

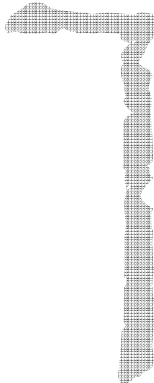
# COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH

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*Transformed Lives Transforming the World.*



**An Introduction to Membership**



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*Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are taken from the New International Version.*

## PREFACE

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**BEGINNINGS.** Community Bible Church exists to be a tool by which God transforms the world. Growing crowds, expanding facilities and a recognizable name are meaningless unless people are truly encountering God and being changed because of that encounter.

The number of members at many churches is often four to five times that of regular attendance, this is not the case at Community. We like it that way and we expect it to stay that way. While those exploring their faith will always be welcome to attend and participate at whatever level they feel comfortable, the world will never be changed by people that are exploring faith. It can only be changed when people are fully committed to faith.

In the following pages we will lay bare the philosophies and procedures of Community Bible Church. It is our hope that some will read these pages, catch the passion, and fully commit themselves to the ministry of this body. It is also our expectation that others will read these pages, realize this is not the place for them, and continue their search elsewhere. We realize that not everyone will have the same philosophy of ministry, doctrine, or desire to influence our local community and the world. That's o.k. This Introduction to Membership is designed to let people know what we're all about before they make the commitment of becoming a member.

We choose to distinguish between members and non-members for several reasons.

First, we believe it is biblical. While the Bible never specifically mentions the word membership, it does show that people were committed to one another in deep spiritual relationships at the local level. Many New Testament books first addressed specific congregations of people who dealt with many of the same issues we face today.

Second, we believe it is valuable to the individual. Committing to one group of people creates accountability. It protects the individual from deviating into improper theology and gives a sense of connection and ownership. It also assists the process of transformation by submitting to the spiritual authority of others.

Third, we believe it is beneficial to the body. Formal membership is one tool by which the church can evaluate the process of transformation. As people grow in faith they show deeper levels of commitment and service. Membership is one more way to measure that process.

It is our hope that some will read these pages, catch the passion, and fully commit themselves to the ministry of this body.

Finally, we believe it is practical to the organization. While voting is rare at Community, there are limited decisions that need to be carried out by those who form the core of the body. Membership provides a standard by which this can be done.

While becoming a member is not difficult, it is more involved than some churches. Attendance at all 5 membership class meetings is required. Also, we require each person to commit their life to Jesus Christ. And lastly, we require that a short questionnaire be filled out with some biographical information and a testimony explaining your faith journey.

## THE COMMUNITY CULTURE

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**CULTURE.** Anything that has a history has a culture—an assumed way of operation or feel. A library should be a quiet place for reading. A basketball gym should be a rowdy place for cheering. No signs are necessary, neither is an explanation; it is simply understood. Community has a culture as well. While we are always changing, our purpose is stable. Changes we make along the way are made by choice and not by chance.

At first glance, we could say that our culture is relaxed. There is no pressure for first-time guests or for long-time attenders. We allow people to make decisions in their own time. Our dress is casual. Our worship services are fun. Our small groups are informal and down to earth.

You may have had a past experience with a church that is pretty rigid in these areas. Dress is formal. Behavior is dictated. And sometimes appearances are maintained at the cost of honesty. This is not so at Community. On issues where some congregations are dogmatic, we are pretty relaxed; however, on issues where some congregations are pretty relaxed, we are quite dogmatic:

- We refuse to communicate a gospel of legalism.
- We refuse to allow people to be treated as second-class citizens because of past mistakes.
- We refuse to accept any form of racism or sexism.
- We refuse to allow the end to justify any means.

- We refuse to exchange a syrupy façade with real faith.
- We refuse to manipulate others for our own good.
- We refuse to respond to gossip or criticism spoken in a hurtful manner.
- We refuse to be a part of any action not founded on love.

We may be relaxed about what you wear, what your past involves, what addictions or habits you might be overcoming, but our views on these issues are unchangeable and we expect every person associated with Community to guard this aspect of our culture.

## **Vision & Values**

Whether it is tradition, heritage, creedal statements, denominational alignment, money, organizational structure, personalities or any of a dozen others—every church is empowered by its own vision and values. That particular philosophy, whether hidden or apparent, provides both purpose and identity for a local congregation and serves as bedrock for the foundation of all that the church attempts or accomplishes. Community is no exception.

### **The Vision: Transformed Lives Transforming the World**

The mission of Community Bible Church has never and will never change. From day one our desire has been to live transformed lives, and for those lives to transform the world. In the early days we said it in a different way, “to be fully devoted followers of Christ and to assist others to do the same.” No matter what our terminology, the objective is still the same. The mission of all churches should be derived from the charge of Jesus to his disciples.

### ***To be transformed ourselves:***

#### **Matthew 22:36-38**

“Which is the most important commandment in the Law?”

Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your mind’ (Deuteronomy 6:5). This is the first and most important commandment. And the second is like it, ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself’ (Leviticus 19:18). Everything that is written in the Law and prophets is based on these two commandments.”

## ***To facilitate transformation in others:***

### **Matthew 28:19-20**

“So you must go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And you can be sure that I am always with you, to the very end.”

## **The Primary Goal of our Faith as Christians is Transformation:**

### **Galatians 4:19**

“I am in the pains of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in you.”

### **Romans 8:29**

“Those God foreknew he also predestined to be *conformed* to the likeness of his Son.”

### **Romans 12:2**

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind.”

All three italicized words come from the Greek word *morphe*. And they all describe the central goal for every Christian. All Christians are supposed to be:

- **Formed** (Galatians 4:19—*morphoo*), or *nurtured* into the likeness of Christ; *morphoo* describes an embryo physically taking on human form in its mother’s womb.
- **Conformed** (Romans 8:29—*summorphidzo*), developing in form and identity with the likeness of Christ; this word describes the spiritual process as being similar to the way children take on the physical and emotional likeness of their parents.
- **Transformed** (Romans 12:2—*metamorphoo*), to be totally changed into the likeness of Christ, in the same manner that experience and age create complete physical maturity. It’s the word the ancient culture used to describe a caterpillar’s journey to becoming a butterfly.

This idea, expressed in three different ways, is not God’s desire for an elite few; it is his expectation of everyone who expresses faith in his son. Therefore, it is the expectation of everyone who calls Community home. While our transformation will not be complete until we are finally reunited with God in heaven, we are continually on a journey of change as God

forms himself in us, conforms our hearts, and transforms our lives into beings that fully resemble him.

Every day, in every place, and in every instance, the primary goal of believers in Christ is to experience authentic transformation and to provide the people we encounter with irrefutable evidence that it's real and genuine. It should be the mission of every Christian and it is the driving passion of Community Bible Church.

## **Two Characteristics of Transformation**

**INDIVIDUAL.** Transformation is a uniquely individual process. It cannot be forced or manipulated. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within the life of the individual believer. Every believer must take personal responsibility for nurturing an environment in which transformation is likely to take place.

**COMMUNAL.** While transformation is an individual process, it takes place within a community, a church. It is only within community that transformation can be tested and the true results of transformation can be experienced. God has called us out of isolation and into relationship with one another. It is at this point that our need can most easily be seen and our change can most likely be achieved.

## **The Values**

The following is a list of core values of Community Bible Church. They form the basic operating procedures by which we function:

**1. WE BELIEVE IN BRINGING GLORY TO GOD.**

*In every action as a body and in every aspect as an individual it is our pursuit to bring glory to God.*

**2. WE BELIEVE IN THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE.**

*The final word for how we operate is the written Word of God.*

**3. WE BELIEVE IN SALVATION BY GRACE.**

*While we are committed to the work of this church, we are not attempting to earn the pleasure and forgiveness of God. We work in response to what God has done. We serve with gratitude for his saving act. Every action we take is an action of thankfulness and obedience because God is worthy of our very best.*

**4. WE BELIEVE IN LEADING BIBLICAL LIFESTYLES IN EVERY ASPECT OF LIFE.**

*We seek to know and express the Living Word (Jesus Christ) by learning from and submitting to the Written Word (Bible).*

**5. WE BELIEVE IN AND PRACTICE THE PRIESTHOOD OF EVERY BELIEVER.**

*Because of the sacrifice of Christ, every barrier between God and humanity has been removed. We have no need of a mediator except Christ himself. Therefore every person who comes to faith has the ability to seek God, experience his forgiveness, receive instruction from his Holy Spirit, and minister to those around them.*

**6. WE BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE MATTER TO GOD.**

*We believe, therefore, that people should matter to us. It means that there is always room for more people in our community. It means that no individual is ever more or less important than another. We seek to minister equally to every person in every situation.*

*We seek to give our best to God in every aspect of life. God made us to be creative beings, therefore we strive to use that creativity to bring glory to him. We do so with integrity and with the hope that we will never appear to be something that we are not.*

**7. WE BELIEVE IN EVERY-BELIEVER, TEAM MINISTRY.**

*Ministry is not saved for the hired staff; it is the responsibility of every believer. We expect every member to involve themselves in works of ministry, but we do not expect them to do so alone.*

**8. WE BELIEVE IN BEING VISION-DRIVEN, NOT OPPORTUNITY-DRIVEN.**

*Opportunity does not necessarily equate God's will. Every opportunity is first viewed through the lens of our God-given vision. No matter how great the opportunity, if it does not match our vision, it is not right for us.*

**9. WE BELIEVE IN HEALTH, NOT JUST GROWTH.**

*Growth is fun, but it is only effective if it is a by-product of health. Healthy organisms grow naturally and so our focus is to remain a healthy body and allow the growth to remain secondary.*

**10. WE BELIEVE IN EQUIPPING LEADERS, NOT CREATING EVENTS.**

*Events can encourage, but leaders can transform. It is not our desire to draw more people to our buildings, it is our desire to engage more people in a relevant relationship with Christ, see their lives change, and then equip them to influence everyone around them. Equipping leaders is our greatest tool toward transformation.*

**11. WE BELIEVE FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION.**

*The Bible clearly lays out several functions which the church is to serve, but it rarely demands the form in which they are to be accomplished. We stringently adhere to biblical functions. We regularly change cultural forms.*

**12. WE BELIEVE IN BEING DOCTRINALLY PURE AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT.**

*Relevance and doctrine are not at odds. It is possible to guard the truth of the gospel and live holy lives while at the same time speaking in a manner which the culture can understand. Being boring to those around us should be avoided as much as being heretical.*

**13. WE BELIEVE EVERY MINISTRY SHOULD BE FOUNDED ON THREE COMPONENTS—TRUTH, RELATIONSHIPS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY.**

**TRUTH.** That which is real, authentic and genuine. It deals with the rightness (in the sense of truthfulness) of things as they really are. Truth is reality, whether in the physical or spiritual realm. The Bible declares that God is true, truthful, and truth (i.e., 1 John 5:20; John 14:6, 17:3; Psalm 32:5; Romans 3:4). For God not to be the source of truth makes this study, and all

other religious investigation, subjective at best. We firmly believe that God is true and that what he has revealed to man is also true. We believe the Bible contains God's eternal truth for man: "The sum of your Word is truth, and every one of your righteous ordinances is everlasting" (Psalm 119:160). Knowledge of and adherence to Truth, the Bible, is absolutely necessary for life and ministry.

**RELATIONSHIPS.** Interpersonal contacts and dealings between individuals. Relationships occur at home, at work, at church, at school, at leisure and so forth. People were never intended to exist in isolation. As John Donne reminds us: "No man is an island." The Scriptures also stress the importance of believers being rightly related to each other. The Bible speaks of the proper attitudes and actions that characterize good relationships. The "one another" admonitions of the New Testament highlight the importance of these relationships (note, for example, "love one another," "serve one another," "forgive one another," et al).

