not more people coming to Christ, becoming engaged with a church, and living out their faith within the surrounding community? Could the answer lie in the apparent lack of connection between one’s profession of faith or connection to a particular faith body and their engagement within that faith community?

Over a five-year period from 2001 to 2005, Gallup Faith Poll conducted telephone interviews with 1000 adults who indicated that they were members of a church, synagogue, or other religious faith community. Their findings will help shed light on some of the reasons behind the disparity between those who say they are religious but who are not formally connected to a local church. During Gallup’s research, participants were asked to rank on a scale (1–10) statements that highlighted spiritually committed attitudes and behaviors. Some of examples of these statements were “My faith is involved in every aspect of my life;” “Because of my faith, I have meaning and purpose in my life;” and “I will take unpopular stands to defend my faith.” Of interest is that Gallup did not ask any questions about Jesus and the Bible, finding such questions to be counterintuitive.

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104 Winseman, Growing an Engaged Church, 10.

Items about Jesus and the Bible actually don’t tell us much about spiritual commitment. In our initial study, we asked several (“core belief” questions, such as ‘Jesus Christ is the Son of God,’ ‘Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine,’ and ‘I believe the Bible has authority over what I say and do.’ We found no significant difference in responses to these items between those who are spiritually committed and those who are not.\(^{106}\)

Winseman would continue by saying,

> While we found that spiritually committed individuals are doctrinally sound, we also discovered that those who are not spiritually committed are nearly as likely to be doctrinally sound….Believing all the right things doesn’t automatically mean a person is spiritually committed.\(^{107}\)

In conclusion, Winseman would make the observation that

> In order to be spiritually committed, you have to go beyond mere belief. Believing the right things—adhering to correct doctrine—is just the beginning. Not only are the spiritually committed doctrinally sound, they go beyond sound doctrine to actually incorporating the tenets of the faith into their daily lives, and then acting on those beliefs.\(^{108}\)

Winseman’s research indicates that there is a difference between professing an affiliation to a particular faith or even a faith doctrine, and putting those beliefs into practice. Unfortunately, many churches assume that a new believer knows what to do when he becomes a new member. However, based upon the research done by Gallup, there appears to be a difference between those who consider themselves spiritual and those who are spiritually committed as evidenced in their daily living.

This seems to go against the conventional wisdom of churches for the past thirty-five years. According to Winseman’s research,

\(^{106}\) Winseman, *Growing an Engaged Church*, 58.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 58–59.

\(^{108}\) Ibid., 59.
The conventional wisdom has been that the decline of the Church in the United States has been because of a lack of spiritual depth among its people. Mainline churches have been particularly susceptible to this criticism; detractors on all sides have been telling mainline churches that they just weren’t ‘spiritual enough’ and that they weren’t certain enough in their beliefs—those were the reasons for their declining membership.\(^{109}\)

As a result of this criticism, “there has been an increased emphasis upon deepening individuals’ spiritual lives as evidenced by the explosion of the Christian devotional book industry since 1970.”\(^{110}\) The thinking of many mainline American churches led them to believe that simply teaching doctrine and theology would result in spiritually committed disciples. However, as the research has shown, the decline of church membership is not due to the lack of sound biblical teaching.

In light of these findings, strong indications exist that one reason why American churches are in trouble is not because of a lack of sound biblical teaching, but because their members are not spiritually engaged. Mark Waltz, in his book *Lasting Impressions*, stated,

> Association with a church can become a substitute for knowing Jesus; Christian can become a catchphrase describing churchgoers who may not follow Jesus at all…Unfortunately, rather than calling people to a lifestyle that transforms not only the believer’s life but also the believer’s world, too many churches present Christianity and membership as mere assent to a set of beliefs.\(^{111}\)

Waltz states that being a disciple of Jesus is more than merely associating oneself with a particular religious group. This should come as no surprise and may explain the disparity in the poll results taken in America that show a high percentage of people following a Christian faith and the decline of the Christian churches. But, what Waltz is also saying is

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\(^{109}\) Ibid., 62.

\(^{110}\) Ibid.

that churches may have been contributing to the disparity between church association and church membership by presenting Christian engagement as a “mere assent to a set of beliefs.”

Winseman would say that the engaged church member is someone whose faith has grown and deepened as a result of the impact of Jesus Christ and the influence of his church in his life. These are people who are serving and helping people within their community, who have made good relational connections with people in the church and are actively reaching out to others within the community for the cause of Christ. Waltz’s conclusions, supported by Winseman’s conclusions derived from research done by Gallup, states, “spiritual commitment is usually the result of one big—and often overlooked—factor: congregational engagement. Focus on improving engagement, and increased commitment will follow.”

Statements like these fall in line with the previous exegetical research on what it means to be a disciple, along with the role of the church in discipleship.

**Congregational Engagement**

It has been shown that a disciple of Jesus is someone who is actively living out his faith within the context of the Church community and his world. Disciples are those who devote themselves to growing in their understanding of God and His Word, to loving and supporting others within the Christian community, and reaching out to people in the world who need Jesus. The Church and its leadership have a responsibility to disciple their followers to accomplish the purposes set out for them in Christ.

Unfortunately, while many people say they follow a Christian faith or ascribe to a set of Christian beliefs, people are leaving Christian churches in droves. What Winseman and many other Church leaders are discovering is that there is a difference

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between a person who professes to be a Christian or ascribes to a certain set of Christian doctrines and one who is spiritually committed or engaged. According to Winseman, the difference between the two is spiritual engagement for “engagement is the key.”\textsuperscript{113} For Winseman, “congregational engagement describes the degree of belonging an individual has in his or her congregation.”\textsuperscript{114} Through the research and analysis done by Gallup, three types of members were discovered in every congregation: the engaged, the not-engaged, and the actively disengaged.

The engaged members of a congregation are described as “loyal and have strong psychological and emotional connections to their church or parish. They are more spiritually committed, they are more likely to invite friends, family members, and coworkers to congregational events, and they give more, both financially and in commitment of time.”\textsuperscript{115} The engaged member is someone who has deep ties and often serves in key positions in a congregation.

The second group identified by Winseman is that of the “not-engaged.” These are members who “may attend regularly, but they do not have strong psychological or emotional connections to their congregation; their connections are more social than spiritual.”\textsuperscript{116} This is a group that attends regularly, would probably even say that they like their church, but give less, serve less, and invite less than the engaged person does.

The last group that Winseman discovered in the survey results were the “actively disengaged.” In this group, two types emerged. The first type “usually show up only once or twice a year, if at all. They are on the membership rolls, and can usually tell you what congregation they belong to—but often by location rather than name.”\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 67.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 68.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 69.
Typically, these are people who affiliate themselves with a particular church (“I go to ‘xyz’ church”) but may only attend during the major church holidays such as Christmas or Easter.

The second type of “actively disengaged” person is someone who is “quite regular in his or her attendance...physically present but psychologically hostile.”\(^{118}\) This group of people is comprised of those who come fairly regularly to church but are unhappy with the congregation and insist on sharing their misery with just about everyone. This negativity drains the effectiveness of the church and is a constant source of frustration to church leadership.

Through the surveys that were done by Gallup, the contrast between those who were considered engaged versus those who were categorized as being either not-engaged or actively disengaged is staggering. Below are some highlights of their findings\(^ {119}\):

- 39 percent of those categorized as being engaged were more fully spiritually committed compared to 12 percent of the not-engaged and 3 percent of the actively disengaged.
- 61 percent of the engaged strongly agree that they are completely satisfied with their lives whereas only 40 percent of the not-engaged strongly agreed and only 23 percent of the actively disengaged could say that they were completely satisfied with life.
- 64 percent of the engaged people were more likely to invite someone to their church as compared to only 6 percent of the actively disengaged. For the not-engaged, about 20 percent would consider inviting people to join them at their church.

\(^{118}\) Ibid.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 73–75.
• When it came to serving, engaged members would spend a median of $2 \frac{1}{2}$ hours per week volunteering in their communities—*in addition to* volunteering within their churches. Those not engaged spend a median of about 1 hour per week, while for the actively disengaged, the median number of hours volunteered per week is 0.

• Engaged members give, as a median percentage, 5 percent of their annual income to the church as compared to 3 percent by the not-engaged and 1.5 percent by the actively disengaged.

In many ways, the research done by Gallup only puts numbers to the feelings that so many church leaders have in regards to the decline of so many Christian churches. The research showed that 54 percent, or most of the individuals attending Christian churches, are not engaged, 17 percent are actively disengaged, and only 29 percent could be considered as engaged.\textsuperscript{120} Is it any wonder then that so many American congregations are struggling as a result of the low percentage of their congregants being engaged?

The question that begs to be asked is what are the factors that encourage spiritual engagement? Again, referring to Winseman’s research, one of the factors is an effective church membership process. According to the research by Gallup, “Church membership appears to make a difference in spiritual commitment: 18 percent of members vs. only 5 percent of nonmembers are fully spiritually committed. To put it another way, church members are more than *three and a half times as likely as* nonmembers to be fully spiritually committed!”\textsuperscript{121} Based upon this conclusion, not only membership, but more importantly, the membership process can serve an important role in fulfilling Jesus’ command to make disciples.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 6.
It is the local church that serves as the visible, tangible, real-world expression of the body of Christ. Charles Colson writes in his book, *The Body*, “Of course every believer is part of the universal church. But, for any Christian who has a choice in the matter, failure to cleave to a particular church is failure to obey Christ.” Charles Spurgeon, a nineteenth century pastor, gave a message to the Metropolitan Tabernacle in Newington, England in 1869. In his message, Spurgeon speaks to his perspective on church membership by saying,

I know there are some who say, “Well I have given myself to the Lord, but I do not intend to give myself to any church.” Now, why not? “Because I can be a Christian without it.” Are you quite clear about that? You can be as good a Christian by disobedience to your Lord’s commands as by being obedient? Spurgeon continues,

There is a brick. What is it made for? To help build a house. It is of no use for that brick to tell you that it is just as good a brick while it is kicking about on the ground as it would be in the house. It is a good-for-nothing brick. So you rolling-stone Christians, I do not believe that you are answering your purpose. You are living contrary to the life which Christ would have you live, and you are much to blame for the injury you do.

Spurgeon, in his eloquent way, clearly states the importance of church membership. Combine that with the discoveries of Winseman’s research and membership takes on an additional role of enhancing engaged followers of Jesus.

The next question to explore is what if there was a process that could be used to equip people, connect people to a set of doctrines and values, and to hold people accountable to Jesus’ commands and the life that He desires for us to live? What if there was a process that could be used to enhance Jesus’ command given in Matthew 28:19 to “…make disciples of all nations…”?

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Taking a New Look at Church Membership

Most churches in America would say that they have a membership process but would not consider their current members to be engaged. In research by Jan Linn, he discovered several churches with high attendance, high membership, but with low participation overall. For example, “one church generally considered as the most prestigious pulpit in its denomination boasts of a membership exceeding 3000, with 210 counted as ‘participating.’ The average weekly worship attendance is 845, which is less than 30 percent of the total membership the church reports.”124 These results were found in newer and older churches too. For example, “a six-year-old congregation reports a membership of 137, with 115 participating, but a weekly average of 72. A very large church about 10 years old has a membership of 3346, with 2500 ‘participating’, but only 900 for an average worship attendance.”125 As Linn has discovered, there are many people who are part of a church, who may even be a church members, but would be considered to be not-engaged or actively disengaged according to Winseman’s categories. Linn concludes, “The way mainline churches do membership is not working very well.”126

Rethinking Membership

Due to the struggles of some current membership models, many churches and church leaders are re-evaluating their membership process with the view toward advancing the overall purposes of their churches. Nelson Searcy states, “Church membership is not optional and should not be viewed as such. If you don’t encourage your regular attendees to become members, you are doing them a disservice. In effect,

124 Linn, Rocking the Church Membership Boat, 32–33.
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
you are stifling their spiritual development."

Take note of Searcy’s comment that a poor membership process can be “stifling to their spiritual development.” Linn emphasizes this point when he states,

...membership requires a new way of thinking altogether. It calls for viewing church membership as a spiritual discipline. The biblical basis for this perspective is the fact that membership in the body of Christ means loving Jesus and loving the way Jesus loves. It is at least presumptuous to think anyone joins the church already capable of either understanding the implications of this dual challenge or living by it.

He concludes by saying,

Membership, then, by its very nature, ought to be understood as a process of spiritual maturing. If joining the church means anything, it must mean we have made the decision to commit ourselves to becoming disciplined in spiritual growth and development.

From these two examples alone, church membership takes on a deeper emphasis than prior models. According to these authors, membership and the membership process are being used as a vital role within a church’s discipleship of its people.

Granger Community Church in Granger, Indiana, provides further support of this idea. Mark Waltz, the Connections Pastor at Granger, states,

We have more weekend attendees than members. That’s because our ministry model is about journey. It’s about steps, one at a time. We allow our guests and returning attendees time to explore the church, to listen to messages and conversations, to experience safe relationships with people who are members, who are Christ-followers.

In this quote, Waltz makes a clear delineation between those who attend and those who are members. Waltz even goes so far as to say that those who are members are Christ-

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127 Searcy, Fusion, 144.

128 Linn, Rocking the Church Membership Boat, 9.

129 Waltz would also say, “At Granger, if we consider the percentage of people who are not members too small, we conclude that our Christ-following members are not living out their commitment to invest in the lives of people who do not yet know their worth before God—enough to invite them to ‘come see.’”
followers, men and women who are actively living out their faith in their daily lives.

Waltz makes this clear when he says,

They [those who are guests] want to know if Jesus and the claims we communicate about Him are true. And we’ve found that they will agree or not agree over time, as they explore, listen, and experience. They want to know for themselves if the hope we keep talking about actually translates into changed lives.

Waltz concludes with an emphasis upon commitment to membership by saying,

As they watch, listen, interact, and journey, they learn that membership is about commitment. It’s a choice. There’s a cost. And yes, it’s worth one’s time, effort, resources, talents, and energy….Give people time to make commitments that count, but call for commitment!130

This emphasis upon commitment is an important element in the membership process, but it is more than a commitment to a local church, it is a commitment to discipleship.

Stetzer’s survey of 324 churches that experienced significant growth through conversion (meaning, not transfer growth) found that 53 percent of comeback churches had raised the requirements of church membership, “challenging people to live out the privileges and responsibilities of the covenant community described in Scripture.”131

Chuck Lawless emphasizes this thought by saying, “An effective membership class lays the foundation for church members to participate fully in the life of the church. Raise the standards of the church membership; promote these standards through an intentional class—and then expect people to live up to them.”132


131 Ed Stetzer, How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 124.

132 Chuck Lawless, Membership Matters (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 91.
Key Factors in a Membership Process

The research indicates that discipleship, when linked with membership, can enhance the biblical purposes of that church. The question is raised, then, what does an effective membership process look like? The importance of this question is addressed by Rick Warren in his book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*,

A number of studies have shown that the way people join an organization greatly influences how they function in that organization after joining. This is true of joining a church as well. The manner in which people join your church will determine their effectiveness as members for years to come.133 How people get connected is vitally important to a good membership process.

Several key factors come into play for developing an effective membership process. The first, and probably most important, key factor is that of the leader clearly communicating the importance of and path to membership. In a survey done of 150 growing churches by the Billy Graham School of Missions, 73 percent of those churches who had a membership class “let it be known by the leadership that membership matters in their congregations.”134 Searcy also states, “As leaders, we have a responsibility to educate our attendees on the importance of being part of the Church family and then to hold them accountable for what they have learned.”135 Chuck Lawless also emphasizes this point when he says, “They [the Senior Pastor] bring to the class a passion and commitment few others in the church have….Pastors who do not lead the classes may miss a prime opportunity to influence church members for years to come.”136 This commitment by the leadership of a church is so important that for many churches the Senior Pastor not only communicates from the pulpit the importance of membership, but also either teaches the membership class or plays a key role somewhere during the

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135 Searcy, *Fusion*, 144.

membership classes.

Research shows that a second factor in the membership process is providing a clear path that leads to church membership. In some cases, it could be likely that church attendees do not know how to become church members. Having a clear process, a process that some churches consider to be their assimilation process, becomes very important. Searcy writes, “Assimilation leads to life transformation by giving people the means and opportunity to become maturing followers of Christ.”[137] Unfortunately, according to Searcy, many churches do not have a clear process. He states,

…with churches across the country, I have found that a surprisingly large majority have no clear-cut system for taking the step of membership. They simply expect a prospective member to call the church office, talk to the pastor or stop by the resource table—but they rarely pinpoint or detail a specific way to express membership interest.[138]

Having an unclear process for membership can be a contributing factor in many people not becoming members. Making the process as clear and simple as possible for getting people engaged in the life of a church is an important piece of the membership process.

A third factor, according to research, is to provide opportunities for relational connections between the attendees during the membership classes. According to Lawless, “relationships that began in the membership classes often remained strong for the laypeople we interviewed….In general, members responding to our survey fondly recalled the membership class as the place where they met soon-to-be-good friends.”[139]

Having the goal of building relationships as part of the purpose of the membership process may require conducting multiple classes over a period of a few weeks verses having just one class. Lawless observed

[137] Searcy, Fusion, 27.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Lawless, Membership Matters, 56.
...strong relationships among class members were more likely to develop in classes that included multiple sessions. Of the churches that we surveyed, 50 percent of them had membership classes that met for at least four weeks. Longer classes that met over several weeks simply allowed more opportunities for class members to get to know each other.  

Building relationships early in the assimilation process is very important to one’s spiritual engagement. According to Winseman, less than half of the people surveyed could say that, aside from family members, they had a best friend in their congregation. Winseman writes,

The best congregational environments are those in which there are many real, genuine friendships. Individuals are happiest, most productive, and most fulfilled when they can cooperate and combine their efforts…Members need to feel they can trust the people around them. Friendship is the gateway to trust.

Building trust through relationships is important to building a strong congregation where discipleship can take place.

Fourth, communicating a clear set of expectations for your members geared toward spiritual growth is vital. Mark Dever, in his speech during the 2007 Southern Baptist Convention, said,

We must consider whether those who are becoming members of our church are known for living Christ-honoring lives. Do we understand the seriousness of the commitment that we are making to them and that they are making to us? If we are more careful about how we recognize and receive new members, we will have less occasion to practice church discipline later.

Dever not only emphasizes the commitment of the member, but a commitment by the church as well to disciple them. Winseman observed that,

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140 Ibid. 55–56.

141 Winseman, Growing an Engaged Church, 103.

142 Ibid., 104.

143 Mark Dever, “Meaningful Church Membership,” speech delivered to Southern Baptist Convention, August 23, 2007, San Antonio, TX, MP-3.
…leaders are not challenging their members to grow and helping them find the best ways to do this, but rather are hoping their members will feel challenged to grow on their own. The problem is many will not.

He continues by saying,

Congregations are often woefully inadequate when it comes to providing feedback to members about their progress. In many cases, new members attend a class at which the meaning of membership is discussed, but expectations are seldom clarified. After members complete the class, the only expectations that many congregations even hint at are attendance and financial giving. So they go without such criteria, or make up their own—which may or may not be in line with anybody else’s. The result: Nobody is on the same page, so it is no wonder many congregations have a hard time defining their mission. 144

Having clearly stated expectations of what it means to be a member of a particular church helps to make sure the people understand how to contribute to the overall purpose of the church.

For some churches and church leaders, having expectations for their membership may seem risky. However, Stetzer found, based upon his research done on “Comeback Churches,” that, “over and over, comeback leaders stated that increasing expectations is a key to creating an atmosphere for mobilization of the laity. Church members are expected to be involved and to use their God-given gifts, talents, and skills.” 145 Lawless found this to be true in his survey results and stated, “All but two (96%) specifically indicated expectations of members in their membership classes, and they did so because they believe that membership matters.” 146 As previously noted, these findings reinforce Paul’s statement to the Ephesians when he said, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and 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…. ” (Eph 4:11–12). Having clear expectations and stating them up front is important to maximizing the effectiveness of a church’s membership process.

144 Winseman, Growing an Engaged Church, 107.

145 Stetzer, How 300 Churches Turned Around, 137.

146 Lawless, Membership Matters, 80.
The fifth component to an effective membership process is that of accountability. According to Bill Hull,

To believe you can make disciples or develop true maturity in others without some form of accountability is like believing that you can raise children without discipline, run a company without rules, or lead an army without authority. Accountability is to the Great Commission what tracks are to a train.147

Accountability by the leadership of a church is important. The author of Hebrews states, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account” (Heb 13:17). According to Searcy, this step is important because “when attendees cross the line to membership, you have amplified permission to disciple them on a deeper level and hold them accountable for continuing to seek after God’s best.”148

Follow-up with the members on how they are doing regarding membership expectations is important. Regarding this issue, Winseman states, “Just as members need to know the expectations of church membership, they also must know how they are progressing in meeting those expectations—particularly in the area of spiritual growth.”149

By holding members accountable, the leadership of the church can ensure that the mission of the church is being applied by their congregants, measure the effectiveness of their mission, and ultimately encourage their members to be deepening their spiritual engagement.

Some churches use a Membership Covenant, or a signed agreement that the new member will carry out certain actions agreed upon through the membership class. These actions are generally geared around the values of the church and what the church desires for the members to do in fulfilling their responsibilities as Christians. In his book,

147 Hull, The Disciple-Making Pastor, 159.

148 Searcy, Fusion, 152.

The Deliberate Church, Mark Dever expresses the importance of having a Membership Covenant Statement for his church:

Implementing a church covenant helps to correct the misperception that members can live in either isolated individualism or unrepented sin and still be members in good standing. Church covenants make membership meaningful because they clarify the spiritual and relational commitments that membership signifies. Clarifying the commitments of membership promotes the health of the local church because it keeps nominalism at bay and keeps us accountable to growing in real Christian piety.\footnote{Mark Dever, The Deliberate Church (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 62.}

Through a membership covenant, the church and its members know what is expected and that they can be held accountable.

The sixth element of a good membership process is moving the attendees into ministry. According to Lawless, “getting attendees to join the church is only a first step in moving them into ministry. In fact, moving them to ministry is sometimes even more difficult.”\footnote{Lawless, Membership Matters, 100.} However, while this may be one of the more difficult steps in the process, it is nonetheless one of the most important. According to Lawless’ research, 76 percent of those who had attended a membership class indicated that they were “more willing to get involved in a church.” Two years later, over 70 percent of the members from the churches Lawless surveyed remained involved in the church.\footnote{Ibid.} It is at this step that a church member becomes, according to Winseman’s research, “engaged.”

**Conclusion**

The research has shown that membership in America has been in decline and continues to decline. With fewer and fewer people being exposed to the good news of

\footnote{Mark Dever, The Deliberate Church (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2005), 62.}

\footnote{Lawless, Membership Matters, 100.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
Jesus Christ, combined with the command of Jesus to go into the world and “make disciples, “ this decline is troubling. The statistics should be troubling for all Christians, whether in leadership or not.

Based upon the brief survey of the Bible, it is clear that each Christian has a responsibility, not only for his own spiritual growth, but also a responsibility to the Christian community at large. Every follower of Christ should be actively engaged within the context of a Christian community, also known as the local church, with the desire of reaching out to others who do not know Jesus as their personal Savior.

The Biblical survey also showed that while the Christian has a responsibility to the local church, the local church has a responsibility to the Christian as well. It is the responsibility of the Church leadership to provide a community wherein Christians can live out the Christian faith. This kind of community includes creating a loving Christian culture for the community to grow, supporting and holding Christians accountable for the spiritual growth, and providing opportunities for Christians to serve and reach out to those who need Jesus.

In order to create this kind of community, church leaders need to develop, as Winseman describes, a process of moving attendees from “not engaged” to “engaged” in their church community. This movement from “not engaged” to “engaged” could be considered a discipleship process whereby the attendee can actively live out his faith while the church accomplishes its mission of making disciples. As the research has also shown, these two goals can be enhanced by an effective membership process.

Based upon the research, an effective membership process would include the following factors:

- The leadership of the church clearly communicates and supports membership within the church.
- A clear path for becoming a membership within the church is provided.
• Throughout the process, several opportunities are given to develop key relationships within the church.

• A clear set of expectations for what it means to be a member is stated.

• A system of accountability is also in place, holding members accountable to the stated expectations.

• A plan is used for moving each person into an active role within the church.

With these six key factors in place, the membership process within a church can be used to enhance discipleship. This will become clearer through the selected Case Study Churches that will be provided in Chapter 4 of this research project.
CHAPTER 3

PROCEDURE AND RESEARCH METHOD

Based upon the research that was given in the previous chapter, membership in many evangelical churches in America is on the decline. There were several cultural reasons for why this is the case, but the result is that many church-goers view membership as optional, legalistic, or interfering with the desire for autonomy. The declining trend is certainly concerning to many church leaders, and some, have begun to reexamine the role of membership within the church. For some church leaders, membership is nothing more than assenting to a particular set of doctrines then assimilating into the overall church institution. Others view membership as a restriction on the expression of God’s love towards others and should be abolished. However, there are some church leaders who are beginning to connect membership in a church with Jesus’ call to disciple by examining their membership process. It is this latter group that this project seeks to examine.

This group presents several challenges. The first challenge in studying how churches use their membership process to enhance discipleship is finding a church that recognizes the cultural issues that are before them regarding membership. As has already been stated, some church leaders view membership with ambivalence, others seek to maintain the status quo, while others have analyzed their culture and seek to overcome it. What this project is specifically looking for are those churches that have accepted the challenge of reconsidering their membership process as it relates to discipleship within the church.
This leads to the second obstacle which is finding churches that have not only identified the characteristics of a disciple of Jesus, but also how that kind of person lives out his faith in his everyday life. Unless a clear understanding of who a disciple is, what a disciple looks like, or how this kind of disciple is developed, then the discipleship process exists in name only.

Finally, the third challenge is finding churches that have made the connection between membership and discipleship through their membership process. This leads to other questions such as: Has this church implemented its membership process into the overall systems of the church? Does its process not only highlight the characteristics that is sought in a disciple, but does it provide opportunities for people to move through the process to achieve the desired characteristics?

