

Seed Partnership Step 2 - Understanding What We Believe & Commit to in Membership

Seed's church membership process is called Partnership. As a family Partner of Seed Communities, members commit to supporting our mission: *to gather to Christ, grow in Community and to go into Culture*. Specifically, we commit to submit to the Word of God, respond in the worship of God, live in the community of God, and join in the mission of God.

Seed Partnership | Purpose

These classes are designed as an introduction to Seed. It is a comprehensive course offered to anyone, suggested for everyone, and required for those who wish to become a Partner of our family and/or pursue leadership. These classes serve as a basic starting point, a basic "101" class that explains who we are, what we do, and why we do it. We trust that this class will answer some commonly asked questions about the Gospel of Christ, the body of Christ (Church), the mission of Christ, and how that all gets lived out through Seed. In reading the material provided and discussing it in class, we hope you will gain a clearer understanding of our family values, our doctrinal convictions, our philosophy of ministry, and our mission in this world. It is very likely that some of your more specific questions may remain unanswered and new ones will be formulated. Knowing this, we encourage you to freely ask any question during the class for clarification or contact any of the church elders to obtain the answers. We believe that God has brought you here for a purpose, and we are dedicated to helping you discover, cultivate, and fulfill that purpose.

Seed Partnership | Structure

Below is the structure of our two classes. Please read all of the current week's materials before our meeting. Additionally, we suggest that you answer the provided questions at the end of each Section—these will help guide our discussion. During your study, please write down any additional questions you have and bring them to the next class. We will strive to make every one of our gatherings beneficial and hope they feel more like an exploratory discussions than directed lectures. The outline for the class is as follows:

Section One | THE CHURCH & LEADERSHIP:

The first class introduces you to the bride of Jesus—the church. This class aims to explore what the Bible defines a church to be and what Jesus has sent it to do. What is the church? What is the mission of the church? What must, should, and can a church do? How is Seed fulfilling the mission?

Additionally, we will read how God has instructed His church to be organized. We will share how we understand biblical leadership functions. We will answer questions such as: What is an elder? What is a deacon? Who is accountable for the church? Who is responsible for the ministry of the church?

This is meant to begin at home, as you read & review -taking notes on the content of Section 1.

Section Two | DOCTRINE & COVENANT:

The second class introduces you to our basic doctrinal beliefs and theological convictions. This class answers the questions such as: What is theology? And What does it mean to be theologically "reformed" at Seed?

We also review our membership covenant, answering questions such as: What is covenant membership? Why become a member of a church? How do I participate as a covenant member (Seed Partner) of Seed?

Section One | The Church

The plan of redemption was written well before the world was even created (Rev. 13.8). And though a good God created a good world full of good things, the fact that man sinned and rejected His goodness did not take our omniscient God by surprise. God always had a plan to gather a people for Himself.

Beginning with the garden, we see God's story does not end where it starts—giving men the punishment they deserve. Instead, God gives them a promise of a Savior who would one day restore creation to all the goodness God desired.

The book of Genesis tells us the histories of men like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. More than that, their stories give us a picture of our God in constant pursuit of relationship with His people. The book of Exodus is a wonderful image of God as a warrior-missionary, pursuing and freeing His chosen people from slavery. Not only does He free them, he leads them, covenants with them at Mt. Sinai, and He chooses to commune with them uniquely. God has them construct a temple and build an ark where the glory of his presence would dwell. They are God's assembly *BECAUSE they assembled where the presence of God is.*

This does not mean that God's presence does not exist elsewhere, rather, that His presence dwells in a special and powerful way with Israel. And they physically gathered regularly to make sacrifices, to worship, to feast, to pray, ALL intended to remind them WHO THEY WERE. But it is clear, in the Old Testament, that they forgot...often. Again, though it grieved Him, it did not surprise our God. And over hundreds of years, God raised up priests, prophets, and kings to call them back into relationship, but they were always imperfect. But the choosing, the redeeming, and the dwelling always had a future and complete restoration in view—a future Savior who would set all things right. The people would not always be insulated from the glory and God's people would include others: Through the prophet Isaiah, God says: "I will gather yet others... besides those already gathered." (Is. 56.8)

For thousands of years, the redemption that would come through Messiah remained hidden in His relationship with Israel. And it wasn't until the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that God revealed the mystery of His church—the beginning of a renewed creation.

What is the Church?

The church is more than a place where Christians just happen to hang out on Sundays. It is more than a once-a-week event, more than a religious Christian club. The church was not an addendum to God's plan for salvation, in fact, we believe it is central to it.

Jesus did not die for a person, he died for a church—a specific group of people—through whom he would continue to restore the world with the gospel. The church is the fellowship of believers, the family of God (a family of families), where the presence of God's Spirit chiefly dwells, and where the wisdom of God is uniquely made manifest.

Seed Church is not the only expression of God's family. The church is both universal and local, both invisible and visible, both spiritual and physical.

According to Scripture, the universal, invisible, and spiritual church refers to all the true Christians around the world past, present, and future. The local, visible, physical church refers to an assembly of disciples saved by Jesus, unified by their gospel identity, sent into the world on mission to proclaim the gospel, led by biblically qualified elders, committed to proclaiming gospel truth and living as gospel community in the world.

Some other Biblical descriptions and metaphors for the church include:

- I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)
- For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. (1 Corinthians 6:9)
- So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. (Galatians 6:10)
- 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. (Ephesians 2:19-22)
- ...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 3:10)
- As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:4-5,9)
- ...but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. (Hebrews 3:6)
- ...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15) 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. (1 Corinthians 12:12ff)

What a church MUST do to be a church?