Not only are relationships inescapable, they are often the stimulus for encouraging spiritual birth and/or growth; for example: "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

**ACCOUNTABILITY.** The final ingredient, and the one so often missing in Christian ministry. As defined by *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, accountability is "the quality or state of being accountable, liable or responsible." For the believer, there are vertical (God-ward) and horizontal (man-ward) dimensions to this element. We are, first and most importantly, accountable to God. Each of us will one day answer to God for the life we've lived, whether we're a Christian (2 Corinthians 5:10) or not (Revelation 20:11-15). We're all accountable to God for how we've conducted our lives. Believers are also accountable to each other. We are to submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), love one another (John 13:34-35), follow the direction of our church leaders (Hebrews 13:17), and submit to the proper authorities (Titus 3:1).

Believers, therefore, should be accountable (responsible, faithful, obedient) to the truth of the Bible as it is lived out in the relationships of life. When these ingredients are present, effective personal and church ministry results. Without them, we lose our moorings and drift aimlessly without stability, balance or success.

## Conclusion

We have already said that we are a vision-driven church. We seek to accomplish what we believe God has called us to accomplish, namely, transformation. If the final chapter of Community Bible Church does not reflect people who have been radically transformed by the gospel and a community which has been distinctly changed by the gospel, and if the world is not a different place because of what God has accomplished through us, then the story of Community will be one of failure. However, if people truly grasp and hold onto the message of Christ, if they begin the process by which God puts to death their old nature and brings to life a new nature, and if they permeate their culture with compassion, the story of Community will be told throughout the ages—not a story about what we have done—a story about what God has done through us. Our vision is clear and from it we will not deviate. Our core values are set, and within them we will work. Our culture is intentional, and we will guard it with all passion. Through our culture and within our values, we will accomplish the vision of transformation.

... the primary goal of believers in Christ is to experience authentic transformation and to provide the people we encounter with irrefutable evidence that it's real and genuine.

## THE FOUNDATION

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**SEPTEMBER 1996.** Seven families from three different churches met together to address two questions:

“Do we believe a need exists in the Fort Smith area for a new church with a distinctive emphasis and an innovative approach to ministry?”

The unanimous answer was “Yes.”

“Are we willing to dedicate ourselves to such an enterprise?”

Again, the unanimous response was “Yes.”

The following month, Community Bible Church (known initially as Community Church of Fort Smith) was incorporated and held its first worship service on October 6<sup>th</sup> in the home of one of the families. At this first service, Dr. Edward A. Saucier was invited to become the church’s first pastor.

Soon thereafter the church rented a conference room from the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith, (then Westark College), and met there for Sunday morning worship for a period of several months. Later in that same year, an old theater was leased for the worship services, allowing more room both for worship and children’s classes. After some months, due to the need for more room for nursery and children’s education, Community signed a lease with the downtown Holiday Inn, where the church met for a period of one year.

In February of 1998, the decision was made to sign a three-year lease for space located inside the Phoenix Village Mall in Fort Smith. Some 12,000 square feet of space was leased and remodeled. In June of that same year the church relocated to this site. During the summer of 2001, CBC rented and renovated an additional 3,000 square feet of space in the mall providing 5 new classrooms, a conference room, and a learning center.

In January of 2001, we decided to begin an aggressive campaign to raise funds in order to purchase 20 acres of land on Dallas Street. We had agreed to purchase the land at half the assessed value of \$600,000. However, before those funds were raised, the twenty acres were anonymously given to the Church. A three-tiered task force was formed and the plans for a new building were devised.

In March of 2004, we moved from Phoenix Village Mall to our new twenty-acre plant on Dallas Street, into a 35,000 square feet building. With a worship center capable of seating 900, children's classrooms, a student room, and offices, these twenty acres should serve as our main physical location for many years. Nearly \$700,000 was raised in the three years preceding the completion of the building project. Through donations of labor and material, along with hard work from many church members, we were able to build property valued near \$3 million while only financing \$1.4 million.

The effective communication of clear and relevant biblical truth was a watershed mark of the new church.

## Why Community Bible Church Began

Far more important than knowing when a church began is knowing why it began. From the beginning, certain major desires guided the development of CBC.

### **1. DESIRE FOR BIBLICALLY CENTERED TEACHING OF THE SCRIPTURES.**

If indeed the Bible is foundational to the whole of the Christian life, then a church ministry firmly committed to the Word of God is needed. The effective communication of clear and relevant biblical truth was a watershed mark of the new church.

**2. DESIRE FOR A UNIQUE FORM OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE AND MINISTRY.**

The new church was to be governed according to principles found in the New Testament. Every ministry would be required to pass the test of biblical authority. Every person and every program would be subject to the scrutiny of biblical principles (cf. Matthew 15:1-3).

**3. DESIRE TO BUILD A CHURCH DEDICATED TO THE SPIRITUAL EDUCATION, NOURISHMENT, AND DEVELOPMENT OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES.**

Church and home were not to compete against one another for time and involvement. A mutual ministry was needed to correlate the nurture and maturity of both.

**4. DESIRE TO MINISTER TO OUR COMMUNITY AND TO REACH THE WORLD WITH CHRIST'S MESSAGE OF LOVE AND FORGIVENESS.**

Community Bible was never intended to be a closed body of believers with no concern for those outside the church. Our desire is to penetrate our community and the world around us by training for ministry inside the church walls. By training inside, we are prepared to minister outside. (cf. Matthew 5:16; 28:19-20).

**5. DESIRE TO TREAT ALL INDIVIDUALS WITH DIGNITY AND TO MOLD A MINISTRY THAT RESPECTS THEIR RIGHT TO ASK QUESTIONS IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF ACCEPTANCE AND UNDERSTANDING.**

While maintaining a solid commitment to our core beliefs we understand the importance of accepting and befriending others whose belief system is yet unformed, or is misinformed, for the purpose of evangelism and/or spiritual formation (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

Our simple desire as a biblical community of believers was (and is):

- **TO BECOME FULLY DEVOTED FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST**
- **TO DEDICATE OURSELVES TO FULFILLING THE COMMANDS OF SCRIPTURE**
- **TO BRING GLORY TO GOD AND TO DO GOOD FOR PEOPLE IN THE PROCESS**

Or to say it simply...transformed lives transforming the world.

## The Doctrinal Statement of Community Bible Church

Doctrine is rarely the main reason why someone attends a particular church. Far more often, people find a place to worship based on the friendliness of a congregation, the effectiveness of a children's ministry, or a certain style of worship. Doctrine tends to take a back seat to these issues. However, it is not uncommon for someone to leave a church because of a different understanding or belief concerning a core issue of faith.

We believe that the doctrine of any church is not a secondary issue, but is of primary importance. While it is not expected that every person who desires membership should be able to quote our doctrinal statement, it is expected that each person who commits to this body will strive to grow in their understanding of the gospel message. We are reminded in the book of James, "not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1). The great danger of being a teacher is teaching a false message and leading people away from the true message of Christ. We must guard our doctrine seriously not allowing for any incorrect teaching to be an aspect of this body.

When discussing doctrine it is important to remember the old saying, "In the essentials unity, in the non-essentials liberty, and in everything love". We desire to live out this statement at Community. On some issues, we simply will not waver. These issues are fundamental to the understanding of Scripture and the message of Christ. It is in the essential issues that we ask every member of Community to be in agreement.

Within the framework of the core beliefs of our faith are issues that are secondary in nature. On these issues there is great debate not only within the Christian community as a whole but even within our own church body. Calling these issues "non-essential" does not mean that they are non-important. It is a simple way of keeping in mind that they are areas of debate which do not change the basic message of God. Members are encouraged to search out these issues, form opinions, and yet remain open to the ideas of others.

No matter what our view, we must never place a theological standpoint above God's command to love one another. Even when we disagree, we must do so in love.

## The Bible

### ESSENTIALS:

We believe the Word of God is enclosed in both the Old and New Testaments. They are inspired of God, in whole and in part. They are error-free in the original writings and are the supreme authority of faith and practice for the believer in Jesus Christ. We further believe that there is but one true interpretation of any biblical passage with different practical applications.

### KEY VERSE:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16-17

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*Psalm 12:6* The Bible is without error.

*Psalm 119:160* The Bible does not contradict truth.

*2 Peter 1:20-21* The Bible came from God.

*Hebrews 4:12* The Bible is relevant to every person.

### NON-ESSENTIALS:

- How the Bible was inspired by God
- Which translation is more accurate
- How a passage should be practically applied

### WHAT TO AVOID:

- Partial Inspiration—the Bible is inspired only in major truths
- Open Canon—other documents could be authoritative for our lives
- Belief that the New Testament has replaced the Old Testament

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

- Every believer can read, study, and eventually understand the true meaning of a text.
- The Bible teaches us who God is, what he has done, and what he continues to do on our behalf through his son Jesus.
- We are a people *of* the bible because there is no other way to understand the message of Christ apart *from* the Bible.
- The Bible is sufficient for understanding God’s message of salvation and living a holy life in response.

## The Triune God

### ESSENTIALS:

We believe there is but one living and true God who is infinite, eternal and unchangeable. We further believe that God is one in essence while existing in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though each person of the Godhead possesses precisely the same nature and attributes, each functions differently in respect to God's purposes and dealings with humanity.

### KEY VERSE:

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ” Deuteronomy 6:4-5

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*Genesis 1:26* God refers to himself in the first person plural.

*Matthew 3:16-17, 28:19* The trinity is clearly present at the same event.

*Matthew 28:19* There is a distinction between the three.

*Romans 3:29-30* There is only one God.

*James 2:19* Even the demons believe in only one God.

*2 Corinthians 13:14 & Acts 10:38* There are different functions between the three.

*Colossians 1:16-20* God is separate from creation.

*Job 12:10* Creation is dependent on him.

### THINGS TO AVOID:

- Modalism—belief that God simply “appears” in three forms
- Tritheism—belief in three separate Gods
- Subordination—belief that the Son and Spirit are less than the Father

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

- There is nothing in creation which fully explains the nature of the Trinity (i.e. God is H<sub>2</sub>O but can be water, ice, or vapor).
- The Trinity is never mentioned in the Bible, but is an attempt to define what the Bible teaches.
- The Trinity must be accepted by faith.

## God the Father

### ESSENTIALS:

The first person of the Trinity orders and directs all things according to his own purpose, pleasure, and grace. The Father is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption. He has decreed all things that come to pass for his own glory. He graciously involves himself in the affairs of humanity, hears and answers prayer, and saves from sin and death all who come to him through Jesus Christ.

### KEY VERSE:

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.” Ephesians 1:3-6

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*1 Chronicles 29:10-13* The Father is worthy of our worship.

*Colossians 1:15-23* The Father rules over creation through his son.

*Matthew 6:9* The Father hears our prayers.

*John 5:19-24* The Father sent the son and has entrusted him with judgment.

*John 17* The Father is active within creation.

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

- God chose to reveal himself as a father pointing to the personal aspect of God.
- God being father reminds creation of his loving care and concern for all of humanity.
- God is omniscient, meaning that he knows all things.
- God is omnipotent, meaning that he is all powerful.
- God is omnipresent, meaning that he is present at all places at all times.

#### Key Terms

- **Sovereign** — God's supreme authority
- **Providence** – God's active role in governing creation
- **Redemption** – God's rescue of lost humanity from the penalty of sin

## God The Son

### ESSENTIALS:

The second person of the Trinity is both the eternal Son of God and virgin-born Son of man. Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, surrendered none of his deity during his earthly life. Having led a sinless life, he satisfied the Father's justice concerning sin by his substitutionary death. We believe in his bodily resurrection, his physical ascension, and his visible return to earth to establish his earthly kingdom.

### KEY VERSE:

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*John 1:1-18* Jesus existed before creation in fellowship with the Father and the Spirit

*Matthew 16:13-20* Jesus is the true Son of God.