If such churches are discovered and studied, they can likely serve as models for other churches. Church leaders would be provided with another tool that could be used to fulfill Jesus’ commission to the Church in as commanded in Matthew 28. Many churches would also welcome the opportunity to learn how discipleship could be enhanced by means of an effective membership process.

This project seeks to study the membership processes of two Case Study churches and how they use their membership processes to enhance their discipleship. The project’s research problem is summarized in the following statement: The researcher wishes to examine how selected case study churches use their membership process to enhance their discipleship. Specifically, the research question is: What is the membership process that select churches use to enhance discipleship?

In order to answer the research question, the researcher chose not to study the membership process of many churches. This sort of quantitative analysis of churches with varying membership processes would be difficult to condense and would not likely produce the most helpful information for churches or church leaders. Since the researcher’s objective was to determine the particular processes that enhance
discipleship, the decision was made to focus on a qualitative analysis of membership processes of selected churches. To conduct this level of qualitative analysis, the case-study methodology was chosen. Case-study research allows an outside researcher the opportunity to immerse himself in the culture of the church and more fully comprehend the components of the explored ministry.

**Selection of Case-Study Churches**

In order to respond to and to answer the research question, “What is the membership process that select churches use to enhance discipleship?” the researcher needed to discover appropriate case-study churches. As has already been stated, the researcher sought out churches that could clearly define what a disciple looks like at their church and could identify how their particular membership process was being used to develop that kind of disciple.

When the researcher asked other pastors if they could recommend potential case-study churches, several churches were suggested. Of those that were suggested, the researcher decided on two churches for this project. The first church is Grace Point Church in San Antonio, Texas. The Senior Pastor of Grace Point, along with the Connections Pastor, transitioned their process for membership to one that reflected their core values of a disciple in their church. An initial interview was scheduled with the Senior Pastor in 2008 and, later, a more extensive interview was conducted with the Connections Pastor in 2009. During these two interviews, it was revealed that the church had a well-defined membership process and that process was being used to enhance discipleship within their church.

The second church selected for this project was Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas. The research on Austin Stone was conducted with Todd Engstrom, Pastor of Missional Community and Elder, in the Fall of 2010. This church was unique from Grace Point Church in that Austin Stone had a missional philosophy of
ministry. It was interesting to observe how a disciple at Austin Stone was defined and how their membership process was being used to enhance their discipleship. It was also interesting to note that due to the rapid growth of the church (6000+ attendees in less than 10 years), how their membership processes have morphed over the years and to hear how they were transitioning their membership process for the future. But, even with their process in flux, it had always been a process to develop disciples according to the values of Austin Stone Community Church.

**Researching the Case-Study Churches**

The process of studying the selected churches began with gathering data from each church. Of particular interest was any information related to church values, a well-defined description of a disciple, written description of the meaning of membership at the church, or written membership manuals. In order to understand the church culture, the researcher also sought out information revealing church history, theology, vision, and purpose. The researcher searched for these materials on the churches’ web sites and requested written documentation as well.

The process continued by scheduling an interview with the key leaders who had oversight of the membership process. To prepare for the interview at each church, the researcher developed a list of verbal interview questions. The interview questions reflected the hypothesis of the research project. The anticipated findings in the research question, “What is the membership process that select churches use to enhance discipleship?” are reflected in the hypothesis: Case Study churches use their membership process to enhance discipleship.

The goal of the interviews was to ask open-ended questions that would get the church leaders talking candidly about the membership process of their church. While the interview questions get at the heart of understanding the basic membership processes that enhance discipleship in their church, the interviewer did not limit himself to those
questions. The initial research gave the researcher insights into the discipleship of the church and the membership process that was being implemented. Consequently, the researcher was equipped to ask more specific questions of each church.

The researcher sought to ask well-informed questions that showed a genuine interest in case-study churches and in learning from the various decisions that were made in order to develop the process that they had. During the interview times, the researcher sought to earn the trust of those being interviewed in order to learn from their struggles, mistakes, victories, and successes. The church leaders were very generous with their time and responses.

**Chapter Summary**

Given the goal to determine the membership processes used to enhance discipleship, the researcher chose to conduct a qualitative analysis using case-study methodology. Two case-study churches were selected: Grace Point Church in San Antonio, Texas and Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, Texas.

Preliminary research was conducted on each church. The researcher then made site visits in order to conduct in-depth interviews with the church leaders responsible for overseeing their respective membership process. Though the researcher developed a standardized list of questions for the case-study churches, the interviews allowed for open-ended questions. During these interview times, the researcher was able to ask questions that expanded on significant aspects of the church and its membership process.

The results of the research could validate or fail to validate the hypothesis, which is: Case-study churches use their membership process to enhance discipleship. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the case-studies of the selected churches.
CHAPTER 4
CASE STUDY RESULTS

Grace Point Church

In a day when commitment to organizations is rare, it should come as no surprise that church membership is being scrutinized by many churches across America. According to a Leadership Weekly poll given in 2005, about a third of respondents believed that membership was not all that important at their church. “While 38 percent said attendees were frequently urged to join, and 34 percent said the membership appeal was occasionally given, the remainder said their church placed little or no emphasis on membership. That trend, according to many experts, is a mistake, the costly result of a casual, come-as-you-are attitude.”¹ Ken Sande, founder of Peacemaker Ministries and international speaker, shared in this article that “it’s time for churches to raise the bar, to focus on a serious mission, and ensure that every person aboard serves a vital function.”² What if membership within a church became the norm rather than the exception? If so, what would the process look like for making this a reality?

At Grace Point Church in San Antonio Texas, they are purposefully and actively working against the trend of declining church membership in America. According to David Galbraith, Grace Point’s Connection Pastor,

Membership at Grace Point Church from the very beginning has been a pretty high expectation. For us, when it comes to what it means to be a member of our church, it’s not a matter of if, but where. It’s not a matter of if you want to be in a


²Ibid.
Life Group but where. It’s not a matter of if you want to serve but where. We would think that anything less than 80 percent of our people being actively involved by certain measurements within the church is unacceptable, unspiritual, and unbiblical.³

From David's perspective, membership at Grace Point Church requires high expectations.

According to a survey done by the Barna Group in 2006, only 27 percent of those surveyed were volunteering within their local church congregation.⁴ While Grace Point’s goal is to have 80 percent of the congregation actively involved in the church, a 70 percent active volunteer level is far higher than the national average of 27 percent. What makes so many people respond to Grace Point’s membership and how do they get such a high commitment from those who join? What processes do they have that produces such a high rate of participation? For David, he attributes much of the high participation levels to Grace Point’s membership process.

**History of Grace Point Church**

In 1992, Grace Point Church started as a church plant of Castle Hills First Baptist Church, a large Southern Baptist Church located on the northern side of San Antonio. George Harris, the Senior Pastor of Castle Hills First Baptist Church, commissioned his son, Jeff Harris, to be the Senior Pastor of this new campus in 1994 at the age of 26. It wasn’t long after arriving on the scene that Jeff came to realize that his vision and values were quite different from his father’s church. So, in February of 1998, the decision was made to become independent of Castle Hills First Baptist Church, and thus Grace Point Church was born. Since that time, Grace Point Church has grown to over 3000 adults worshiping on Sunday mornings.

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³ David Galbraith, interview by author, July 15, 2009, Tape Recording.

Membership Process at Castle Hills First Baptist Church

David Galbraith, who would later become the Connections Pastor at Grace Point Church, moved his family from Indiana to San Antonio in 1992. Upon arriving in San Antonio, Castle Hills First Baptist Church became their church home. They chose Castle Hills for its solid biblical teaching, and many well-done programs were available for their whole family. It was not long before David and his family decided to pursue membership at the church. At that time, the process for becoming a member at Castle Hills Church involved completing three phases.

The first phase was a 6-session video-based course which covered subjects such as a general overview and history of the church, beliefs, values and doctrine, church leadership structure, and serving opportunities within the church. According to David, “One of the video sessions highlighted the staff members as people you should know but it wasn’t a physical thing—a hand-to-hand, eyeball-to-eyeball thing. A lot of responsibility was upon you to step out and take the next steps, which I found to be ineffective.” This feeling of ineffectiveness served as a catalyst to some changes that David would later make at Grace Point Church. After completing the 6 sessions, the second phase involved being interviewed by a Deacon Board Representative. According to David, “The interview was with someone who hadn’t been tracking with us during the process, so it came off a bit cold and impersonal.” For David, the questions that were being asked seemed rote and lacked a personal touch. Finally, after completing phases 1 and 2, David and his family was presented before the congregation during one of their Sunday morning services and confirmed as members by the other church members. David’s experiences of going through the membership process at Castle Hills would later influence how the membership process would be conducted at Grace Point Church.

5 David Galbraith, interview by author, July 15, 2009, Tape Recording.

6 Ibid.
Transition from Castle Hills to Grace Point Church

Several years after becoming a member of Castle Hills Baptist Church, through many discussions with Jeff Harris, David made the decision to leave Castle Hills Church and join the staff at Grace Point Church as the Connections Pastor in 2004. As the Connections Pastor, David’s responsibilities included leading the evangelistic ministries of the church, large events, counseling, and assimilating people into the life of the church. Another one of David’s responsibilities was overseeing Grace Point’s Membership Process—a process that David doesn’t like to call “membership.”

We like to call our process Discovery. Our goal is for people to use this process, whether they intend to join or not, as an opportunity for others to put us under the microscope. This is important because we have found that many people who are coming to Grace Point are not coming from the strong, mainline Baptist denominations but rather from other Protestant faiths or from a completely unchurched background altogether. As a result, many people who come to our church wouldn’t go through a traditional membership class because they don’t value the concept of traditional membership.7 With such a variety of backgrounds, the term “membership” can mean a variety of things. This explains why David continues by saying, “Instead, we call our process Discovery because for many of our people, learning about what it means to be a follower of Christ and what it means to be church is new to them. Actually one of the fun things about Discovery is watching people’s eyes light up when they really understand and see the church being the church.”8 Based upon David’s experiences in other churches, understanding what it meant to be a church seemed to be an assumption.

Grace Point Church Membership Philosophy

Jeff and David, found that those who were showing up to their church were either tired of their previous church experiences and needed something fresh, or they had never been part of a church. Compounded by the culturally negative connotation of the

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
term “membership,” Jeff and David sought to turn membership into an “exploration of finding one’s place at Grace Point.”

Jeff and David began to ask themselves what they believed were reasons that someone considered a particular church. Their observations could be boiled down to three simple questions:

- How can I really be connected?
- What does community really mean?
- Where and how do I serve?

These three questions are vital for the church and serve as the foundation of the church. From the three questions, Grace Point Church formulated their three key strategies of the church: Connect, Community, and Calling. From these three strategies, Grace Point then began to arrange their staff structure and responsibilities. According to David, this is important because it provides a clear cohesive direction for the church. Discovery then becomes part of the whole philosophy of the church and a place where people can know how to become connected at Grace Point but refuse to become a member for whatever reason. David shared,

> Very early on, if we can accomplish knowing why they are at Grace Point and what brought them here, meet them individually and make a first spiritual connection to hear their story, then we have accomplished a big part of what we do during Discovery. That is one of our key goals.

From these early discussions, they not only hear a person’s personal story, but also share Grace Point’s story and what it means to be a follower of Christ. Thus, Discovery becomes part of the process of intersecting one’s faith journey with the overall direction of Grace Point Church.

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9 Ibid.

10 See Appendix B.

11 See Appendix B.

12 David Galbraith, interview by author, July 15, 2009, Tape Recording.
Overall Structure of Discovery

The current structure of Discovery is as follows:

• *Discovery* is offered 7 times throughout the year.
• Each *Discovery* session is two Sunday’s lasting for three hours each.
• The average class attendance is 40–50 people. The most they have had for a session is 69 in January of 2009.
• All the participants are given a set curriculum at the beginning of the class.
• Each person is assigned a “Discovery Guide” who oversees a group of 6–8 people. These Discovery Guides are volunteers from Grace Point who attend the *Discovery* sessions with those who are going through the class. Each Discovery Guide is a member of Grace Point and has gone through training on the *Discovery* material, developed skills on how to help each person feel connected within the class, and is committed to connecting each person into the life of the church.

David would go on to explain that these Discovery Guides are important “because membership and other commitment areas will often come more out of relationship than anything else.”13 This lesson came out of David’s negative experience at Castle Hills Church. He would go on to say, “Our most effective tools are people who are committed to community and who find, through relationships, ways to encourage others in their next steps.”14 These Discovery Guides serve as a vital role to the effectiveness of the program.

During the six-hour *Discovery* course, the sessions seek to cover four key elements:

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13 David Galbraith, interview by author, July 15, 2009, Tape Recording.

14 Ibid.
• Overall summary of the church, including its history and vision,
• An opportunity for each person to share with their Discovery Guide their personal faith story,¹⁵
• Complete and understand the findings of their S.H.A.P.E tests,¹⁶
• Understand better how to engage in community and serve at Grace Point.

Each participant is given a Personal Action Plan that will be completed at the conclusion of the two sessions,¹⁷ turned into the Discovery Guides, and then later returned to each participant by mail. Each participant is also given a Grace Point Membership Covenant that is signed and returned to the church leadership.¹⁸

**Discovery Schedule**

Overall, the two evening sessions are broken down into five main categories based upon their five stated Mission Measures. Grace Point’s Mission Measures are the five characteristics they have identified for a fully devoted follower of Christ.¹⁹ Their Mission Measures are:

1. Grace—“*My relationship to others.* We encourage our members to build relationships and live out the grace that God has appropriated to us.”

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¹⁵ See Appendix C.

¹⁶ S.H.A.P.E. is a tool of Saddleback Ministries used to discover one’s spiritual gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experience. The traditional S.H.A.P.E. class is approximately 15 hours long and so Grace Point received permission to modify the structure of the class. Grace Point is also in the mode of taking the test from paper to electronic so that each participant can complete the test online prior to arriving at *Discovery*.

¹⁷ See Appendix E.

¹⁸ See Appendix F.

¹⁹ Grace Point’s Purpose statement reads, “To lead unsaved people to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ.”
2. Growth—“My relationship to God. We believe every Christian should strive to become a fully devoted follower of Christ, growing spiritually in an intimate relationship with Jesus.”

3. Gifts—“My relationship to the Church. We believe it is crucial that every member of our church know and utilize their God-given spiritual gifts.”

4. Give—“My relationship to my finances. A fully devoted follower of Christ is one who gives systematically, sacrificially and proportionately as an act of worship and as a tangible expression of his love for God.”

5. Go—“My relationship to the world. The purpose of missions is to move the Church beyond the walls of the church building.”

Throughout the six hour class, the participants will also visually meet and hear a presentation by every pastor on the staff. During each presentation, the pastors are responsible for sharing their history and faith-story, casting a mini-vision of their particular ministry area, and presenting a structure for serving opportunities. Over the course of the two sessions, seven pastors will make at least one presentation to the participants. Key ministers (Senior Pastor, Pastor of Connection, Pastor of Community, and Pastor of Calling) each have 20–25 minutes to share while all other pastors have 10-15 minutes each. During these presentations, each participant gets a chance to personally connect, see, and hear the heart of the leader.

More specifically, the schedule is as follows:

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See Appendix B.
### Table 2: Grace Point Church Discovery Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SESSION 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Element</strong></td>
<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome and Introduction</td>
<td>David Galbraith, Connection Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of Grace Point Church; Introduction to the 5 Mission Measures</td>
<td>Jeff Harris, Senior Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of Grace Point Church; Ice Breaker</td>
<td>Jamye Cappadonna, Executive Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISSION MEASURE: GRACE -Presentation of Gospel; discussion on baptism; Grace Identity</td>
<td>David Galbraith, Connection Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISSION MEASURE: GIFTS -Introduction to S.H.A.P.E.</td>
<td>Jamye Cappadonna, Executive Pastor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SESSION 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Element</strong></td>
<td><strong>Speaker</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISSION MEASURE: GROW -Presentation of 360 Life Groups</td>
<td>Mike Sharrow, Community Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISSION MEASURE: GIVE -Presentation of Biblical Financial Stewardship</td>
<td>Mike Sharrow, Community Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of College Ministry</td>
<td>Mike Sharrow, Community Pastor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MISSION MEASURE: GO -Presentation of Missions Vision</td>
<td>John Walters, Calling Pastor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MISSION MEASURE: GIFTS -Discussion of S.H.A.P.E. results -CORE Value Discussion</td>
<td>David Galbraith, Connection Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of Children's Ministries</td>
<td>Melody Cardenas, Associate Children's Pastor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation of Student Ministries</td>
<td>John Davison, Student Pastor</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation of Worship &amp; Arts</td>
<td>Justin McCartney, Worship &amp; Arts Pastor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclude Sessions -Complete Personal Action Plan -Finalize Membership Covenant</td>
<td>David Galbraith, Connections Pastor</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Discovery, Session 1

At the beginning of the evening, after general introductions and comments have been made, Jeff Harris shares with the group the philosophy and vision of Grace Point Church. He introduces the Five Mission Measures to the participants and explains, from a biblical perspective, their place within the overall picture of Grace Point. Jeff also shares with the participants that Grace Point’s membership and process is meant to challenge them towards full participation within the life of the church. Knowing that membership at Grace Point calls for a higher standard of involvement, Jeff communicates that membership may not be for everyone. Regardless of whether or not the participants become members at Grace Point, at least they know where the leadership of Grace Point stands on this issue.

Mission Measure: Grace

David, as the Connection Pastor and general emcee of Discovery, then transitions to the first mission measure of Grace by giving a clear presentation of the gospel. Due to the fact that many people are coming to Grace Point from all kinds of religious backgrounds and for all kinds of reasons, David feels that this is foundational to their beginning of the Discovery class. Following the gospel presentation, each person is given 15 minutes to fill out their personal faith story by answering three key questions: What was your life like before you exchanged your life for Christ? Tell us about the time when you exchanged your life for Christ. Tell us the effect the transformation has had in your life when you exchanged your life for Christ.

The Discovery Guides then dialogue with each person in their group about the presentation, answer any questions that they might have, listen to each person share their faith story, and then interact with

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21 “Exchanged your life for Christ” is their catch phrase for someone who has placed their faith in Jesus as their personal Savior.

22 See Appendix C.
them about their spiritual condition in light of the gospel. During the six years that David has been leading *Discovery*, there has seldom been a time when there hasn’t been someone who accepted Christ as their personal Savior during these sessions.

*Mission Measure: Gifts*

At this point, the pastor of Calling is given time to share with the group the importance of serving within the church (Gifts). The discussion begins by introducing the participants to the S.H.A.P.E. test. S.H.A.P.E. stands for *Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality, and Experience*. Following the presentation, the participants are given time to discuss with their Discovery Guides how to use the test, answer any general questions that they might have, and are then dismissed for the evening.

*Discovery, Session 2*

*Mission Measure: Gifts, cont.*

By the time they return a week later, participants are expected to have completed their S.H.A.P.E. tests and be ready to share their findings with the rest of their Discovery Group. Throughout the discussion, their Discovery Guide helps the participants interpret the findings in a way that they can understand and answers any questions they might have about the results.

Each participant is then given a Service Opportunities booklet outlining all of the service opportunities within the church. All of the service opportunities have a brief description along with a list of spiritual gifts associated with that particular opportunity. These gifts line up with the ones listed in the S.H.A.P.E. tests. This allows each participant to assess each ministry based upon their passion and their particular set of spiritual gifts according their S.H.A.P.E. results.\(^{23}\) The Service Opportunity booklet not only serves as a resource of possibilities to serve within the church, but assumes that once

\(^{23}\) See Appendix D.
someone discovers the results of their S.H.A.P.E. tests they will want to serve. This assumption is best expressed by David when he challenges them, as a first step, to “go find those ministries, whether it’s in your mind or heart, that most closely fits your identified spiritual gifts and passions.” David is very careful not to say, “If there is ever a day when you want to serve, we’d love to hear from you,” but,

When you leave, on your personal action plan, you will identify three areas that most interest you today. We are not obligating you in any way, but we don’t even know if these are the best fits for you, but based upon what you have experienced so far and the desires of your heart, here are the 3-4 areas that you have identified.\(^\text{24}\)

This expectation most likely helps with their high volunteerism level at the church.

Each participant is then told that they will be contacted within the next 2 weeks by the ministry Point Leader (Grace Point’s term for staff person) who oversees the particular identified ministry areas. Upon thanking them for their interest in serving, the Point Leaders seek to provide an opportunity for them to “test-drive” their area of interest by shadowing someone in a similar role. This exposes them to the reality of what that ministry is like. Based upon these experiences, they will hopefully better understand what they want to do in the church. If their first option is not a good fit, they are not obligated to stay, but are encouraged to try the next service opportunity that they have listed on their Personal Action Plan. If a person doesn’t find an area of service in the Service Opportunity booklet that interests them, they are encouraged to describe their ideal area of service and share it with the leadership.\(^\text{25}\) Hopefully, either through the shadowing opportunities or through the new ministry ideas, each person will have at least one place for them to serve within the church.

To ensure that people are getting plugged into areas of service within the church, they track their participation through Exception Reports. Exception Reports detail

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\(^\text{24}\) David Galbraith, interview by author, July 15, 2009, Tape Recording.

\(^\text{25}\) See Appendix D.
those who are in their database system and track the progress of someone through the process of coming to Grace Point as a guest, attending *Discovery*, getting plugged into one of their community groups, and serving within an area of ministry. Lay people are involved in entering the information into the system along with analyzing the results of the Exception Reports. These reports are also discussed by the staff on a quarterly basis for the purpose of making sure that the information is entered accurately, to keep the staff’s awareness level high to those who are new to Grace Point, and to ensure that each person who attends is afforded the opportunity to get plugged in and is serving. At the end of each year, the staff will then take the Exception Reports and look to see how those who went through the *Discovery* process are doing. This yearly report helps the leadership know what areas are working in their membership process and what areas may need attention. By analyzing the data regularly, they have found that it is difficult for people to get lost in the shuffle.

*Mission Measure: Grow*

Mike Sharrow, the Community Pastor, then shares with the participants Grace Point’s expectation that all who consider themselves members should be in a 360 Life Group. It is in these groups that Grace Point seeks to encourage community and support for spiritual growth. These groups are offered throughout the week on and off the campus of Grace Point Church. Participants are given three different options for choosing 360 Life Groups: location according to zip codes, stages of life (single, women, men, young, old), and timing (days of the week). These Life Groups serve as the foundation for discipleship and community within the church.

*Mission Measure: Give*

Following the discussion on the 360 Life Groups, Mike then leads a discussion on the fourth Mission Measure of Giving. In this section, Mike shares with the
group the biblical financial stewardship principles. Using Willow Creek’s Good Sense as their model for teaching this segment, each person is challenged to give in three ways:

- Systematically—having a plan for consistent giving,
- Sacrificially—encouraging lifestyle changes in order to encourage generous giving,
- Proportionately—proactively setting aside a proportion of one’s income.

Since the presentation of this mission measure is relatively brief (30 minutes), Mike encourages the participants to attend further educational opportunities offered through their Financial Peace University classes.  

**Mission Measure: Go**

The last mission measure is presented by John Walters, the Calling Pastor. During this presentation, John shares the church’s vision of local, global, and church planting missions of Grace Point. He then communicates the churches high expectation levels of membership involvement at both local and global levels. All members are expected to participate in at least one local outreach ministry each year and one global outreach every five years. Throughout this presentation, video vignettes of countries they have gone to and the many folks who thought it would never be possible for them are shown. This year, they have gone to Brazil, Kenya, Morocco, Moldova, Mexico, Honduras, Columbia, Panama, and South Africa. According to David, “Our mantra is: You don’t go to church, you are the church wherever you go! You cannot see through God’s eyes apart from leaving your world for another. You will come back different.”

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26 Financial Peace University is a product of Dave Ramsey Ministries.

27 Grace Point has a vision of planting 100 churches in 10 years. 3 ½ years into this vision, they have planted 45.

28 David Galbraith, interview by author, July 15, 2009, Tape Recording.
Personal Action Plan and Membership Covenant

At the end of the Discovery sessions, participants are expected to complete and turn in their Personal Action Plans. The Personal Action Plans serve as a way to summarize the five Mission Measures and allows each person to formulate his or her own plan for spiritual growth at Grace Point. Under the Grace element, they are asked to share their faith story with the Discovery Guide (which should have been completed during session 1. For Growth, they are asked which 360 Life Group they are most interested in and would like to join. They are also given the option of starting a 360 Life Group as well. For Gifts, they are asked to write out three ministry options, based upon their findings in their S.H.A.P.E. tests that they plan on exploring for their service at Grace Point. For Give, they are asked to share how they plan on systematically and proportionately giving to the church. Finally, for Go, they are asked which outreach areas they most interested in locally and globally. Finally, they are asked if they want to commit themselves to Grace Point through their Covenant Statement. The Covenant serves as a review of what was covered during the Discovery sessions and provides a formal opportunity to officially commit to Grace Point Church.

Once participants complete the Discovery sessions, turn in their Personal Action Plans, and sign the Covenant statement, they are presented before the congregation and a celebratory event is planned in their honor. These celebratory events are designed for the entire family and include music, BBQ, games, movies, and lots of fun. During this time, small group leaders are encouraged to attend in order to get to know the new people and to use the time for recruiting them to join their small group. These events raise the awareness level for the Discovery classes, encourage relational connections, and celebrate what is important to the church as a whole.
Testimonies

With Discovery being a lengthy process calling for high standards from its participants, how effective is the process in answering Jeff and David’s stated questions of connection, community, and service? Sharon Vale, a member of Grace Point for several years shared her thoughts on this question,

I found the membership process to be the key to getting connected. I’ve been a member of other churches and it wasn’t always easy to get to know people or become involved in the church. The Discovery class has several attractive aspects. There is an opportunity to hear from each of the Pastors. They all tell everyone about themselves and the ministries they lead. It’s really helpful and interesting. There is a lot of material that’s covered but having most of it in notebook to refer to helps a lot. Another helpful aspect is learning what your spiritual gifts are and what areas of ministry might be a good fit. There are Discovery Guides to help with the process and answer questions.