There are many people who view the church as a building or an antiquated institution unimportant to their faith. In fact, there are an increasing number of people who can easily describe why they love Jesus but hate the church. Jesus loved the church. In fact, He loved it so much He gave up everything for her. Not only did He promise to build the church through His death, but He also promised that His love would continue to make the church more beautiful (Ephesians 5:25-33). In other words, it is impossible to love Jesus and not His bride—they are inseparable. Those who have put their faith in the head of the church have become part of His body.

Through our shared identity in Christ, God brings us together into one family through adoption. And as brothers and sisters, He intends to build us together, encourage us together, grow us

together, and sanctify us together so that we look more individually like His Son and corporately like His people. And while there is much we CAN do as the church, there are a few things God has commanded we MUST do.

A CHURCH MUST | PREACH THE GOSPEL

There is only one gospel. There is only one foundation laid by Jesus Christ alone. We are given the authority to proclaim the one message declaring the TERMS for ENTERING the Kingdom of God AND for living for God's glory on this earth. We have the authority to speak but not to change the terms of it. And not only do we have the authority, we have the responsibility.

We don't preach in church because we want to—we have to. And though we don't think preaching should be boring, our aim is not to entertain, but to be faithful to the truth. Jesus preached and he commanded his disciples to preach. Preaching is a priority because the Word of God is a priority. We preach God's Word because there is power in it. We preach God's Word because God's Word is central to every aspect of our lives. We preach God's Word because, if we don't, we are not doing what Jesus told us to as the church. We preach because God's Word has always been His chosen instrument to create, convict, convert, and conform His people—it is the power of salvation and the way God works. (Romans 1:16; Isaiah 55:10-11)

For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" (Romans 10:13-15)

A CHURCH MUST | ADMINISTER COMMUNION

And within a few days, after Pentecost, the disciples began to practice the breaking of bread: And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42) This text gives an example of both regular eating and drinking with one another in the context of community, as well as remembering the death of Jesus through the Lord's Supper the way Jesus told us to do.

In communion we evidence the reality that we do LIFE together:

1. NEW LIFE – Communion reminds us of our REDEMPTION from slavery to sin. It is a declaration of the eternal truth of the gospel—of the fact that Jesus died in our place for our sins, and he was raised to give us a new life. Jesus is not crucified every time we take communion, rather, we REMEMBER the work is finished. The shame has been taken, the guilt removed, we are FREE! He suffered once for all, for our sins past, present, and future. We have been freed from our sin, saved from God's wrath, and adopted into the family of the King who is now reigning in victory.

2. RENEWED LIFE – Not only is it participating in what God has DONE, but in what He is doing. It is the very place where we recognize our SANCTIFICATION—that we are a redeemed work-in-progress. We do not repent once, we confess and repent ALL THE TIME. The act of communion, unlike any other time or event in our lives, calls Christians to put their sin to death in the light of the fact that Jesus died, compelling us to examine ourselves and repent before partaking.

3. SHARED LIFE – This is a meal where we SHARE in our UNITY. We participate together in Christ’s death for the church—for us. We see our life born together, as our life growing together, as our sin affecting each other, our faith working itself out together. This is the beauty of the gospel, the unity of God’s people. We worship together with our voices in song; we worship together through hearing the Word of God proclaimed; we worship together through giving of our offerings; and we worship together through taking of communion—Jesus dying for the church, forgiving the church, caring for the church.

4. ETERNAL LIFE – Finally, Jesus told his disciples to do this in remembrance of him. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:26, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” It is not only our life, our growth, our unity, it is also our HOPE. This one meal points us toward the future marriage supper where we will sit with Jesus and feast with Him.

In other words, Communion is more than a meaningless tradition; it is a sacred meal that means something. Through this powerful active experience, we come to know Jesus intimately in a way that sets us apart from the world as genuine believers (Luke 24.25). Not only are we memorializing His death for us, we are proclaiming it. Not only are we proclaiming, we are participating in the benefits of that death. As we receive physical nourishment, the meal gives us spiritual nourishment. As we take the bread and cup individually, we do so in unity with one another.

Together, we affirm Jesus’ love for us and the blessings that come from that love.

Together, and all at once, we affirm our sinfulness and our faith in Jesus to cleanse us from all sins. It is a meal like no other, one filled with joy, thanksgiving, and a deep abiding love (John 6.22-59).

A CHURCH MUST | BAPTIZE DISCIPLES

Once a person accepts Jesus Christ as their Savior and receive the seal of our faith in the person of the Holy Spirit, then the Bible calls us to make our private commitment a public declaration. Baptism is not “magical”, nor does it come before salvation. Simply, Baptism is a visible representation of the invisible change that has occurred in the individual as a result of belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A believer is someone who realizes that their sin separates them from God. They know they will never be good enough to reach God through their good works or religious activities. They depend on Jesus Christ's death on the cross alone to pay the debt for their sins, declare them innocent, redeem them from slavery, appease the wrath of God on their behalf and, ultimately, bring them back into right relationship with our Creator.

Baptism is a physical act with spiritual meaning. The act of Baptism is the literal immersing of a believer under water and then bringing him forth out of the water. Symbolically, the person being baptized is plunged beneath the waters and brought forth in the same way that Jesus was buried in the earth and raised on their behalf in forgiveness of their sins. It symbolizes a union with Christ in His death and resurrection. (Romans 6:1–10; Colossians 2:12).