*John 17:1-5* Jesus has authority over all people.

*Colossians 1:15-23* Jesus is supreme over creation.

*Hebrews 1:1-2* Jesus is the ultimate message of God's love for humanity.

*Hebrews 4:14-16* Jesus experienced every temptation yet remained sinless.

*Philippians 2:5-11* Jesus is the ultimate example for the Christian.

*Titus 2:11-14* Our final hope is in the return of Christ.

### NON-ESSENTIALS:

- The specific purpose of the Virgin Birth
- The exact meaning of how the Cross reconciles God and humanity
- What happened to Christ between his death and resurrection

### THINGS TO AVOID:

- Arianism—belief that Jesus was fully human but not fully divine
- Adoptism—belief that Jesus was a good man who later became divine
- Docetism—belief that Jesus was divine, and only appeared as a human.
- Nestoriansim—belief the Jesus was two persons, one divine and one human, in one body

## God The Holy Spirit

### ESSENTIALS:

The third person of the Trinity executes the will of God in the world of humanity. It is the Holy Spirit that applies the salvation that Jesus Christ secured through his death on the cross. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. It is the Holy Spirit that empowers the church to live a lifestyle pleasing to God, endowing each believer with special gifts that equip the church to accomplish distinct ministries, planned beforehand by God the Father.

### KEY VERSE:

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*John 16:5-15* The Spirit convicts the world of sin and guides believers in truth.

*John 15:26-27* The Spirit does not draw attention to himself but points to Christ.

*Galatians 5:16-26* The fruit of the Spirit gives evidence of his presence in one's life.

*1 Corinthians 12* The gifts of the Spirit function together in building up the church.

*Ephesians 1:13-14* The presence of the Spirit guarantees our ultimate salvation.

### WHAT TO AVOID:

- Elevation of the Spirit above the Father and the Son
- Judging the Spirit's presence in a life more by an outward expression than an inward devotion

### NON-ESSENTIALS:

- How a specific gift is expressed
- Whether spiritual gifts change over time
- If the list of spiritual gifts is descriptive or prescriptive
- Possible cessation of some gifts after the Bible was complete

### PRACTICAL APPLICATION:

- The Holy Spirit was never meant to divide believers; his intent is to unite believers.
- The expression of our spiritual gifts is to build up the body, and not to glorify ourselves.

## Humankind

### **ESSENTIALS:**

We believe that humankind was directly created in the image of God to enjoy his fellowship and to fulfill God's will on earth. Through the first humans, Adam and Eve, sin entered the world through a voluntary act of personal disobedience to the will of God. As a result, all people are spiritually dead and subject to the certainty of physical death. The fall of humanity was a non-repeatable event, the effects of which are transmitted to all persons, each of whom is born with a sinful nature, and sins habitually in thought, word, and deed.

### **KEY VERSE:**

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.” Ephesians 2:1-3

### **OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:**

*Genesis 1:26-27* Men and women were created in the image of God.

*Genesis 3:3-7* Humanity was separated from God by their disobedience.

*Romans 5:12* The penalty of sin is death.

*Romans 1:18-32* Sinners experience the wrath of God.

*Romans 3:10-23* Humanity cannot reconcile themselves.

*Ephesians 2:1-3, 11-12* Humanity is without hope apart from God.

### **WHAT TO AVOID:**

- Belief that humanity is not responsible for their sin

### **NON-ESSENTIALS:**

- The view of when sin enters a person whether at birth or at a later age of accountability
- The extent of humanity's free will
- The extent of human depravity
- The state of God's image in humanity after the fall

## Salvation

### ESSENTIALS:

We believe that Jesus Christ died as the only sufficient, substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. All who believe in him are declared justified by the Father on the grounds of Jesus' death and resurrection. All who receive the Lord Jesus Christ by grace through faith have been regenerated by and baptized in the Holy Spirit. They become, thereby, the children of God forever and members of the one true church, the universal Body of Christ. This salvation will result in righteous living and good works as the believer submits his or her life to the control of the Holy Spirit who directs the life of the believer in harmony with the Word of God.

### KEY VERSE:

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Romans 3:21-24

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*John 1:12; 3:16; 5:24; 14:6* Jesus offers the gift of salvation to people.

*Acts 4:12* Salvation is found only in Jesus Christ.

*Romans 5:6-11* The love of God was demonstrated through the death of his son.

*1 Corinthians 15:1-4* The gospel message is that Christ died, was buried, and rose again.

*Galatians 3:26* By grace and through faith we become the sons and daughters of God.

*Ephesians 2-8-10* Salvation is a gift from God, not a result of human action.

*Titus 3:4-7* God's salvation has transforming power from death to life.

*1 John 5:11-13* We can be sure of our salvation.

### WHAT TO AVOID:

- Loss of Salvation—salvation is a gift from God which is given and not taken back
- Multiple ways to God—Jesus is the only way to the Father.

### NON-ESSENTIALS:

- The extent of divine election
- The moment of salvation vs. gradual belief

## The Church

### ESSENTIALS:

We believe that all who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit belong to the one true universal church, and are directed by the Scriptures to associate themselves in local, visible churches. The local church is the only scriptural representation of Christ's invisible church and consists only of regenerated believers. The local church is self-governed and recognizes its own members for biblical offices and leadership positions. Two ordinances have been committed to the local church—baptism and the Lord's Supper. The purpose of the church is to lead humanity to Christ, mature them in the faith, and equip them for personal ministry.

### KEY VERSE:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” Ephesians 2:19-22

### OTHER VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*Matthew 16:13-18* The church is built on the belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

*Acts 2:41-47* The description of the early church shows a healthy body.

*Ephesians 4:11-13* Every person has a role within a church.

*Hebrews 10:23-25* We must meet together and spur one another toward good deeds.

*1 Peter 5:1-3* Leaders are called to be examples to those they serve.

### NON-ESSENTIALS:

- Polity—how a church governs itself (i.e. elder board vs. congregational vote)
- Structure—the means by which a church chooses to accomplish its mission (i.e. Sunday School vs. Home Groups)

### Key Terms

- **Regenerated** – God's gift of new life through the Spirit to a believer
- **Autonomous** – the state of independency and self-government
- **Ordinances** – God's command to the church to carry out an activity

## Future

### ESSENTIALS:

We believe that God in his own time and in his own way, will bring an appropriate end to the earth. This will include Jesus Christ's bodily and visible return to earth, at which time all who are believers in Christ will receive an eternal relationship in his presence, and the unrighteous will be condemned to an eternity of judgment.

### KEY VERSE:

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." Revelation 22:12-13

### VERSES FOR CONSIDERATION:

*Matthew 24-25* Jesus teaches that when he will return is unknown and will be unexpected.

*John 14:1-3* The eternal destiny of believers is in the presence of Christ.

*Acts 1:9-11* An angel promises that Jesus will return to the earth.

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:3* Jesus will return.

*Revelation* God is in complete control of the future giving hope to those that believe in him.

### NON-ESSENTIALS:

- The timing of the Rapture—before, during, or after the tribulation
- The literal or figurative interpretation of the millennial reign of Christ

### WHAT TO AVOID:

- Naming times and dates of the return of Christ
- Becoming rigid about your view of how the end will take place
- Failing to balance end-time thought with the rest of Scripture

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS:

Our future is in God's hands. This fact either creates comfort or fear depending on our faith in him. For those that have trusted in Christ, the end-time message is one of great hope, knowing that no matter what we may face, in the end Christ wins. For those that stand outside of faith, the end-time message is one of great concern. No matter what success or joy the unbeliever may experience on earth, their lack of faith assures a destiny of doom.

The teachings of the end-time were never meant to be a dividing point between believers. Prophecy is rarely fulfilled in the way we expect it. Therefore, all Christians should be slow in proclaiming details of the last days. The overall message is clear. How those events will play out is left to speculation.

## TWO MODES OF MINISTRY

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**MINISTRY.** From day one, Community has had a two-pronged approach to ministry—cell and celebration. Every age group is encouraged to participate in both large group and small group settings. The primary model of this philosophy is our emphasis on Community Worship and Community Groups. By joining with hundreds of believers in corporate worship, we can celebrate the goodness of God in a unique way. Then, by breaking into small cell groups, we can dive into the specifics of life, offering support and encouragement to every member.

This double focus is foremost in our planning, staffing, and allocation of resources. We believe that both are equally necessary for a healthy church, and we plan on devoting balance between these two concepts. To engage in one aspect without the other is to live an unbalanced spiritual life. Worship without small group involvement is impersonal and inauthentic. Small group interaction without worship is self-centered and undernourished. Yet a life that encompasses both creates relationships, brings accountability, gains benefit from the knowledge and experience of others, and finds meaning by being involved in something larger than itself.

### **Worship**

Corporate worship at Community is just an hour on Sunday (although in the future there might be an alternative hour on Saturday night), but it means far more. Worship is the fuel by which we get the energy to live the Christian life. To fail to worship would certainly lead to a malnourished life.

Worship is more than what happens in a building on Sunday morning. It is a lifestyle. What we do on Sundays is one aspect of a life that brings glory to God. Corporate worship flows out of and into individual worship. They intrinsically play off one another. We learn important lessons from both types of worship that lead us into a deeper relationship with God.

### **The Lesson of Individual Worship**

The key lesson gained from individual worship is the idea that we must worship honestly. The danger as we move from individual worship into corporate worship is the idea that we have to fit the cultural climate of community worship. Expectations have to be met, styles have to be mimicked, and before long our worship can lose authenticity. Yet when worshipping alone, it is easier to worship as one's self. There is no one to impress. There is no one watching.

Individual worship tends to be void of self-awareness. It is an action in which we open our hearts honestly before God. We no longer have to protect ourselves, and so we are deeply aware of our situation, our sin, our need, and we are honest about it all before God. In individual worship, we worship as ourselves.

### **The Lesson of Community Worship**

We must worship in a community if we ever desire to deepen our vision of God. Community worship expands our knowledge, ability, and experience. This is the place we are led in prayer, forcing us to pray for things we otherwise wouldn't consider. This is the place we sing songs that we don't choose, forcing melodies and words with which otherwise we would not associate. This is the place we are led in Bible study, opening up sections of Scripture we might not read and providing insights which we might otherwise have not understood. This is the place that other worship styles may be introduced, showing us multiple ways of worship. Some are more expressive, others are more solemn. Some are more reflective, while others are more celebratory. All are vital to our spiritual development. Without community worship we forever would worship in the same style and worship the same attributes of God. By worshipping with other people, we are drawn into a deeper worship of God.

The difficulty and the challenge is to take the lessons learned from both types of worship and to incorporate one set into the other.

In individual worship, we seek for the depth of vision that we experienced in corporate worship. In Psalm 63, the psalmist searches for God in the midst of his situation, and that search is nourished by the glimpse of God he receives in corporate worship at the Temple.

In corporate worship, we seek for the depth of honesty that we experience in individual worship.

By extending our worship of God as individuals, we extend our worship as a community. In community worship our experiences are tied together. The more one person grows this week, the more someone else will have an opportunity to grow today. The deeper one person goes in worship, the deeper someone else will be given a chance to go today. In community worship, everything that we do and are affects the experience that everyone else has. If you do something distracting, we are all distracted. If you check out, we all suffer. If you are passionately involved in what is going on, we all are benefited. Individual worship is integral to our community experience.

Likewise, our community experience is integral to our individual experience. It teaches us how to better worship God. It provides the tools by which we grow.