Sharon continued,

I believe the membership process makes all the difference between attending church as opposed to being the church. It gets people connected in life groups where there is authentic community and serving in servant groups where they serve in a ministry that they’re passionate about.\footnote{Sharon Vale, “Grace Point Church Case Study Discovery Thoughts,” e-mail message to author, November 14, 2009.}

For Sharon, it appears that the membership process at Grace Point has been helpful to her understanding and participation within the life of the church.

Julie Tibbit, also a member of Grace Point for several years and a Discovery Guide, says,

I feel Discovery equips the participants to be more knowledgeable about each Pastor and the various areas of ministry. There is a lot of information, but I feel it is definitely a benefit for those attending. It also gives them a contact person called a Discovery Guide that checks on them to make sure they have gotten connected within the church. Discovery also provides a place for good accountability. As one goes through it, they are challenged to discover their spiritual gifts and use them.\footnote{Julie Tibbit, “Grace Point Church Case Study Discovery Thoughts,” e-mail message to author, 2009, November 14.}
According to Julie, the active role of the Discovery Guides plays a strong part in making the membership process work at Grace Point.

Conclusion

Grace Point’s membership process is a demanding process. This is evidenced by the information that is presented in their Discovery classes, the volunteer personnel needed to serve as Discovery Guides, and the underlying presumption by the leaders that those who become members are actively participating in the life of the church. While the process is demanding, Grace Point Church has a higher than average participation across several areas of the church. According to their records, Grace Point has grown from a congregation of 500 to over 3000 over the past six years. During this time, they have celebrated 1200 people who have accepted Christ as their Savior and baptized 700 of them in the church. Currently, 65 percent of the church is plugged into a 360 Life Group, with 70 percent of the congregation serving in a particular ministry of the church. 40 percent of the congregation has already gone on a missions trip either nationally or internationally this year. These numbers are certainly higher than the national average of 27 percent according to the Barna survey.\(^{31}\)

But, as they go forward and especially as they continue to grow in size, some questions come to mind:

- As the church continues to grow, how are they going to manage an increasing number of people who are going through the Discovery classes?
- Will they be able to keep up the pace of leadership development for the continual influx of active participants?
- How will they continue to develop and connect each member into a 360 Life Group, area of ministry service, and local or global outreach?

• How is Grace Point going to be able to keep up with a growing congregation, ensuring that all of their members are actively working on their five Mission Measures?

• Is there any way that they can stream-line their membership process without losing the essence of *Discovery*.

**The Austin Stone Community Church**

As Matt Carter, the Senior Pastor of Austin Stone Community Church, concluded his message to his congregation in the Fall of 2009, he finished with these words:

> If you’re here as a believer and you have no intention of getting on mission with us, then this is not the church for you. If you’re here and you have no intention of growing toward a biblical picture of authentic Christianity, your presence is hindering our mission at the Austin Stone because there are people who want to hear about Jesus and who want to engage in authentic Christianity but can’t because they are unable to find a parking space. So, you need to find another church.  

Over the 8-year history of Austin Stone Community Church, the church has experienced incredible growth. From a fledgling group of families who gathered together at a home in Austin in the Fall of 2002 to a congregation of over 6000 in attendance, one could take Matt Carter’s quote to mean, “make some room!” But, at the heart of Matt’s statement, and at the heart of this church, is a call for them to be a church for the city of Austin, Texas.

**The City of Austin, Texas**

Austin, Texas, is the 15th largest city in America and the 4th largest city in Texas. With a population of over 1.5 million people, including the surrounding

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32 Matt Carter, “Blueprint: You Call Yourself a Christian?,” speech delivered to The Austin Stone Community Church, November 11, 2009, Austin, TX.

communities, it serves as the state capital of Texas and home to the University of Texas. According to *Popular Science Magazine*, Austin is listed among the top 10 greenest cities in the United States. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) considered Austin as being #8 on the list for North America’s most vegetarian-friendly cities. The U.S. Census Bureau ranks Austin 5th among the most educated cities in the U.S. with 45.1 percent of the population having a college degree or higher. According to a study compiled in 2010, Austin ranks forty-second among the fastest growing cities in America. According to Charles Heimsath, president of Capitol Market Research, Austin is expected to exceed over 3 million people in the next 20 years. Proudly touting the two most common slogans of Austin, the “Live Music Capital of the World” and “Keep Austin Weird,” the city is an incredible blend of cultural and business growth.

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38 *A Church for the City (Intro)*, (Austin, TX: The Austin Stone Community Church, 2008), MOV http://vimeo.com (accessed October 23, 2010).

39 During the Spring each year, Austin hosts “South by Southwest” whereby hundreds of musical acts from around the globe play live music on over 80 stages scattered around downtown Austin. For more information, go to http://sxsw.com/music.

History of Austin Stone Community Church

Austin Stone Community Church was established through the leadership of Matt Carter, Brad Cauley, and Chris Tomlin (Worship Leader). This core group of friends all started their journey in Dallas, TX with the belief that God was calling them to start a church...somewhere. After much time in prayer, the group believed that God was calling them to the city of Austin, Texas. To put it simply, “Chris looked Matt in the eyes and told him he had not been able to get the city of Austin out of his mind or off his heart.” As Matt began researching the city of Austin, he learned that the vast majority, more than 90 percent, of church plants in Austin failed and that the city was not spiritually sensitive or open. With this serious challenge ahead of them, Matt, Brad, and Chris set out to begin Austin Stone Community Church in November of 2002.

From a handful of people meeting and praying in a home in November, the church quickly grew to 125 by December. It is then that they made the decision to move into the local middle school facility for Sunday morning worship. One year later, more than 500 worshipers had filled the space that they were using, causing them to move from the Middle School to the local High School in 2003. The church continued to grow at a rapid rate to the point where they now have 6000 in attendance, 1000 of whom joined them in the summer of 2010 alone. Combining the leadership of Matt and Brad, along with Chris Tomlin, a nationally popular worship leader, the church was destined to grow.

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42 Ibid.
Mission and Vision for Austin Stone Community Church

Austin Stone’s Mission states that they desire “To be a New Testament Church existing for the supremacy of the Name and Purpose of Jesus Christ” with a vision “To build a great city, renewed and redeemed by a gospel movement, by being a church for the city of Austin that labors to advance the gospel throughout the nations.” Since its inception in 2002, the leadership group not only wanted to be a strong Bible teaching church, but wanted also to be the kind of church that has a direct and practical impact upon the city of Austin itself. Halim Suh, Pastor of Equipping, when describing the philosophy of the Austin Stone, put it this way, “Historically in the past, churches have adopted attitudes of apathy or animosity when trying to deal with the city. We seek to preach the gospel of Christ. But through the gospel, be able to offer to the city a renewed and restored spirituality, sociology, and culture.”

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44 A Church for the City (Reprise), (The Austin Stone Community Church, 2009), MOV http://vimeo.com (accessed October 24, 2008).
people of Austin Stone Community Church impact the city by serving in the local schools as mentors and tutors, serving in the local food banks, partnering with the Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization, adopting refugee families, feeding the homeless, and helping out at the Austin Pregnancy Resource Center. This list is only a sample of the many local opportunities and does not include the many global mission initiatives that they are involved in as well.

Membership Philosophy at the Austin Stone Community Church

Todd Engstrom, Pastor of Missional Community, when reflecting upon membership at the Austin Stone, commented by saying, “We don’t want somebody who is coming to consume, but fight alongside, to commit to linking arms with us, and to engage with the mission of God in the city of Austin…. We’re not going to call people to a place with benefits. We’re going to call them to a place to come and die.”

On the Austin Stone website, they describe their membership this way:

We believe that the Scripture teaches that everyone who is part of the body of Christ is a minister of the gospel. The role of elders, pastors, teachers, and other leaders is to help partners become prepared to be all God intends them to be. Because of this, we call our members “partners” to emphasize the fact that we hope and expect they’ll be more than spectators. Our partners use their unique gifts and talents to help fulfill our vision at The Austin Stone. Together, we are becoming a New Testament Church existing for the supremacy of the name and purpose of Jesus Christ.

This change of terminology from “membership” to “partnership” was a strategic move. The emphasis upon “partnership” versus “membership” is meaningful for the leadership of the Austin Stone. Todd made the comparison between the two this way when he said:

45 Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.

Membership had become something that was access to a country club, not engagement with mission. So, at the Austin Stone, we made the decision to call our membership “partnership” because we wanted this to mean something different than what traditional membership means…Partnership asks the question, “What does it look like to covenant with the Body of Christ in a local congregation in order to pursue the mission of God?”

By asking this question, the leadership of the church sets out to use their membership process as a tool, or bar for what it means to be a disciple at the Austin Stone Community Church.

Todd would further emphasize the importance of this question when describing the conversations that were had early in the history of the church with the Elders and other Pastoral leaders of the church. He shared,

We began to ask ourselves, what is the bar for discipleship at the Austin Stone? Where is the bar to say that “I’m a faithful disciple of Jesus’ at this church?” The answers to these questions is what defined “Partnership” for us—the commitments, the external practices or behaviors of a faithful follower of Jesus.

These questions would later lay the foundation for developing fourteen Ministry Partner Commitments and would set the tone for the kind of church culture that they desired to create. According to their church website, they would describe their culture as, “The Austin Stone is not something you go to, it's a community to be a part of, centered around the person and mission of Jesus Christ. We're actively working to build a great Austin, renewed and redeemed by the gospel.”

When describing specifically who a Ministry Partner is, they would put it this way:

We believe that the Scripture teaches that everyone who is part of the body of Christ is a minister of the gospel. The role of elders, pastors, teachers, and other leaders is to help partners become prepared to be all God intends them to be. Because of this, we call our members “partners” to emphasize the fact that we

47 Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.

48 Ibid.

49 A Church for the City (Reprise), (The Austin Stone Community Church, 2009), MOV http://vimeo.com (accessed October 24, 2008).
hope and expect they’ll be more than spectators. Our partners use their unique gifts and talents to help fulfill our vision at The Austin Stone. Together, we are becoming a New Testament Church existing for the supremacy of the name and purpose of Jesus Christ.\footnote{The Austin Stone Community Church, “What Is Partnership?” http://www.austinstone.org (accessed October 21, 2010).}

Based upon this statement, the church leadership has placed a high value upon their members to be participating in the life of the church and the surrounding community. By doing so, the Ministry Partner is not only growing spiritually, but is also an active contributor to the overall vision of the church.

Three Phases of Partnership Evolution at Austin Stone Community Church

Over the past 10 years, the Ministry Partnership has undergone three key phases in its development. While the concept of partnership was part of Matt Carter’s vision in 2002, it has evolved and matured over the years. The first phase was developed under the leadership of Brad Cauley, one of the key founding pastors of the church. The Partnership Process was developed around some key values that the church had at that time, but are no longer in use at the church. These values served as the preliminary language that was used in order to begin providing an understanding of who they were in their early church planting days.

About three years into the inception of the church, Ministry Partnership shifted under the leadership of Michelle Ritchie. When she joined the staff of Austin Stone, her first task was to overhaul the partnership process by creating and cultivating a sense of identity around what it means to be a Ministry Partner. It was at this time that discussions with the leadership of the church were made concerning Austin Stone’s “bar of discipleship.” Michelle, along with the input of the other pastors and elders, then developed 14 Partner Commitments.

The third phase was developed in 2008, when Todd joined the staff. Todd set out to tie the church’s values to their 14 commitments. This was an important transition
for the church because in so doing, it moved the commitments from being just another check-list to an embodiment of the values of the church. This combination is best explained in their Ministry Partner Packet when it states,

As we read the New Testament, we see that believers on-mission: Worship Christ, Live in Community, Get Trained for Ministry, and Make Disciples. If you decide to partner with us, we will ask you to affirm a series of commitments centered on these four elements of missional life. These commitments are not our definition of Christianity; they are commitments that describe what it means to be a partner in The Austin Stone’s mission as a church for the city and the nations.  

From this statement, a closer look at how the 14 Partner commitments serve to fulfill the four elements of their stated mission will be made.

**Missional Element 1: Worship Christ**

For Austin Stone Community Church, the first element of missional life is to “Worship Christ.” As they state in their Ministry Partner packet,

> We worship Christ because He is the only one truly worthy of such a high level of devotion and affection,…We worship Christ by making Him King and Master of every aspect of our lives….God has made us to worship Him in two ways specifically—personally and in community.

From this foundation, several opportunities are given for how to fulfill this first element (Corporate worship, prayer services, Communion, Baptism, Giving, Scripture Reading Plan) along with five Partner Commitments at the Austin Stone:

- PC1: *Habitually spend time with God through the reading of scripture and prayer.* According to their Ministry Partner Packet, this is an important step because “you can’t worship what you don’t know.” By reading the Word of God and praying regularly serves as a vital commitment to worshiping Christ.

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51 See Appendix G.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.
PC2: Follow the example of Christ in my personal holiness. Part of worshiping Christ is to be transformed into His likeness.

PC3: Financially supporting the mission of this church, starting with a tithe (10%) of my income to The Austin Stone. To worship Christ is to “value Christ above all else.”54 An expression of this value in a Christ-follower’s life is through financial giving.

PC4: Be or have been baptized as a believer. This commitment is an expression of obedience to Jesus and “the opportunity to publicly identify with Christ.”55

PC5: Participate in communion with The Austin Stone.

Missional Element 2: Live in Community

The second element of missional life is to “Live in Community” For Austin Stone, they see community as being like as “family, hospital, school, body, and army.”56 Each one of these analogies highlights a particular aspect of support, healing, learning, interdependence, and mission. Ultimately, “the primary task of living in community with one another is striving to share and encourage one another with the Gospel.”57 This element also has several opportunities provided such as their Missional Communities.58

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 According to their website, “The Austin Stone is a network of missional communities – small groups of people, joined by the Gospel, pursuing the renewal and redemption of their community together. Missional community is the primary way to connect with others at The Austin Stone and pursue life on mission….At The Austin Stone, we ask missional communities to do more than Bible study. We ask them to pursue four elements as missional believers, which are also elements of a New Testament church: Worshipping Christ, Living in Community, Getting Trained for ministry, and Making Disciples. We believe that as we balance these pursuits we will grow a missional church, missional communities, and missional followers of Christ.” During the interview with Todd, he shared that, practically speaking, each Missional
• **PC6: Actively pursue biblical community within The Austin Stone.**

Because community “was modeled within the Trinity”\(^{59}\) along with the many references to the “one anothers” in the Bible, participating in a Missional Community is important.

• **PC7: Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit.** Because Jesus prayed for unity of the believers (John 17), “Christian unity is the first and best testimony of Christ to the world.”\(^{60}\)

• **PC8: Not gossip, but instead use my words to give grace to those who hear them.** “Gossip is the cancer to unity….and is harmful to the church.”\(^{61}\)

**Missional Element 3: Get Trained**

The third element is to “Get Trained.” As stated in their Partner Packet,

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, all of us are saints and ministers of the gospel, not just a select few individuals. If every saint is called to be a minister of the Gospel, then every saint must pursue training and discipline to be an effective minister….it is the call of every Christian to participate in God’s work through the church.\(^{62}\)

Therefore, one of the purposes of Austin Stone is to “train and develop, not to educate.”\(^{63}\)

At this point, attendees are directed to the Missional Communities again, but also provided several “Get Trained Classes”\(^{64}\) and directed to their website for a listing of

Community gathers as a group for community care, Bible study, prayer, and active service within the city of Austin.

\(^{59}\) See Appendix G.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.

\(^{61}\) Ibid.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.

\(^{63}\) Ibid.

\(^{64}\) Some examples of these classes are “Discover Your Spiritual Gifts” and “Austin Stone’s Philosophy of Ministry.”
service opportunities.

- **PC9: Serve the body of The Austin Stone.** According to Austin Stone, “Missional people serve the Lord by serving others …. When we serve with sacrifice, we are truly modeling the message of Christ.”

- **PC10: Get trained for ministry with The Austin Stone.** Because of our Fallen state, “we must stir our hearts (affections) to love Christ more than anything else, restore our minds to know God (his purposes and his ways), and also serve the Body for the sake of unity in making Christ known to a lost world.” Training is done through their “Get Trained Classes” conducted throughout the year.

- **PC11: Not teach beliefs contrary to our Affirmation of Faith.**

- **PC12: Build discipleship relationships with other Christians.** According to their Ministry Partner packet, Austin Stone encourages each Partner to pursue mentoring relationships in order to provide support and accountability in their spiritual growth.

**Missional Element 4: Make Disciples**

The fourth, and final, element is to “Make Disciples.” In the Ministry Partner Packet, they state, “We make disciples by being a witness of Christ, and by baptizing and teaching people to obey the commands of Christ in three spheres of our lives—personally, locally, and globally.” A variety of opportunities is provided including serving within the city of Austin, short-term mission trips, praying for other nations and missionaries, and serving as a host family to international students and refugees.

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65 See Appendix G.

66 Ibid.
• **PC13: Pursue intentional, transparent relationships with non-Christians in my sphere of influence.** Austin Stone desires that the church “be full of missional people who…take the name of Christ to this city, as well as to the nations…” According to them, this happens best through the kinds of relationships listed in PC13.

• **PC14: Be involved with the living out and sharing of the gospel both locally and globally with The Austin Stone.** Every Ministry Partner is called to participate in reaching all of the nations in some way.”

By combining the four values with the 14 Personal Commitments, the commitments become the embodiment of their values. These 14 Commitments serve as the tangible representations and external behaviors that they desire to see in their congregants as they seek to embrace the missional values of the church. In so doing, this serves as the bedrock of their discipleship and the foundation for accomplishing their vision at the Austin Stone Community Church.

While reflecting on what it means to be a Ministry Partner at the Austin Stone, Todd shared,

> Partnership is not easy, it’s hard. You’re covenanting to this body that you are in fact on mission with everything in your life and not just part of it. You’re committed to the 14 commitments. If that’s not you, awesome, we still love you and you’re still welcome to be a part of the Austin Stone. Partnership is specifically for those who have covenanted together.\(^69\)

In a desire not to make this list of 14 commitments legalistic in the life of the church, Todd confessed,

> Man, I’m struggling on putting into practice some of these. But the question is, to what extent do we say this is a list of checkboxes that you must be to be a

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\(^67\) Ibid.

\(^68\) Ibid.

\(^69\) Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.
faithful disciple of Jesus while at the same time being gracious to the process of discipleship? We want to lean behind the heart of discipleship and to pastor people on their process of discipleship rather than give them a set of rules.\textsuperscript{70} Later, in the present study, it will be discussed how keeping this balance between the heart and practices of the 14 commitments can be a challenge.

\textit{Ministry Partner Process}

In many ways, with Austin Stone being a relatively new church plant, they have the luxury of not having well established traditions or processes for how to do things at the church. As a result, for as many phases that the church has gone through regarding Ministry Partnership, there have been that many changes to the process as well. Originally, phase one involved a formal Connections Class. The target audience was those who were disconnected, and the goal was to familiarize them with the vision and direction of the church so that the participants could better connect. These Connections Classes would often be held in the home of the pastors and would be led by them as well.

Eventually, mostly due to the rapid growth of the church, these responsibilities needed to be handed off to someone else. In this case, Michelle Ritchie took over the task. It was at this point that becoming a Ministry Partner became closely tied into the first initial steps of the church’s assimilation process. In other words, the target audience was those who were new to the church, not just simply for those who were disconnected. From these classes, small groups would be launched and participants would be given the opportunity to become Ministry Partners.

Unfortunately, according to Todd, connecting Ministry Partnership with the front-door assimilation process of the church wasn’t very effective and became one of the first responsibilities when joining the staff. He stated that, in the current culture that Austin Stone resides in, “belonging often happens before believing.”\textsuperscript{71} It was at this point

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
that Ministry Partnership became more of a bar to obtain. Todd would go on to say,

If discipleship is indeed a process and membership is the bar that we are attempting to attain, the assumption that you being here for a few weeks with the expectation of being pressed into the high bar of discipleship doesn’t make sense.\(^72\)

Todd continued,

Partnership is not so much a front-door for us anymore, but a bar for discipleship. So, instead of making Ministry Partnership a pre-requisite for community, it becomes a requisite. We say that if you’re going to lead a missional community\(^73\), you don’t have to be a partner to do it. But, we’re going to ask you to pursue it over the course of the next year or two years to get to know the heartbeat of the church. So, Partnership became less of a front-door entry, but a milestone for us. Therefore, if it’s a milestone, then obtaining it can come about through a variety of forms.\(^74\)

Over the past couple of years under Todd’s leadership, the form for becoming a Ministry Partner has become much more diverse. The process can now be done through smaller one-on-one meetings, small group-based meetings, event-based (seminars and classes), and even whole church-based. The most recent example of a whole-church based Ministry Partner push came in the Fall of 2009 when Matt Carter preached for 5 weeks on what it meant to be a Ministry Partner at the Austin Stone.

Over the past 6 months, most of the opportunities to become a Ministry Partner have been done through their 2-week, event-based seminars. These seminars are led by Todd along with one of the other community pastors. During these seminars, the core values, leadership structure, mission, vision, values, and commitments are discussed.

\(^72\) Ibid.

\(^73\) A “Missional Community” is their form of small groups within the Austin Stone Community Church. According to their website, they describe their Missional Communities by saying, “A missional community is not JUST a small group, Bible study, support group, social activist group, or a weekly meeting. It can involve these sorts of things, but it doesn’t stop there. Our missional communities worship God, live in community, get trained for ministry, and make disciples together... over time. Being involved in community is critical to being the church rather than simply attending church.” (http://www.austinstone.org)

\(^74\) Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.
The participants are then required to write out and turn in a short essay describing their spiritual journey. The community pastors use these essays to look for evidences of salvation. The participants then sign the Ministry Partner Covenant\textsuperscript{75} and self-identify which missional community they belong to at the church.

At this point in their journey, with the various means of becoming a Ministry Partner, Todd is looking to settle in on one of a couple of different forms. The first form, one that is not completely developed, is to make the opportunity available to become a Ministry Partner close to the beginning of the assimilation process. While this seems counter-intuitive to Todd’s earlier comments, he does recognize that for some who are new to the church, due to their particular faith background, membership to a local church body is very important. Todd also recognizes that there are some whose spiritual lives, maturity, and Christian philosophy more readily lend themselves to fitting in within the Austin Stone mission and vision.

The second form, one that is also being developed further, will combine their Philosophy of Ministry class with becoming a Ministry Partner. In this 8–10 week Ministry of Philosophy class, the participants are challenged to be God-centric, Gospel-centric, and Mission-centric with their lives. By combining the opportunity to become a Ministry Partner with this class, the participants will not only gain an extended period of time to understand the mission and vision of the Austin Stone, but also connect the church’s whole-church philosophy to the individual responsibilities of a Ministry Partner. According to Todd, this class will most likely become the primary pathway to becoming a Ministry Partner at the Austin Stone.

\textsuperscript{75} See Appendix H.
Following Up with the Ministry Partners

In 2009, a second responsibility was given to Todd to develop a process for following up on the Ministry Partners. If there was an expectation for the Ministry Partners to be growing in their 14 commitments, how would the leadership know if they were, indeed, growing? As Todd put it, “if partnership is the bar of discipleship, then it is also the measure of health for our body.” If Ministry Partnership is the measure of health, then how could they measure effectively? For Todd, the other Lead Pastors, and Elders at the church, the solution came by implementing an Annual Ministry Partner Renewal process.

By making this transition, Todd shared that “we don’t want to give someone the ‘stamp’ and then say in perpetuity, you’re a member.” Instead, “We want to ask the questions because we feel like that’s faithful stewardship of the people that God has entrusted to us, ensuring that they are actually obeying Jesus, and fulfilling what it looks like and what it means to be a disciple in Austin, Texas.” Todd would go on to say,

For 6 years, we never checked in on our membership. Throughout our growth, we went through many transitions and never took the opportunity to really evaluate our partnership in light of where we were at the time. So, at the 6 year mark, we put a stake in the ground by clearly stating, here is what a Ministry Partner is and what a Ministry Partner does.

He added,

We then began to re-teach it to everybody through Matt Carter’s Sunday morning vision series in September of 2009. This 5-week sermon series reset expectations of what it meant to be a Ministry Partner at the Austin Stone and asked for everyone to renew their partnership on an annual basis.

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76 Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.
The opportunity to renew, or become, a Ministry Partner was made available online to the congregation for a 4-week period following Matt’s final sermon in the vision series. These online forms essentially asked for confirmation on the following items: that the person had attended or heard the 5 sermon series that Matt had given, an affirmation of faith along with an agreement to the core doctrines of the church, an expressed desire to fulfill the core values and commitments of the church, and finally, that they were connected to a missional community at the Austin Stone. From that point, they were given 4 options,

- “Yes, I would like to be a Ministry Partner”,
- “I have questions that need answering”,
- “I would like to be considered as inactive”, and
- “No, I do not want to be a Ministry Partner at this time.”

Once the 4-week window was closed, those who desired to become a Ministry Partner would have to go through a seminar or class that would be offered in the coming weeks and months.79

**Key Discoveries to the Ministry Partner Renewal**

The results of the first Ministry Partner Renewal showed that of the 1500 Ministry Partners (members) that they had prior to the Fall of 2009, only 600 of them renewed their commitment. At first glance, this appears to be an incredible decrease of Ministry Partners. What happened to all those people who did not renew their partnership? Why did they not renew? For those who had committed to being a Ministry Partner in the past but who did not renew their partnership or did not respond, Todd and his ministry team went about personally contacting each person by phone.80 This dramatic

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79 See Appendix I.

80 According to Todd, this took them approximately 6 months to complete this process.
drop to only 600 of the original 1500 brought some key discoveries during their conversations.

The first discovery came with acknowledging that they were in a very fluid culture consisting of many college students and young professionals. As a result, many people were coming and going without any way of keeping track of them. With the Ministry Partner Renewal process in place, being able to know who is engaged at the Austin Stone verses those who had, for one reason or another, moved on was a definite benefit.