Seed offers a Baptism Class which takes an in depth look at what baptism is. In summary:

- Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have received His forgiveness and submitted themselves to His leadership (Matt 28:19-20).
- Baptism is a symbolic representation of repentance and purification. In essence, Baptism is a public funeral symbolizing the individuals crucifixion with Christ and a public celebration of new life in Jesus Christ who now reigns as Lord and King in the life of the individual (Gal.2:20).
- Baptism is public identification with Jesus. It provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church and the world (Acts 10:48; Rom 6:3; Gal. 3:27).
- Baptism is a biblical rite of initiation into the universal church (1Cor. 12:13) as well membership in the local church (Acts 2.41).

A CHURCH MUST | BE ON MISSION

The mission of Seed as a Church is simply an extension of the Great Commission, the command which the resurrected Jesus gave His disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 before he ascended to heaven: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28.19-20)

"GO THEREFORE"

The word GO reminds us that building a community of believers has a purpose: it is a means to an end, not the end itself. Sometimes, however, we confuse church for the mission. The church does not have a mission, the mission has a church. God's mission has been the redemption of His people since time began. We do not separate ourselves from the world to avoid living worldly - which is disobedience to God. Like Jesus, we GO into the world.

"MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS"

Our engagement of the world has a purpose. It has been said that "everything preaches." The truth of the gospel should permeate all that we do, from our advertising to our preaching. Jesus is the beginning and end of all things, the hero of every story, the aim of all of our efforts and praise. We are not saved by the gospel and then changed by obedience, but the gospel itself transforms us into a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), it is the way we grow (Gal. 3:1-3) and are renewed (Col. 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom. 1:16-17).

Discipleship and evangelism happen when we (like Jesus) befriend sinners and tell them about the Greatest Friend who laid down his life for them.

"BAPTIZING THEM INTO THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT"

We are not in this alone. The purpose of proclaiming the gospel is not simply to call people to change, but to bring them into a new family (Galatians 3:4-7), the church. This three-in-one naming ceremony that happens in baptism proclaims to the world and affirms with our spirit that we have a completely new identity that is given to us in the gospel, and therefore a completely new power to accomplish all that God desires for us to do. In the gospel, we are declared somebody in Christ before we are given things to do for Christ.

“TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THAT I HAVE COMMANDED”

God's objective in this life is to make us look more like Jesus. We aim to live like Jesus as He lived in and among the people. Specifically, we live NO MORE than Jesus and NO LESS than Jesus. By no more, we mean that we do not build self-righteous rules that are simply attempts to work our way back to Jesus and minimize the need for the atonement. We also recognize God will not accept less than Jesus and requires perfection. In our dependence upon the cross alone and Jesus living in us (Galatians 2:20), we avoid both self-righteousness and self-indulgence.

A CHURCH MUST | REPRODUCE - PLANT CHURCHES

Healthy discipleship should be involved in reproducing disciples, and healthy churches should be involved in reproducing churches. Because we truly believe in the Great Commission, we believe in church planting. Jesus' essential call was to plant churches. Virtually all the great evangelistic challenges of the New Testament are basically calls to plant churches, not simply to share the faith. The 'Great Commission' (Matthew 28:18-20) is not just a call to 'make disciples' but to 'baptize'.

In Acts and elsewhere, it is clear that baptism means incorporation into a worshipping community with accountability and boundaries (cf. Acts 2:41-47). The only way to be truly sure you are increasing the number of Christians in a town is to increase the number of churches (and therefore, the number of disciples).

Planting churches is not only an effective means to reach people, it is the means that God commanded and the apostles practiced. The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for the numerical growth of the Body of Christ, and the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches.

Section One | Leadership God and His People

ROLES & LEADERSHIP

How is the church like a family?

The church is by definition the family of God, and by nature a family of families living out their shared belief in the gospel together. Having been made in the image of God, the relationships within the church should imitate the eternal relationship shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In essence, the people of the church live in loving submission to one another, fulfilling their God-given roles, using their God-given talents, gifts, and experiences to glorify God. Through the life of the church, the world should hear, see, and experience the “manifold wisdom” of God.

How is the church family to be organized?

In Ephesians 3:8-10 the apostle Paul states his two-fold job description: *“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”*

Paul states that his job is to 1) preach to the Gentiles and 2) bring to light what is the plan (*oikonomos*) of the mystery—which is Jews and Gentiles together. The word for plan, often translated administration, comes from two words: “Oikos” meaning “house” and “nomos” meaning “law”. Together, the word for “plan” means house law or management of a household.

Through his letters, one of Paul’s primary concerns is to give instructions for proper living within the household of God (a local church family). He writes to young pastor Timothy: *“I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”* (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

In other words, God intends for the church to be organized and He has not left us without guidelines on how to do that.

Who is the head (Shepherd) of God’s house? | JESUS

Supreme to Paul’s instructions is the truth that Jesus Christ is the head of the church, the one who plants, builds, and sustains it until He sees fit to end it (Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:9, 1:22-23, 4:15, 5:23, Colossians 1:17, Hebrews 3:1, Revelation 2:5). Jesus is the Lord of the universe, and He is the Lord of the church. Just like God’s first creation of the world, his tool for re-creation of that world -the church- is also made through Jesus, by Jesus, for Jesus, and is held together by Jesus.

Without a head, a body cannot live, it cannot grow, and it cannot function as designed. You can have gatherings. You can have traditions. You can have religion. You can have buildings. You can even have preachers, programs, and a sense of community. But without Jesus it is all

meaningless. Therefore, the true title of “Chief Shepherd” is reserved for Jesus as it connotes a sense of immeasurable wisdom, and final authority.

What are the roles in the house | Who does the work?

Viewing the church as the “household of God” helps us to understand what the life of the church is supposed to look and feel like. This concept also helps the church to function properly and to be effective in the ministry it has to do. The ordering of the church is not simply a matter of personal preference. Harmony and fruitfulness in our individual lives, our family life, and the life of our church are all dependent upon following God’s principles.