## Definitions and Descriptions

“Worship” literally defined means to “bow down.” The English form of the word means to declare the worth of a person or a thing. We declare God’s worth by “bowing

### **Study the following words for worship from the Hebrew and Greek biblical text:**

- **Shachah** – to prostrate oneself, bow down, fall down, or stoop. *He said to his servants, “Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you.”* (Genesis 22:5)
- **Abad** – to be enslaved, to serve. *Then say to Pharaoh, “This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let my son go, so he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.”* (Exodus 4:22-23)
- **Proskuneo** – to kiss, to prostrate oneself, to adore. *After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”* (Matthew 2:1-2)
- **Sebomai** – to revere, adore. *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.* (Philippians 3:3)

down.” Worship is both a subjective experience and an objective activity. But one of the more shocking omissions from the Bible is a full definition of how the church should worship. There is little doubt that worship is an important theme throughout the Bible. Early in the Old Testament, many rules and regulations were given to God’s people describing how and where they should worship. Time and time again the people failed to worship God, and they were punished. The prophets chastised the people for improper worship and hypocritical worship. Jesus is seen at worship services in the Temple in the New Testament. While he was sickened by many of the worship practices of the Pharisees, he never said we should stop worshipping, but instead told us to worship “in spirit and in truth.” Romans 1 tells us that the chief sin of humanity is a failure to worship God for who he is. Worship is a major theme and yet we lack a definition of how it is to be done. Lacking any definition, we still do many of the same things that people did before Christ came which are described in both the Old and New Testaments—we gather, we sing, we pray, we read Scripture, and someone teaches to challenge and encourage us. The only new elements that Christ brought to our worship are baptism and Communion.

## **Two Ordinances**

The only two acts which Jesus instructed the church to carry out are baptism and communion. Both illustrate a key principle to worship. Worship may best be described as revelation and response. God reveals himself, and humanity responds to that revelation. Baptism is our response to the inner work of salvation that God reveals through his son. As an act of faith, and in order to publicly proclaim what God has done for us, we worship God through baptism. Communion is our remembrance of his death, burial, and resurrection. We respond to God by the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup. Some traditions celebrate every day, some each week, but we do not keep a set schedule. We attempt to include communion in a meaningful addition to worship when possible. It is our belief that any person who has made a commitment to Christ is welcome to join us when communion is an aspect of our worship.

## **Music**

It is no accident that music plays a vital role in our worship. From the earliest known history of faith music was an essential aspect, so much so that one of the longest books of the Bible is a book of songs. Music is an aspect of worship. Often we wrongly describe our services as being

composed of music and then message. This is a misleading description; singing praises to God and listening to his word are equally worship. Yet this in no way diminishes the value of music to the spiritual life of the community.

The skill level of our musicians is a striking element of Community. Without shame we desire that every note played and every song sung will be done so with the highest manner of excellence and all to the glory of God. The focus on our worship, however, is not musical greatness. It is a meaningful response to God. Our band is not present to be on display; their desire is to lead us into the presence of God. Every person is invited to be a participant in worship to sing, to listen, to pray, and to glorify God in every action.

Our musical style is under constant review. We provide music that we believe to be culturally relevant and theologically accurate. Anyone who has a desire to become a member of the worship team is welcome to schedule an audition.

## Teaching

The teaching time during worship is focused on one thing—hearing what God has to say. For this reason it does not matter which teaching pastor is doing the speaking; our focus remains the same, listening to God. We choose to use more than one speaker for a variety of reasons. Having one speaker could limit our view of God. It could lack variety. It could create an inability to learn from others. It could too closely tie a congregation’s spiritual life to one person. By using multiple speakers over the course of a year we are given a variety of experience, style, and emphasis. The congregation benefits from more meaningful lessons during worship and our teaching pastors benefit from not only hearing one another but also from extended time in study and preparation. We intentionally choose not to pre-announce who will be speaking because we believe it is not important. We do not participate in worship to hear from a certain person; we participate in worship to respond to God.

Worship without small group involvement is impersonal and inauthentic. Small group interaction without worship is self-centered and undernourished.

## Prayer

Prayer is not a program at Community—it is a constant lifestyle. It is an essential element of our worship long before anyone gathers on Sunday. From planning to practicing, prayer is a

constant activity of everyone involved, and especially with those charged to lead others in worship. Our teaching pastors prayerfully prepare their messages. Our musicians prayerfully plan their song selections. We encourage all that attend to prayerfully anticipate and prepare their hearts before worship. In worship we take time to pray for the needs of others, to invite God into our services, and to express our every need and desire to him. When someone leads us in prayer during services, our heads may be bowed and our eyes maybe closed, but our minds and hearts should be fully engaged.

## **Offering**

In most of our services the opportunity to give support to the financial needs of the church is presented. The offering is a time for our members and regular attendees. It is not geared toward anyone who would not consider Community Bible Church his or her church home. Giving should be done in the most private and yet worshipful way. Giving records are extremely confidential and are only seen by the staff member making the weekly deposit. The pastors of Community do not seek out the specific giving history of any individuals.

## **The toughest aspect of worship is simple—it's not about you.**

Consider the following:

“People have the tendency to approach worship as consumers. The focus is on my experience, sitting back with arms folded and saying to those leading worship, *Wow me. Do something to grab my attention, catch my interest.* They assume worship is like watching a movie; it's something I critique afterward.

“Can you imagine the Israelites, freshly delivered from slavery, before a mountain that trembles violently with the presence of God (Exodus 19), muttering: ‘We’re leaving because we’re not singing the songs we like. Like that tambourine song, how come they don’t do that tambourine song anymore?’ ‘I don’t like it when Moses leads worship; Aaron’s better.’ ‘This is too formal—all that smoke and mystery. I like casual worship.’ ‘It was okay, except for Miriam’s dance—too wild, not enough reverence. And I don’t like the tambourine.’

“No, scripture doesn’t read like that. The people were filled with awe and wonder and trembling and hope and fear, because there in the middle of nowhere, before this bunch of ex-slaves, was God.” (John Ortberg)

If worship is the supreme goal, our highest aspiration, then we should pursue and discover its treasure with all our attention. Satan will try to derail our pursuit. Therefore, it’s important to recognize some of the tools he will use against us. Note each of the following hindrances to worship:

- **AN UNSURRENDERED HEART** (Matthew 16:24-25) If our focus is not worship, naturally our thoughts will wander and drift to other issues.
- **UNCONFESSED SIN** (1 John 1:9) Confession of personal sin cleanses our conscience and redirects our focus. By acknowledging our sin, our ability to worship is restored.
- **WRONG ATTITUDE** (Philippians 2:5; 4:8) Whatever the motive for a bad attitude, it hinders our ability to worship.
- **ENEMY OPPOSITION** (James 4:7) Satan does not want us to worship.
- **FATIGUE** (Psalm 23:2-3a) If you can’t stay awake, you can’t worship. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is getting a good night’s rest.
- **FAITHLESSNESS** (Mark 9:24) Even though we might believe and trust in God, isolated pockets of disbelief and/or disobedience will interrupt our ability to worship. We can all learn from the honesty of this boy’s father. As we enter into worship a sense of awe and wonder, combined with a willingness to obey God, will greatly enhance our worship.

## Small Groups

Small Groups are present throughout the New Testament and were best modeled in the life of Jesus. Called to save the masses, he accomplished that mission not only by teaching thousands, but also by meeting with his own small group of disciples. The life of Jesus, the practice of the New Testament church, and the experience of church history has proven the need for every Christian to be involved in small group ministry.

The focus of each Community Group is living out the truth of Scripture in the midst of everyday life. No better format can be found for investigating the practical nature of faith than within

the small group setting. By opening our individual lives to eight to ten other individuals, our individual faith will be strengthened, our individual lives will be confronted, and our individual destinies will be changed. True transformation requires a willingness to share with other people.

Community Groups encourage a questioning faith. The ability to seek out the true meaning of the Scriptures within the context of real life is one of its greatest benefits. No question is out of bounds within the small group setting.

Community Groups provide a deep connection with other people. As our church continues to grow it becomes more and more easy to remain anonymous within Community Worship. This makes the small group setting even more necessary to make life-changing relationships with other Christians.

Community Groups enable every person to receive the aid of ministry. We best meet the needs of our members through the ministry of small groups. Being on the front lines allows for the fastest and most effective forms of care ministry in every situation.

## **Types of Community Groups**

Community Groups are not one-size fits all. They come in many different shapes and sizes, serving different needs. It is not uncommon for a person to be involved in more than one group in order to gain differing experiences and deeper spiritual growth. All of our groups can fit into one of the four following categories:

### **Home Groups**

At the heart of our small group ministry are home groups. Meeting weekly or bi-weekly in homes throughout the area, these groups encourage the development of personal relationships and accountability while providing spiritual growth and opportunities for service. It is assumed that every person who calls Community home will be involved in a home group.

The mix and make-up of every group is different with some focusing on similar ages, others on specific neighborhoods, and still others on being an eclectic assembly with diverse perspectives. Since each group is different, finding the right one may not happen on the first try. Facilitators are well aware that people need the freedom to find the group that is right for

them, and therefore they pledge to never take it personally if someone tries their group and does not come back.

Home groups generally start the week following Labor Day and continue meeting regularly through mid-May with occasional summer meetings or socials. Several topics are available for study and each group is encouraged to design its own “cause,” (i.e. a legitimate outward focus of the group on something other than the spiritual and physical well-being of the Christian members of the group). Specific information regarding time and place of meetings can be obtained from the church office.

Our hope is that a day will come in which a home group will be meeting in every neighborhood in the greater Fort Smith area. From Poteau to Lavaca, Van Buren to Greenwood, home groups take the ministry of the church away from a central campus and into the streets of everyday life. Every year we desire to expand our home group ministry to more effectively serve the needs of the surrounding community.

### **Life Setting Groups**

One of the most effective and non-threatening ways to build relationships is through a group that is focused on a similar life setting. Relationships flourish in situations where everyone in the group is going through the same growth stages. Whether it's being engaged, married, having kids, or being single, we all need to share life with people enduring similar struggles and experiencing the same joys. Several Life Setting Groups have been mainstays at Community for many years, such as: Men's Fraternity, Circle of Friends, and the Singles group. These Community Groups provide ample opportunity to develop meaningful relationships and equip people to succeed in every stage of life. Our hope is that in the future we will have a Life Setting Group that will focus on the needs of nearly every situation imaginable. Some Life Setting groups function as a home group, while others like Men's Fraternity meet at a different time throughout the week.

### **Common Cause Groups**

Common Cause Groups differ from Home Groups and Life Setting Groups by rallying behind one specific activity or ministry. These groups are made-up of people from all walks of life, but

who share a passion about a pressing need in our community. Some groups may form on a temporary basis until a situation has passed, while others may be ongoing and year-round.

Recovery Groups are an example of a Common Cause Group. Meeting on a regular basis to heal or overcome past behavior, Recovery Groups provide a confidential atmosphere through which individuals can search their past and focus on their future. We have a continuous 12-step group and other groups are formed as a need presents itself. Other Common Cause Groups include: marriage enrichment retreats, a cooking ministry, and many opportunities for service through our LOVE Network.

### **Developmental Groups**

Developmental Groups could also be called Spiritual Formation Groups. These groups focus on specific aspects of the Christian life and take steps to deepen a Christian's walk in those areas. Whether it is a class on prayer or short-term mission projects, developmental groups tend to have a focused objective and meet in order to accomplish that task. The most frequently attended Developmental Group is our Membership Class. In this class the opportunity is given to find out more about the church, understand its mission and vision, clarify its structure and ministry objectives, and finally make a decision about one's future aligning with the church through membership. Other developmental groups include: mission trips, Tool Time, one-on-one discipleship, and mentoring programs.

