

Lakeshore City Church

Church Membership Declarations

Statement of Purpose: This document was created to declare and teach Lakeshore City Church's position and practice regarding church membership.

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Section 1

Defining a Christian

“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised”.

-2 Corinthians 5:14-15

- a) A Christian is one who has repented of his or her sin (Mark 1:15). Sin is the breaking of God’s Law, falling short of moral perfection, as was set forth in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; 1 John 3:4). The punishment for sin is physical as well as spiritual death – an eternity of experiencing God’s wrath in Hell (Matthew 3:7, 5:22, 7:13, 8:12). All are guilty of sin because all have broken God’s Law (Romans 3:23). Repentance is the acknowledging of, seeking forgiveness for, and the turning away from sin (Acts 3:19).
- b) A Christian is an individual who has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ. This faith is demonstrated by fully trusting in God’s word and promises, as is written in Scripture. A Christian is one who does not merely believe in his or her head that Christ died for his or her sins, but is completely constrained by that reality – the truth presses in, grips and holds a Christian and impels and controls the Christian (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). A Christian has complete faith that Jesus was sent to pay the penalty for his or her sin. He bore the weight of God’s wrath on His shoulders while being crucified and then resurrected from the dead on the third day in defeat of death (Romans 3:21-26).
- c) Christians are those who no longer live for themselves, but live for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Christians are described as slaves of Christ (Ephesians 6:6; 1 Peter 2:16), who are completely surrendered to the will of the Father and understand that His will for their lives is sanctification, the process of being made into the image of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Christians are commanded to present their bodies as living sacrifices by not conforming to the world, but being transformed by the renewing of the mind to be fully committed to Christ’s will (Romans 12:1-2). Living for Christ brings an understanding that all things, good or bad, are the fulfillment of His desire for our sanctification and are thus designed for our benefit (Romans 8:28).
- d) Christians are those who “bear good fruit” - actions that demonstrate our understanding, love, and application of Scripture to our daily life. The Bible states that any who do not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into fire (Matthew 7:21). It is Christ’s will that we bear much fruit to God’s glory (John 15:8). Christians are called to do good works and proclaim the Gospel in order to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:11; Matthew 5:16, 28:16-20).

Section 2

Defining Membership and the Local Church

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit”.

– 1 Corinthians 12:12-13

“For as in one body, we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

- Romans 12:4-5

- a) When an individual is saved through repentance of his or her sinful nature and puts his or her faith in Jesus Christ, he or she becomes a member of the body of Christ. The body of Christ does not consist of a single member, but rather consists of many members united in their love for Christ and their desire for Christ’s name to be glorified (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).
- b) Church membership is the opportunity to become part of a local expression of the body of Christ. Such membership “lives out” commitment to the church, in which Christ has commanded each Christian to love one another (Hebrews 10:25), to serve the body using the spiritual gifts given by God (Romans 12:4-8), to confess sins to one another (James 5:16), to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10), and to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2).
 - 1) The local expression of the body of Christ is known as the local church; a group of Christians who regularly gather in Christ’s name in order to affirm and oversee one another’s membership in the Kingdom of God through the preaching and proclaiming of the Gospel and of Gospel ordinances (baptism and communion).
 - 2) Church members gather regularly to declare their highest allegiance to Christ (Acts 4:23-36) and publicly identify with Him through baptism and communion (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 11:26-29). The local church is the institution authorized by Christ to pronounce the Gospel (Matthew 28:16-20), affirm members of His body (Matthew 28:19), oversee the discipleship of those members (Matthew 28:20), and to expose those who threaten that body through false doctrine or deception (Romans 16:17-18).
- c) Church membership is the formal relationship between a church and a Christian, characterized by the church’s affirmation of his or her conversion and the oversight of that Christian’s discipleship. This membership requires the Christian to submit to living out his or her discipleship in the care of that church while committed to the health of that church.