Contrary to popular belief, the “work of ministry” (Ephesians 4:1) in the life of the church is not the sole responsibility of the pastors. Scripture teaches that God has organized the people of His church into different roles in the church, each with different responsibilities. Specifically, Paul states that the church is full of saints, elder, and deacons (Philippians 1:1-2). All three of these support one another in fulfilling the “work of ministry”.

ELDERS | Servants who Lead

Elders lead and manage the church family, to which they have been entrusted, shepherding and caring for believers, being careful not to lord their office over them, but rather seeking to be an example in family, in community life, and in character. The men must be skillful handlers of the Word of God and use it to protect the church by defending sound doctrine as well as refuting those who contradict. They must be vitally involved in development, recognizing, and commending of new leaders and young “ministers of the gospel” as their lives are tested and giftedness made evident. They are responsible to appoint more elders and deacons and approve of new members.

Biblical passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 describe elders’ responsibilities and qualifications explicitly. Other tasks can be inferred through various passages describing the leaders of the church. The Scriptures illustrate how elders serve by leading with their primary focus as the spiritual oversight of the congregation. In addition to being called and qualified, an elder must competently and consistently accomplish the biblical duties of an elder as listed by Scripture:

- Prayer and Scripture study (Acts 6:4)
- Ruling and Leading the church (1Timothy 5:17)
- Managing the church (1Timothy 3:4-5)
- Caring for people in the church (1 Peter 5:2-5)
- Giving account to God for the church (Hebrews 13:17)
- Living exemplary lives (Hebrews 13:7) • Rightly using the authority God has given them (Acts 20:28)
- Teaching the Bible correctly (Ephesians 4:11; 1Timothy 3:2)
- Preaching (1 Timothy 5:17)
- Praying for the sick (James 5:13-15)
- Teaching sound doctrine and refuting false teachings (Titus 1:9)
- Working hard (1Thessalonians 5:12)
- Rightly using money and power (1Peter 5:1-3)
- Protecting the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17-31)

DEACONS | Leaders who Serve

The name deacon, or diakonos, is translated to mean: "servant", "waiting-man," "minister" or "messenger." Deacons are only explicitly mentioned in two places in the New Testament, both in relation to elders, because the two groups of leaders work so closely together (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:8-13). Most scholars refer to the narrative at the beginning of Acts 6 as the appointment of the first deacons, though the word itself is never used there. The Acts narrative is at times descriptive versus prescriptive (it tells us what happened but does not tell us exactly what we should do) in what it teaches. The text of Acts 6 does not explicitly mention "deacons", therefore, we must be careful to use these verses as a model and not as dogmatic principles. In other words, when senior spiritual leadership is overburdened to the degree that they are unable to simultaneously get time for prayer, Bible study, and care of needy people, they are free to appoint pastoral assistants to help alleviate some of their burden—even if that burden is not the same one described in Acts 6.

Deacons serve the church, being faithful to carry out the responsibilities entrusted to them by the elders, recognizing that at times they will be given special tasks of meeting community-wide needs and finding solutions to problems. This demands character, faithfulness, and not being double-tongued (1 Timothy 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-6).

Deacons are an example to the church and heralds of the mission, possessing a clear understanding of the faith, living consistently with the truths, especially in ordering their lives and families in accordance with God's principles.

PARTNERS | Family Relationships and Responsibilities

One does not have to be an elder or a deacon in order to contribute to the "work of ministry." In fact, the life of the church is more dependent upon individual members living a gospel centered life more than its leaders running programs, starting ministries, or teaching Bible studies. Some members will be called to godly leadership, but all members are called to godly living. Scripture provides clear guidelines for how individual members without office or title, can fulfill their role in the church:

- Older Men: Set an example of faithfulness and perseverance within the church as godly men, husbands, fathers, and members. Continue on in faith and remain sound in it, growing in the Word, and modeling the living of a life that is ordered under biblical principles so the community might be strengthened as it relates as an extended family (1 Timothy 5:1; Titus 2:2).
- Older Women: Set an example of respectful behavior in the life of the community, evidently both toward the leaders in the church as well as for younger women toward their husbands and family responsibilities. Continue to be devoted to good works, using their homes to meet needs in the church and in the world. Anything they teach must have soundness to it that is marked by good works and is oriented toward assisting younger women to orient themselves to godly living as women, wives, mothers, and members (1 Timothy 2:9-10, 5:9-10; Titus 2:3-5, 9-10).
- Younger Women: Be devoted to their husbands and children and to laboring hard to make their homes a powerful witness to the beauty of the Word of God. They are to be known for good deeds by using their homes as a base for meeting needs in the believing community and in the city, as well as assisting those in distress (1 Timothy 5:9-10; 1 Timothy 2:9-10; Titus 2:3-5).

- Younger Men: Seek to show themselves as an example of good deeds, watching their speech so as not to get caught in youthful lusts, which is so often connected with the tongue. They must also labor, like an athlete in a gym, to become established and sound in their faith, learning both from God's Word and from the older men in the church (2 Timothy 2:22-26; Titus 2:6-8).
- Widows/Single Moms: Younger widows should seek to remarry and invest in the types of responsibilities listed for younger women. Older widows should seek to devote themselves fully to the needs of the household of faith, even to the extent of being supported if they are in need and their children cannot support them (1 Timothy 5:3-16).*

The gospel-centered family is a God-given model for the church family. Therefore, Seed Church believes that building strong families with godly men, women, husbands, wives, mothers, fathers and children is essential to the health of the church and the effectiveness of our mission.