Secondly, they discovered that many people had committed to being a Partner in the past but failed to follow through on their commitments. Todd, when reflecting on this discovery, stated, “Most people would say that was a failure of the discipleship process. But for us, this became a jumping off point for where to start discipling people and how to pastor people well. It was a good revelation for us.” So, through the process of making the Ministry Partners renew their partnership, 70 percent were fulfilling their responsibilities, 25 percent were disconnected from community and given the opportunity to join a Missional Community, leaving 5 percent who didn’t meet the requirements or refused to fully commit. This last group was graciously refused Ministry Partnership at the Austin Stone.

The third, and probably most revealing discovery made, was that because the church had grown so fast and because the nature of the church is, in Todd’s words, “heavily prophetic and apostolic,” pastoring and shepherding people became lost in the shuffle, Todd said,

We like to proclaim the truths of God and be on the front lines of new things for God. Pastor / teachers tend to be more oriented towards loving and caring for people. For a long time, we knew we were good at being prophetic and apostolic,

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81 Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.

82 Ibid.
but what came as a surprise was that we were not very good at pastoring people well.\textsuperscript{83}

Todd continued,

Being more entrepreneurial (apostolic) and prophetic, we tend to be “ready, fire, aim.” So, we will launch just about anything, but that comes at a cost. Many of our people over the years felt burned, used, tired, and lost. So, renewing our Ministry Partnership became a great pastoral opportunity for us.\textsuperscript{84}

This new revelation highlighted some of the inadequacies of their previous Ministry Partner process. Apparently, under the old system, Ministry Partnership was….

…all expectation with very little pastoring. As a result, there were a) many people who were not following through with their commitments, but you wouldn’t know it because there was no follow up. Or, b) they had every intention of following through on their commitments but nobody was helping them.\textsuperscript{85}

For a church that placed such a strong emphasis upon discipleship (Core value #4: “Make Disciples”), this last discovery was a wake-up call.

As a result of these findings, several changes were made within the church and to the Ministry Partner process. One of the changes that made within the church was to place a greater emphasis upon training and equipping the people to not only fulfill their commitments, but to better shepherd each other as well. Being a large church, shepherding would primarily fall to the Missional Community Leaders and so this is where they focused their training and development. Secondly, they learned that communicating Ministry Partner Commitments didn’t necessarily equate to reality in the lives of their Ministry Partners. As Todd would say, “We were great at telling people what to do, but terrible at showing people how to do it.”\textsuperscript{86} As a result more emphasis was put upon “how” to fulfill the various commitments along communicating a clearer pathway to involvement.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
This last discovery also impacted the Ministry Partner process in that the follow-up process would play a more important role in the future. In so doing, it would become a tool for shepherding within the church without losing sight of their entrepreneurial culture. By enhancing this aspect of the Ministry Partner process, a better balance could be made between being prophetic and apostolic with that of the pastoring and shepherding needs of the church.

While the number of people moving on from Austin Stone could be discouraging to the leadership, according to Todd, they viewed this information positively. Now, because of the phone interviews, they had several explanations for why some people did not renew their membership. They also discovered that the process of renewal became an effective tool in shepherding their congregants. This information would not have been discovered unless the opportunity to renew wasn’t given.

On an encouraging note, an additional 600 new Ministry Partners were added bringing the total Ministry Partnership at the Austin Stone to 1200 people.

*Congregational Perspective on Ministry Partnership*

Some reacted to this new direction that the leadership decided to take with resistance. Some struggled with this concept of membership because it was new or something that they were not used to based solely on their previous church experiences. For this group who had come from other churches, many were used to going to a class where they were given the opportunity to adhere to a set of core doctrines. Upon doing so, they would become a “member.” Now, at the Austin Stone, “membership” was so

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87 Some commented that they didn’t realize until then that the leadership of Austin Stone was so staunchly Calvinistic!
much more than what they were used to, leaving some to question the lengthy process to become a Ministry Partner. One of the inadvertent consequences for some was the feeling that they could not get into a Mission Community because they were not a Ministry Partner.

In spite of these questions, the leadership at the Austin Stone continues to seek clarity on the process. They do this in a variety of ways including sermon series, regular announcements from the pulpit, bulletin posts, and church-wide videos. The leadership is also committed to this process because they believe that the key to their success is to “continue holding a high bar of discipleship and to not allow the people to become consumers.”

**Conclusion**

Of the 6000 people who attend Austin Stone Community Church, 1200 people are Ministry Partners (20%). These 20 percent are engaged within the life of the church and actively participating in helping the church accomplish its vision. In addition, 55 percent of the congregation is in a Missional Community and 50 percent is serving in some capacity either in the church or the surrounding community. While many of these are Ministry Partners, many are faithful engaged members who, for some reason, not made the decision to become a Ministry Partner.

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88 A great example of a funny video on Ministry Partnership titled “Myths of Partnership at The Austin Stone” can be found at http://vimeo.com/2243106.

89 Todd Engstrom, interview by author, October 3, 2010, Tape Recording.
When asked what the benefits of being a Ministry Partner were, Todd responded,

None. The benefit is that you get to come here and die! You may be expecting that you are going to be getting something from us and you’re not. You are going to be expected to die. Tangibly, you do get to vote on the annual budget (which will be going away) and the dismissing of Matt as the Senior Pastor if that should ever come about.\textsuperscript{90}

Todd went on to add, “One of the benefits to covenanting with us is that we now have the responsibility to pastor and shepherd your soul.”\textsuperscript{91}

Moving forward, Austin Stone Community Church has several challenges regarding their Ministry Partner process. The first challenge is addressing the continued problem of keeping up with the masses. With the rapid growth of the church, how are they going to effectively keep track of all their people, let alone their Ministry Partners?

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
When asked this question, Todd made clear that it was a daunting task. Over this past year, Todd mentioned how they had implemented a new software solution called “The City” to aid them in this problem. Whether or not this tool will be effective is yet to be seen.

The second challenge, which builds off of the first, is how they are going to continue ensuring that their bar of discipleship remains high. If the key means of measuring the maturity of their body is by the level of their Ministry Partnership, and this is built upon the expectation that their Ministry Partners have embraced what it means to be a Ministry Partner, how are they going to know if their Ministry Partners are fulfilling their responsibilities? Todd made it clear that they were not going to be following up with their Ministry Partner renewals by phone again! At this point, the only solution that was offered was for the people to self-assess.

Thirdly, discovering that pastoring and shepherding can be done through the Ministry Partnership process, how effective are they going to be at this with that many people? How are they going to adequately disciple their people towards spiritual maturity? This, then, becomes a staffing and equipping issue. Fortunately for them, they already have a culture of equipping combined with a strong missional community to provide accountability and shepherding of their people. But, how much can they rely upon their Missional Community leaders to provide adequate accountability? As has already been stated, keeping up with the rapid growth of the church makes this an ongoing infrastructure challenge.

Finally, there seems to be no fully developed process that is clearly defined for becoming a Ministry Partner over a given length of time. Eventually, one would think that they will need to settle on a primary process that works for them. What that process

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92 “The City” is a web-based communication and administration platform developed by Zondervan.
will be has yet to be determined. How long will they be able to go without a well-defined process before the people become frustrated with the constant changes? Todd did state that they were looking towards their Ministry of Philosophy class as the potential medium for becoming a Ministry Partner, but will this become the primary path to Ministry Partnership? This is yet to be seen.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER STUDY

Church leaders face a conundrum today. Having entered into the ministry in obedience to Jesus’ command to “make disciples” (Matt 28:18–19), many are discovering that their church consists of people who are disengaged, a problem compounded by rapidly declining membership rolls. The solution appears simple: motivate people to become more engaged while increasing the membership rolls. Questions are begged, however: What determines if members are engaged, and how does one effectively increase membership? What, if any, is the connection between engagement, attendance, and membership? Does an increased membership role automatically mean that people are more spiritually committed? Research from Gallup indicates that church membership is an indicator of spiritual commitment. Putnam’s research, however, reveals that more and more people are refusing and / or are withdrawing from church membership altogether, and for good reasons (culturally speaking). This is the nature of the conundrum.

Reviewing the Chapters

In chapter 1, the research problem was stated: “The researcher desires to examine how selected churches use their membership process to enhance discipleship.” The statement of the research problem led to the research question: “What is the membership process that the select churches use to enhance discipleship?” The answer to this question led to the development of the hypothesis, which was that the selected churches do use their membership process to enhance discipleship.
The final chapter discusses some conclusions based on the research and also presents some opportunities for further studies on the subject. The conclusions presented will be helpful to many church leaders who are seeking to fulfill the command of Jesus given in Matthew 28:19, while struggling with the decline in church membership. However, while the conclusions will be helpful, they will not be complete, leaving room for further study.

Chapter 2 presented the biblical foundation for church membership. It was shown in the Old Testament that being a “true Jew” was more than being physically born into a Jewish family, but that belonging to this community included a heart that was humble before God and spiritually engaged with the teachings of God. This was for a Jewish person along with a Gentile who desired to become a member of the Jewish community. The Apostle Paul would use this as the theological foundation for becoming a member of the Christian church in the New Testament. Jesus, in His development of His disciples, would give them the authority necessary to oversee the discipleship of its members along with the authority to expel those who disobey. It was from this foundation that the Christian Church began and grew.

It was also shown that throughout the teachings of the Apostles that discipleship, as it relates to the individual Christian, is expressed in one's engagement in the Christian community. Likewise, the Christian community shares a responsibility for discipleship of the individual Christian by providing opportunities for that individual to spiritually grow and be discipled. Both the individual and the church share the responsibility of discipleship.

The research also provided a brief, general historical account of membership with churches from the first century to today. As a result, it was shown that four broad, major categories of membership were discovered that exist in one form or another in churches in America today—the Catholic Church, Reformed Church, Baptist Church, and Non-Denominational Church. Each one of these categories of membership have historical
and theological reasons for their development and current status.

Chapter 2 also reported the empirical data showing the decline of church membership throughout America along with the various cultural contributors for such a decline. These cultural influences included emphasis in American culture on individualism, consumerism, anti-authoritarianism, and skepticism. Combine these with the mentality that current church attendees have regarding membership—membership by birthright or membership that carries little to no responsibilities—it is no wonder that church membership in America is on the decline. Researchers have been documenting this decline for years, but it is church leaders who have been observing it and feeling its impact first-hand in their congregations.

As a result, church leaders are struggling with how to respond to the rapidly declining membership numbers within their churches while also seeking to fulfill the responsibility given to them by Jesus to make disciples. How does one make disciples in a culture that is increasingly becoming disengaged with organized institutions, including churches? This researcher proposes that an effective membership process can be used as one method used by church leadership to enhance discipleship within the church. The research given by Winseman in chapter 2 seems to support this view. According to Winseman’s research, “church members are more than three and half times as likely as nonmembers to be fully spiritually committed.”

With this being the case, the research in chapter 2 led to what an effective membership process could look like in the life of a church. That process involved six key factors:

- The leadership of the church clearly communicates and supports membership within the church.
- A clear path for becoming a membership within the church is provided.
- Throughout the process, several opportunities are given to develop key relationships within the church.
• A clear set of expectations for what it means to be a member is stated.
• A system of accountability is also put in place, holding members accountable to the stated expectations.
• A plan is used for moving each person into an active role within the church.

An examination of these six factors in the two case study churches from chapter 4 will be provided in the concluding observations of this research project.

Chapter 3 revealed the research method and procedure for the applied research project. Since the stated goal is to uncover transferable practices that will be of benefit to any church desiring to enhance discipleship through their membership process, this researcher decided to conduct a qualitative analysis of churches who were using their membership process to enhance discipleship. The case-study methodology of analysis was chosen and the two churches were selected: Grace Point Church in San Antonio, TX and Austin Stone Community Church in Austin, TX. The procedure for analyzing these two churches began with a review of the church websites and documents. The research continued with site visits to each church. At each of these visits, this researcher conducted in depth interviews of those giving leadership over the membership process of their respective churches.

The case-studies of the membership process of both churches proved to be invaluable in that they had similar attributes, although some variances were apparent. From these two case-studies, one can see how their membership process does enhance the discipleship in their church-through the application of the six key factors of an effective membership process previously mentioned.

In light of the historical and cultural data developed in chapter 2, the role and place of church membership is eroding. For some Catholics, “membership” can be viewed as a given once they have been baptized into the Catholic Church and yet remain disconnected spiritually. Members of Reformed Churches and even Baptist churches,
while having an expression of faith and agreeing to a select set of doctrines can also be disengaged in their spiritual growth. This could be dangerous because membership can give the false sense of spiritual maturity due to their membership status. As long as these members don't do something that would warrant a removal from the “membership roles,” then they are viewed as being “members in good standing.” Then, with the emergence of Non-Denominational Churches, membership has taken an even lesser level of importance often regulating membership to nothing more than signing a piece of paper.

Over the past 30–40 years, many church leaders are struggling not just with the decline of membership of their churches, but the declining level of engagement within their congregations. According to Winseman's research, he discovered that there is a difference between professing an affiliation to a particular faith or even a faith doctrine, and putting those beliefs into practice. In other words, there was a disconnect between a growing, engaged disciple and being a member of a particular church. The belief among Christian leaders for the longest time has been that the decline of membership is due to the lack of spiritual depth and teaching. However, what Winseman seemed to suggest was that the decline of membership was more the result of a lack of spiritual engagement.

As a result, there seems to be renewed focus on what it means not just simply what it means to be a member of a church, but the expectations of what being a member involves. This is seen by the relatively new published materials by Mark Dever, Thabati Anyabwile, J.E. Eubanks, and Chuck Lawless along with other journal articles and blogs. What these authors, along with other Christian Church Leaders, are purporting is the need for an elevated role of membership within the church. But, what the selected case-study churches have discovered is how they can merge their membership process with discipleship and to use their membership process to enhance discipleship within their churches. This goal was clearly voiced by Jeff Harris and Todd Engstrom in the early stages of their church's history. For Jeff, he would develop a membership process centered around the answer to three key questions: “How can I really be connected?”
“What does community really mean?” and “Where and how do I serve?” According to Tod, when the leadership of Austin Stone Community Church asked the following questions, “What is the bar for discipleship at the Austin Stone? What are the external practices or behavior of a faithful follower of Jesus?” the answers provided them the foundation for their membership process as well.

While the intent of this dissertation was not qualitative, the results provided by each church seem to show a high level of spiritual engagement as a direct result of their expressed expectations given during their membership process. What is also interesting to note is that it appears that in each church, the measurement for success is different in that while each have and understanding of how many attend their church, what they are more concerned about is the number of people who are engaged in certain activities within their church. Having people fill their pews during their Worship Services is not enough for them, but engagement in small groups and actively serving is their desired goal and expectation of their members. It is their expressed expectations that they can more readily measure and keep track of because for them, these are the evidences of spiritual engagement.

In so doing, each of the case-study churches may have stumbled onto the age-long dilemma of measuring spiritual growth. Christian leaders have known that one cannot truly measure spiritual growth within an individual. How can one know if someone has spiritually grown over the years? Completing a survey of biblical or theological knowledge can only show an intellectual grasp of the facts, but cannot determine whether those facts have penetrated the heart and is displayed by the appropriate action. Not to mention, how can one measure the growth of the fruit of the Spirit in one's life and who can determine the condition of one's heart?

However, what these two case-study churches, along with Winseman and other like authors, have discovered is that one's spiritual engagement within a church can be measured. While spiritual engagement cannot be necessarily equated with spiritual
growth, one can assume that the chance for spiritual growth to take place when one is greater when one is spiritually engaged in discipling opportunities and activities of a follower of Jesus such as joining a small group, applying one's spiritual gifts through acts of service, financially giving, and actively participating in ministries designed to reach the spiritually lost. Again, each one of these cannot “prove” the development of one's spiritual growth, however, when each of these are done within the context of community where accountability and support are found combined with the work of the Holy Spirit, the assumption can be made that spiritual growth is taking place in the life of the believer.

At this point, a more thorough look at each of the case-study church's membership process can be examined as to whether their process is enhancing discipleship.

An Effective Membership Process

*The Leadership of the Church Clearly Communicates and Supports Membership within the Church.*

In both of the case-study churches, the senior pastor plays a vital role communicating the value and importance of church membership within the church. From the inception of Austin Stone Community Church, Matt Carter, the Senior Pastor, along with other key leaders of the church, were intricately involved in the membership process. As the church grew, Matt’s role transitioned to being the primary communicator who continually challenges the congregation (which includes entire sermon series) to become engaged in the life of the church, and one of the ways to do this is by becoming a Ministry Partner. For Jeff Harris, the Senior Pastor at Grace Point Church, he not only communicates from the pulpit the importance of membership, but he also serves as a vital participant in conducting the membership classes in which he casts the vision for membership at Grace Point.
Church leaders, especially senior pastors, must understand their role in the membership process. It is the passionate support they provide that will serve to generate interest in and the importance of church membership. The pastors also have the unique opportunity to communicate regularly what discipleship looks like at their church, how being a follower of Christ will look different than our surrounding culture, and how being a member of the church can serve as a commitment toward discipleship by all parties involved.

If the church leadership is not involved in the membership process, consider reading chapter 10 of Linn’s book, *Rocking the Church Membership Boat*, or chapter 2 of Lawless’ book, *Membership Matters*. Church leaders may also need to consider the passion with which Matt Carter and Jeff Harris express when it comes to membership at their churches. It is their passion for this particular area of church life that serves as a catalyst for membership growth.

*A Clear Path for Becoming a Member within the Church is Provided.*

Both case-study churches use various methods for communicating the pathway for becoming members. Grace Point Church uses their weekly worship folder, along with other flyers provided at their Guest Reception desk. Grace Point, as well as Austin Stone Community Church, also uses their website as an avenue to communicate how, when, and where their membership classes are conducted. Finally, in both cases, as has already been stated, verbal announcements from the pulpit are regularly used.

The pathway for becoming a member at Grace Point Church begins at the Guest Reception desk. From there, attendees are encouraged to attend “Base Camp,” where they can hear more about the history and philosophy of the church. This is a first step where the church can then encourage their attendees to attend “Discovery,” where the more formal membership classes begin.
The pathway at Austin Stone Community Church, at the time of the interviews, was less clear than Grace Point’s process. According to the interview conducted with Todd Engstrom, they had been using their “front-door” discovery class as a means for producing members. However, since Todd’s arrival on staff, Todd has separated out their discovery step from the membership step in their assimilation process. As a result, as it currently stands, going through the membership process can take place in a variety of forms at Austin Stone Community Church—one-on-one meetings, small group seminars, and even church-wide sermon series. Eventually, as Todd shared in the case-study, Austin Stone Community Church will eventually determine a specific process.¹

It is interesting to note the reason why Todd felt that becoming a member of the church should take place later in the assimilation process of the church. According to Todd, membership at Austin Stone Community Church should come after a person has been involved within the church for an extended period of time in order to “know the heartbeat of the church.” As was observed in both of the case-study churches, strong church cultures were present, especially with regard to the fulfillment of the stated purposes of the churches. These cultures are vital when it comes to the expectations given for what it means to be a member. But, from this researcher’s observations, Austin Stone Community Church’s membership process not only supports their church culture, but they also desire for their membership process to emerge naturally from their particular culture.

Developing a membership process that is clear is vital. If attendees do not know where to go or how to become a member, then this lack of a clear path will obviously inhibit membership growth. What should also be considered, though, is where

¹ As shared in the Case Study, Todd did seem to indicate that they were going to use their “Philosophy of Ministry” class, a 10-week course, as their process for becoming members at their church.
in the assimilation path membership should be offered. To answer that question, a church leader needs to look at the strength of the particular church culture. As in the case of Austin Stone Community Church, who already has a strong church culture in place, their membership pathway flows out of their church culture which serves as an agent for shaping the kind of members they are seeking to create. However, if a church leader is in a church culture that is undefined or needing to be reshaped, then the membership path can be used as a means to define and shape the desired culture that the church is seeking to create. The method for accomplishing this goal can be done by stating a clear set of expectations for what it means to be a member (which will be discussed later).

_Throughout the Process, Several Opportunities are given to Develop Key Relationships within the Church._

According to the research, building relationships early in the assimilation process is important to one’s spiritual engagement. Two kinds of relationships are displayed in each of the case-study churches: relationships with other attendees, and relationships with the church leadership.

As in the case-study of Grace Point Church, their whole philosophy of membership is founded on three basic questions, two of which deal directly with relationships: “How can one be connected?” and “What does community mean?” From these two questions, each potential member is placed into a group of 6–8 people and assigned a “Discovery Guide,” who will help serve as a vital link to the rest of the church.

For Austin Stone Community Church, relationships are part of their stated core values. As a result, they used their front-door assimilation classes not only to encourage membership, but to encourage them to join a small group within the church. However, under Todd’s leadership, the church is providing opportunities for people to “belong before believing.” This is done by using their front-door assimilation classes to
encourage small group participation and then to use their small groups as an avenue for future membership opportunities. This seems to fit the more post-modern, liberal culture in which they find themselves in the city of Austin, TX. Even with that being said, Todd also recognized the need for a more formal and lengthy process for people to become members relationally, hence the 10-week seminar that they were looking to launch in the near future.

The other relational connection that both case-study churches made was the relationship between the attendees and the church staff. As in the case of Grace Point Church, the senior pastor, along with several of the key staff members, made personal appearances and presentations about their particular area of ministry. For Austin Stone Community Church, the class was also led by one of the key pastors and other staff members. In each case, there was a direct, personal attempt to meet, teach, and direct the attendees into the life of the church.

When considering the vital importance of relationships in the membership process, this researcher echoes the statement by David Galbraith, the Connections Pastor at Grace Point Church, who stated, “membership and other commitment areas will often come more out of relationship than anything else.” While someone can make a commitment to a person as well as to an institution, the research shows commitments that are relational tend to serve as a gateway to trust, which is important to building a strong congregation where discipleship can take place. Therefore, what is presented during these membership classes is important, but how the classes are conducted is vital. If the class is geared to building relationships, then the engagement factor has the potential to increase at a faster rate than if the classes are not conducive to building relationships.²

² For more information on how to gear the classes more around relationships, the case-study on Grace Point is certainly a great case to consider. This researcher would also recommend reading some of the other books listed in the bibliography, especially Nelson Searcy’s book, Fusion.
A Clear Set of Expectations for what it Means to be a Member is Stated.

Providing a clear set of expectations for what it means to be a member is vital because it is at this step that the membership process can begin to shape discipleship and engagement within the church. It is not only important that the attendee is given a clear set of expectations, but that those expectations align with values of the church and what it means to be a disciple of Christ. This can be seen in both of the case study churches. For Grace Point Church, their expectations flow out of their 5 core values (“G5”—Grace, Growth, Gifts, Give, and Go). As a result, the attendee not only understands the “why,” but the “how” of fulfilling the desired expectations for membership. For example, a core value for Grace Point Church is “Grace,” which speaks of the grace that God has offered to humanity through Jesus Christ. When one accepts God’s grace by faith and then becomes a Ministry Partner at Grace Point Church, that member is expected to share the story of grace to others as well. Consider also their value statement of “Growth.” Here, they clearly state in their membership packet that they “believe every Christian should strive to become a fully devoted follower of Christ, growing spiritually in an intimate relationship with Jesus.” Attendees are therefore expected to become involved in one 360 Life Groups. Grace Point Church then utilizes their “Discovery Groups” as a starter for new Life Groups within the church allowing the attendee not only to go through the membership process, but to transition into a Life Group, thus fulfilling one of expectations of a Ministry Partner.

Austin Stone Community Church also uses a similar method for communicating expectations by using their core values as a foundation. Austin Stone Community Church has fourteen “Partner Commitments” that they have linked with their four stated core values (“Worship Christ,” “Live in Community,” “Get Trained,” and “Make Disciples”). Members at Austin Stone Community Church are expected to “Be
involved with the living out and sharing of the gospel both locally and globally with The Austin Stone” and “Serve the body of The Austin Stone,” which are two examples of the Partner Commitments.

The membership process, if it is to be used as a means of enhancing discipleship, must have clear expectations of what it means to be a member of that particular church. Without having clear expectations, several problems can arise. First, engaging as a disciple becomes unclear and left to the attendee to decide. Second, if the expectations are left for the member to decide, then the result may not align with the core values of the church. Third, without clear expectations, the members can develop their own process for accomplishing what they believe the church should be about which may reflect what the leadership has defined as the mission of the church to be. Finally, without clear expectations, especially if they do not flow from the church’s core values, members may decide on their own what a disciple should look like. This can be troublesome and frustrating for the church leadership as they seek to fulfill the command of making disciples within their church. When church leadership provides a clear set of expectations, understanding the discipleship process is easier for attendees. In so doing, the church leadership is not only better able to, as Paul stated in Ephesians 4:12, “…prepare God’s people for works of service…,” but the church members are better directed in becoming engaged in the life of the church and their spiritual growth.

A System of Accountability is also in Place, Holding Members Accountable to the Stated Expectations.

Having a clear set of expectations is important, but so is providing a system for accountability. By adding the element of accountability, the research has shown that the leadership can be assured that the mission of the church is being applied by their members and that members are being cultivated for deeper spiritual growth. In both of the case-study churches, the members are asked to complete a personal action plan. These
personal action plans serve as the basis for encouraging the member to take the next steps in the spiritual growth process. These action plans are then submitted to the leadership of the church for accountability. Grace Point Church requires their members to sign a Ministry Partner Covenant. Austin Stone Community Church takes this process even further by requiring their members to renew their membership each year, which includes completing another personal action plan. This then serves as a measure of their spiritual health within that church.

Developing a system of accountability is vital to an effective membership process, especially if it is to be used as a tool to enhance discipleship. A membership “contract” is certainly a good method for accountability, and the two provided in the appendices of this research paper provide good examples. However, this researcher would also suggest that, while a signature on a piece of paper can provide adequate incentive for some, others might need a regular reminder of what it means to be a member at the church. This reminder is not meant to be used as a way to make the members feel guilty, but to continually challenge them to grow spiritually.