### **Five Components of a Healthy Small Group**

While we have several different types of Community Group, the overall purposes of each group attempt to accomplish the following five areas:

#### **Spiritual Growth**

It is our desire to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only. With this purpose, Bible study for the sake of Bible study seems without merit. When we study the Bible in small groups we do so with the intent of understanding God's love at a deeper level and responding to that love with a deeper obedience. The spiritual progression of each member is vital to every small group ministry. This is accomplished in several ways. We believe the Bible holds within its message the power to change the course of humanity. Therefore, we seek to base decisions on biblical principles. This can only be done as we come to understand the Bible as is

accomplished through Bible study. Prayer is an integral part of every small group. It is in a small group setting, unlike a corporate event, that people are free to share in-depth burdens, to receive specific, individual prayer, and realize the activity of God through answered prayer. Small groups also offer a level of accountability that cannot be experienced on the corporate level. This accountability is never meant to guilt or embarrass, but is meant to provide correction and encouragement when needed. Every small group should focus on the spiritual growth of each member if it desires to accomplish its intent.

## **Evangelism**

Each small group has a niche that gives it a unique ability to reach out to a non-churched person who has a similar attraction as that specific group. Due to our conviction that humanity is separated from God and that God is in the process of reconciling us back to himself through the sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ, we believe that there is always the need to reach out to others with the good news of the gospel. For this reason, groups are never closed but are always open to one more. If the size of a group becomes a problem, the group will birth another group before ever turning away a person. We do not believe that evangelism is something only done by paid staff or through a specific program; we believe it is the natural part of any life given to Christ. Small groups are uniquely situated to reach out to the friends and families of its members. In our cell ministry we pray for those who do not know Christ, we make room for them, we build relationships with them, and we invite them to become a part of what God is doing among us.

## **Care**

Equally important with the spiritual growth of a person is the personal care of every member. Pastoral care is essential to every church. Over a period of time everyone experiences times of great grief and times of great joy. Everyone has the ability to give to others and everyone at some point will be in need. The unique set-up of Community is that we accomplish pastoral care primarily through the Community Groups. While we seek to minister to each person equally, we cannot assure such service if a person is not part of a Community Group. Without that connection it is far more likely that a person's need will go unmet, not for lack of concern, but for lack of awareness. Connection with a Community Group provides a line of

communication throughout the church, leading to more effective pastoral care—pastoral care that is primarily accomplished by the facilitators and members of a specific group.

## **Service**

It is unnatural for a Christian to only have an inward focus of life. The very presence of Christ within the life of a believer results in a newfound compassion for other people, leading to a life of sacrifice for others. The same is true of any group comprised of Christians. At the heart of our mission is a desire to minister to all people equally despite race, gender, age, socio-economic status, or even church attendance. When a need is brought to the attention of a member of Community, it is the expectation of the church that the member will minister to that need with the same passion and desire as if that person were a long-time member of this church. While we never force ourselves upon people, we do offer our services when needs arise.

## **Leadership Development**

Our world is transformed by God. God has chosen to use women and men as his means through which that transformation takes place. The women and men used by God to facilitate transformation are people who have the ability to influence others. Community Bible desires to produce spiritual leaders—women and men equipped to positively influence others toward Christ. We believe that every person has the potential of being a leader in some type of setting. To accomplish this task, it is our desire to equip people with the necessary tools to influence others. Small group leaders take great pains to assist others in identifying their passion, understanding how God has been at work in their lives in the past, realizing past experiences that can relate to others, growing in the fruit of the Spirit, and developing their spiritual gifts. Through life on life experiences, shared ministry, and specific studies, the leadership qualities within each person will emerge.

The Community Group ministry is diverse, yet intentional. It is vital to the health of our church and will forever be a foundational aspect of who we are. When matched with corporate worship, we see the two major modes through which we accomplish our mission and vision. Cell and Celebration are not only vital to our well-being, we desire that they define the spiritual life of every person who calls Community home.

## THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

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**STRUCTURE.** Every organization has a structure: decisions have to be made, employees have to be supervised, and properties have to be maintained. A church is no different. Without a clear and efficient structure a church cannot effectively accomplish its mission. The purpose of organization is to assist ministry, not to hinder or hurt relationships. Relationships always come before structure, but the life of the church must always come before one relationship. We will not harm the well-being of the entire body just to ease tension in one relationship. Organizational policies and structure are intended to give guidelines to protect the church and encourage ministry, but should never be oppressive or injurious to an individual.

### **Biblical Basis**

The Bible has a lot to say about the church, but surprisingly it has very little direct instruction on how a church is to be organized. For this reason, church structure is possibly the greatest difference in a majority of churches, more so than doctrinal beliefs or social views. We believe that the reason the Bible gives no definitive way to organize a church is to provide freedom for each church to structure itself in a manner that is most effective in its community.

The only area in which the Bible clearly speaks regarding organization is its teaching on the officers of the church. It explains two leadership roles that should be present in a local church. We believe these roles to be two.

First is the role of Pastor. Three terms are used in the New Testament to convey the idea of pastor—elder, overseer (bishop), and pastor (shepherd). Some believe that these are three separate offices, but we believe they are three interchangeable terms regarding the same role.

Second is the role of deacon. Deacons are charged to assist the pastors with the works of ministry in order to allow the pastors more time for prayer, study, and visionary leadership.

## **Leadership Team**

In light of these two descriptions of church leaders, and within the freedom of the New Testament to organize in the most effective way, the leadership team of Community Bible Church functions in the following way:

### **Ministry Directors**

Ministry Directors form the governing board of the church. They are the Macro-leaders of the church overseeing its ministries, shepherding its people, and governing its resources.

Ministry Directors are nominated by the Senior Pastor and confirmed by the congregation. They serve rotating terms yearly determined by the Directors. The Directors are comprised of the Senior Pastor, the Executive Pastor, and a minimum of three members of the congregation, but no more than thirteen members.

### ***Six Responsibilities of Directors:***

**GUARD THE MISSION:** A church's attention can be pulled a thousand different directions in the pursuit to do good. The Directors are charged with ensuring that the church stays focused on the timeless mission commanded by Christ.

**BUY INTO THE VISION:** Our unique take on how we are to accomplish the mission given by Christ to his church is ultimately decided by the Directors upon recommendation from the Senior Pastor and the staff. While the Directors may not dream up the vision for the church, they must buy into that vision before it can become a reality.

**DIAGNOSIS THE HEALTH:** Like any living organism, the church's future is dependent upon its current state of health. The Directors are charged with keeping a pulse on the life and ministry of the church while confronting and treating any unhealthy aspect that could hinder its survival.

**ENSURE THE RESOURCES:** Having bought into the vision of the church, it is the Directors' role to ensure the proper allocation of resources to accomplish that mission.

**DEFINE THE PROCEDURES:** While they do not micro-manage any ministry, the Directors do have the right to set forth operating procedures that are to be followed by all staff and volunteers.

**EVALUATE THE SENIOR PASTOR:** The Directors only directly oversee the performance of the Senior Pastor. They oversee his job performance while encouraging and advising future performance.

## **Senior Pastor**

The Senior Pastor serves as the Directional Leader of the church and staff. He is the primary vision-caster and leader. He evaluates and oversees all paid personnel. He is charged with long-range planning and development. He serves as the chairman of the Ministry Directors.

The Senior Pastor is nominated by the Ministry Directors and confirmed by the Congregation.

## **Staff**

All staff serve at the pleasure of the Senior Pastor. All staff positions are selected by the Senior Pastor and confirmed by the staff and Ministry Directors. The congregation and Directors may voice support or dissent for any staff member, but the congregation does not vote on the addition or removal of staff.

## **Trustees**

Trustees provide assistance and advice to the Ministry Directors, specifically in the area of physical and financial resources. Upon the Directors recommendation, the Trustees assist the staff in the formation of a yearly budget, determination of staff salaries, and future capital improvements or ventures.

Trustees are nominated by the Senior Pastor, confirmed by the Directors, and are voted on by the congregation. They serve rotating terms to be determined by the Directors.

## Deacons

The role of deacon is fulfilled primarily through community group leaders and other volunteers in our church. We do not use the name deacon, in order to avoid confusion with churches who are structured in a manner in which deacons are their ruling body. In our opinion deacons are called to serve the church by assisting the pastors in ministry; they are not called to make the daily organization decisions or give the overall vision of the church. As members grow in maturity, we attempt to equip them to function in the role of deacon serving those around them and pastoring their circle of influence.

### Making Decisions

Our structure attempts to be streamlined for the most effectiveness while at the same time protecting the integrity of our organization with appropriate checks and balances. At the core of decision-making philosophy is the idea that those who are actually doing the work should be the ones who make the decisions regarding their ministry. For this reason the congregation as a whole makes very few decisions as a group. Only those issues directly involving the congregation are voted on by the congregation.

A unique aspect of how we make decisions is based on what voices are given credibility and what voices are ignored. Every voice does not carry equal weight. We refuse to allow critics who are not involved in ministry to influence the work being accomplished by those who are actually involved in ministry. While we are willing to listen to any critique and to consider any criticism, only the active voice, the one involved in the ministry of the church, carries true weight. This is one reason why we do not have regular business meetings. It is our opinion that business meetings allow for the decision-making process to be taken away from those doing the work and given to any person who happens to show up for a meeting.

While we do not take seriously the voices of those who only critique and do not serve, there are voices that carry tremendous weight in the decision-making process. Every member is

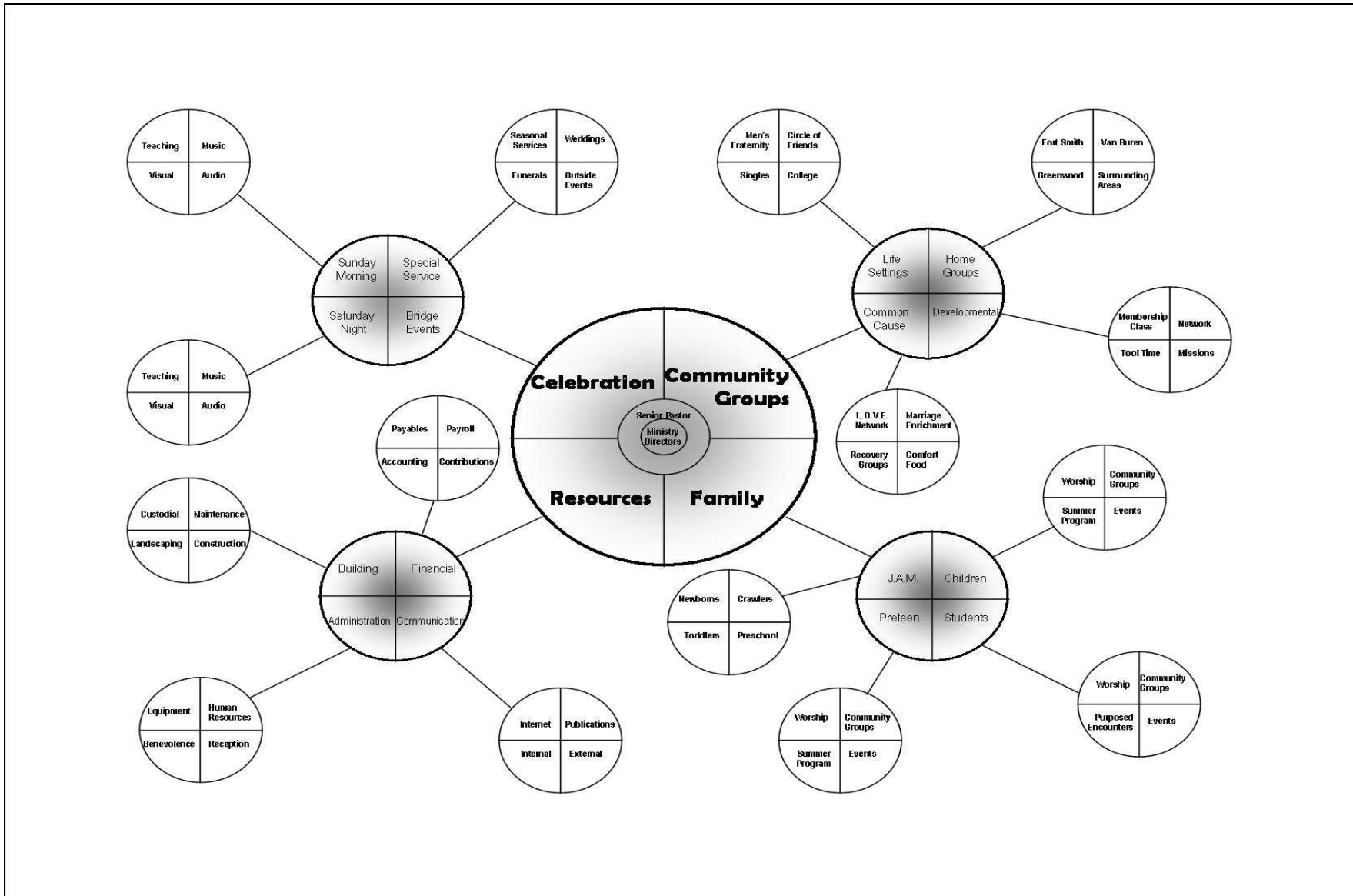
#### ***Issues confirmed or denied by congregational vote:***

- **Calling or removing the Senior Pastor**
- **Amending the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws**
- **Merging or Dissolving the Church**
- **Approving indebtedness or the acquisition of property**
- **Approving the annual operating budget**
- **Approving selection of Trustees**

expected to be actively involved in the life of the church. This involvement gives members not only the right but the responsibility to seek answers, raise questions, and attempt to understand the philosophy and reasoning behind decisions that are made. We have an “open-air” policy on the decision-making process as long as any information given out is not personal in nature or destructive to any parties involved. Members should not hesitate in discussing issues with the directional leaders of ministries or chosen leaders of the church.