- d) A church member is a person who has been publicly and officially recognized and affirmed as a Christian by the local church and who submits to the authority of that local church. He or she is responsible for the health of the local church physically (serving, giving, etc.) and spiritually (discipleship, accountability, prayer, etc.).

Section 3

The Biblical Case for Local Church Membership

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”.

-Acts 2:42

The biblical foundation for church membership permeates the New Testament. This biblical basis can be seen most clearly in A) the example of the early church, B) the existence of church government, C) the exercise of church discipline, D) the exhortation to mutual edification.

a) The Example of the Early Church

- 1) In the early church, when one believed in Christ, he or she committed to the local church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and subsequently added to the church body (Acts 2:41, 47; Acts 5:14). More than simply living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining together formally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, meeting the needs of fellow believers, and prayer (Acts 2:42).
- 2) The establishment of local churches is recorded in Scripture. They are namely mentioned based on the city or region of their location (Galatians 1:2b; Ephesians 1:1b; Philippians 1:1b; Colossians 1:2a; 1 Thessalonians 1:1b). Many New Testament epistles were written to these churches. These New Testament epistles reveal and demonstrate the Lord’s design that believers are committed to a local assembly. There is also evidence in the New Testament that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Timothy 5:9), there may have also have been a list of members that grew as people were saved (Acts 2:41, 47; Acts 5:14). In fact, when a believer moved to another city, his or her church often wrote a letter of commendation to his or her new church (Acts 18:27; Romans 16:1; Colossians 4:10; 2 Corinthians 3:1-2).

- 3) In the book of Acts, much of the terminology fits only with the concept of formal church membership. Phrases such as “the whole congregation” (6:5), “the church in Jerusalem” (8:1), “the disciples in Jerusalem” (9:26), “in every church” (14:23), “the whole church” (15:17), and “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20:17), all reveal a recognizable church membership with well-defined boundaries (Hebrews 10:25).

b) The Existence of Church Government

- 1) The consistent pattern throughout the New Testament establishes that a plurality of elders was to oversee each local body of believers. The specific duties given to those elders presuppose a clearly defined group of church members who are under their care.
 - A) Among other things, these godly men are responsible to shepherd God’s people (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2), to labor diligently among them (1 Thessalonians 5:12), to have charge over them (1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17), and to keep watch over their souls (Hebrews 13:17). Scripture teaches that elders will give account to God for the individuals allotted to their charge (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:3).
 - B) The elders of a church are not responsible for the spiritual well-being of every individual who visits the church or who attends sporadically. Rather, they are responsible to shepherd those who have submitted themselves to the care and the authority of the elders, and this process is done through church membership.
- 2) Conversely, Scripture teaches that Christians are to submit to their elders. Hebrews 13:17 states to “obey your leaders and submit to them.” The question for each believer is, “Who are my leaders?” The one who has refused to join a local church and entrust himself or herself to the care and authority of the elders has no leader. For that person, obedience to Hebrews 13:17 is impossible. To put it simply, this verse presumes that every believer knows to whom he or she must submit, which, in turn, assumes a clearly defined church membership.

c) The Exercise of Church Discipline

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus outlines the way the church is to seek the restoration of a believer who has fallen into sin – a process commonly known as church discipline. The exercise of church discipline according to Matthew 18 and other passages (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 1 Timothy 5:20; Titus 3:10-11) presupposes that the elders of a church know who are members. For example, the elders at Lakeshore City Church have neither the responsibility, nor the authority, to discipline a member of the church down the street. The Bible's teaching on church discipline provides for church membership.

d) The Exhortation to Mutual Edification

The New Testament teaches that the church is the body of Christ, and that God has called every member to a life devoted to the growth of that body (Romans 12:4-5). In other words, Scripture exhorts all believers to edify other members by “stirring up one another to love and good works ...” (Hebrews 10:24-25) and by exercising their spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8). Mutual edification can only take place in the context of the corporate body of Christ. Exhortations of this kind of ministry presume that believers have committed themselves to other believers in a specific local assembly. Church membership is simply the formal way to make that commitment.