How do elders manage the household of God?

The leaders of God's household are described as "pastor-elder", "shepherd-elder", or the like. To use biblical terms, the elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church. In that sense, Seed Church is an elder-led church. All of our elders are considered pastors, men called by God to shepherd and lead this local expression of God's church. According to Hebrews 13:17, these men will have to give an account for those in their charge. To this end, they meet regularly to ensure they protect, lead, and nurture the church to the glory of God.

The following describe the key elements which characterize our view of biblical eldership:

- **Qualifications of Eldership:** The qualifications of eldership are clearly spelled out in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-3). The primary qualifications deal specifically with character. Elders are distinguished from other leaders in their mandate to teach doctrine, manage their household properly, and maintain an overall life of temperance and godliness. (See Selection of Elders)
- **Plurality of Eldership:** Both the OT. and the NT. evidence a plurality of eldership in churches. There is a cooperative team as opposed to polarization around one man (Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15, 20:17-38, 21:17-26; Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:1-7).
- **Equality of Eldership:** The elders share the position, authority, and responsibility of the office of eldership. This principle emphasizes "gift-based diversity" within the eldership, which recognizes both the variety of gifting and unity of purpose within the leadership.
- **Leadership within Eldership:** Within the elder team, we believe that there is space for a lead pastor is a 'leader among leaders.' He is often the primary speaker, motivator, leader, visionary, and energizer. He does not do all the thinking or decision making but often points the direction. He has greater responsibility, NOT authority. He is in no way autonomous nor should this additional responsibility enhance his authority. He serves a role fully in submission to Jesus Christ and under the authority of the elder team. His role is as a servant-leader, submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and not a tyrant.

There are two reasons for holding this position:

1. Old Testament History: Clearly, biblical history illustrates God's use of one man as a leader of his people. Some of these leaders among leaders include: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha, Ezra, Nehemiah, etc. Even while oppressed in Egypt, the children of Israel still were led by a group of elders (Exodus 3:16, 18; 4:29). When God called Moses to lead, his leadership was made effective by the elders' representation of the people.
2. New Testament Church: In the NT, the book of Acts is replete with new churches led by a plurality of elders. Yet, there also exist "leaders" like Peter and Timothy who appear to hold unique positions in those churches as the primary shepherd.

Who is qualified to be an elder in the house of God?

Male Eldership

Biblically, only men are qualified to be elders. This should not be received as a condemnation of women in leadership, but rather embraced as an upholding of biblically assigned roles (Titus 1:6, 1 Timothy 3:2). There are three different views of women in ministry related to this topic:

- 1) Hierarchical View – women should be relegated to women’s and children’s ministries.
- 2) Egalitarian View – men and women are partners together in every arena of ministry. All ministries and offices in the church are open to all qualified men and women.
- 3) **Complementarian View** – Men and women are partners together in every arena of ministry. All ministries in the church are open to all qualified men and women with the singular exception of the office of elder, which Scripture requires to be a male-only office. **This is the view of Seed Church.** This also is where we derive and select to use the term “Partner” to refer to our members.

Selection of Elders

We believe the utmost care, caution, prayer, and assessment must be undertaken to assure that only called, qualified, and competent men are appointed to this position of leadership. The guidelines for selecting “qualified” men are based on the character qualities of elders found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

The New Testament elders were chosen and installed by other elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Paul warns us in 1 Timothy 5:22 to not be quick or hasty to install elders as these are the leaders of the church, examples in every aspect of life. They are ordinary men; but they are ordinary men are called to an extraordinary task.

Specifically, the Lordship of Jesus must be evident in ALL aspects of their private and public life. They must commit to sacrificing for the work of God while preserving their commitments to their families. As the elders seek and listen to and take cues from the Chief Shepherd of His Church, their decisions must evidence a strong sense of conviction, commitment to vision, wisdom, and clarity guided by the the Holy Spirit through Scripture.

How do the elders make decisions?

The principle of philosophical purity guides the decisions of the elder board. This principle refers to an agreement, especially among elders, but extending to the congregation, concerning: 1) The purposes, goals, and products of the church, 2) The priority of certain ministries over others, 3) The methods used to reach those objectives.

Philosophical purity means oneness-of-mind—a harmonious agreement. It is an agreement founded on the principle of consensus, but it is not necessarily unanimity (Philippians 1:27; 2:2; 1

Corinthians 1:10). Unity occurs when there is a working agreement based on a common objective. Since all elders are all in agreement with the mission, vision, core values, and doctrines of the church, this model works well when they decide more practical issues.

To this end, all elders submit to each other to make decisions. If the group cannot come to an exact agreement on an issue, then it is the role of the Lead Pastor to decide whether the issue is tabled at that time, or whether the church should go forward in a specific direction. After any decision is made, the elders unite around the decision and support it privately and publicly. For all practical purposes and with few exceptions, our goal is consensus, not necessarily unanimity.