### **Ministry Structure**

For day-to-day operation the elements of the church organization are broken into four major categories: Celebration, Community Groups, Family, and Resources. Each quadrant has a directional leader who is assigned by and reports to the Senior Pastor. This leader is charged with setting the direction of that set of ministries within the overall vision of the church.



## **Three Requirements for Membership**

### **Salvation**

The church is intended to be a body of believers that submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The centerpiece of anyone who desires to join with other believers is the fact that they believe. A person who is not sure about faith, who has not yet made a decision regarding Jesus, or who is still uncommitted in regard to the teachings of the Bible is more than welcome to attend Community. They are welcome to search for understanding in our services and in our home groups. They are also welcome to involve themselves in meaningful relationships throughout the ministry of our church. However, the church is comprised of committed believers, those who have decided to follow Jesus and to live in obedience to his teachings.

For this reason it is necessary to explore the faith of those who desire to join the church. It is not our intention to offend anyone by asking questions regarding what they believe, their experiences from the past, and their current understanding of the gospel. However, we must gain a basic knowledge of someone's story before they can be acknowledged as a member of Community Bible. We think of salvation in two ways—as a point and as a process, neither can be excluded from the life of a true believer and both are expected in those who desire membership.

### **The Point of Salvation**

Every process must have a beginning and salvation is no different. This beginning is what some may call a born again experience, conversion, or confirmation. Whatever we call it there must be a time in each individual's life in which they come to grips with Jesus Christ on a personal level. For many this event is a memorable experience that is never forgotten in time, date, or location. For others this event is less specific but just as much real. Especially for some who grew up hearing the message of Jesus, faith did not emerge in a sudden moment; instead, as they grew, so did their faith. However dramatic or meek a person's story, the issue is not how one came to believe, but rather that someone can say that they do currently believe.

## **Understanding the Gospel**

**FROM OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIBLE, AS EXPLAINED IN OUR DOCTRINAL STATEMENT, WE CONCLUDE THAT THE FOLLOWING IS TRUE FOR ALL OF HUMANITY:**

- A meaningful and intimate relationship with God is the highest purpose for humanity. Only in that relationship can meaning, purpose, and lasting happiness be found.
- Each one of us is a sinner and because of that sin we are separated from God.
- That separation cannot be bridged by any human effort or ability.
- Humanity is therefore without hope.
- However, because of God's love, he has made a way in which humanity can be in a right relationship with him.
- Through the gift of Jesus and because of his death, burial, and resurrection, humanity can come into a relationship with God through faith.
- Faith is then expressed by an inward dependence and outward devotion to God.

**HAS THERE BEEN A POINT IN YOUR LIFE IN WHICH YOU HAVE PRIVATELY ACCEPTED GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION AND PUBLICLY ACKNOWLEDGED YOUR FAITH? IF NOT, HERE'S HOW:**

- Confess your need as a sinner.
- Believe that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross and rose from the grave.
- Commit to live your life in grateful response to what God has done.

## **The Process of Salvation**

From a human perspective, the point of salvation is the beginning of the salvation process. Any person who is in this process is guaranteed an eternity with God. However, no one who truly believes in God's gift of salvation would stop at one single decision. The true result of a point of salvation is a changed life- one that desires to become more like Jesus everyday.

If salvation were simply a point, there would be no need for a church. Our only focus would be convincing people to make a one-time decision, coaxing them into praying a prayer, or walking an aisle. However, salvation is more than a single event. It is a lifelong process, a process that

does not conclude until a person is ultimately transformed in the eternal presence of Jesus. For that reason our concern is not only that someone prays the right prayer, but also that they begin to allow God's grace to enact authentic change in them. We want them to start with a prayer and a public proclamation, but it cannot stop there.

The process of salvation is not an easy one. Old habits are overcome. New habits are formed. Attitudes are changed. And a different perspective is formed. Without exception people fail. Yet the intent remains the same, to participate with the Holy Spirit in the process of forming a new heart and living a new life.

Throughout history these two aspects of salvation have, at times, been separated from each other. Some focus so much on the point of salvation that people confuse it as simply a past event, like an item to be checked off a list. Others focus so much on the process, that they almost forget about the beginning point, and therefore no one really knows who is attempting to live the Christian life and who is not. Our hope is to live in a healthy balance between the two, assisting people in beginning a relationship with Christ and continuing to aid them as they follow him the rest of their lives. These beliefs lead us to a key question: Have you experienced a point of salvation, and are you experiencing the process of salvation? If the answer is "No" to either of these questions we encourage you to set an appointment with one of the membership class facilitators, community group leaders, or staff.

The centerpiece of anyone who desires to join with other believers is the fact that they believe.

## **Introduction to Membership**

Participation in the Introduction to Membership class is mandatory for membership to protect both the individual and the church from a relationship that is unhealthy. We believe it is vital for both parties to know what is expected, believed, and desired before the relationship is entered. We do not take membership lightly and we want to go to every length to communicate our expectations and to answer any questions a prospective member may have.

## **Confirmation of Covenant**

**AS A MEMBER OF COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH, I PRAYERFULLY COMMIT MYSELF:**

1. To grow personally toward spiritual maturity in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)
2. To live before the world an exemplary life of Christian conduct and integrity (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12) and if married to seek to fulfill God's design for marriage and the home. (Colossians 3:18-21)
3. To seek to understand and to exercise my own unique giftedness in a supportive, non-divisive manner and, thereby, to actively participate as a needed member of this body of believers. (Romans 12:3-8)
4. To uphold fellow believers in prayer, to give aid to those in need, to love others and to diligently serve the Lord. (Romans 12:9-13ff; James 1:27)
5. To submit to the pastoral direction of the elected and appointed pastors and leaders who have oversight for this body of. (Hebrews 13:17)
6. To support, through cheerful and worshipful giving, the financial obligations of the church according to biblical guidelines. (2 Corinthians 8:1-6ff; 9:6-7)
7. To support the biblical philosophy of ministry discussed in the Introduction to Membership class.

## **Membership Papers**

To confirm that all three requirements for membership have been met we ask each prospective member to fill out membership papers. These papers serve as an official application to membership at Community Bible Church. No person is considered a member until these papers are completed and approved.

Beside personal information, the membership papers ask for a description of three different aspects of a person's faith.

**Describe the circumstances and events regarding your point of salvation:** This description may be of a specific time or place for some people while it may cover several years

for others. The issue is that a person can confirm that they do in fact believe in the saving grace of Jesus Christ and its application to their lives. This description should include a short explanation of the gospel as understood at the point of salvation and any circumstances or events that led to their making a decision to become a follower of Jesus.

**Describe how God has changed you through the process of salvation:** God's presence in our lives produces fruit. No one can accept the salvation of Jesus Christ and then remain the same. Evidence of his presence is found in every aspect of life. Acknowledging the process of salvation admits that one is not currently perfect, but is being changed by the Holy Spirit. A description of this process is not a list of sins that have been overcome; it is a story of one's life since they have accepted Christ describing success and failures.

**Describe your next step in becoming actively involved at Community Bible:** Church membership is an important aspect of someone's life. It identifies them with other believers, gives accountability, and provides a support system for spiritual growth, but it is not an end. We ask potential members to consider their next step in spiritual development to provide the church with a better understanding of how we can assist in that process.

A church's organization should be a reflection of their values, vision, and theology. As organizations grow their structure must constantly adapt. While certain aspects of our operation will probably never change, a great deal of our structure will continue to modify in order to meet the needs of the congregation. In no way are we married to how we do things. At any point we are willing to sacrifice our structure in order to more effectively accomplish God's call upon this church.



**MEMBERSHIP MATTERS.** It matters to both the individual and the organization, but it only matters when there is meaning behind it. Being on a mailing list or having an “M” beside one’s name in a computer does not lead to spiritual growth or a true connection with God. Completing a class and filling out some papers does not draw one into a deep sense of relationship and purpose. These things only come as we involve ourselves in the life of the church.

Getting people involved is not our way of building our organization; it is an invitation for people to connect with other people and with God. No matter how great our desire to meet people, to make them feel welcomed, to connect them with others, and to see them grow spiritually, we cannot take total responsibility for the spiritual life of others. They must share that responsibility. It is our duty to provide an atmosphere that facilitates growth. It is the responsibility of individuals to involve themselves in that atmosphere.

It is not the responsibility of the staff or members to poke or prod people into involvement; it is their responsibility to equip people for ministry. One of the perks of Community is the ability to seek God without being called out or put on the spot. A person can attend anonymously for as long as they choose. However, when they desire a deeper connection, they must be willing to take the first step.

Two different people could attend our church—one believing this is the most warm and friendly congregation possible and the other believing that we are aloof and uncaring. Most of the time,

the only difference in their experience is the effort that they put into it. While there are times which we fail to reach out and we drop the ball, this is the exception far more than the rule. We make every effort to meet the needs of the people. We challenge every person who seeks to be a part to make an effort, testing our theory that anyone who desires a place can find his or her place at Community.

## **Pursue Spiritual Transformation**

At the very heart of Community's being is the belief that God desires transformation within the life of every person. The idea that true change is not only possible but also expected for every believer is a concept foreign to the mindset of many Christians. Our hope is that as people understand the biblical teaching, they will see that an authentic renovation of the heart is available to all.

If transformation is available and expected for all people, why do so many go through their lives with little or no evidence of a life change? The possibilities are several:

### **Poor Biblical Teaching**

Across denominational lines, the teaching on transformation (many times referred to as discipleship) has varied. The pendulum of teaching has swung between two heresies rarely resting in the center of truth. On one side has been a focus of human effort, at the cost of God's sovereignty. On the other side has been a focus on God's forgiveness as the only aspect of salvation, at the cost of calling for any tangible life change. Any teaching that denies the sovereignty of God in salvation or neglects the need for human change in response to God's actions is an improper teaching. Salvation is an act of God's graciousness. Its effects in the life of humanity result in faith, repentance, and the diligent work to become more like Christ.