A Plan is Used for Moving Each Person into an Active Role within the Church.

Finally, a plan needs to be in place for moving each person into an active role within the church. In other words, the church leadership should not only challenge its members to grow, but they should show the way for growth. Grace Point Church accomplishes this by not only plugging each attendee of their “Discovery” seminars into a “Discovery Group,” which encourages the core value of Growth, but they also use the S.H.A.P.E. tool to serve as a way to get their members into meaningful areas of service (see Appendix B as a tool that is used to match their gifts to ministry). Grace Point Church also uses their Discovery Guides to aid in getting the members connected to the ministry leaders within the church. Austin Stone Community Church went so far as to personally call every member in the church in order to see if they needed help in
becoming more actively involved in areas of community and service. This proved to be an exhausting process. They have now transitioned to using the online software solution “The City” to monitor the engagement of their participants.

**Section Summary and Further Observations**

When faced with cultural challenges and attitudes of indifference toward membership, church leaders are left with some options. The first option is to continue membership as usual. The research has shown, however, that doing what has always been done in the past is not producing the desired results. The research has shown is that membership and church engagement are on the decline.

The second option for church leaders is to minimize the role that membership has within the church, or to drop membership altogether. While this option may seem to be more attractive to a culture that views boundaries and expectations as unloving and outdated, the research has shown that the results of this option can hinder a church’s effectiveness in making disciples. Without membership, the church leadership cannot effectively determine who is committed to the church, nor are they able to determine effectively who is a committed follower of Christ and who is not. Attendees are also not given a clear direction from the church leadership with respect to what it means to be engaged in the life of the church, thus depriving them of an opportunity for spiritual growth.

The third option, and the one that is proposed by this researcher, is to consider using membership, and specifically the membership process, to enhance discipleship. This option has its challenges and risks. The obvious challenges to this option are that this goes against the grain of the American culture and potentially the long-standing system of membership already in place within the church. The Bible, however, calls followers of Christ to “not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). Jesus would also tell his
disciples in John 15:18–25 that His ways would not always be popular with non-
Christians.

Asking for commitments and expectations from a culture that is seeking to run
away from such things is risky. It is risky for churches that have an established
understanding of membership as well as for churches that seek to reach out to the
surrounding community for Christ. For those who already have an established
membership process, especially one that has low requirements and low expectations,
making such a transition has the potential to alienate the current members, making them
feel that their role in the church was acceptable at one time, but now is no longer. As a
result, many of them can become disenfranchised to the point that they could even leave
the church. The other risk is that the church can be viewed by those outside of the church
as unloving and legalistic.

However, as this research has shown, the reward of this kind of membership is
two-fold. First, when an effective membership process is used to enhance discipleship,
those who are members are more likely to be progressing in their spiritual growth and
more engaged within the church at large. While the quantity of membership might
decrease in the short term, the quality will increase. Those who are engaged will then
serve as an effective pool that the church leadership can draw from in order to support
and fulfill the mission of the church. Second, this kind of membership process can
provide a clear pathway to progress for those who do desire to grow spiritually. As the

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3 A personal example of this took place at this researcher’s church, Grace Bible Church of La
Vernia. Following the announcement that the church was transitioning to a membership process that would
include membership expectations, a congregational meeting was held. During this meeting, one of the
members raised her hand and said, “Well, I haven’t been coming to this church in over 6 months, but are
you now telling me that I can’t vote?!” After explaining that this was the case, this particular family
withdrew from the church and began attending a different church in town.
research indicates, if this process is accompanied by assistance and accountability, one can expect a positive outcome. Not only could a church grow in quality, but in quantity as more and more members become actively engaged in their spiritual walk and live out their faith within the surrounding community.

Further Study

The research brings to the surface other items that were not within the scope of this project, but which could be covered in further studies. One area deserving further study is the impact of this kind of membership, especially with the two case-study churches that were used in this project. This kind of research would have to be more quantitative and seek to be more results-oriented. Essentially, answer the question, “How effective are their membership processes in accomplishing the stated goals or expectations?” This kind of research would seek to measure how many people are in their small groups, serving, and giving. It would also be interesting to measure the retention rate, especially at Austin Stone Community Church.

It is also interesting to note that both of the case-study churches come from a Southern Baptist background and both churches present themselves as being Non-Denominational. As a result, they are drawing many people from a variety of faith backgrounds. In light of the historical development of membership within the Baptist Churches, how much influence did that foundation have in the development of their membership process? What would a membership process look like for a church that came from a different denominational background look like? Some churches that come to mind would be Apostles Church in New York which appears to come from a more Reformed background, Mars Hill Church which appears to be a more true Non-Denominational church, or even Church of Saint Gerard Majella, a Catholic Church, that has incorporated the discovery of one's spiritual gifts among other spiritually engaging activities into their confirmation process.
Another significant study would be to track effective ways for a church to make the transition to a membership process that would enhance discipleship within their church. Based upon this researcher’s experience, this transition can be difficult. This researcher would have benefited in his personal ministry from the steps and practices of other churches that have gone through such transitions.

Another worthy project would have to include the effectiveness that a membership covenant contributes to the accountability of a church member. What does that covenant mean to the church leadership and how is it used with its members? How does a member view the covenant in light of the expectations that are being asked by the church leaders? What is the best method for holding membership accountable with respect to the commitments that have been made? Is signing a covenant enough or would accountability be better served through regular follow-ups? If that is so, then what would the follow-up process look like? What would be good practices used for effective accountability within the membership process?

**Chapter Summary**

Churches throughout America are facing the rapid decline of membership. In a culture that is contributing to the rapid decline, the task of making disciples is becoming increasingly difficult. Without a new plan for addressing the impact of culture on the church and for increasing the potential for disciple-making, the impact on the church for tomorrow could be devastating.

A real need exists today for a solution that addresses the call of Jesus to make disciples. One of the tools that can be utilized, as this research has shown, is the membership process. By implementing an effective membership process, a church can more effectively disciple its congregants. In so doing, they will not only increase the number of those who are engaged within the church, but also identify engaged members for leadership positions. The members can also take greater responsibility for their
spiritual growth by taking the necessary steps identified for them by the church. This clear path will not only benefit members in their spiritual growth, but will also benefit the Body of Christ at large.
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE CHURCH COVENANT


Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior; and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church, in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances’ discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children; to seek salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale and use of intoxicating drinks as a beverage, and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior, to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage, that when we remove from this place, we will as soon
as possible unite with some other church, where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant, and the principles of God's Word.
Dear New Member,

As a New Member you are certainly aware that at Grace Point we want nothing more than to see you fully devoted to Jesus Christ. It is with great excitement and expectation that I welcome you to our community. I believe the greatest days of our church are ahead of us and that you will be a significant part of leading unsaved people into a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ.

You will undoubtedly experience growth, but let me enlighten you to the fact that sometimes growth is painful. We often recoil from difficult feelings, discussions or challenges and sometimes we have a fight or flight mentality. I would encourage you to recognize the Holy Spirit is going to challenge you but will not give you more than you can handle. I would encourage you to ‘Mind the Gap’ and above all keep your eyes on Jesus the Author and_finisher of our Faith.

Thank you for your commitment to Christ and this Community. It is my prayer that we grow closer to Him and to one another in the coming months and years.

One Life, One Lifetime

Jeff Harris
Senior Pastor
# Grace Point Church

*Our Purpose*
To Lead Unsaved People to a Relationship of Full Devotion to Jesus Christ

## OUR STRATEGY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GET CONNECTED</th>
<th>ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY</th>
<th>PURSUE YOUR CALLING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>Life Groups</td>
<td>Servant Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Impact Impact Events</td>
<td>Personal Development</td>
<td>Local and Global Missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ticket</td>
<td>300 Discipleship</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guest Reception</td>
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<tr>
<td>Base Camp</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

## Characteristics of Full Devotion (G5)

### Our Mission Measure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grace</th>
<th>Growth</th>
<th>Gifts</th>
<th>Give</th>
<th>Go</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My Relationship to Others</td>
<td>My Relationship to God</td>
<td>My Relationship to the Church</td>
<td>My Relationship to my Finances</td>
<td>My Relationship to the World</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Identity</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Know Them and Use Them</td>
<td>Systematic Responsibility</td>
<td>Go Local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Lifestyle</td>
<td>Consistent Joy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Systematic Responsibility</td>
<td>Go Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual Disciplines</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Our C.O.R.E. Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Encouragement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consistently displaying the life of Christ in sacrificial devotion to God in the service of others.</td>
<td>Responsibly creating and carrying out meaningful ministry in an excellent way.</td>
<td>Ruthlessly pursuing authentic interaction, selflessly putting others first and passionately loving from a point of grace.</td>
<td>Joyfully and enthusiastically encouraging others in their pursuit of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippians 2:16-17</td>
<td>Mark 2:3-4</td>
<td>Philippians 2:3</td>
<td>1 Thessalonians 5:11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Show Up, Speak Out, Take Part, Move the Step, Choose Joy.**

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A GRACE-FILLED JOURNEY

Our calling is to a relationship of full devotion to Christ, to attain Spiritual maturity or "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ". It is only through God's grace that we can even begin that journey and seek that calling. It is only through God's grace that we progress toward spiritual maturity. It is a quest that continually calls us upward. There is always more to climb, always another summit.

The Christian life is the most important journey you'll ever experience because it is the essence of life itself. We like to view the Christian life as a mountain climb because the journey is so much like scaling a series of peaks. We have to make a decision to begin our ascent and as we make our way, we experience steep climbs at times, and beautiful valleys at others. There are times we feel the exhilaration of being on a summit and others the fear of hanging onto a sheer cliff.

So the Christian life is a life-long adventure and no matter where you are in that journey, whether at the very start or on a very high summit, we want to help you take your next steps. We want to be your guide, counselor, your equipper and encourager for that most important journey.

This discovery class is the first step to joining a fellowship of believers who are on that same journey of grace. Our perspective is that it is much more exciting and enjoyable to make the journey with friends and fellow believers. In this class you will discover the characteristics of the climb, and be given tools that will help you on your journey as you tackle the treacherous terrain. You'll have a guide who will walk with you and help you discover your place of ministry in the church and your 360 community. We do this because it is our purpose as a staff and church to lead unsaved people to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ. We hope that is your desire, your quest, to be fully devoted to Jesus Christ. If it is, we pray that our church enables you to discover a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ.
GRACE POINT CHURCH

Discovery Guidebook

"So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."
Romans 12:5

Why Membership?

While the term "church member" is never used, the concept is implicit throughout the New Testament. Believers clearly identified themselves with a specific local body and were challenged to become devoted participants. Membership is valuable to the leaders of the church and crucial to the church's fulfillment of God's plan. Grace Point welcomes and attracts not only Christians but seekers, observers and guests. But it is important to identify those who truly comprise the "flock" at Grace Point—the core that can be counted on to build and sustain the ministries of the church.

Benefits of Joining the Journey

♦ You will be able to effectively and graciously communicate Christ to those you love and desire to see fully devoted to God.
♦ You will be able to establish long-term and lasting relationships that will help you grow closer to Christ and other people.
♦ You will realize your unique purpose, your God-given gifts and discover the joy of serving in community.
♦ You will discover God's timeless financial principles and realize tangible and eternal return on your investments.
♦ You will forever be changed as you go locally and globally with the transforming message of Jesus Christ.

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OUR PURPOSE

To lead unspoken people to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ

The "G5" - Characteristics of a fully devoted follower of Christ

Grace, Growth, Gifts, Give and Go

GRACE

We encourage our members to build relationships and live out the grace that God has appropriated to us. Every member has a responsibility:

♦ to pray for those they know who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
♦ to share a verbal witness of God's grace by sharing their own salvation story.
♦ to invite their friends, neighbors, relatives, and co-workers to church.

GROWTH

We believe every Christian should strive to become a fully devoted follower of Christ, growing spiritually in an intimate relationship with Jesus. Our 360 Community helps provide Bible study, fellowship with other believers, accountability groups, and opportunities for service.

GIFTS

We believe it is crucial that every member of our church know and utilize their God-given spiritual gifts. The Bible tells us that every Christian has a unique place of ministry within the body of Christ and we desire to help you discover an area where you can exercise your spiritual gifts for God with a team of people who have similar gifts and passion for service.

GIVE

A fully devoted follower of Christ is one who gives systematically, sacrificially and proportionately as an act of worship and as a tangible expression of his love for God.

GO

The purpose of missions is to move the Church beyond the walls of the church building. It is to take the message of God's love to people all around the world. We accomplish this through San Antonio Missions endeavors (local) and Global Mission trips. It is our goal that every member be actively involved each year in San Antonio Missions and participate at least once every five years in Global Missions.

OUR CORE VALUES

Commitment "Show Up Surrendered" Consistently displaying the life of Christ in sacrificial devotion to God in the service of others. Philippians 2:16-17.

Ownership "Take it!" Responsibly creating and carrying out meaningful ministry in an excellent way. Mark 2:3-4.

Relationship "Mind the gap!" Ruthlessly pursuing authentic interaction, selflessly putting others first and passionately loving from a point of grace. Philippians 2:3.

Encouragement "Choose joy...give joy!" Joyfully and enthusiastically encouraging others in their pursuit of God. 1 Thessalonians 5:11.
Beginnings. They are exciting and sometimes a little stressful. We've all had them at various points in our lives. We pray this class will be a great beginning of a wonderful journey, a “defining moment” in your pursuit of God.

God's grace enables us to make a very important beginning spiritually. It's by grace – the word means "a favor we didn't earn" - that we start the Christian life.

Our purpose at Grace Point is to lead you to full devotion to Jesus Christ. Your relationship with Jesus is of course critical to being fully devoted to Christ. And not only is it critical that you have been saved but that you have an assurance of that salvation. Without a saving relationship with Christ, you have no chance to be devoted to Christ, and without assurance of your salvation, your relationship and devotion to Christ suffers. Therefore we want to be sure you fully understand that you are saved by grace, and be able to say “I'm sure I'm a recipient of it.”

1 John 5:13 These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

If you are a Christian there was a specific point in time in which you began your spiritual life in Christ by the grace of God.

Eph 1:13-14
And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of his glory. NIV

Grace Received
Included in Christ...

You are united with Him for eternity. How does this happen? What goes on before that moment in time?

1) I heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation...

- Preparing

God's grace involves working behind the scenes long before this point in time. He literally came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ and by means of the death on the cross, Jesus paid our sin debt. He comes to each of us now, pursuing us even in our waywardness and points us in a new direction. He pursues us with his grace, captures us with his grace and keeps us through His grace.

- Sharing

You heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Someone shared with you the gospel. Through word or perhaps witness, you came to understand what Christ had done for you on the cross and that you had a need for and wanted God's grace. List below people who helped lead you to Christ.

- Understanding

You realized that you were separated from God and through your own strength, works, or goodness you could not make it on your own.
Rom 3:10
"There is no one righteous, not even one,"
Rom 3:23
"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"
1 John 1:8-10
If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

Some people assume that they are not that much worse than anyone else, so they don’t need any special help from God. After reading these verses, what would you say to someone who says they are morally acceptable?

• Believing
  2) **Having believed...**(the truth, the gospel of your salvation), you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit
    You came to a point when you believed in what Jesus had done for you and accepted God’s grace, his free gift.

Rom 10:9
that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
Eph 2:8-10
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.
John 1:10-12
He came to what was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.
Acts 16:30 32
30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?"
They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.
Rom 10:9
that if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
Titus 3:4-8
But for the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Sometimes, we’re afraid to admit our sinfulness because to do so feels so hopeless. Many of us react to that sense of despair and decide to become “religious”. We try to change our behaviors so we feel and appear better.
Understanding these verses explain why you can’t and don’t have to earn God’s acceptance.

3) **you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our Inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.**
You are united with Christ for eternity. You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Nothing can drive Him out. You are secure for eternity. God continues to pour His grace on you. You are not only saved by grace but sanctified by grace also.
Heb 13:5
God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

John 6:33-38
All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

The Outward Sign of Grace Received

Acts 2:37-38
When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:36-39
As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Acts 16:14-15
One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.

According to these verses, what was the response of new believers — those who had recently received grace — that visibly demonstrated what God had done in their lives?

Many people, perhaps you also, were baptized as a child. But the pattern in the New Testament is “believe — then be baptized.” Why do you think it would be appropriate for a person to be baptized after his or her conversion instead of before it?

The Responsibility of the Recipients of Grace

Matt 28:19-20 (NIV)… Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Jesus has commanded us to become persuasive communicators of His love and truth. We were made to fulfill the Great Commission. That is the primary reason God left us here on the planet.

If you examine the gospels you will find that God’s overriding message is that He cares greatly for those who have not come to faith in Jesus Christ as son. In Luke 15 we have three beautiful examples told by Jesus of how much God loves those who don’t love Him. Jesus is being criticized for hanging out with the tax-collectors and sinners by the Pharisees. So Jesus tells them these parables. A shepherd that has lost one of his sheep. A woman who has lost a coin. And the prodigal son.

We can understand three truths from these parables:

1) Lost people
2) We mattered so much that
3) There is a ____________ each time one of the lost is found.
It changes your whole perspective when you understand that at one point in your life you were lost and you mattered a whole lot to God. There was an all out search for you. That the day you turned over your life to Christ there was a cosmic party for you all across heaven.

Knowing that, how easy should it be to share with friends and relatives that they matter to God. That God loves them so much He is pursuing them right now and that a party awaits when they decide to trust Jesus Christ with their life.

We encourage our members to build relationships and live out the grace that God has appropriated to us. Every Christian has a responsibility and should have a desire.

- Pray for those they know who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Share a verbal witness of God’s grace by sharing their own salvation story.

**THE VALUE OF YOUR STORY**

1. It is unique! There are no others just like it.
2. It is personal and easy to understand.
3. You are the authority on it. It is difficult to argue with.
4. People love to hear personal stories and they remember them.
5. People can relate to it. It builds a relational bridge.
6. In our postmodern world, it may be your most effective witness.

*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...* 1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

- Invite their friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers to church so that they may be confronted with the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

List some of the reasons why you think so few Christians share their faith with others:

- __________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________
"Solely by God's gift of faith..."

Ephesians 2:8-9  I Can't Do It!

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

"And not dependent upon my works..."

Luke 9:24  Exchange

"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

"I have Exchanged my life for life In Christ..."

Galatians 2:20  In Christ

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

"I am a new creation in Christ..."

2 Corinthians 5:17  Totally New!

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

"Freed, and forever approved."

Galatians 5:1  Free!

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."
Growth

My Relationship to God

The Christian life is a journey, an ascent, toward an intimate relationship with God. And the Growth Characteristic of Full Devotion is the expression of your relationship with God.

When a Christ-follower pursues a daily relationship with God through the practice of Spiritual Disciplines, Gratitude, and Consistent Joy, the character of Jesus Christ is formed in his life and intimacy with God is experienced. Matthew 22:37-39 (NAS), "...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." And when a Christ-follower engages in authentic community with others, life-long relationships are formed where he can be supported as he grows in his relationship with God.

Acts 2:42-47 (NAS). "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. And those who believed were of one heart and of one soul; and no one said that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not among them anyone in want; for those who owned lands and houses sold them, and brought the proceeds and laid them at the apostles' feet, and they distributed to each as anyone had need." And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

The Essential 3: Spiritual Disciplines, Consistent Joy and Gratitude

"...The three areas that generate maximum Christian character are not independent of one another, but are conceived as interlocking circles. On their own, each will certainly affect our character for the better, but we will achieve maximum Christ-likeness when we cultivate all three areas, when they induce each other and combine forces, so to speak, to spawn something that is, in fact, greater than the sum of its parts. So this is a completely interdependent system— it is the combination of all three—that culminates in the most powerful formula for growth. Our potential for Christ-like character, and indeed, our potential to glorify God with our lives, resides in the intersection." Cultivating Christian Character, pages 43-44.

360 Life Groups

Developing a church of churches where people are led to live a life of full devotion to Jesus Christ

Expectation

Individuals who call Grace Point their home should be in a 360 Life Group

There are Two Options:

360 Life Groups
ON CAMPUS
Meet at Grace Point
Sundays at 9:30 and 11:00 am
Affinity-Based

360 Life Groups
OFF CAMPUS
Meet in Homes
Various Days and Times
Group Type/Zip Code-Based
360 DISCIPLESHIP

An additional element in the process of spiritual formation is the development of 360 DISCIPLESHIP. Relationships to spur each believer to even greater heights in their pursuit of intimacy with God. 360 Discipleship has its roots in the life of the Apostle Paul where a close examination of his life reveals several vital human relationships that served to encourage and challenge him in his service to the Lord. The Bible says that a "cord of three strands is not easily broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:12) and we see that principle at work in Paul's life. He had Barnabas who served as his mentor and advocate, Silas, who was his peer and his companion and Timothy, his protégé and his disciple. 360 Discipleship is simply a modern day application of the Biblical principle as modeled in Paul's life.

Paul's MENTOR = Barnabas
Paul's PEER = Silas
Paul's DISCIPLE = Timothy

Characteristics of 360 Relationships

You and Your Mentor (Barnabas)

Your mentor is a person you RESPECT, is ACCESSIBLE and with whom you have a RELATIONSHIP. A mentor possesses WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE and SPIRITUAL MATURITY beyond your own. Your mentor should also be RESPONSIVE; that is you can expect answers or be given the means to find the answers you seek within a reasonable time frame.

You and Your Peer (Silas)

Perhaps our most understandable description of this person is an ACCOUNTABILITY relationship. An effective accountability relationship should provide for MUTUAL DISCLOSURE and ACCESS. That is, there are no secrets and either one can inspect the life of the other at any time. MUTUAL HONESTY means that the relationship must be based on trust building and not approval seeking. For that to happen, an accountability partner must be someone you TRUST. Since more than 85% of communication is non-verbal, REGULAR FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION with your accountability partner is necessary. With the goal of developing a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ, an effective and meaningful accountability relationship should include a MUTUAL DESIRE FOR TRANSFORMATION IN THE AREAS DISCLOSED. From time to time, accountability relationships will find it helpful to do an ASSESSMENT of the progress they are making. Finally, there should be an element of MODELING with each person seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit to live the Christian life. We are seeking to be imitators of Christ and in so doing become models for one another.

You and Your Disciple (Timothy)

This is the relationship in which you invest yourself in the life of another for the purpose of their spiritual development. You take on the responsibility for MODELING the Christian life. The disciple and the disciple must spend INTENTIONAL TIME TOGETHER, ASSESS what the disciple's needs are and then DEVELOP A PLAN WITH THE APPROPRIATE TOOLS to address those needs. The disciple should be prepared to complete ASSIGNMENTS given by the disciple and be willing to be held ACCOUNTABLE for their completion. The ultimate goal of this relationship is MULTIPLICATION. That is, the disciple in whom the character of Christ is being developed would, in turn, undertake the discipling of another.
Statement of Faith

The Bible

The Bible is the supreme source of the truth for Christian beliefs and living. It was written by human authors, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because it is inspired by God, it is truth without error.
2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20; 2 Timothy 1:13; Psalm 126; 119:105, 160; Proverbs 30:5

God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He exists in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are the Trinity, they are equal and are one God.
Genesis 1:1, 26, 27, 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; John 14:16; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is God's Son. He was born of a virgin as both God and man, lived a sinless life, died to atone for the sins of human beings, was buried, arose from the grave, ascended into heaven and will literally return to earth.
Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:7; John 3:14-16, 14:5; 1 John 5:12

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is present in the world to make mankind aware of our need for Jesus Christ. He lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides Christians with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth and guidance.
2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 1:13

Mankind

We are all created in the image of God. We are the supreme objects of God's creation. Although mankind has tremendous potential for good, we are marred by an attitude of disobedience towards God. The disobedience is called sin, which separates us from God.
Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1-2; Romans 3:23

Salvation

Salvation is a gift from God. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ can we be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment we receive Christ into our life by faith.
Romans 5:1, 6:23, 10:9; John 11:25, 14:6; Galatians 3:26; Ephesians 1:13, 2:8-9
Identity in Christ

As Christians we are brand new people on the inside. The Holy Spirit gives us new life and we are not the same anymore. We are not reformed, rehabilitated or re-educated — we are recreated (new creations). When we placed our faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we did not merely turn over a new leaf, we began a new life under a new Master.
John 3:3; Romans 6:4-12, 7:6; Galatians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:1, 2:10

Eternity

We were all created to exist forever. We will exist eternally either in union with God through forgiveness and salvation or separated from God by sin. Eternity with Christ begins the moment you receive Christ. Once we pass from this life our place of eternal union and life with God is Heaven. Those who do not have Christ will spend eternity separated from God in Hell.

Eternal Security

God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ. Because of this, the believer is secure in salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by self-effort there fore we cannot lose it. God says I will never leave you, never forsake you.
Hebrews 13:5, 7:25, 10:10; John 6:37, 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3-5

The Church

The church is the body of Christ and the family of God. It is made up of saved and baptized believers, who regularly join together on the Lord’s Day for worship, fellowship, and in ministry.
Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Hebrews 10:25

Baptism

Baptism (by immersion) is a one-time act of obedient identification with Jesus as Lord. A believer is baptized as an outward sign of his or her conscious confession of repentance and faith to Jesus Christ. It is a beautiful picture of the believer’s death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ.
Mark 1:9; Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 8:38-39, 2:41; Colossians 2:12

Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is an ongoing symbol remembering our Lord’s death, burial, resurrection, and promised return. Through the breaking and eating of the bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine, we remember Christ’s wounded body on the cross and the blood that was shed for us.

Jesus instructed His followers to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols (called “ordinances”) as reminders. These two ordinances are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Neither of these ordinances contains any saving grace.
What is a Life Group?
A group of 8-14 people getting together weekly to study, fellowship, worship, minister to each other and reach out into the community. Typically meeting in homes, with people from varying stages of life and engaging in a variety of studies, formats and flavors. The purpose of these groups is to seek and facilitate growth towards a life of full devotion to Jesus Christ.