Section 4

The Purpose of Formalized Church Membership

“...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, a pillar and buttress of truth.”

- 1 Timothy 3:15

The purpose of church membership is ultimately to protect the bride of Christ, keeping the church from defilement and blasphemy.

- a) Church membership serves to protect the church through its affirmation of a Christian's conversion (the affirmation of one's repentance and placing his or her faith in Jesus Christ) in order to best protect the church from false teachers and false converts (Mark 3:5; 2 Peter 2:1-3).

- b) Church membership serves to protect the church through the submission of the Christian to the authority of the local church through a commitment to serving, accountability, and discipleship in order to keep the bride of Christ from deviating away from truth (Acts 2:24; 1 Peter 5:5; 1 Timothy 3:15).
- c) Church membership serves to protect the church through its oversight of the Christian's discipleship. This discipleship includes a commitment to spiritually mature alongside the local body of believers and to ensure biblically-sound teaching (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 1 Peter 5:2).
- d) Church membership serves to protect the church through its discipline, in love, of those who have fallen into sin in order to set the believer on the correct path and prevent false teachings and negative influences over other members of Christ's bride (Matthew 18:15-17).
- e) Church membership serves to protect the church through the displaying of God's holiness by manifesting a clear separation of the Christian (church member) from those living a worldly and godless life (Romans 12:2).

Section 5

Church Discipline – Its Purpose and Practice

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”

- Matthew 18:15

- a) Formally, church discipline is the act of holding a believer who has sinned accountable for his or her actions. It is part of the discipleship process in which sin is corrected and the believer is pointed to biblical truth. The primary passages in Scripture that support church discipline can be found in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

- b) The purpose of discipline is to expose sinful actions, warn of the punishment for those actions, save from that punishment, protect other members from falling into sin, and present a good witness for Christ.
 - 1) The church must be active in the protection of the bride of Christ.
 - 2) The underlying purpose in every act of discipline is love for the brother or sister in Christ (Hebrews 12:6).
- c) The process for church discipline follows a four-step process:
 - 1) When a brother or sister sins, he or she is to be confronted privately by a single member of the church (Matthew 18:15). If the individual repents, no further action is necessary.
 - 2) If he or she refuses to repent, one or two other church members are to be brought along to confront the sinning individual again (Matthew 18:16). If that individual repents, no further action is necessary.
 - 3) If the sinning brother or sister refuses to listen to the two or three, they are to tell it to the church (Matthew 18:17) through the oversight of the elders. If the individual then repents, no further action is necessary.
 - 4) If there is still no repentance, the final step is to remove the person from the assembly of believers (Matthew 18:17).
- d) If an individual is removed from participation in membership, the following must be true:
 - 1) The act of discipline must not be capricious. The sin must be visible in word or deed before discipline can be imposed.
 - 2) The sinner must be unrepentant at all four stages of the disciplinary process.

Section 6

The Accountability of Church Leaders to the Church Members

“But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon swift destruction”.

- 2 Peter 2:1

- a) Leaders in the church, including teachers, deacons, elders, and pastors, are held to a high biblical standard to ensure that false teachings and/or abuses of power do not infiltrate the bride of Christ (1 Timothy 3:1-13). It is a leader’s job to properly teach, proclaim, protect, and model the Gospel of Jesus Christ to members of the church.
- b) Abusive leaders exist, are mentioned frequently in Scripture as false teachers, and may exist at any moment in a local assembly (Mark 13:5-6; 1 Timothy 6:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1).
- c) If leaders are characteristically abusive of their power, they have lost their right to be overseers of Christ’s body. In this case, your best option is to protect yourself and your family by considering transferring your membership to another local body.
- d) The Bible requires two witnesses for a charge to be leveled against an elder. Reasons for such charges include improper teachings and/or demonstrations of unscriptural doctrines or practices (1 Timothy 5:19).
 - 1) If a leader is confronted, one should ensure that the utmost honor, grace, and love are shown (1 Peter 5:5a).
 - 2) The first confrontation should be done in private with these two witnesses. This ensures that the motives behind the confrontation are pure and in love, not out of spite or hatred of the confronted leader.
 - 3) If the problem persists, seek for aid from another trusted elder.