### **The Process is Difficult**

G. K. Chesterton said, "Christianity has not so much been tried and found wanting, as it has been found difficult and left untried." There is no easy path to Christlikeness. To think so misunderstands the holiness of God and the depths of humanity's sin. The process of changing a rebellious heart into a heart bent toward love cannot happen in an instant. The point of salvation awakens our hearts to the possibility of good; the process of salvation takes time in order to make good our natural choice. Such a process is not easy. Yet it is far easier than to

remain in rebellion against God. We are given the option of two roads. The first begins easily but ends in great toil. The second begins with great struggle but ends in God's eternal rest. Many people see the difficulty at the beginning of the second road and simply refuse to travel it, even though it is the way that is most beneficial.

## **Results are Difficult to Measure**

For those who have not left Christianity untried, the road of transformation can be one of discouragement. Because we are accustomed to measurable success in quick quantities, the way of transformation can be frustrating. Long before outward signs are seen, internal differences must be made. Success can go unnoticed and often be confused for failure. Not only is the process slow, but also difficult to measure. A growing financial portfolio can be measured, but how do we measure a heart that is growing in love? What are the visible differences between a net loss and a net gain when it comes to obedience? The intangible is not so easily gauged. Transformation takes great diligence in discipline, but it also takes great confidence in the process that is being taken. To doubt the process could lead to a premature end to something that is silently working quite effectively.

## **The Way of Transformation**

### **1. Commit to becoming a student of Christ**

The first step on the way of transformation is a commitment to be a disciple of Jesus. The point of conversion can mean many things to many people. While it should be a life-changing moment in which a person immediately begins a life mission of learning to live as Jesus would have them live, often it simply is seen as a trust which will one day keep them out of hell and get them into heaven. Salvation clearly has these implications, but more important is its ultimate goal of our being formed into Christlikeness. We have been saved in order to become like Jesus. That is a process that begins now.

If transformation is the focus of a life, an unwavering commitment to follow Christ must be kept. Being a student of Christ means that we believe he is the ultimate teacher of how to live. We desire to learn from him and to emulate his lifestyle into our everyday living. Just as an apprentice works beside the master in order to learn a trade, so we live beside Jesus to learn a life. From our earliest days as children we are students of those with whom we live. We learn

different tasks and behaviors in order to be accepted and to mature in society. No one goes unformed.

A problem arises when we realize that no matter whom we followed, the effects of sin influenced that formation. We now seek to be re-formed or to transform our old way of life into one which pleases God. This can only take place in the same way that our original formation took place. We must commit ourselves to spending time studying the model of Christ, living life with him, and not only doing the things that he did, but also employing the disciplines which allowed him to do the things he did. We cannot simply forgive because he forgave, we must first have our hearts changed by his love in order to provide a forgiving heart. Our goal is as Dallas Willard has said, “the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life, not just in the moment of specific action.” (*The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 10)

Without an unmovable belief that Jesus is the ultimate teacher of life and that humanity’s greatest pursuit is to learn from him, the way of transformation cannot be found. Springing from this belief is the will and desire to daily interact with Jesus in the journey of transformation.

## **2. Personally train in a way that leads to transformation**

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

### **Training vs. Trying**

Runners do not try to run. Dentists do not try to become dentists. And Christians do not try to become like Christ. We train to do so. John Ortberg reminds us of the difference between trying and training, both desire an outcome, but only the second can achieve its desire. Trying to be transformed will make us no more like Christ than trying to be rich will add to our income. Effort is good only if it is placed in the right direction. Trying, apart from training, is nothing but wasted energy. Training on the other hand is an intentional process in which we engage in activities that will eventually allow us to do routinely that which we cannot now do by

direct effort. As we train, God transforms. Apart from training, transformation does not take place. God rarely will force himself upon a person. Training is humanity's way of opening itself up to the transforming power of God.

## **Train the Heart**

The focus of our training is not to do that which Christ did. Action is a by-product of our true focus that is to be who Christ was and is. If we were to focus on the action, our training could quickly turn to nothing but legalism. Employing the action that Christ requires apart from having the heart that he desires does not bring glory to him. Our focus is on having a heart like his, which clearly would result in an action that brings him glory.

## **The Classic Disciplines**

We are unaware of any other way to open ourselves up to the transforming power of God than to involve ourselves in the same activities that Jesus involved himself in when he lived on earth. By arranging our lives around these classic disciplines, God begins to form our lives from the inside out.

A few of these disciplines are activities performed solely by the individual. Solitude would be the most obvious discipline that cannot be performed by a community. If it was necessary for Jesus to remove himself from the crowds in order to be refreshed, how much more important will it be for us. Slowing one's life and performing acts of secrecy are two other disciplines that are not practiced in a public way.

Most of the spiritual disciplines are practiced in both public and private settings. Bible study, prayer, fasting, confession, worship, celebration, service, fellowship, submission, and sacrifice can take place as personal acts or communal acts. For example, personal Bible study does not remove the need for regular public teaching of God's word. While at the same time, listening to weekly sermons will in no way provide enough Biblical knowledge to grow in grace and truth. The church desires to assist the individual in their pursuit toward godliness, informing and equipping them to engage in the proper activities through which God will transform their lives.

It is important to remember that we are not seeking a way in which we can earn the favor of God. We are simply responding to the grace he has lavished upon us, desiring to become more like him in every aspect of our lives. Richard Foster reminds us, "The grace of God is unearned

and unearnable, but if we ever expect to grow in grace, we must pay the price of a consciously chosen course of action which involves both individual and group life. Spiritual growth is the purpose of the Disciplines.” (*Celebration of Discipline*, 8) History provides no other examples of how to become like Christ, apart from engaging in activities which unform the sin that is ingrained within us, and transform those attitudes and habits into actions of holiness.

### **3. Provide an Arena for Others**

Community Bible seeks to be a place where every person can come and engage themselves in a relationship with Jesus Christ. From the most mature Christian, to the person just beginning to seek understanding of God, we want to be a place of openness, love, truth, and opportunity. We hope to provide that place for you and we expect you to provide that place for others. There are several ways to make Community the place we want it to be. The following principles are not in our membership covenant, but they are expected and desired of every member.

#### **Work One, Worship One**

A long-standing tradition at Community is the belief that each member should worship for one hour and then provide that same opportunity for others during another hour. For worship to be meaningful it requires countless volunteers in order to provide a non-distracting atmosphere in which we can focus our attention solely on God. A parent cannot worship unless they know their children are in a caring environment. A first-time guest may struggle in worship unless they are welcomed into a warm atmosphere. Several minutes could be lost from worship as we transition from one service to another unless someone is helping direct the crowd. By worshiping one service and working another, we not only reap the benefits of community worship, but also provide an equal opportunity to others.

#### **Feel (but don't abuse) Ownership**

A great threat to any church is that a network of leadership will be formed that is unchanging and closed to any new comers. It is our intent to never create this atmosphere. Instead we desire for this to be a place that once someone has joined the church, they feel as much a part as someone who has been here since day one. While we will always respect the experience of those who have been here longer, Community never intends to allow tradition to rule out innovative thinking.

In order to prevent an unchanging guard of leadership, we intentionally seek out new members for leadership positions. Without sacrificing spiritual maturity we hope to transition new members into meaningful roles of ministry as quickly as possible.

While there is but one owner of the church—Jesus—he has entrusted the care of the church to us. Feeling a sense of ownership is vital to making this your church home. The sense of ownership comes in several ways. Understanding the philosophies of the church gives better insight into how decisions are made and in what ways you can best be a part of that decision-making process. Making a conscious effort to meet the leadership team provides an outlet should questions arise or you feel your voice is not being heard. Regular attendance assists the feeling of ownership by helping you stay informed of the activities and experiences of the church.

Feeling ownership is integral for membership to be a lasting commitment, however, it has its dangers. Ownership is positive if it creates within us a sense of purpose and meaning. Ownership is negative if we use it to prevent others from finding their purpose and meaning. An important transition should be quickly made as people move from mere attendance to membership. This church begins as “your” church when people first attend. As they involve themselves it becomes “my” church. It must rapidly move into a sense of “our” church if we desire to be open and welcome to others. No one, neither staff nor charter members, has the right to prevent others from becoming deeply involved in the ministry of Community. If a person is willing to uphold the membership covenant, they are just as much a part of this Body as any other person.

## **Involve Yourself in Involvement**

Creating a welcoming and engaging atmosphere is the responsibility of every person who calls Community home. It can only be accomplished when members find it their personal mission to reach out to others. By joining the church a person is accepting a deeper level of responsibility and accountability. Each member can involve themselves in some basic activities to further the involvement of others.

**Invite others.** Most people visit a church because of an invitation from someone they know. By visiting with a member, that guest has the guaranty of being spoken to in service, being introduced to other people, having questions answered, being able to give any feedback from

services, and staying informed about future activities of the church. When you invite a guest, make it your mission to ensure that their experience is a positive one. Pre-arrange a meeting place, show them around, introduce them to others, make them feel comfortable about our children's ministry, sit with them in service, and invite them to join a group for lunch. By doing these things, a guest can make more connections in one morning than he or she would over several months of attending alone.

**Be Aware.** Whether it is in worship service or walking down the hallways, we must each be aware of those around us and consider how we can make their attendance more meaningful. If you sit in the same place every week make it your goal to be able to identify every person who sits around you. Whenever someone new is present, make sure you introduce yourself and invite them to sit with you. If you move around from week to week, take the opportunity to meet more people and ask if you can sit with them. Be willing to ask what home group someone is attending, and if they are not attending one, volunteer to help them find one that is right for them.

Awareness starts long before a service ever begins. Whether it is at work or at a child's game, we can make relationships with others, explore their faith, and be willing to invite them to Community if they are seeking a church home.

**Get Involved.** It is an easy imperative to give, but not always an easy one to apply. For some, the goal of Christ-likeness is so overwhelming that it paralyzes them. Others, however, realize the greater the task, the more urgent the time. We cannot afford to wait for a more convenient time to begin our journey. The process will take a lifetime and we have no time to waste.

## Epilogue

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**THANK YOU.** No words better describe our feelings to people who honestly desire to know who we are and what we are about. We appreciate your willingness to take the time to study, listen, consider, and understand Community Bible Church. While our mission is clear and our vision is lofty, our spirits are humbled by the reality that men and women continue to become a part of what God is doing among us. We do not take lightly the responsibility that we have for people who choose to make Community their church home.

Over the preceding pages we have set forth our vision, history, theology, structure, and ministry plan. While we cannot communicate all that we are, we hope these pages have been a good start. Now the choice of your role within this community is left in your hands. If you decide this is not the place for you, we still desire to do anything we can to assist your spiritual journey. We choose not to minister to people based on membership or attendance. We attempt to meet all needs of which we are made aware. If there is anything that we can do, please feel free to contact us.

If you choose Community as the place for you, we hope that this book will serve as a beginning—a beginning of training, of spiritual pursuit, of ultimate joy in worship of God. Our prayer is that we will be found faithful in what God has entrusted to us, knowing that he will prove faithful in his love toward us. May God bless.

# Baptism

*Our first step of obedience*

By both example and command Jesus instituted the right of Baptism as a central teaching of faith. While it is an action that is simple in process, it is packed with symbolism and meaning. By Christ's example, because of his teaching, and confirmed by church history, we believe that baptism is a command for every person who places their faith in Jesus Christ.

Baptism is an act of obedience. The mark of a true Christian is one who does the will of God. One of the first acts of obedience that a new believer can make is to follow the commands of Christ in baptism (Matthew 28:19). Baptism has no saving power. Salvation is the free gift of God. Baptism is a sign of faith already present in the life of a person.

Baptism is a public profession of faith. It symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection that Christ did on our behalf in order that we may have new life (Romans 6:4). It often is the first opportunity that a person has to publicly proclaim what God has done for them. While faith is personal, it is also public. Just as a marriage is between two individuals, yet contains outward expression through the wearing of rings, so to faith is between an individual and God, yet has an outward expression through baptism.