How do I join one?
The world of groups at Grace Point is constantly changing—new groups starting, groups changing where they meet, what they study or multiplying into additional groups. If you’re not in a group, the best thing to do is email Ioni Renfrow (see card below) or call some of the current group leaders to find out what group would be good for you and when a good time to meet and explore joining the group would be. If you’re interested in possibly starting a group, let Ioni know and she’ll set up a time for you to meet with Pastor Michael to discuss possibilities.

Why join a Life Group?
Christ never invited people into a solitary pursuit of spiritual growth, intimacy or love. Effective ministry and growth happens best in the context of relationships where we can pursue the love of God while showing His love to each other! As God models a divinely mysterious community in the Trinity, we are invited to a mysterious adventure of being the church—literally the called out group of followers being the Body of Christ together. It’s where you serve and are served, love and are loved, teach and learn. If you’ve never been in a healthy life group, it may sound strange or even pointless— but once you’ve experienced true community where grace and love are lived out together, you’ll see what it’s all about!
More than 500 people meet weekly in one of 30+ Life Groups—they’re everywhere! As you explore finding a Life Group, consider these aspects:

✓ **Location.** There are groups meeting in the following zip codes: 78006, 78245, 78023, 78247, 78201, 78249, 78230, 78251, 78231, 78254, 78240, and 78255

✓ **Make-Up.** There are groups for stage of life, family status and specific situations, including: Adult Co-ed/Couples (19), Singles (1), Women-only (7), Men-only (2), College/Early Career (5), with kids, no kids, and everything in-between

✓ **Timing.** There are groups meeting *everyday* of the week!

New groups start regularly, so take the first step towards getting involved in these community venues where real relationships and intentional pursuit of full devotion to Jesus Christ living intersect in powerful ways. If there’s not a group near you or matching your life situation, let us help you explore options—whether it means being part of an upcoming new group launch or hosting your own!

**Contact us:**
trenfrow@gracepoint.org
(210) 558-5908

*Growth happens in the context of relationships.* We are called to live the life in Christ as a **community**. We need each other, as God created His Church to be an interdependent **Body**... **Engage in purposeful community today!**
**Middle School Ministries**

Crappie Jr. High

Crappie is our Sunday Morning small group ministry for Middle School students. During all these services students are challenged to grapple with their faith. It allows us to tackle the tough questions, captivate their attention as we dig into real life issues, engage them into the lessons through unique videos, fun games and life changing lessons, connect with students during the week through phone calls and encourage them to practice their faith everyday.

**High School Ministries**

The Element is our Small Group ministry to High School students which we go to great lengths to fulfill our purpose. Every Sunday evening during the school year, high school students meet together in small groups for a time of learning, growing, encouragement and community.

**6th - 12th Grade Ministries**

**The GAP**

The GAP (gathering at the point) is our mid-week worship experience for all students from 7:00pm - 8:00pm on Wednesday night. Students come for great worship, in depth teaching and encouraging fellowship.

**T卢 (The Point University)** is an in-depth Bible study for all grades designed to equip students with spiritual disciplines for life. Our goal is to see students graduate from The Point prepared and equipped spiritually to live out their calls in a relevant and effective way. High School TPU is built into our small group time. Middle School TPU takes place on Sunday evenings from 6:00pm - 7:00pm.
**Kids of Grace**

**Same Purpose, Same Strategy, Different Tools**

To partner with parents to lead unsaved children to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ.

**Seeds** is a ministry to Birth-Kindergarten kids on Sunday Mornings. Lessons for all SEEDS children focus on these main concepts: God made me, God loves me, and Jesus is alive.

**Crosswalk** is a ministry to 1st through 5th grade kids on Sunday Mornings. During the five years your child is in Crosswalk, we help answer these three questions: (1) Who is God? (2) How do I have new life in Christ? (3) How can I live with Christian character?

**Discovery Kids** is a class for children, 3-years and older, who have exchanged their life for new life in Christ. Here they learn more about baptism, prayer, Bible Study/quiet Time, and how God wants them to live.

**Breakout** is a weekly discipleship ministry for 2nd-5th grades onWednesday nights. Children are led towards spiritual maturity through interactive games, small group discussions and large group presentations of Biblical truths.

**Kid's Quest** is a weekly discipleship ministry for children 3 years old through 1st grade on Wednesday nights. Children are introduced to God's Word and helped on how to apply Bible truths to their lives.

In order to accomplish our purpose of partnering with you to lead your children to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ, we have several resources available for you each and every week:

- The weekly Kid's Family Activity is located in the back of the worship center, in the Training Center, and in Pastor Jeff's weekly emails. These easy to use activities use the worship service and are a great resource for you to use as an intentional family time with God.
- "Come Hang with Me" is the invitation you will receive to come "hang out" with your 1st - 5th graders every other month in their Crosswalk Classes. Come participate with them in learning about God.
- "See what your child is learning in SEEDS or Crosswalk by visiting our website at www.gracepoint.org.

**And Much More...**

- [Great Expectations](#)
- [No Boundaries](#)
- [Divorce Care for Kids](#)
- [Kids Night Out](#)
- [Kids Day Out](#)
My Relationship to My Finances

There are a lot of emotions surrounding the topic of giving. Some people feel they do not make enough to give while others are prudential as to the amount they give. The Bible makes it clear that one of the characteristics of a person pursuing full devotion to Jesus Christ is that they are a generous giver—one who gives with an obedient will, a joyful attitude and a compassionate heart. Giving allows us to say "Thank You" to God for His provisions in our life (James 1:17). It helps us to focus on God as the source of our security (Matthew 6). Giving allows us to be a conduit for blessing others and breaks the hold that money can have on us. The Bible teaches that regarding our finances we are managers and not owners.

Psalm 24:1 (NAS) "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it."

Although generous giving is ultimately a matter of the heart, the biblical benchmark for giving is the tithe. Generally, the title is defined as 10% of your gross income.

Genesis 14:18-20 (NAS) "And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heavens and earths. And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he gave him a three of all."}

Malachi 3:10 (NAS) "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the Lord of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

If you are not currently giving a tithe, as a follower of Jesus Christ, it should be your desire to reach the goal of the tithe. To do so, develop a plan to reach the tithe and start by giving something. It may not be much but start with something regardless of your circumstances. If you are currently giving a tithe, we affirm your commitment, but while the tithe is a wonderful goal to aspire to, it is a terrible place to stop. Generous giving is ultimately a matter of the heart. The question is not how much should you give but rather how much of God's money do I need to live on? It is our goal as a church to have each of our members practice giving that is:

♦ SYSTEMATIC
   A desire to follow a plan to give with consistent frequency.

1 Corinthians 16:2 (NIV) "On the first day of every week each of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..."

♦ SACRIFICIAL
   A desire to make changes in your lifestyle in order to give.

2 Corinthians 8:5 (NAS) "Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that a great cloud of affliction and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their generosity. For I testify that according to their ability, and beyond their ability, they gave of their own accord, begging us with much earnestness for the favor of participation in the support of the saints, and this, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God."

♦ PROPORTIONATE
   A desire to give in proportion to what God has given.

Deuteronomy 16:17 (NIV) "Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you."

Tools
Education
On-going opportunities to learn and implement what the Bible teaches about finances and related topics.

Services
Provides assistance with specific financial areas accomplished through one-on-one advisors.

Legacy
Provides assistance for giving that is perpetual.
BIBLICAL FINANCIAL PRINCIPLES

CARING

The Elijah Principle—One who gives much will also receive much; one who is generous will also be given much. (1 Cor. 16:2)

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The biblical principle of giving is not just about money; it is about the heart. God’s Word teaches that when we give, He will bless us in return. (Proverbs 3:9)

GOD CHERISHED LOVE—When Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden, God’s presence was very near. (Genesis 3:8)

The Bible teaches that God delights in giving. (Psalm 112:9)

EARN POTENTIAL SHARE INCREASE

If you are a thief, stop stealing. Begin using your hands for honest work, and then give generously to others in need. (Ephesians 4:28)

WE ARE MADE TO GIVE

We are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). God is generous and generous. We will not become satisfied until we give like He gives to others.

GIVE AS A RESPONSE TO GOD’S GOODNESS

Every good and perfect gift is from above (James 1:17).

Therefore, we give not out of goodness for what we have received but out of goodness for what we receive from God.

GIVE TO FOCUS ON GOD AS OUR SOURCE AND SECURITY

God ensures that his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).

GIVE TO HELP ACHIEVE ECONOMIC JUSTICE

Our society is not just; the poor are not provided with what they need. (2 Thessalonians 3:15)

Biblical financial principles are about more than paying your bills. They are about living in a way that honors God and helps others.

GIVE TO BENEFIT OTHERS

If you know someone who needs help, give them what they need. (Galatians 6:10)

GIVE TO SHARE

Share your time, talents, and resources with others. (Acts 6:3-4)

GIVE TO BREAK THE HOLD OF MONEY

Money is a tool that can be used for good or evil. (Proverbs 13:22)

Biblical financial principles are about more than managing money. They are about living a life that honors God and helps others.

GIVE JOYFULLY, GENEROSITY IN A TEMPERED WAY

Give with joy, but not overly. (Colossians 3:17)

Biblical financial principles are about more than giving money. They are about giving with joy and generosity. 
WORRIES FOR GIVING ARE IMPORTANT

Unless our worries are right, we can give as we have.

Our worries are significant—what will we do? (2 Corinthians 12:11)

SAVING

The Bible Savior—What? Jesus, Deliveree, and the One

who answers!

IT IS IN WISDOM TO HAVE

To live in the light of the one who knows the secrets of your heart (Proverbs 1:21)

IT IS SINFUL TO HOARD

And he gave (1) as an illustration: “A rich man had a little store that he had amassed. He knew he would die in summer, therefore he gathered up everything. And he said to his sons, ‘My heart, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now look, every one of you, fill in your cellars, and it will be mine. And God said to him, ‘No, you foolish man, you have not recognized that death is a fact and you are dead. It is not your cellars, but the Lord, who will see to your cells.’ God said to him, ‘No, you foolish man, you have not recognized that death is a fact and you are dead. It is not your cellars, but the Lord, who will see to your cells.’” (Proverbs 11:21)

CALCULATE COST: PRIORITIZE

It cost him to enter with you the cost, for who will begin construction of a building without first gathering materials and then checking to see if there is enough money to pay for it? (1 Corinthians 3:9)

AVOID QUICK-SKINNY SCHEMES

If you save money, will it be wise to save the same amount every year, or will it be better to save the same amount in a high-yield account? (Proverbs 11:21)

SEEK WISE COUNSELORS

If you have a wise counselor, can you be wise in the name of God?

ESTABLISH A JOB BEFORE BUYING HOUSE

Spend your money wisely, and you will live a long time after you build your house (Proverbs 22:7)

DIVERSIFY YOUR HOUSES

They prefer to build houses that are not only safe, but also the most beautiful (Proverbs 22:7)

REPAY DEBT AND DO SO PROMPTLY

The rich become richer, and the righteous can enjoy the wealth they have (Proverbs 22:7)

AVOID THE BINDINGS OF DEBT

The rich man who has more than his share of wealth is a debt collector (Proverbs 22:7)

DEBT PRESURES ON THE FUTURE

The wise rich will be in debt, and the righteous will also be in debt (Proverbs 22:7)

DEBT CAN DENY GOD THE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK

In our lives and teach us valuable lessons

GIVE INSTEAD OF SEEKING ASKING

Gave very little to those who have nothing, and then asked for more, saying, ‘Give me more!’ (2 Corinthians 2:14)

GIVE AND BEHOLD WHAT YOU GAVE

When you give to others, you are giving to God (2 Corinthians 2:14)

DON'T-GO-SIGN

Do not waste your money on a preacher’s house, and give as a gift to someone who has no house (2 Corinthians 2:14)

DEBT CAN COMPROMISE SPIRITUAL GROWTH

This is why God has given us the command to be debt-free (Galatians 5:23)

SPEAKING

The man who speaks to the Lord has the power to speak as He speaks (1 Corinthians 14:24)

DEATH

The Lord's promise: Those who love God will be kept from death (Revelation 2:10)

GUARD AGAINST GRIEF

Things do not bring happiness

GUARD AGAINST GRIEF

Things do not bring happiness

SEEK MODERATION

Seek the richer or poorer lives, but also seek the life of the believer (Psalm 1:1)

BE CONTENT

Know that the Lord is a contented man (Psalm 1:1)

DON'T WASTE GOD'S RESOURCES

Enjoy a portion of God's provision

WASTE MONEY AT THE CHURCH

Giving is to God, as it is to others (James 4:17)

WATCH YOUR FINANCES (BUDGET)

The wise man knows that God is wise (Proverbs 22:7-29)
Gifts

My Relationship to the Church

Our “Calling” is the means that God provides for us to help accomplish our purpose on this earth. There is an overarching purpose for all believers, and that is to glorify God by joining Him in accomplishing His purpose in bringing others to a relationship with Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19 says we are to make disciples. Jesus termed it as loving God and loving others.

When you chose to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ, your life purpose changed from serving yourself to living for God. Accomplishing His purpose is no easy task. The Bible tells us that we are in a constant battle with spiritual forces and principalities working hard to prevent you from accomplishing God’s purpose. On your own, you will not be able to fulfill that purpose. Therefore, God has given us the church and also equipped each of its uniquely with a gift or gifts used to bring about the new purpose you have in your life.

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation. His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

The body of Christ, the church is God’s instrument of bringing about His purpose. Together, we can overcome the forces of evil and help bring others to a relationship with Jesus Christ.

However, at one point in the life of the church, believer’s lost sight of their purpose, and perceived the work of God to be reserved for ministers, missionaries, monks and priests. The people in the church also considered God’s calling reserved for a select few men and women. Therefore, the clergy did 99% of the work. But scripture teaches a whole different concept. From the words of Jesus to the teachings of Paul and Peter, we find that every Christian has a duty, a calling and a place of service in the body of Christ.

Matt 9:35-38

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

1 Tim 1:12

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Obviously many Christians don’t share that attitude. Why do you think that is?

The Bible compares the Church to a human body, with Christ as the head and all of us as different parts, or members, of the body.
1 Cor 12:14-20
Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Notice that each person has a different gift and that no gift is more important than any other. No matter how you are gifted, you have a place in the body of Christ.

John 15:8
This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
John 15:16-17
You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

Do you believe you can be used by God to bear fruit in His kingdom? 1 Cor 15:58
Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

It is great also to know that we don’t have to perform or train long hours to be of service to God. He has already empowered you when you came to Him. He wants your availability more than anything.

Empowered for Ministry

(2 Peter 1:3-4)
His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

(2 Cor 4:7-8)
But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us.

God wants to use you and me.
The New Testament strategy for the church was for the Pastor to be equippers; the people to be the ministers. God wants to use individuals to build up His Body, the church. Ministry allows each individual to experience fruitfulness and fulfillment in their daily walk with Christ and spiritual maturity. He has shaped you for ministry through your spiritual gifts, your heart for serving, abilities, personality and experiences.
DISCOVERING YOUR SHAPE FOR MINISTRY

For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gifts prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouragement, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully. Rom 12:3-8

By knowing the gifts given to me by the Holy Spirit, I can best serve the Body of Christ

S. H. A. P. E.

Spiritual gifts, Heart for ministry, Abilities, Personality, Experience

S = Spiritual Gifts 1 Cor 7:7a
What am I gifted to do? This is a special ability given by the Holy Spirit. It is not a learned or natural talent, but a gift from God.

H = Heart Rev 17:17
What do I love to do? God has given you desires in your heart which guide you in ministry. Some have a heart towards missions or evangelism. Others have a heart for administration or a heart for teaching. God puts in our hearts to do certain things to accomplish His purpose.

A = Abilities 1 Cor 12:6
What natural talents and skills do I have? God has given each of us natural abilities or skills. We each have learned skills from school or work which can be used for the kingdom of God. We are all different and good at different things.

P = Personality 1 Cor 2:11
Where does my personality suit me to serve? All of us have different personalities that affect our ministry. (For example, some individuals are introverted or shy. This person would probably not enjoy being a Welcome Center greeter.)

E = Experiences Heb 5:12-13
What spiritual experiences have I had? What has been your experience with the Lord? How long have you been a Christian? These things will influence your ministry involvement. Your life’s experiences will help you to determine your involvement in ministry.
POINT PERSON...GRACE POINT’S SERVANT LEADERS

Over the years the biblical understanding of what a Deacon is has become confused. Depending upon your church background, your understanding of the biblical function of a Deacon may differ from someone else’s understanding. Because of this, Grace Point Church leaders decided years ago to eliminate the confusion and change the term “Deacon” to “Point Person” yet maintain the biblical characteristics of a Deacon.

The Bible describes a Deacon as a Servant Leader. A person who possesses the characteristics as listed in 1 Timothy 3. At Grace Point Church, our “Deacons” or “Servant Leaders” are called “Point People.”

A Point Person is a Servant Leader of a strategic task-oriented Servant Group at Grace Point. The group is strategic by having a Kingdom based value; task-oriented is the group’s practical focus; a servant group because it accomplishes its task with a team.

When you have discovered your S.I.L.A.P.E, for ministry, your Discovery Guide will direct you to a servant group of the church lead by a Point Person. You will serve with a team of other members who are committed and shaped for that particular ministry.

Who may be a Point Person?

Any member of Grace Point who fulfills the profile of a Point Person one who consistently demonstrates a servant’s heart through the living out of our:

Purpose (see page 4)
C.O.R.E. Values (see page 4)

Biblical qualifications

1 Timothy 3

Respected Not greedy Integrity Committed to the Christian Faith
Not addicted Faithful to spouse Good manager of their children and household
GO LOCAL AND GLOBAL

A century ago Martin Luther stated, "Mission is the mother of theology." Grace Point recognizes that God is a missionary God and the church's fundamental identity is mission. That is the purpose of the church to go and make disciples." The fact that Jesus was the "sent one" is the most fundamental identification of Jesus. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." John 20:21. Because of our identity in Christ, we are to continue the mission of Jesus. There is no participation in Christ without participation in his mission to the world. The concept of mission Discipleship the mission of God, is recognition that God is a sending God, and the church is sent. It is the most important mission in the Scriptures.

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that mission; the Holy Spirit is the power of that mission; the church is the instrument of that mission.

Jesus told his disciples before He ascended into heaven, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." Acts 1:8

We see Jesus' charge for our calling in three distinct areas:

Within the church...Jerusalem
Outside our church and in the culturally dissimilar areas within our state and nation...Judea and Samaria
Countries other than the United States...The ends of the world

Therefore we encourage our members to Go locally at least once a year and to Go globally once in every 5 years. We believe it is the greatest change agent in a believer's life. Those who go on short or long term mission trips are changed forever. They not only grow spiritually and closer to God but their perspective on the world, other believers, and their faith as it relates to God's purpose in the world is transformed. Few things can help transform a person more than working together with a team in a country far away from home. Grace Point provides our members several opportunities a year to Go Global as close as Poland, Mexico and as far as Africa and South America. These trips vary from a single day to two weeks in length. They are planned well in advance so to give our Members adequate time to take care of every detail before the trip.

PLANT 100 CHURCHES IN 10 YEARS

Our purpose as a church is to reach the non-believer, the unchurched in San Antonio, the United States and the world and bring them to full devotion. Whenever God calls us, we want to win the lost and plant churches so that these new believers can be dispatched into being missionaries for Christ. In January of 2006 we set a goal of helping plant 100 churches in the next 10 years. We will support all kind of churches, small house churches to regional plants as long as they make disciples and baptize new believers. Our support may include financial, mentoring, encouragement, and coaching. In the first year we helped start 13 churches, 7 in the United States and 4 in Africa, one in Brazil and one in Colombia.

MISSION GIVING

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

Our church supports global missions through our annual budget by giving to the Cooperative Program of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The Cooperative Program is a central clearing house for the sending of Southern Baptist missionaries. Our church contributes financial and prayer support to the Cooperative Program and in keeping with the doctrinal standards of the SBC we commission, train, and support missionaries all over the world. Our Cooperative Program support not only enables national and international missions work but also supports The Baptist General Convention of Texas, The Southern Baptist Convention of Texas the San Antonio Baptist Association and the Baptist University of the Americas in San Antonio.
LOCAL MINISTRIES
We support financially many of the local ministries in which we participate on a weekly, monthly, or quarterly basis. Here are some of the local ministries Grace Point Church supports from budget giving:

Strong Foundation, and Seek the Lost: Ministries both are ministries to the Homeless. Women at the Well, and Grace House both women's a residential communities for formerly incarcerated women.

FAITH PROMISE
Faith Promise is a unique way of experiencing God’s promise to provide. We call it a promise and it is built on the basis of faith. Once a year, we ask each of our families to pray and ask God for an amount of money to be placed on their hearts and for which they will believe God throughout the year. This amount of money is to be over and above their tithe, an amount that they will feel obligated to pray for and when it comes in, given to missions. After you have prayed and God has laid an amount on your heart (for which you are convicted to pray and believe Him), make a promise in our service to give that money. The money does not have to be given all at once but we ask that you be faithful to give having faith that God will provide. You may also be led to give by sacrificing something. However, you give, the key is prayer; pray for the amount God lays upon your heart, promise to give it and then have faith that He will supply it.

Grace Point's Faith Promise Missionaries

Teresa Devlin
Teresa Devlin’s ministry began in Tegucigalpa, Honduras in 1997 where she worked under the guidance of Rev. Larry Elliott, a missionary with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. In March 1999 she moved to La Ceiba where she has created a Community Music School for the youth and children of the community. She is currently helping to start an orphanage for many street children in Honduras.

John and Cynthia Dolezal and their children are serving with World Mission in Mexico. As a teenager, the Lord gave John a strong desire to study the Scripture and proclaim the Gospel. In her teenage years, Cynthia’s desire to serve the Lord increased. John and Cynthia were married in 1986. While serving with World Mission, their desire is to spread the Gospel and Christ to the lost and to establish churches in the area of Lomas. Their ministry is fully supported by the International Mission Board. However, Grace Point has pledged our prayer support to reach out to the nation of Angola.

Suzanne Westrum will be going to Hong Kong this spring to serve with Crossroads International in Hong Kong. Crossroads is a Christian non-profit agency whose mission is to redistribute donated goods to those in need all over the world. Suzanne spent three months in Hong Kong last year and felt God's call to return to China to serve him.

Partrick Paulino Esquivel serves as pastor of the church in Pedradas Negras, in Angola. Pastor Paulino began serving as a pastor of the church where he was born and raised, and now has the opportunity to serve in his home town. He has also been called to serve in the United States to serve in the church and to teach both in the church and in the community.

Daniel Camarote is pastor of Jamaica Baptist Church in a favela of Rio de Janeiro. He is also part of a team church in another part of the city and is involved in missions. He was called to be a missionary in his early thirties, and his vision is to help men and women overcome drug addiction in the poverty areas of Rio. He also travels around South America and to the United States to speak about drug awareness and the role of Jesus Christ in the lives of drug addicts.

Janette Hughes is serving in Sudan. She is in Sudan in 2013 to participate in the African Islamic Mission's AIM program (Training in Missionary Outreach). There she will learn how to be a missionary while at the same time under the guidance of a seasoned missionary. After two years there, Janette prays the Lord will open the door to work full-time in Sudan with AIM missionaries there. Janette is very involved in the youth and music ministry at Grace Point.
WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Doctrine of Salvation
The Need of a Savior

It is essential that we understand that from our birth we are sinful, and every individual is in need of a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

"Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me." Psalm 51:5

We must understand that our sinfulness has affected every part of our existence.

Our Hearts
"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" Jeremiah 17:9

Our Minds
"The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." 2 Corinthians 4:4

Our Bodies
"To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pain in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, you must not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat your bread all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:16-19

The Means of Salvation

Deliverance from our sinful condition comes through rebirth.
"For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." 1 John 5:4-5

Being born again refers to our need for spiritual birth.
"Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'" John 3:6-7

Rebirth delivers us from condemnation that would otherwise result in eternal separation from God.
"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1
Faith is how we accept what Christ has provided for us through His death, burial, and resurrection.

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Romans 5:1-2

Faith in Christ is the only way to receive Eternal Salvation.

"For it is by grace you have been saved; through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8

If you were standing at heaven's door and the Lord asked you

"Why should I let you into My heaven?"

The only correct response is "I have placed my faith in your Son Jesus Christ."

The Eternal Security of the Believer

NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD!
(Romans 8:31-39, John 10:27-30)

What about those who confess and then reject?
They were never saved in the first place.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Matthew 7:21-23

They will be restored.

"his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

The Proof of Salvation

The indwelling testimony of the Holy Spirit:

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."
BAPTISM BY IMMERSON

New Testament Perspective
(Scripture References are from the NIV)

WHY BE BAPTIZED?
A desire to follow Christ's example.
"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan." Mark 1:9

Christ commanded it.
"Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

Baptism declares you are a Christ follower. "Many of the Corinthians who heard him believed and were baptized." Acts 18:8

Obeying Christ's command shows you are a Christ follower.
"We know that we have come to know Him if we obey His commands." 1 John 2:3

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF BAPTISM?
Baptism is a symbol of Christ's burial and resurrection.
"Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised on the third day." 1 Corinthians 15:3,4

"Having been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him through your faith in the power of God, who raised Him from the dead." Colossians 2:12

Baptism is a symbol of your new life as a Christian.
"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17

"We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Romans 6:4

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—it is the gift of God not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8,9

Baptism doesn't make you a believer—it shows that you already believe. Baptism does not "save" you, only your faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring—it's the outward symbol of the commitment you made in your heart.
HOW SHOULD WE BE BAPTIZED?
As Jesus was baptized by being immersed in water.
“As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water.” Matthew 3:16

Every instance of baptism in the Bible was by immersion under water.

(Example) “Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water….” Acts 8:38, 39

The word baptize comes from the Greek word baptizo, which means “to immerse or dip under water.”

Immersion is the best way to picture a burial and resurrection.

The founders of denominations agree:

Martin Luther… “I would have those who are to be baptized to be entirely immersed, as the word imports and the mystery signifies.”

John Calvin… “The word ‘baptize’ signifies to immerse. It is certain that immersion was the practice of the ancient church.”