As leaders in the church, hard decisions have to be made. There are not always clear biblical passages to define what the best decision is. However, there are some basic convictions of thought that are laced in every decision that we make concerning the church. Here are some of the philosophical priorities that the leadership uses in its decision making:

- Everything preaches: We believe that everything we do communicates something about our understanding of who God is and His salvation. From the sermon, to the music, to communion- everything either preaches truth about God or falsehood. Our first question, in all decisions, is how well or poorly it reflects the truth of the Gospel.
- Faith not Fear: Calculated risks are necessary. Big risk does not necessarily demonstrate big faith. But too little risk, often in the guise of “wisdom”, can often demonstrate too little faith. Ours is a spiritual endeavor dependent upon the grace of God, not our abilities to “figure it out.” We do not have all the answers but take steps of faith with the ones we have (2 Timothy 1:7; Hebrews 11:6).
- Progress over Programs: When you are no longer willing to change, you are no longer willing to grow. We never do anything because “everyone else is” or because “we always have.” We do not fear change; we fear stagnation and dogmatic attachment to routine. A growing church makes changes, even difficult ones at times. Change in direction is good if we find ourselves misaligned with what God has called us to. We avoid making changes for the wrong reasons. Change is never made based on the personal preferences. We know we cannot please everyone, so the leadership must determine a particular direction and act, praying for wisdom and, in faith, believing God has given it (Philippians 3:14, James 1:5).
- Quality over Complacency: We believe there are very few “have to’s”. We do not start programs, have activities, or begin other ministries because there is a need if we can’t satisfy that need with quality. Mediocrity is not acceptable. Everything we do, we do to the glory of Jesus with excellence. We would rather have two songs sung with theological accuracy and quality than 10 songs brutalized. We would rather have no children’s programs than an inadequate one. We would rather speak for 10 minutes to an audience of three on a topic with authority than three hours before 3,000 people without a clue.
- Releasing over Restraining: We believe that ministry is messy. We also believe that there is too much ministry to be done by a few ‘professional’ pastors. This means that the lay people are expected to do more than traditionally practiced. We aim to equip people and release them to minister without a million hoops to jump through in order to “prove themselves.” This means that we encourage involvement and all people as they learn to lead and live God’s mission.
- Approval of God over Approval of Men: We aim to ensure our decisions are God-directed as opposed to man-directed. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Proverbs 1:7). God’s will for the individual and the church is discerned by His word, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Decisions driven by the approval of men do little than appease the personal preferences of a person or people who happen to dislike some aspect of the church. Our responsibility is not to determine what a majority, target audience, or an individual would like, rather, what God would have us do. This is discovered by walking in the Spirit that we might be led by the Spirit.

Questions | SESSION ONE

1. In your own words, what is the church?

2. Which of the descriptions of or the metaphors for the church most are most comfortable to you? Uncomfortable? Why? (John 15.5, Romans 11.17-24, 1 Cor 3.9, John 4.35, 1 Peter 2.4-8, Heb. 3.6, 1 Timothy 3.15, 1 Cor. 12.12-27)

3. In your opinion, what is “good” preaching and what is “bad” preaching? What is biblical preaching? (See 2 Corinthians 4.-6).

4. At Seed Church, we take Communion every week. The practice of most of the church throughout its history is to celebrate the Lord’s Supper every week when believers gather. However, in many Protestant groups since the Reformation, there has been a less frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper—sometimes once a month or twice a month, or, in many churches, only four times a year. Discuss your experiences and opinions? (See 1 Corinthians 11.26)

5. In your own words, what is the primary mission of the church? In Ephesians 5: 7-13, what does Paul state are additional purposes of the church? Where or how do we see this?

6. If you are a confessed believer, have you been baptized? If no, why not? If yes, how would you explain to someone why you chose to?

7. What MUST a church do to be a “true church?” What SHOULD they do?

8. Why does Seed Church believe in planting churches? How do you think this commitment might affect the programs and priorities of the church?

9. What is the difference between an elder, a deacon, and a member?

10. As a member, what role can you play in building the church community right now?

Section Two | DOCTRINE

What is theology?

Theology is the study of God and all He has revealed. A systematic or structured approach to theology is any study that seeks to answer the question, “What does the whole Bible teach us today about any given topic?” Answers relative to each topic are called *doctrines*.

Whatever doctrines we hold to, biblical or not, form a view of the reality called a “worldview”. One’s worldview answers questions such as:

What do you believe about God?

What is His overall purpose in the universe?

What is the purpose of human existence?

Are humans born essentially good or essentially evil?

What do you believe about the Bible?

What do you believe about salvation?

What do you believe is the way a Christian should live?

At some level everyone has a basic theology and a system of doctrines. Anytime you study Scripture and come to conclusions that are used to support other passages of Scripture, you are developing a theology.

Why talk about theology?

The purpose of teaching basic theology is for your awareness as a member of Seed. We do not expect you to fully understand every aspect of our theology to be a member, or to fully embrace every distinctive listed below; but do expect you to be willing to not be divisive concerning the teaching.

The goal of this class is not to convince you of a particular theology nor tell you why we believe what we do, but to just try to identify and explain our beliefs. If nothing else, we hope that this class will affirm the importance of every individual to know the major and minor theological doctrines of the Christian faith because:

1. Theology Confirms our Faith

By confirms we mean that it proves that our faith is alive and not dead. Jesus taught while He was alive. After He rose and ascended to heaven, the Bible says that Jesus continued to teach through His apostles (Acts 1:1). The Great Commission, given by Jesus, was not just a charge to evangelize the world; it was a command to learn what Jesus taught. In other words, it is an act of faithful obedience.

2. Theology Protects our Faith

As we read throughout all of the New Testament, there are many false teachers and false truths. 2 Corinthians 11:4 tells us there is another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel. Learning theology helps us to overcome the teaching of a darkened world.

3. Theology Tests our Faith

The truth is we all have a theology, a set of doctrinal beliefs about men, relationships, God, etc. that govern our behavior. Some of our theology is good, some is bad. Studying the truth of God tests our “personal doctrines” to see whether what we believe is actually biblical. Refusing to test ourselves is disobedient (2 Corinthians 13:5).

4. Theology Establishes our Faith

Like a strong plant, studying theology helps to establish deep roots in our faith. Deep roots in any plant ensures health and beauty. But cultivating an understanding of theology takes work—it is work with a reward. We cannot drink milk forever, we must move to meat. A life of milk only will never provide the necessary nourishment.