Baptism is not required for membership. While we believe that baptism is not an optional command for a Christian, we do not see any link between baptism and church membership. If a person has not been baptized we hope that through maturity they will understand the biblical teaching and then seek baptism. However, we do not hold baptism as a prerequisite for membership.

Many parents struggle as to an appropriate age at which to allow their children to be baptized. Since our focus is more on a lifelong spirituality and not on an immediate response, we believe that parents should encourage their children to wait to be baptized at an older age. While every child is different, baptism can be more meaningful if it happens at a later age of eleven or twelve. However, this decision is up to the parent and is not mandated by the church. We will baptize any minor who with the consent of their parent is willing to publicly confess salvation in Christ.

Some people come from a tradition in which a child is baptized as an infant with the hopes that the child will one day profess Christ. Some believe that from the Old Testament custom of circumcision it can be deduced that infant baptism is biblical and appropriate. However, this link is never specifically mentioned in the New Testament. We believe that baptism is specifically saved for a person after he or she has committed his or her life to Christ and is not a measure taken in hopes that a person will make a commitment. For this reason, baptism is saved for the person, who on his or her own accord, makes a commitment to Christ.

As an alternative to infant baptism we offer a baby dedication. This dedication is intended to set a child apart, for the parents to commit to raising the child in a godly way, and for the church to commit to engaging in that child's life in a way that promotes faith. This dedication in no way guarantees the salvation of the child but begins the process through which, hopefully, the child will come to faith. A baby dedication is recommended for every child and can be scheduled by calling the church office.

Two theories exist regarding the form of baptism. Some believe it is symbolically important in function while others believe the form also is important. For those who believe function only, two forms are available—immersion or sprinkling. For those who believe that form is also important, immersion is the chosen means for baptism. Since immersion is the only example of baptism in the New Testament and because it symbolically illustrates the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ we choose to baptize by immersion. However, if a person was baptized by sprinkling we do not require them to be re-baptized.

Baptism is most often observed during community worship as a way to testify to the whole church body one's conversion. However, others prefer to save baptism for after service at which time a celebration can be held or for another time when family members can be present.

We are happy to work with any family in arranging an experience that will be most beneficial to the participants and the church as a whole. For more information or to schedule a baptism, contact the church office.

BYLAWS  
Of  
COMMUNITY CHURCH OF FORT SMITH

An Arkansas Not-for-Profit Religious Corporation

ARTICLE I  
Name and Principal Office

The name of the Corporation is COMMUNITY CHURCH OF FORT SMITH. This Corporation will be further referred to in the Bylaws as the “Church.” The Church maintains its principal office at 9201 Dallas, Fort Smith, Arkansas, 72903. The Ministry Directors of the Church, herein referred to as “Directors,” shall have full power and authority to change the principal office from one location to another. Any change of this location shall be recorded by the Secretary on these bylaws opposite this section, or this section may be amended to state the new location.

ARTICLE II  
Purpose

The purpose of the Church is to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).

1. OUTREACH – “To share the good news of Jesus Christ with as many people as possible in our community and throughout the world” (Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, 2 Peter 3:9).
2. DISCIPLESHIP – “To help members develop toward full Christian maturity and train them for effective ministry. To promote personal, spiritual growth and discipleship through Bible teaching” (Ephesians 4:11-13, Matthew 18:20, Timothy 2:2).
3. WORSHIP – “To participate in public worship service together and to maintain personal daily devotions” (John 4:24).
4. MINISTRY/SERVICE – “To serve unselfishly, in Jesus’ name meeting the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of those in our Church, community and in the world” (1 Peter 4:10-11, Matthew 25:34-40, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Galatians 5:13).
5. FELLOWSHIP – “To encourage, support and pray for each other as members of the family of God. To share our lives together” (1 John 1:7, Acts 2:44-47, Hebrews 10:23-25, Romans 15:5,7, John 13:34-35).

This Church seeks to benefit the people of Fort Smith by providing opportunities for spiritual, physical, intellectual, social and cultural development (Luke 2:52).

ARTICLE III  
Statement of Faith

We affirm the Holy Bible as the inspired Word of God, and as the only basis for our beliefs. This Church accepts “The Baptist Faith and Message,” a 1963 affirmation of basic Christian beliefs, as a general statement of our faith.

ARTICLE IV  
Affiliation

This Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denominational control.

ARTICLE V  
Membership

SECTION I: General

Membership in this Church shall consist of all persons who have met the qualifications for membership and who are listed on the membership role.

SECTION II: Qualifications for Membership

1. A personal commitment of faith in Jesus Christ for salvation.
2. Completion of the Church’s membership class.
3. A commitment to abide by the membership covenant.

Nothing in this Article V shall be construed as limiting the right of the Church to refer to persons associated with it as “members.” No such reference, however, shall constitute any such person a member within the meaning of Arkansas Nonprofit Corporation Law. The Church may confer, by amendment of these Bylaws, some or all the rights of a member as set forth in Arkansas Nonprofit Corporation Law upon any such person or persons. Reference in the Bylaws to “members” are not references to such associated persons.

SECTION III: Membership Roles

In an effort to properly reflect the membership of the Church, two rolls shall be maintained. These rolls shall be updated periodically.

1. Active/Resident Members: All members who reside within the Church’s ministry area or are currently active in the Church.
2. Nonresident Members: Members who have become inactive as a result of moving out of the Church’s ministry area and have not joined another church.

## SECTION IV: Responsibilities of Membership

The responsibilities of membership are described in the membership covenant.

## SECITON V: Voting Rights of Membership

Every Active/Resident Member shall have the right to vote on the following matters: the annual budget of the Church, the election of the Trustees, the disposition of all or substantially all of the assets of the Church, the merger or dissolution of the Church, the acquisition of real property and related indebtedness, amendments to the Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws of the Church, and the calling or removing of a Senior Pastor. Each member 16 years and older is entitled to one vote. Voting by proxy is prohibited.

## SECTION VI: Termination of Membership

Members shall be removed from the Church roll for the following reasons:

1. Death.
2. Transfer of membership to another church.
3. By personal request of the member.
4. Dismissal by the Pastors according to the following conditions:
  - a. The member's life and conduct is not in accordance with the membership covenant in such a way that the member hinders the ministry influence of the Church in the community.
  - b. Procedures for the dismissal of a member shall be according to Matthew 18:15-17.

"Pastors" shall mean the Senior Pastor and the ordained pastors of the Pastor's Management Team, such team being determined and appointed by the Senior Pastor in his sole discretion from time to time.

## SECITON VII: Restoration of Members

Members dismissed by the Pastors shall be restored by the Pastors according to the spirit of 2 Corinthians 2:7-8, when their life-styles are judged to be in accordance with the membership covenant.

## ARTICLE VI Membership Meetings

### SECTION I: Place

Meetings of the members shall be held at the principal office of the Church or at such other place or places within or outside Arkansas as may be designated from time to time by the Directors.

## SECTION II: General Meetings

A general meeting of the members shall be held in December of each year at such time as determined by the Directors. This general meeting shall be the annual membership meeting. The purpose of this meeting shall be to adopt an annual budget and to elect the Trustees. Subject to Section IV of this Article, any other proper business may be conducted at this meeting.

## SECTION III: Special Meetings

Special meetings may be called at any time by the Senior Pastor, the Executive Pastor or by a majority of the Directors for any purpose by giving notice to the members in accordance with Section IV of this Article.

## SECTION IV: Notice Requirements for Membership Meetings

1. General Requirements. Whenever members are required or permitted to take any action at a meeting, notice shall be given to members no less than two (2) weeks prior to a meeting. Notification of membership meetings shall be given in any of the following manners which shall be deemed to be a reasonable method of calling a membership meeting:
  - a. Distribution of written material to the congregation in attendance at a Sunday service;
  - b. Announcement of the meeting in the Church newsletter;
  - c. Oral announcement to the congregation at a Sunday service; or
  - d. Delivery by United States mail to each member identified on the membership roll.
  
2. Notice of Certain Agenda Items. Approval by the members of any of the following proposals, other than by unanimous approval by those members entitled to vote, is valid only if the notice or waiver of notice specifies the general nature of the proposal:
  - a. Calling or removing the Senior Pastor;
  - b. Amending the Articles of Incorporation;
  - c. Adopting, amending or repealing Bylaws;
  - d. Disposing of all or substantially all of the Church's assets;
  - e. Adopting or amending a merger agreement; or
  - f. Approving the election to wind up and dissolve the Church;
  - g. Approving the acquisition of real property and related indebtedness.

## SECTION V: Quorum

Those members present and voting at a meeting duly noticed and called shall constitute a quorum of the membership for the transaction of business.

ARTICLE VII  
Trustees

SECTION I: Number and Term

The Directors shall, from time to time, designate the authorized number of Trustees of the Church. The Trustees shall be elected by the members at the annual membership meeting based upon the recommendation by the Directors. The Trustees may only be removed by a vote of the members.

SECTION II: Powers

The Trustees shall have the following powers and duties:

- a. To provide financial counsel to the directors. Such counsel shall be provided at the discretion of the Directors.
- b. To determine the compensation of the licensed and/or ordained ministers of the Church.
- c. To conduct such other duties and activities as the Directors may designate from time to time.

ARTICLE VIII  
Directors

SECTION I: Number and term

The authorized number of Directors shall be, until changed by amendment of the Articles of Incorporation or by a Bylaw duly adopted by the members, such number as may from time to time be authorized by resolution of the Directors, provided that such number shall not be less than three (3), nor more than fifteen (15). The Directors shall consist of the Senior Pastor, Executive Pastor, Pastor of Administration, and other ordained or lay pastors as designated by the Senior Pastor. Each Director may serve successive terms and shall hold office until a successor has been designated and qualified or until earlier resignation or removal. Vacancies may be filled by the unanimous affirmative vote of the remaining Directors. Persons selected to fill vacancies shall be confirmed by the congregation of Community Church of Fort Smith.

SECTION II: Powers

1. General corporate powers. Subject to the provisions and limitation of the Arkansas Nonprofit Corporation Law and any limitations in the Articles of Incorporation and these Bylaws, the activities, business and affairs of the Church shall be conducted and all corporate powers shall be exercised by or under the direction of the Directors.
2. Specific Powers. Without prejudice to the general powers set forth above, and subject to same limitations, the Directors shall have the power to:

- a. Select and remove all officers, agents and employees of the Church except for the Senior Pastor; prescribe any powers and duties for them that are consistent with law, with the Articles of Incorporation and with these Bylaws; and
- b. Change the principal executive office or the principal business office of the Church in the State of Arkansas from one location to another, and designate any place within or outside the State of Arkansas for the holding of any meeting or meetings of the Directors; and
- c. Adopt, make and use a corporate seal and alter the form of the seal; and
- d. Borrow money and incur indebtedness on behalf of the Church and cause to be executed and delivered for the Church's purposes and in the Church's name, promissory notes and other evidences of debt and securities; and
- e. Exercise all other powers conferred by the Arkansas Nonprofit Corporation Law or other applicable laws.

### SECTION III: Manner of Acting

The act of the unanimous vote of the Directors present at a meeting at which a quorum is present shall be the act of the Directors.

## ARTICLE IX Meetings of the Directors

### SECTION I: Place of Meetings

Regular or special meetings of the Directors may be held at any place within or outside the State of Arkansas that has been designated from time to time by resolution of the Directors. In the absence of such designation meetings shall be held at the principal office of the Church. Notwithstanding the above provisions of this section, a regular or special meeting of the Directors may be held at any place consented to in writing by all of the Directors, either before or after the meeting. If such consents are given, they shall be filed with the minutes of the meeting. Any meeting, regular or special, may be held by conference telephone or similar communication equipment, as long as all Directors participating in the meeting can hear one another. All such Directors shall be deemed to be present in person at such meeting.