John Wesley… “Buried with him, alluding to baptizing by immersion according to the custom of the first church.”

WHO IS TO BE BAPTIZED?
Each person who has made the decision to exchange their life for the life of Christ.

“Those who accepted His message were baptized.” Acts 2:41

“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news… and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.” Acts 8:12

“Simon himself believed and was baptized.” Acts 8:13

IS THERE AN APPROPRIATE AGE FOR CHILDREN TO BE BAPTIZED?
At Grace Point Church we strongly recommend that children wait until they are 8 years old to be baptized. Generally children 8 and older can more clearly believe and understand the true meaning of baptism. They also begin to think more abstractly at this age. It is our belief that by waiting until age 8, baptism will be a more memorable and significant event for the child. When a child is 8 years old we ask that they enroll in our children’s New Believers / New Members class called Discovery Kids. This class will help them understand the true meaning of salvation, baptism, the ordinances of the church and what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Christ.

Some churches practice a “baptism of confirmation” for children. This ceremony is intended to be a covenant between the parents and God on the behalf of the child. The parents promise to raise their child in the faith until the child is old enough to make his own personal commitment to Christ. This custom began about 300 years after the Bible. This is different from the baptism talked about in the Bible which was only for those old enough to believe. The purpose is to publicly confess that you’ve exchanged your life for the life of Christ.

At Grace Point Church, it is a membership requirement that every member must have been baptized the way Jesus demonstrated, even though many of us were “confirmed” as children.
WHAT ABOUT BEING BAPTIZED TWICE?

Our church recommends that you be baptized again if you have not been baptized by immersion since you became a Christ follower. It does not devalue a prior experience but simply reflects your desire to be baptized in the same way Jesus was baptized.

CAN MY FAMILY BE BAPTIZED TOGETHER?

Yes, if each family member understands fully the meaning of baptism, and each one has personally exchanged their life for the life of Christ, we encourage families to be baptized at the same time. It is a wonderful expression of commitment. However, it is important to remember that baptism is a personal statement of faith, not a family tradition. It is usually not wise to delay your baptism while waiting on other family members to exchange their life, particularly children. This puts pressure on them, and delays your obedience.

WHEN SHOULD I BE BAPTIZED?

As soon as you have believed!

"Those who believed . . . were baptized . . . that day?" Acts 2:41

There is no reason to delay. As soon as you have made the decision to exchange your life for the life of Christ you can and should be baptized. If you wait until you are "perfect", you will never feel "good enough".

The Ordinance of the Lord's Supper

Jesus never asked His disciples to remember His birth. But He did instruct them to remember His death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper is an object lesson that represents a great spiritual truth for believers.

What is the Lord's Supper?

It is a simple act, not an elaborate ceremony.

"The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread . . ." 1 Corinthians 11:23

It is a reminder.

". . . and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is broken for your sake, it is in remembrance of Me.'" 1 Corinthians 11:24

It is a symbol.

"In the same way, He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; drink it to remembrance of Me.'" 1 Corinthians 11:25

It is a statement of faith.

"For whenever you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes back." 1 Corinthians 11:26

Who should take the Lord's Supper? Only those who are already believers.
Our Statement of Faith

The Essentials We Believe:

About God:
God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has eternally existed in three personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.  

Matthew 28:19

About Jesus Christ:
Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.  

Matthew 1:22,23

About the Holy Spirit:
The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son of God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He gives every believer a spiritual gift when they are saved. As Christians we seek to live under His control daily.  

Acts 1:8

The Bible:
The Bible is God's Word to us. Human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit, wrote it. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is the truth without any mixture of error.  

2 Timothy 3:16

Human Beings:
People are made in the spiritual image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God's creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are marred by an attitude of disobedience toward God called "sin." This attitude separates people from God and causes many problems in life.  

Romans 3:23

Salvation:
Salvation is God's free gift to us but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-centered life and turn to Jesus in faith we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith.  

Romans 6:23

Eternal Security:
Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. If you have been genuinely saved, you cannot "lose" it. Salvation is maintained by the grace and keeping power of God that gives us this security.  

John 10:29

Eternity:
People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence.  

Romans 8:17-18
The Bible as our Sole Authority:
Since God's Word is the only completely reliable and truthful authority, we accept the Bible as our manual for living. Our first question when faced with a decision is "What does the Bible say?" We practice daily Bible reading, Bible study, and Bible memorization. The Bible is the basis for all we believe.

The Autonomy of Each Local Church:
Christ is the recognized head of our church, not any person, group, or religious organization. While recognizing the value of associating and cooperating with other groups of Christians, we believe every local church should be self-governing and independent from any denominational control. In relating to our "sister churches" that we sponsor, we encourage each congregation to determine its own strategy, structure, and style.

The Priesthood of Every Believer:
The Bible teaches that every Christian is called to "full time" Christian service, regardless of his or her vocation. We practice the truth that every believer is a minister by encouraging every member to find a place of service and ministry. Every believer has direct access to God through prayer and Bible reading.

Immersion:
We practice baptism by immersion under water — the way Jesus was baptized and the way the Bible commands.

Spirit-Led Living:
We believe the only way possible to live the Christian life is by God's power within us, so we seek to practice a daily dependence on God's Spirit to enable us to do what is right. Ephesians 5:18

Telling Others About Christ:
It is the responsibility of every Christian to share the Good News with others God brings us into contact with. We practice personal sharing about Christ and inviting friends to church.

Our Structure
The structure of the church should not be determined by culture, business practices, or denominational traditions.

Nature: The nature of the Church determines its structure
The church is a fellowship/community.
A top priority in a fellowship is unity and acceptance. ANY attitude that causes disharmony is sin.

Col 3:15, 1 Cor 1:10, 2 Tim 2:14, Pho 17:14, 2 Cor 13:11,
Phil 1:27, Col 2:2

Voting Privileges:
Implication: A good structure promotes unity and downplays division. "Voting" tends to cause division. At Grace Point Church we only vote on:

• Annual Budget & Legal Trustees
• Purchase of Land or Buildings
• Calling the Senior Pastor
• Changes in the Church Bylaws
Denominational Affiliation

Grace Point Church is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention.

What is the Southern Baptist Convention?

- It is the largest association of Christian churches in America. One out of every 10 churches in America is affiliated with the SBC.
- It is the most diverse association of churches. SBC churches include every race, nationality and ethnic group. Each Sunday, services are held in over 80 languages in the U.S. The San Antonio Baptist association includes Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Hispanic, Vietnamese, Laotian and African American Southern Baptist churches.
- It is one of the fastest growing groups. The SBC baptizes over 10,000 new Christians a day in the U.S. and begins nearly 5 new churches a day.

Why not just be an independent church?

We are an independent church! Every SBC church is completely independent. There is no denominational control or hierarchy, as there is in most other denominations. Each church is self-governed and determines its own affairs. For example:

- Every SBC church chooses its own pastor
- Every SBC church owns its own buildings and assets
- Every SBC church determines its own programs

What are the Advantages of Affiliating with the Southern Baptist Convention?

It allows us to identify with other Christians around the world who are known for their commitment to the Bible. Unlike other groups, the SBC has no man-made "creed". The Bible is our only authority.

It allows our church to participate in the largest missionary organization in the world. Through the SBC "Cooperative Program" we help support over 7,800 missionaries in 124 countries around the world.
BYLAWS
OF
GRACE POINT CHURCH

As Constituted on February 1, 1998, and last Amended on October 19, 2003

PREAMBLE

Grace Point Church, a Texas corporation, declares these bylaws to govern itself in a manner consistent with the Holy Bible. Furthermore, these bylaws are intended to preserve the liberties of each Grace Point member and establish the independence of Grace Point.

I. Name.

This church shall be known as Grace Point Church ("Grace Point"), located at 9750 Huebner Road, San Antonio, Texas.

II. Objectives.

Grace Point's purpose is to lead unsaved people to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ. In doing so, we seek to fulfill the Great Commission as stated in Matthew 28:19-20. Our desire is to be led by the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

III. Statement of Basic Beliefs.

Grace Point affirms the Holy Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God and the basis for our beliefs.

IV. Polity and Relationships.

Grace Point is an autonomous church and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denominational control; and, in furtherance of its purpose, may choose to cooperate with other like-minded organizations, including the Southern Baptist Convention.
ARTICLE 1. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

Section 1. General. Grace Point is a sovereign and democratic Southern Baptist Church under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Our membership has the exclusive right of self-governance in all phases of its spiritual and temporal life. Accordingly, only Grace Point members ("Member") may participate in its governing efforts.

Section 2. Membership Requirements. Grace Point membership requires the following:

(a) Personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation;

(b) Baptism by immersion at either Grace Point or a church of like faith and order; and

(c) Completion of Grace Point's new-member class.

Section 3. Presentation for Membership. Candidates may present themselves for membership in any one of the following ways:

(a) Personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation — for candidates who are now accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and desire to be baptized;

(b) Baptism as a testimony of salvation — for candidates who have previously accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and now desire to be baptized;

(c) Transfer of membership from a church of like faith and order — for candidates who have previously accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, been baptized by a church of like faith and order, and wish to transfer membership from a church of like faith and order; or

(d) Reinstatement — for candidates whose membership status has previously been terminated (see Article 1. Section 6.) and who are now making a request for reinstatement.

Section 4. Membership Voting. Whether a candidate becomes a Member shall be determined by a vote of the Voting Members present at a Business Meeting (as later defined in Article 3. Section 2.). If there is no dissent at the vote, all candidates immediately become Members. If there is any dissent at the vote, the dissenting Members and the specific candidates who are the object of the dissent shall be recorded; and, the record of the dissent shall be referred to the Elder Board for a thorough inquiry. Within thirty (30) days, the Elder Board shall make a recommendation to the Members at a Business Meeting, during which the Members will vote again on the candidate. For this second vote, a Member Vote (as later defined in Article 3. Section 4.) shall be required for membership.

Section 5. Rights of Members.

(a) A Member who has attained the age of eighteen (18) years ("Voting Member") is entitled to one vote on each matter submitted to a vote of the Members; provided, however, the Voting Member is present for such vote. Proxy votes are not permitted.

(b) Members may participate in the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper in accordance with the administration of such ordinances by Grace Point; and
(c) Members may participate in all Grace Point meetings in accordance with the administration of such meetings by Grace Point.

Section 6. Membership Termination. Membership shall be terminated as follows:

(a) Transfer of membership by way of letter to a church of like faith and order;

(b) Removal from membership roll upon request of the Member;

(c) Death of the Member;

(d) Expulsion of the Member by vote of the membership (see Article 1, Section 7 (b)); or

(e) Evidence that Member is no longer an active participant.

Section 7. Discipline of Members. Grace Point shall have the authority to administer discipline among Members. Such discipline includes, but is not limited to, the teaching, rebuking, correcting, and expelling of Members. To determine appropriate discipline, Grace Point shall have the authority to investigate any report of Member misconduct.

(a) Resolving Personal and Public Offenses. In personal offenses, the Members shall govern their conduct by the provisions of Matthew 18:15-17, and other relevant Scripture. In public offenses, Grace Point and the Members shall govern themselves by the provisions of 1 Corinthians 5, Galatians 6:1, and other relevant Scripture.

(b) Expulsion of the Member by Vote of the Membership. If the Senior Pastor believes an incident of Member misconduct warrants expulsion, he shall refer the matter to the Elder Board for a thorough inquiry. Within thirty (30) days, the Elder Board shall determine whether the incident warrants an expulsion vote. A Member Vote shall be required to terminate membership.

(c) Conciliation, Mediation, and Arbitration. Any legal dispute between a Member and Grace Point, a Member and another Member, or a Member and a Grace Point officer, employee, volunteer, or agent involving a discipline determination by Grace Point shall be resolved in accordance with the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation, Institute for Christian Conciliation. If efforts to conciliate or mediate the dispute fail, the matter shall be resolved through binding arbitration. The decision of the arbitrators shall be binding on both parties, and both parties submit themselves to the personal jurisdiction of the courts of Texas, both state and federal, for the entry of judgment confirming the arbitrator's award. Each party shall bear their own costs, including attorney's fees, related to any mediation, conciliation, or arbitration proceeding.

Provided, however, if a dispute results in an award of monetary damages payable by Grace Point, then use of the conciliation, mediation, or arbitration procedure is conditioned upon the Grace Point liability insurer's acceptance of the procedure and monetary award, up to any applicable policy limits.
ARTICLE 2. CHURCH OFFICERS, STAFF, AND COMMITTEES.

Section 1. General. All Grace Point officers, ministerial staff, and committee members shall be Members. Grace Point support staff are not required to be Members. The salary of the Senior Pastor shall be determined by the Elder Board. The salaries of the Pastors and Staff shall be determined by the Senior Pastor. Elders and committee members are not paid salaries.

Section 2. Church Officers. The Grace Point officers ("Officers") shall be the (a) Senior Pastor, (b) Pastors, and (c) Elder Board. All Officers must possess the qualifications expressed in 1 Timothy 3: 1-7 and Titus 1: 6-9; provided however, when applying these qualifications to a female Pastor, it is understood that she serves under the authority of the Senior Pastor and is therefore not teaching, or exercising authority over, men.

(a) Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor must be a man and shall be responsible for leading the Members, Officers, and Staff to perform the appropriate tasks for Grace Point to function as a New Testament church. The Senior Pastor shall be responsible to the Members for teaching them the Holy Bible, shepherding their spiritual care, and overseeing the operation of Grace Point.

(i) Electing a Senior Pastor. If the office of Senior Pastor is vacant, Grace Point shall elect a new Senior Pastor. In this event, the Elder Board shall establish a seven (7) member Senior Pastor Search Committee comprised of (a) three members of the Elder Board, not including the Senior Pastor, (b) three Members, and (c) one Pastor. The Senior Pastor Search Committee, with a maximum of one dissenting committee member, shall present a single nominee for Senior Pastor at a Business Meeting for a secret ballot election. Electing a Senior Pastor shall require a Member Vote.

(ii) Term of Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor shall serve until he resigns or is terminated by the Members. He may offer his resignation at any Worship Service Meeting or Business Meeting.

Termination of Senior Pastor. Termination of a Senior Pastor shall require a Member Vote. A vote regarding termination of a Senior Pastor can only be scheduled upon (a) the recommendation of the Elder Board or (b) written petition signed by at least one-fourth of the Members.

Vacancy of Senior Pastor. If the office of Senior Pastor is vacant, or the Senior Pastor is temporarily incapacitated, either mentally, physically, or spiritually (and this determined by the Elder Board), the Elder Board shall, after consulting with the Pastors, determine how the responsibilities of the Senior Pastor will be carried out in the Senior Pastor's absence.

(b) Pastors. Pastor positions must be approved by the Elder Board before the Senior Pastor may hire a Pastor. The Senior Pastor shall have sole authority in regard to hiring and terminating a Pastor for an approved Pastor position. Pastors shall be responsible to the Senior Pastor for carrying out the ministry of Grace Point. The Senior Pastor shall appoint one of the Pastors to oversee all Grace Point business, property, and financial affairs. He shall serve as the sole custodian of Grace Point records, including, but not limited to, legal documents, accounting records, and a current list of Members. At the close of the fiscal year, he shall present to the Elder Board an annual audit conducted by an independent certified public accountant.
(c) **Elder Board.** The Elder Board shall be comprised of five (5) male Members, who shall not be Pastors, and the Senior Pastor. They are responsible for leading the spiritual and organizational matters of Grace Point, providing biblical accountability for the Senior Pastor, serving as a liaison between the Senior Pastor and Members, serving as Grace Point’s Board of Trustees, and fulfilling any other duties expressly stated in these bylaws.

**Election of Elders.** Elders shall be elected annually, and individually, by secret ballot at a Member Vote. The Senior Pastor shall nominate the initial Elder Board candidates. The Elder Board shall nominate all future candidates. The number of candidates shall always be five (5). The Elder Board shall establish a rotation system ensuring that at least one Elder each year did not serve the previous year. If one of the Elder offices is vacant, the Elder Board shall nominate one candidate to replace the vacant Elder for the remainder of the term. The candidate shall be elected by secret ballot at a Member Vote to be held within two months of the vacancy.

**Term of Elders.** The term of service for Elders shall be one (1) year beginning January 1st each year, with succeeding terms not to exceed five (5) full consecutive terms; provided however, the Senior Pastor serves perpetually. Elders must be individually nominated and elected for each term. An Elder who has served five (5) or fewer full consecutive terms is eligible to serve again for up to five (5) consecutive terms after not serving for one (1) year.

**Termination of Elders.** Termination of an Elder shall require a Member Vote. A vote regarding termination of an Elder can only be scheduled upon (a) the recommendation of the Elder Board or (b) a petition signed by one-fourth of the Members.

**Decisions of Elder Board.** All decisions of the Elder Board, unless otherwise expressed in these bylaws, shall be made after prayerful consideration and by a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of the Elders then serving. Such decisions shall be recorded in minutes of the Elder Board meetings and shall be available to Members upon request.

**Regular Meetings of Elder Board.** The Elder Board shall meet at least monthly. If any Member has a question, comment, or concern regarding Grace Point, that Member can address the Elder Board at its next scheduled meeting.

**Role of Elder Board as Board of Trustees.** Except as otherwise provided herein, the Elder Board shall have the powers granted to the Board of Directors in the Texas Non-Profit Corporation Act.

Section 3. **Church Staff.** Staff positions, both ministerial and support, must be approved by the Elder Board before the Senior Pastor may hire a Staff member. The Senior Pastor shall have sole authority in regard to hiring and terminating a Staff member for an approved Staff position.

Section 4. **Church Committees.** The Elder Board shall use committees to review, study, and make recommendations upon matters that require thoughtful and prayerful inquiry. Committees shall only be formed as expressly stated by the Elder Board. Only Members may serve as committee members. The Elder Board shall select all committee members. The term of service for any committee member shall be the lesser of the length of time taken for the committee to perform its specific function or one (1) year, with succeeding terms not to exceed three (3) consecutive terms. Any committee must have
at least three (3) members to perform its functions. All committee recommendations to the Elder Board shall be by majority vote of the committee. The Elder Board shall take any committee’s recommendation under advisement in making a decision, but shall not be obligated by the recommendation.

ARTICLE 3. MEETINGS

Section 1. Worship Service Meetings. Grace Point shall schedule regular weekly Worship Service Meetings for the worship of Almighty God. Prayer, praise, preaching, instruction, and evangelism shall be among the ingredients of Worship Service Meetings. The Senior Pastor or his designee shall direct the Worship Service Meetings for the Members and guests.

Section 2. Business Meetings. Grace Point shall schedule at least two Business Meetings a year on the church calendar. Other Business Meetings may be scheduled throughout the year upon at least one week’s notice in the Grace Point bulletin, which shall be distributed weekly on Sunday Worship Service Meetings. Notice of any Business Meeting shall include notice of the purposes of the Business Meeting. Business Meetings may only be scheduled by Officers.

Section 3. Quorum. A quorum during any calendar year consists of at least ten (10) percent of the previous calendar year’s average weekly worship hour Bible study attendance by Voting Members. A quorum shall be required for any vote by the Voting Members.

Section 4. Voting. A “Member Vote” is defined as an affirmative vote of three-fourths of the Voting Members present at a Business Meeting. Unless otherwise provided in these bylaws, all questions shall be settled by a majority vote of the Voting Members present at a Business Meeting.

Section 5. Parliamentary Rules. Grace Point meetings shall be conducted in an informal, fair, and democratic process. The provisions of “Robert’s Rules of Order, Revised” shall be the authority for procedure and shall be utilized when necessary to govern meetings, except where they are inconsistent with these bylaws.

ARTICLE 4. CHURCH FINANCES.

Section 1. Source of Finances. Grace Point shall be supported by the tithes and offerings of Members, as directed by Scripture and the Holy Spirit. It is understood that Grace Point membership involves financial obligation to support Christ’s church and its causes with systematic, proportionate, and sacrificial gifts. Members shall annually be provided the opportunity to make commitments of financial support to Grace Point.

Section 2. Budget. The Elder Board, in consultation with the Pastors, shall prepare and submit an annual budget to Grace Point for approval by Member Vote. The budget shall consist of all projected income and expenses.

Section 3. Accounting Procedures. Grace Point accounting procedures shall follow generally accepted practices for fund accounting.
Section 4. Fiscal Year. Grace Point’s fiscal year shall be January 1st through December 31st.

ARTICLE 5. AMENDMENTS

Amendments to these bylaws shall require a Member Vote, provided each amendment shall be provided in writing as part of the required notice for a Business Meeting.
GRACE POINT CHURCH
STRATEGIC MINISTRY STAFF

SENIOR PASTOR, JEFF HARRIS — Responsible for the overall vision of Grace Point Church. He is the lead Pastor and serves as the Shepherd of Grace Point Church. He is the primary leader, visionary and teacher. All other positions directly or indirectly report to the Senior Pastor.

EXECUTIVE PASTOR, JAMYE CAPPADONNA — Works closely with each pastor to fulfill their roles in accomplishing Grace Point’s mission. Responsible for the business affairs of the church, including the supervision of support staff and the appropriation of allocated resources.

CONNECTION PASTOR, DAVE GALBRAITH — Responsible for the assimilation of people new to Grace Point and those not yet relationally connected to Grace Point as their local Body of Believers.

CALLING PASTOR, JO IN WALTERS — Responsible for helping those at Grace Point fulfill their calling by using their spiritual gifts in the church and going local at least once a year and global once in five years.

COMMUNITY PASTOR, MIKE SHARROW — Responsible to engage people in community through 360 Life Groups. Responsible for the Marriage and Family Ministry and the Give Ministry.

PASTOR OF WORSHIP AND PRODUCTION ARTS, THOMAS IVEY — Responsible for the development and implementation Production elements (audio, video, lighting, etc) and programming that supports Grace Point Church’s Purpose, Characteristics of Full Devotion and C.O.R.E Values.

PASTOR OF WORSHIP AND MUSIC ARTS, JUSTIN McCARTNEY — Responsible for the development and implementation Worship music and programming that supports Grace Point Church’s Purpose, Characteristics of Full Devotion and C.O.R.E Values.

CHILDREN’S PASTOR, FAITH HERRERA — Responsible for the development and implementation of the Children’s Ministry strategy that supports Grace Point Church’s Purpose, Characteristics of Full Devotion and C.O.R.E Values.

COLLEGE PASTOR, ANDY BROWN — Responsible for the development and implementation of the Student Ministry strategy that supports Grace Point Church’s Purpose, Characteristics of Full Devotion and C.O.R.E Values.

STUDENT MINISTRIES PASTOR, JOHN DAVISON — Responsible for the development and implementation of the Student Ministry strategy that supports Grace Point Church’s Purpose, Characteristics of Full Devotion and C.O.R.E Values.

CHILDREN’S MINISTRY ASSOCIATE, MELODY CARDENAS — Responsible for the development and implementation of the Children’s Ministry strategy that supports Grace Point Church’s Purpose, Characteristics of Full Devotion and C.O.R.E Values with specific emphasis on Special Events for Children and their families.
APPENDIX C

GRACE POINT CHURCH "YOUR STORY"

YOUR STORY

Name: ______________________________________ Today’s Date: ________________

Phone: ___________________________ email ______________________________________

Have you been baptized by immersion? Yes □ No □ Date of baptism ________________

What church were you affiliated with when you were baptized? _________________________

Would you like to be baptized? Yes □ No □ Date you’d like to be baptized ________________

1) What was your life like before you made the decision to exchange your life for life in Christ?

List bullet points of your story here

   I was...
   *
   *
   *
   *

Write your story here

   I was...

2) How and when did you Exchange your life for life in Jesus Christ (How and when did you decide to follow Christ?)?

3) What is your life like, since you exchanged your life for life in Jesus Christ?

List bullet points of your story here

   Now I am...
   *
   *
   *
   *

Write your story here

   Now I am...

Write your story in one sentence:

“I was __________________...now I am __________________.”

☐ I would like to talk to someone about how to exchange my life for life in Christ.

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APPENDIX D

GRACE POINT CHURCH SAMPLE MINISTRY DESCRIPTIONS HANDBOOK PAGE

ENGAGE IN COMMUNITY

SEEDS Pre-School Ministry Shepherd (4 year old – Kindler)
SEEDS Shepherds serve Pre-K and Kindergarten preschool children by providing a Christ-centered environment as they learn about His love for them. Children this age are in a major transition. They are at the stage of asking those “through” questions and will continue to grow in their knowledge that Jesus Christ is their Savior and wants a relationship with them. The SEEDS’s – Kinder Ministry is a shared ministry effort with the SEEDS Rotation Teachers.

Hospitability: Dennis & Arlene P. / 724-979-8429

P.T.O. Parent: Amy L. / 724-979-2325

SEEDS Pre-School Ministry Rotation Teachers
A SEEDS Rotation Teacher needs to be love and/or talent in either storytelling, music, or khỏi is to share God's Word with preschool-aged children. A teacher for each class will rotate in and out of the classroom so that each group of children will spend about 15 minutes experiencing the story and concept through one of the three areas. Church membership is required to serve on this team.

Teaching, Entertainment, Serve/Help: Leadership, Administration

Point Person: April Horner / 724-115-0316

Crosswalk For Kids Grade School Ministry Shepherd
Crosswalk is our Sunday morning Bible Study for children in grades 1-6. Our workshop rotations allow children to learn and retell Biblical concepts through a variety of learning styles. Teachers prepare our lessons per rotation and teach to a different age group each week for four to six weeks. This is a shared ministry effort with the Crosswalk Shepherds.

Teaching, Entertainment, Serve/Help: Leadership, Administration

Point Person: Cindy Baker / 724-425-3637

Crosswalk for Kids Grade School Ministry Rotation Teachers
Crosswalk Shepherds have the precious task of making a heart-to-heart connection with the 1st - 6th grade kids in their “flock” – Shepherds and their children come to a different workshop each Sunday in 9:00 or 9:45 am, learning the same Biblical concept taught by Crosswalk Rotation Teachers. Church membership is required to serve on this team.