5. Theology Expands our Faith

By expanding our faith, what we mean to say is that a study of theology actually expands God’s Lordship in our lives. A study of theology opens our eyes to all of the little parts of our lives God is concerned with. Without studying theology, we may limit the “topics” of doctrine to the essentials of Christianity. God has something to say about all aspects of our lives (e.g theology of parenting, theology of money, theology of work, etc.).

6. Theology Equips our Faith

A study of theology not only protects us from attacks, it strengthens our confidence in what we believe. Anyone who falls into a pool of water will be able to flail around and stay afloat for a while. They are not swimming, however, they are surviving. Learning to swim gives that same person a confidence, even a joy, in being in the water. Concentrated study of theology equips us so we don’t have to do the “doctrine-dog paddle.”

7. Theology Guides our Faith

Studying theology helps us to make better decisions. Without Scripture as our guide, we will often default into depending on emotion, intellect, or experience. Our decision-making is to be governed by the Word of God—it lights our paths. Theology impacts behavior and Paul makes a point to connect bad theology with ungodliness and good theology with godliness (1 Timothy 1:10; 6.3). In essence, God’s Word helps us to bring glory to God in all that we do and protects us from wrongly worshipping creation.

8. Theology Grows our Faith

By growing our faith, we mean to say, a study of theology grows us in our relationship with God—it brings us closer to Him. John 17:3 says that eternal life is defined by knowing God, an

intimacy akin to a married couple. Knowing God means loving God, and the more we know about God, the more we see there is to love, and the more we want to know Him.

9. Theology Inspires our Faith

A study of theology nourishes us and inspires new joy in us. Time and time again, the Psalmist speaks about delighting in the Word of God. Jesus compared the Word of God to the bread on which men live. The Word of God is what brings ultimate satisfaction and contentment. Therefore, as our theological understanding of God grows, so should our joy. Jesus told His disciples that His teaching was intended to make them full of joy (John 15:11).

10. Theology Multiplies our Faith

Finally, our study of theology prepares us to teach others. As we learn to feast on God ourselves, we are able to feed others whether they are our children, our friends, or the non-believing world. We are not only learners; we are ambassadors of the King. Sound doctrine, is a precious deposit that we are to guard and entrust to others.

How would we describe ourselves theologically?

Seed aligns with the 5 distinctives of the Acts 29 Network, our family of church-planting churches that stands in the tradition of historic evangelical confessionalism. They are stated as follows:

1. We are passionate about gospel centrality.
2. We enthusiastically embrace the sovereignty of God's grace in saving sinners.
3. We recognize and rest upon the necessity of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit for all of life.
4. We are deeply committed to the fundamental spiritual and moral equality of male and female and to men as responsible servant-leaders in the home and church.
5. We embrace a missionary understanding of the local church and its role as the primary means by which God chooses to establish his kingdom on earth.

What is Reformed Theology?

Seed follows the historic tradition of beliefs known as "Reformed" in our theology. Reformed theology is Protestant theology, but as it was developed during the time of the Protestant Reformation, as opposed to Protestant theology developed in the last 100 years.

Among the general doctrines of this system are the emphasis of God's sovereignty in salvation and all of life, God having one people and one church (since the beginning) for which there is one plan, a variety of end times views including a-, pre-, and post-millennial, and the division of Biblical history according to the various covenants of God and His story (creation, fall, redemption, and consummation). Historically, reformed churches have held to church confessions (such as the 1689, the Westminster, etc.), but one of the primary marks is holding to the Five Solas, which is what we mean when we say that Seed is reformed in our theology.

Theological labels can be both helpful and harmful. Different labels often possess negative connotations generated from bad experiences or misunderstandings. In truth, we would consider

ourselves “Calvinists,” which doesn’t mean we adhere to everything that John Calvin wrote or taught, or that we somehow revere John Calvin above Jesus, but rather that the major doctrines he (and many others) upheld regarding God’s big-ness and our small-ness are what we find to be biblical and therefore worthy of our attention and celebration. But that label is not nearly as useful as telling people what we actually believe the Bible teaches about God and His salvation.

Know that first and foremost, we are gospel believing Christians.

Section Two | COVENANT

INTRODUCTION

A covenant is a promise by which we obligate ourselves to one another in such a way that the obligation of one party is not dependent on the faithfulness of the other other (Ezekiel 20:44; 36:22; Psalm 76:11, Hosea 2:19-20; 3:1; 2 Timothy 2:13). Though the covenant does define the relationship between members and the church, it is first and foremost a promise made to God as a commitment to his glory and his bride, the church (Ephesians 5:25).

As Christians, we are members of God's household because of the gospel (Ephesians 2:19) who have been called to function, participate, and serve in a local church context within the larger universal Body of Christ. Just as a healthy body requires that each member do its part well, a healthy church requires the same: Members who are sacrificially committed and well equipped to do the works of service that God has prepared in advance for them to do according to Ephesians 2:10; 4:12, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, and as outlined by Romans 12:

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 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 one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness " Romans 12:3-8 ESV

Seed holds its members in high regard. We expect them to lead as servants in the church and to lead as missionaries in our communities. We do not believe in coincidences. In his sovereignty, God has chosen to place us in this city, among these people, in this time period, for a reason (Acts 17:26-27, Jeremiah 29:7).

Being a Seed Partner is really about being part of a family member. All family members are first and foremost disciples of Jesus, unified by their identity in Christ. This unity is expressed in the way they joyfully choose to collaborate in loving God, loving fellow Christians, and loving non-Christians.