Section 7

Lakeshore City Church's Declaration of Church Membership

"For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe."

- 1 Timothy 4:10

- a) Lakeshore City Church teaches and practices formalized church membership, holding fast that membership is biblical and plays a large role in the protection of the bride of Christ and the discipleship of the saints.
- b) To neglect or refuse to join a local church as a formal member reflects a misunderstanding of the believer's responsibility to the bride of Christ and the commitment that Christ has called the believer to have as Christian.
- c) Membership is reserved for Christians only – those who have repented and put their faith in Jesus Christ (see section 1).
- d) Church membership and the local church can be found in the text of the New Testament (see section 3).
- e) Submission and commitment by a Christian to the local church provides an effective means of spiritual growth through heightened accountability and the ability to serve others as Christ has commanded.
- f) Church discipline is a necessary process to protect the bride of Christ and to help members grow in discernment and wisdom in their relationship with Christ.

Section 8

Becoming a Member of Lakeshore City Church

“So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.”

- 1 Thessalonians 2:8

To become a member of Lakeshore City Church, one must fulfill the following requirements:

- a) Has repented of his or her sins and put his or her faith in Jesus Christ and had this proclamation of faith affirmed by Lakeshore City Church through water baptism or confirmation of water baptism by another church.
- b) Generally, must be sixteen years of age or older depending on the individual's spiritual maturity.
- c) Has a correct understanding of the Gospel that can be communicated verbally in an elder-lead interview. This understanding does not require precise or lofty language, but should touch on the subjects of:
 - 1) Depravity and corruption due to sin. The need for a Savior to pay the penalty for our sin.
 - 2) Justification by Christ dying on the cross for our sins, paying the penalty of God's wrath for us.
 - 3) Christ being the propitiation for our sins.
 - 4) Sanctification that follows conversion.
 - 5) Glorification upon our physical death and entrance into heaven.
- d) Is not a current or active member of another local church body. This will require communication with the previous church.
- e) Has regularly attended services at Lakeshore City Church.
- f) Has attended the officially sanctioned class on membership taught by an elder or elder-appointed leader at Lakeshore City Church.
- g) Understands church discipline as taught by Matthew 18:15-17 (see section 5) and submits to this level of accountability by other members and leaders of Lakeshore City Church.
- h) Commits to discipleship, serving, and giving at Lakeshore City Church and has signed the member covenant.

Section 9

The Role and Expectations of a Member at Lakeshore City Church

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

- Colossians 1:28

Members of Lakeshore City Church are expected, and held accountable to, the following:

- a) A commitment to discipleship within the church body. This includes participating in elder endorsed discipleship groups.
- b) A commitment to meeting with other members outside of official services.
- c) A commitment to accountability, understanding that your actions affect the entire church body. This includes submitting to church discipline when a sinful action has been committed, of which repentance is the proper response.
- d) Holding other members accountable to their actions, with love as the primary motivator. Taking an active role in guiding and helping other members to grow in holiness, being active in their lives as they train for godliness.
- e) Serving in a ministry, or some capacity, at Lakeshore City Church. Christians are called to serve. Areas available for serving include, but are not limited to: set-up and teardown, children’s ministry, women’s ministry, men’s ministry, worship team, resource table, and discipleship.
- f) Assumes responsibility for the financial health of the church. Members give financially to the church with joy, knowing that the giving is used to glorify Jesus Christ and proclaim His Gospel in both word and deed (Acts 2:44-47).
- g) Being in consistent prayer for the church body, constantly praying for needs and growth among other members.
- h) A commitment to the study of Scripture and its application in daily life.
- i) To be active in the sharing and proclaiming of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; seeking to save the lost.
- j) If God has called a current member to leave Lakeshore City Church, the member must meet with an elder to discuss the reason(s) for leaving in order to leave in good standing.