Hospitability: Dennis & Arlene P. / 724-979-8429

Ministry Leader: Vanessa Miller / 814-773-3550

Wednesday Night Ministry

Breakout
Breakout is a dynamic weekly experience led by adults and youth seeking to grow children in 3rd through 6th grade in spiritual maturity through interactive games, small group discussions and large group presentations of Biblical truths.

Kid’s Quest
Kid’s Quest is a weekly small group discipleship program for children 6 years old through 6th grade. Kid’s Quest introduces children to God’s Word and teaches them how to apply Bible truths to their lives, helping them remember what they have learned through songs, crafts, games, and individual homework assignments with the leader. Parents play a key role in the ministry as they work with their children to complete weekly homework assignments.

Teaching, Entertainment, Serve/Help: Leadership, Administration

Point Person: Darla Carter / 724-975-2279

Great Expectations
This outreach group is designed to minister to separated, divorced, and single parents by providing support, prayer and encouragement.

Administration: Creative Communications, Education, Serve/Help, Talent, Mercy, Hospitality, Serve/Help, Leadership

Ministry Leader: Julie Dement / 724-975-2279

183
I have a Ministry Idea...
Grace Point Church, San Antonio, Texas

Your Name ___________________________________ Phone Number _____________________

Email ___________________________ Today’s Date _______________________

1. Please briefly describe your ministry idea.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

2. What financial resources are required? ________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

3. How will the financial resources be obtained? □ Church Budget □ Fundraising
   □ Donations □ Other _____________________________

4. How many people will it take to complete your ministry idea? ____________________

5. Is this an on-going ministry or a one-time event? ________________________________

6. Explain how this ministry idea helps fulfill our Purpose as a Church? _______________

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

7. What Characteristic of Full Devotion to Jesus Christ do you believe this ministry idea supports? □ Grace □ Growth □ Gifts □ Give □ Go

8. Are you making a commitment to create and carry out this ministry idea under the direction of a Ministry Staff Member? □ Yes □ No

9. Please provide any additional information you would like for us to know about this ministry idea. ____________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
## APPENDIX E
### GRACE POINT CHURCH PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

### PERSONAL INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Today’s Date / /</th>
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<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home Phone</td>
<td>Cell Phone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email Address</td>
<td>Work Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>Position</td>
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- Married [ ] Single [ ] Divorced [ ] Widowed [ ]
- Spouse’s Name: Birth date / / Anniversary / /

### CHILDREN’S INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of child</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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- Does this child attend Grace Point? [ ] Yes [ ] No
- Has this child made a Profession of Faith? [ ] Yes [ ] No
- Has this child been baptized by immersion? [ ] Yes [ ] No
- Where was this child baptized? Date Baptized

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- Has this child been baptized by immersion? [ ] Yes [ ] No
- Where was this child baptized? Date Baptized
DISCOVERY PERSONAL ACTION PLAN

Please complete the following after receiving instructions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRACE</th>
<th>I will share God's grace with others and have completed the following:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ YOUR STORY Testimony Sheet □ I would like more information about BAPTISM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ I am interested in the following 360 Life Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ I am already participating in this 360 Life Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ I am interested in participating in this 360 Life Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ I am interested in starting a 360 Life Group.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GROWTH</th>
<th>My Relationship To God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIFTS</th>
<th>My Relationship To The Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gifts</th>
<th>I will serve on the following Servant Team(s) based upon my S.H.A.P.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Servant Team</td>
<td>Point Person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My Top Three Spiritual Gifts Are:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIVE</th>
<th>My Relationship To My Finances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Give</th>
<th>I will financially support the ministries of Grace Point in a God-honoring manner.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Systematic: □ Weekly □ 1st &amp; 15th □ Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proportionate: Specific Percentage % or Amount $</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GO</th>
<th>My Relationship To The World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GO</th>
<th>I will take the Gospel around the world. From the Missions Opportunities List, please indicate your interest in:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Local Missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global Missions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Full Devotion To Jesus Christ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Name of the last church you attended

Name and address of the last church you were a member of (if different)

Discovery Guide Name

Discovery Guide Phone: Discovery Guide Email

Date Discovery Class is completed: ___/___/___
APPENDIX F

GRACE POINT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Grace Point Church Membership Covenant

- As a member of Grace Point Church, I will strive to fulfill our purpose:
  To lead unsaved people to a relationship of full devotion to Jesus Christ.

- As a member of Grace Point Church, I will strive to become a fully devoted follower
  of Jesus Christ through a commitment to the Characteristics of Full Devotion (G5):

  The GRACE Covenant is a commitment to relationship evangelism by building relationships and living out the
grace that God has appropriated to you. I will pray daily for those on my Impact Card to give their lives
to Christ. I will share a verbal witness. I will invite them to church. Ephesians 6:18; Matthew 28:19-20

  The GROWTH Covenant is a commitment to grow in your relationship with God through our common beliefs,
virtues and disciplines in a 360 Community and in 360 Discipleship Relationships. Acts 2:42

  The GIFTS Covenant is a commitment to know and use your spiritual gifts through a Servant Group.
  Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Corinthians 12, 14; Romans 12:3

  The GIVE Covenant is a commitment to be a responsible manager of the financial resources that God has
untrusted to you. Understanding that everything belongs to God, I commit to offer a tangible expression
of my love for God by giving to the church in a systematic, sacrificial and proportionate manner.
2 Corinthians 9:10, 9:5-6; Luke 9:36; Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; Hebrews 7:1-10; Galatians 6:6-10; Malachi 3:7-12

  The GO Covenant is a commitment to take the message of God's love and grace to people all around the
world. I commit to be involved in at least one local mission opportunity every year and one global
mission trip within the next five years. Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19-20

- As a member of Grace Point Church, I will strive to live out our C.O.R.E. values:

  COMMITMENT
  Consistently displaying the life of Christ in sacrificial devotion to God in the service of others.
  Philippians 2:1-17

  OWNERSHIP
  “Show up surrendered!”
  “Take it!”
  “Mind the gap!”
  “Choose joy... Give joy!”
  “Lead the way!”

  RELATIONSHIP
  Responsibly creating and carrying out meaningful ministry in an excellent way. Mark 2:3-4
  Ruthlessly pursuing authentic interaction, selflessly putting others first and passionately loving
  from a point of grace. Philippians 2:3

  ENCOURAGEMENT
  Joyfully and enthusiastically encouraging others in their pursuit of God. 2 Thessalonians 5:11

  I affirm and commit to the Grace Point Church Covenant:

  Signature  Print Your Name
WE ARE A CHURCH

The church is the life and work of Jesus continued in His people, not a building or a series of events. The biblical reality is that we are the church together. God is at work in the world through His church, and The Austin Stone Community Church is committed to spending itself for His purpose and His glory. Our vision is “To be a New Testament Church existing for the supremacy of the Name and Purpose of Jesus Christ”.

ON MISSION

A missional church is a church on-task, a diverse community of people pursuing a single purpose together. We are a church dedicated to being a part of God’s redemptive work in our city and around the globe. A missional church is not so much about a clever mission statement, an air-tight strategic plan, or a full slate of entertaining events. We will be a missional church only when we are full of missional people.

FOR THE CITY AND THE WORLD

God is calling us, by His power, to build a great city, renewed and redeemed by a gospel movement, by being a church for the city of Austin that labors to advance the gospel throughout the nations. Being a church for this city is a catalyst to being a church for the nations. This means we must continue striving for the advancement of the kingdom locally and globally, and that our work is far from complete. We seek to continue moving
forward in equipping and mobilizing disciples to transform the city and then the world both in word and in deed. Toward the end of a Gospel movement, we also must catalyze and cooperate with individuals, other churches and organizations who labor for this same goal of transformation.

PARTNERS ARE VITAL

We believe that God is calling people in Austin, Texas, to partner with us as a local community of believers to do our part in the mission of God together.

PARTNERSHIP IS A COMMITMENT

As we read the New Testament, we see that believers on-mission Worship Christ, Live in Community, Get Trained for Ministry, and Make Disciples. If you decide to partner with us, we will ask you to affirm a series of commitments centered on these four elements of missional life. These commitments are not our definition of Christianity; they are commitments that describe what it means to be a partner in The Austin Stone’s mission as a church for the city and the nations.

Eldership and Leadership at The Austin Stone

The Austin Stone is an elder-led church, which means that we believe that the church should be overseen by a plurality of men who serve as spiritual leaders, as we see in the Ephesian church in Acts 20 and elsewhere in the New Testament. These elders are men who have been tested and approved, and meet the qualifications that we see in both 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 2.
The elders are charged with three primary tasks at The Austin Stone:

- Guard the doctrine of the church, which is articulated in our Affirmation of Faith
- Govern main vision and mission of the church
- Exercise church discipline according to Matthew 18:15-20 and other Scriptures

The Austin Stone’s staff members of The Austin Stone carry out the necessary strategies which proceed from The Austin Stone’s mission and vision. The pastoral staff members are tactical leaders, whom God has called under the authority of our elders, to practically implement the vision in a variety of different ways. Additionally, our staff team is called to be equippers of the saints for ministry, fulfilling the various roles mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-12.
4 Core Values

Core Value 1: Worship Christ

What is the worship of Christ?
A life of worship is lived to honor and exalt God. We worship Christ by accurately representing and reflecting the character and beauty of God to our world. Mankind was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and when our character and actions reflect the name and purpose of Christ, we honor God’s original design and intentions for us as a people.

Why do we worship Christ?
Everyone worships something; we worship because we were made that way. We worship what we treasure - the things that we value the most. We only worship things that are greater than ourselves, or that we at least perceive to be greater than ourselves. We worship Christ because He is the only one truly worthy of such a high level of devotion and affection, because “in Him, the fullness of God dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9).

How do we worship Christ?
We worship Christ by making Him King and Master of every aspect of our lives. This is what it looks like to accurately represent the character and beauty of God. Such worship places God in His rightful place as God and us in our rightful place as not god. The worship of anything or anyone else elevates the created over our Creator. God has made
us to worship Him in two ways specifically - personally and in community.

**Opportunities to worship Christ at The Austin Stone:**

- Corporate Worship
- Prayer Services *(the 1st Tuesday night of every month)*
- Communion *(celebrated in Corporate Worship, at First Tuesday Prayer, and in Missional Communities)*
- Baptism *(celebrated at Family Reunion in Fall and Spring)*
- Giving *(Tithe & Offering)*
- Participate in our Scripture reading plan.
- Personal prayer.

**Partnership Commitments to Worship Christ:**

- **Habitually spend time with God through the reading of scripture and prayer.**
  The heart behind this commitment is the knowledge that you can’t worship what you don’t know. God has primarily chosen to reveal himself through his written Word. Through being in the Word, we are reminded of our heavenly citizenship…we continue developing a Biblical worldview. And it is through prayer that we experience intimacy with the Lord as we adore Him, confession our sin, thank him and take our needs before Him. *(John 5:39, Acts 17:11, 1 Timothy 4:13, Revelation 1:3, Luke 18:1, 1 Thessalonians 5:17)*

- **Follow the example of Christ in my personal holiness.**
  To be holy means to be set apart, as God’s people, from the cultural norm. The heart behind this commitment is to begin the discussion of how the Lord is changing us into the likeness of His Son. *(1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4; 1 Peter 1:14-16)*

- **Financially supporting the mission of this church, starting with a tithe (10%) of my income to The Austin Stone.**
  The heart behind this commitment is to be a people who value Christ above all else. Where your treasure is, there is your heart *(Matthew. 6:19-21)*. In short, tithe is one-tenth (10%), while offering is anything above a tithe and is determined by personal conviction. We learn from Genesis 14:20 that Abraham, even before the law of Moses was put into place, gave a tithe. It was an acknowledgement that God is the owner of everything, and we are the stewards of some things. Yet, now that believers are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, we have already been given every spiritual blessing. Because of this, we are free to give generously beyond 10 percent, which is an offering to the Lord. We desire for you to be healthy in every area of your life, so that you can experience the fullness of being a part of God’s plan. *(Genesis 14:20; Psalm 24:1; Matthew 6:19-21; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:7)*

- **Be or have been baptized as a believer.**
  The heart of this commitment is to obey the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19. Baptism provides us the opportunity to publicly identify with Christ – both in his death as we are immersed into the water, and his resurrection as we are brought
up out of the water. At The Austin Stone, we follow believer’s baptism by immersion. (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:4)

• **Participate in communion with The Austin Stone.**
One of the privileges of the local church is to participate in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, or communion. Communion is offered during the 1st Tuesday Prayer meetings each month. (Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 11:24-26)

---

**Core Value 2: Live in Community**

**What does it mean to live in community?**

To live in community together means to be:

- **A Family:** Like brothers and sisters, we seek to accept and love one another. Just like in a home, at the end of the day, we exist to support one another in loving and generous ways.

- **A Hospital:** We have all been wounded – spiritually and emotionally. Biblical community is a place for honesty and healing.

- **A School:** We all bring experiences and gifts to the table that others can learn from.

- **A Body:** We all have different talents and abilities. We are not sufficient to live solitary lives. We are all a part of the same body, designed to work together to build each other up.

- **An Army:** We do not simply exist to have our own needs met. We exist to be on mission with our friends, family, co-workers and neighbors, locally with the poor and oppressed, and globally with our strategic partners to the reached and unreached of the world.
Why should we live in community?

As we see throughout Acts, especially in chapter 2:42-28 and chapter 5:42, it is the New Testament model for believers to meet in large and small gatherings. Like these early believers, we must be committed to living out the “one another” verses we find littered throughout the New Testament. Not only is community the pattern of New Testament believers, but it also is the very nature of our Triune God – The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have existed eternally in a state of community. We are invited to participate in that unity (John 17:21), and when we live in community with one another, we are displaying the glory of God to the world.

How do we live in community?

We live in community by pursuing relationships with one another. This is a process that takes intentional time and work, much like any successful relationship in life. We live in community by opening our homes to one another, by opening our lives to one another, by serving alongside one another, and by striving to expand the Kingdom of God together over time. The primary task of living in community with one another is striving to share and encourage one another with the Gospel.

Opportunities to live in community at The Austin Stone:

- Missional Community (see austinstone.org/what/community)
- Family Reunion and other events (celebrated every Spring and Fall)
- Service Teams (see austinstone.org/serve)

Partnership Commitments to live in community:

- Actively pursue biblical community within The Austin Stone.
  The heart of this commitment is that Scripture is full of references to the “one anothers,” and we acknowledge that a healthy New Testament believer is connected to community within the local church. Community is not only
necessary, but it is modeled within the Trinity. (John 17; Acts 5:42; Hebrews 10:24-25)

- **Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit.**
  The heart behind this commitment is that Christian unity is the first and best testimony of Christ to the world. It is so important, that Christ prayed for the unity of believers during his last days on Earth. (John 17)

- **Not gossip, but instead use my words to give grace to those who hear them.**
  Gossip is cancer to unity. It is not only hurtful to the individual; it is hurtful to the testimony of the church. (James 1:26; James 3:5-18)

**Core Value 3: Get Trained**

**What does it mean to get trained for ministry?**

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, all of us are saints and ministers of the gospel, not just a select few individuals. If every saint is called to be a minister of the Gospel, then every saint must pursue training and discipline to be an *effective* minister. God has given some believers in the church the task of equipping the saints, so that the whole body might participate in the work of the ministry, but it is the call of every Christian to participate in God’s work through the church.

**Why do we get trained for ministry?**

At the fall of man in Genesis 3, all of our human faculties were depraved—our hearts were corrupted, our minds were corrupted, and our strength was corrupted. Having been redeemed by Christ, these faculties are in the process of being restored as we are trained to use them for the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

**How do we help you get trained for ministry?**

Our purpose as a church is to train and develop, not to educate. The Get Trained Ministry
of the Austin Stone exists to help you restore and use all of these redeemed faculties. In short, we aim to Stir the Heart, Renew the Mind and Serve the Body.

**Stir the Heart:** The mind is a servant of the heart. You may know a truth, but if your heart doesn’t love it, your mind will justify the action your heart desires.

(Ephesians 4:17-19)

**Renew the Mind:** Our minds must be renewed so that we can think rightly about God. (Romans 12:2)

**Serve the Body:** We are missional. We are called to love and serve...we are trained to become the kind of people who love God with all of our heart, soul and mind and, out of that, love others as themselves . (John 13:4-5)

**Opportunities to get trained for ministry at The Austin Stone:**

- Get Trained Classes (Fall, Spring, and Summer terms)
- Missional Community
- Serve the Church (*see austinstone.org/serve*)
- Pursue Discipleship Relationships

**Partnership Commitments to get trained:**

- **Serve the body of The Austin Stone.**
  The heart behind this commitment is that the essence of partnership is found in service. Missional people serve the Lord by serving others. When we serve through the gifts the Spirit has given us, we are fulfilling our purpose in blessing the church and others around us. When we serve with sacrifice, we are truly modeling the message of Christ.
  (Matthew 20:26-28; Mark 10:45; Acts 2:42; Galatians 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10)

- **Get trained for ministry with The Austin Stone.**
  The heart behind this commitment is that at the fall in Genesis 3, our hearts, our minds and our bodies fell away from the holiness of God. As a result, we must stir our hearts (affections) to love Christ more than anything else, restore our minds to know God (his purposes and his ways), and also serve the Body for the sake of unity in making Christ known to a lost world. This does not necessarily mean that you are in a Get Trained class every semester. We are more concerned that you
are pursuing ways of engaging your heart and mind to love Christ more, and as a result, you are serving out of your giftedness. (Romans 12:2; James 1:22-25)

- **Not teach beliefs contrary to our Affirmation of Faith.**
  The heart behind this commitment is that our teaching teams would preserve the unity of the Spirit by not teaching contrary to our Affirmation of Faith. (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

- **Build discipleship relationships with other Christians.**
  The word disciple means “a pupil, a student, and a follower”. In other words, the heart behind this commitment is to build relationships that center on learning to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We suggest that you look around within the areas where you are currently serving, and ask the Lord to show you someone of the same gender who would be a faithful person to shepherd you into Christ likeness. (Hebrews 13:7; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9; 2 Timothy 2:1-2)

---

**Core Value 4: Make Disciples**

**What does it mean to Make Disciples?**

To make disciples is literally to make learners. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 gives us a very clear picture of what making disciples looks like - "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’"

This means living “on mission” personally, locally and globally, from close to far as we see in Acts 1:8 - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

**Why do we Make Disciples?**

We make disciples because we want to make much of Christ. We believe whole heartedly that Christ deserves as much worship as possible, and as long as people are not
worshipping Christ we still have work to do. We long for the day that we can complete the task that God has given the church in Matthew 24:14, to preach the Gospel to all the nations, and hasten the return of Christ.

**How do we make disciples?**

We make disciples by being a witness of Christ (Acts 1:8), and by baptizing and teaching people to obey the commands of Christ (Matthew 28:18-20) in three spheres of our lives.

**Personally:** Get to know a neighbor or colleague at work, or someone at school. Begin to develop caring relationships with those around you. Begin to pray and look for opportunities to share the story of God’s work in your life.

**Locally:** Get involved in ministry within our city, and work for the restoration and redemption of Austin.

**Globally:** Participation on this level can take a number of different forms, which are summarized below.

- Goer: Physically present, laboring on the mission field
- Prayer: Intercede on behalf of all nations and ask God to will and work redemptively in our world
- Sender: Financially support goers
- Welcomer: Embrace and befriend international peoples living in America
- Mobilizer: Develop a global perspective and call others to action

**Opportunities to make disciples with The Austin Stone:**

- Engage in one of many opportunities to serve in the city (austinstone.org/serve)
- Get involved in short term missions
- Join an advocacy team for a long term missionary
- Join an international or local network (Friends of Turkey, Friends of St. Johns)
- Pray for the nations we have adopted as our own (Turkey, North Africa, Dominican Republic)
- Welcome international students and refugees in Austin

*For all opportunities, see austinstone.org/what/make_disciples*
Partnership Commitments to Make Disciples:

- **Pursue intentional, transparent relationships with non-Christians in my sphere of influence.**
  
The heart behind this commitment is to be a church full of missional people. For many, being missional means you simply have to walk across the street. The Austin Stone wants to take the name of Christ to this city, as well as to the nations, and that will only happen when we reach out in our spheres of influence and spend time with those around us. (Acts 1:8)

- **Be involved with the living out and sharing of the gospel both locally and globally with The Austin Stone.**
  
  Similar to the commitment above, the heart behind this commitment is to be a church full of missional people who long to take the name of Christ to the ends of the earth. Living out the gospel locally is addressed above. However, we are all called to be a part of the Great Commission and participate in reaching all of the nations in some way.
  
  (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8)
OUR AFFIRMATION OF FAITH
We Affirm That...

THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD, fully inspired and without error in the original manuscripts, written by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and that it has supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct.

THERE IS ONE TRUE, GOOD, AND LIVING GOD who is of one substance, power, and eternal purpose yet eternally existing in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

GOD CREATED ALL THINGS visible and invisible for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness. Both Adam and Eve were created equally in the image of God and without sin.

ADAM AND EVE SINNED (betrayed God) in eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They thereby incurred not only physical death but also spiritual death which is separation from God.

GOD CHOOSES, by His providence and eternal counsel, some persons to life and salvation before the foundation of the world. Whoever comes by the drawing of God through the invoking of the Holy Spirit Jesus Christ will not cast out.
THE HOLY SPIRIT EMPOWERS SPIRITUAL GIFTS as God wills to His children. These gifts are designed to testify to the presence of the Kingdom and distributed to equip the saints for worship and ministry to build up the body of Jesus Christ.

THE CHURCH consists of all who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for their eternal salvation and is the spiritual body of Christ. This includes all the redeemed of the ages, believers from among all peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation.
APPENDIX H

AUSTIN STONE COMMUNITY CHURCH MINISTRY PARTNER COMMITMENT FORM

As a partner of The Austin Stone Community Church, I commit to being on mission with her vision and strategy. Specifically, I commit to Worship Christ, Live in Community, Get Trained, and Make Disciples with this body under her leadership, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and through the grace found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As a partner of The Austin Stone Community Church, I will:

WORSHIP CHRIST

Habitually spend time with God through the reading of scripture and prayer.

Follow the example of Christ in my personal holiness.

Financially supporting the mission of this church, starting with a tithe (10%) of my income to The Austin Stone.

Be or have been baptized as a believer.

Participate in communion with The Austin Stone.

LIVE IN COMMUNITY

Actively pursue biblical community within The Austin Stone.

Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit.

Not gossip, but instead use my words to give grace to those who hear them.

GET TRAINED

Serve the body of The Austin Stone.

Get trained for ministry with The Austin Stone.

Not teach beliefs contrary to our Affirmation of Faith.

Build discipleship relationships with other Christians.
MAKE DISCIPLES

Pursue intentional, transparent relationships with non-Christians in my sphere of influence.

Be involved with the living out and sharing of the gospel both locally and globally with The Austin Stone.

I recognize that these commitments are not requirements for being a Christian, but rather what it looks like to truly partner with The Austin Stone Community Church. The motive of these commitments is to shape and encourage Godly character in our people. As such, I commit to meeting yearly with a church leader for follow-up, encouragement, and help in these pursuits.

NAME:___ ADDRESS:___ EMAIL:___ PHONE:___ SIGNATURE:___
APPENDIX I

AUSTIN STONE COMMUNITY CHURCH MISSIONAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT

**Worship Christ**

I am experiencing the presence and power of God through prayer in my everyday life ............... 1 2 3 4 5
I am faithfully attending my small group and weekend services to worship God.......................... 1 2 3 4 5
I am feeding myself consistently from God’s Word so that I can bless others ............................ 1 2 3 4 5
I am habitually spending time with God through the reading of scripture and prayer ............. 1 2 3 4 5
I am following the example of Christ in my personal holiness ............................................. 1 2 3 4 5
I am participating in communion ................................................................................................. 1 2 3 4 5

Worship Christ Total _____

**Live in Community**

I am actively pursuing biblical community .................................................................................. 1 2 3 4 5
I am deepening my understanding of and friendship with God in community with others........... 1 2 3 4 5
I am growing in my ability both to share and to show my love to others .................................... 1 2 3 4 5
I am willing to share my real needs for prayer and support from others .................................... 1 2 3 4 5
I am resolving conflict constructively and am willing to forgive others ..................................... 1 2 3 4 5
I see myself as someone who cares for others in my group ....................................................... 1 2 3 4 5
I am diligent to not gossip, but instead use my words to give grace to those who hear ............. 1 2 3 4 5

Live in Community Total _____

**Get Trained for Ministry**

I am growing in my knowledge of the Word of God ................................................................. 1 2 3 4 5
I am learning more about the character of God ........................................................................ 1 2 3 4 5
I am discovering and developing my Spiritual Gifts for ministry ............................................ 1 2 3 4 5
I am regularly asking God to show me opportunities to serve others...................................... 1 2 3 4 5
I am involved in my small group by sharing some group role or responsibility ....................... 1 2 3 4 5
I am building discipleship relationships with other believers .................................................. 1 2 3 4 5

Get Trained Total _____

205
Make Disciples

I am pursuing intentional, transparent relationships with non-Christians in my sphere of influence 1 2 3 4 5

I am asking God to give me opportunities to share the gospel .......................................................... 1 2 3 4 5

I am identifying the mission that God has called me to ........................................................................ 1 2 3 4 5

I am investing my time in another person or group who needs to know Christ personally ........... 1 2 3 4 5

I am involved sharing the gospel locally to the poor and oppressed ............................................. 1 2 3 4 5

I am involved sharing the gospel to unreached people groups globally ............................................. 1 2 3 4 5

Make Disciples Total ______

Total:

0-5 JUST BEGINNING

5-10 FAIR

10:15 GETTING GOING

15-20 VERY GOOD

20-25 WELL DEVELOPED

Optional Exercise: Have your friend, spouse, group leader, parent(s) and/or one additional Christian friend fill out a copy of this form before you complete the Missional Health Plan.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Finke, Roger. “Church Membership in America: Trends and Explanations.” Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research (Quarter 2 2006).