Individuals who enter into a covenant with our local church are called to a higher degree of responsibility and service. At the same time, the elders of our local church are covenanted to assist it's members as a first priority. The elders have been charged by God with the task to love and lead, provide counsel and aid, pray for, teach, and guide the members here.

"So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock." 1 Peter 5:1-3 ESV

COLLECTIVE CONFESSION OF FAITH AND BIBLICAL DOCTRINE

- I am a Christian saved from the eternal wrath of God by faith in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, through his life, death, and resurrection, by which I am assured of eternal life (John 3:16-18, Romans 3:23-26).
- I believe Jesus Christ is exactly who he claimed to be (Isaiah 53:6; Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62; Luke 22:70; John 4:25-26; 6:29; 8:58; 11:25-27; 14:6-7; 15:5).
- I have repented of my sins and have been made a new creation in Christ by faith alone (1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17)
- In obedience to the Scriptures, I have been baptized to personally identify with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and to publicly demonstrate my commitment as his disciple (Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21).
 - If I have not been baptized, I commit to being baptized with Seed as soon as possible.
- I agree that the sixty-six books of the Bible are the ultimate doctrinal authority on all matters (Isaiah 55:11; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; Hebrews 4:12).
- that there is one true and living God, eternally existing in three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- I agree with the primary beliefs of Seed which are fully expressed in our Doctrinal Statement.

COVENANT OF Seed TO ITS PARTNERS

- We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to us in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-22; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
- We covenant to seek God's will for our church to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-5).
- We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from the whole of Scripture (Acts 20:27-28; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).
- We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
- We covenant to care for you and seek your growth as a disciple of Jesus by equipping you for service (Ephesians 4:11-13) and praying for you regularly, especially when you are sick (James 5:14).
- We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1)
- We covenant to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church members as exemplary models (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Timothy 4:12).

COVENANT OF PARTNERS TO Seed

- I covenant to submit to the authority of Scripture as the final arbiter on all issues (Psalm 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
- I understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace. I will adhere to Seed's position on primary beliefs, and I will not be divisive over secondary beliefs, such as sign gifts, eschatological positions, bible versions etc. (Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:7, 17).
- I agree, by God's grace, to walk in holiness as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, who has saved me from my sin that I could live a new life, and strive to live a life free of immorality, repenting wherever necessary (2 Corinthians 5:17 Job 31:1; Proverbs 5; Romans 13:12-14; 1 Corinthians 6:9-7:16; Hebrews 13:4)
- I covenant to follow biblical procedures for conducting church discipline towards others in my relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, to submit to church discipline when conducted biblically towards me by brothers and sisters in Christ, and to submit to church discipline by church leadership if the need should ever arise (Psalm 141:5; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8; Galatians 6:1-5, 8; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 1:9; 3:10-11; Hebrews 12:5-11; Revelation 2:5-7, 14-25).
- I will maintain a close relationship with the Lord Jesus through the regular practice of spiritual disciplines in my personal life such as Bible reading, Scripture meditation, prayer, fasting, etc. My personal relationship with the Lord will be corporately evident by my commitment to Christian community through regular participation in Sunday Gatherings, Communities, and discipleship groups (Psalm 105:1-2; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25).
- I will steward the resources God has given me, including my time, talents, and treasure in a way that is sacrificial, cheerful, and voluntary (Proverbs 3:9-10; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:22-26; Ephesians 4:1-16; 5:15-18). This includes regular financial giving to the church as well as eager willingness to volunteer and serve somewhere in our Sunday Gatherings (Romans 12:1-8; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 12:7-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
- I will not function in leadership or as a member in another church family (Hebrews 13:17).

I have read the mission statement of Seed and commit to participate in the mission, vision, values of this church as a diligent, faithful member of Jesus' Body. I understand that this covenant obligates me to the members of Seed Church and is an acknowledgment of my submission to the leaders of the church. I accept the responsibility to notify the Pastors if at any time I can no longer commit to this covenant.

NAME PRINTED: _____

PHONE NUMBER: _____ **(RECEIVE TEXTS)** _____ **YES** _____ **NO**

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

STREET ADDRESS: _____

Have you been baptized? _____ **YES** _____ **NO** (I will participate in baptism with Seed Church)

SIGNATURE: _____

Seed PASTOR SIGNATURE: _____

WHAT NOW?

How do I become a Seed Partner?

Your first step is participation in the Seed Partnership Class. Attendance of these classes in no way obligates you to pursue formal membership—you may simply use the class to find out more about our vision, goals or what position we take on certain Christian doctrines.

We also recommend walking in relationship with our church for 3-6 months. This will give you ample opportunity to know us and be known. Relationships are what are most important to us, and this takes time. Participating in a Community before pursuing membership will give you a sense of who we are and what we're like.

If you do decide that Seed is where you want to make your home, you fill out the following Covenant, then meet with a Pastor for an informal meeting which includes questions such as when and how you became a Christian, important things we should know about to serve you best, and of course, what is the gospel?

Although this isn't a pass/fail sort of discussion, there may be instances where we encourage holding off for a season if there are some basic issues that need to be worked through first ("I don't know what the gospel is?" for example!).

Unless otherwise notified, candidates for Partnership will be joyfully and publicly acknowledged before a Sunday gathering to celebrate your membership to the church family.

What if I choose to not become a formal member?

We still love you and love that you are here! If you decide to stay involved with Seed without membership, there will be no effort to pressure you into joining.

Do not join unless you are ready to be a committed Seed Partner.

We believe that Partnership with Seed is a privilege. It is not required for full participation in church activities. We encourage you to join our family, but we do not intend to exclude anyone from family activities if they have chosen not to pursue formal membership.