



Covenant MEMBERSHIP

STONEGATE.CHURCH



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WELCOME TO STONEGATE

We are glad you have chosen to learn more about Stonegate Church!

This class is the basic introduction to our church family. Since people from many different church backgrounds have a desire to become members of Stonegate Church, this class is designed to clearly explain the “who” and “what” of our church.

We live in the age of consumerism. Most people (even those claiming to follow Jesus) treat the church like a buffet; we’ll take a few items from this church and a few items from that one. All the while we are missing the primary point. We are meant to give our lives away to the body of Christ, the Church. It is unthinkable that an arm would separate and live apart from the body. It is unthinkable that a finger would find purpose disconnected from the hand. However, the unthinkable occurs often in our culture.

Many people calling themselves Christians separate themselves from the blessings found in the body of Christ.

The parts of the body find meaning as they connect to one another. The parts of the body find purpose as they work with one another. This metaphor holds true with your life (a part/a member) and the church (the body). As you give your life away in sacrificial service to the local church, purpose and meaning follow. Our call as followers of Christ is to sacrificially commit our lives to a church, God’s means of building His Kingdom. We invite you into the movement! We invite you into a radical engagement of life, mission, soul, and gifts! We invite you into the body of Christ.

We want you to know up front that Stonegate Church longs to be a movement centered on Jesus. We do not exist for the sake of entertainment, but for the sake of eternity. We are fighting not with guns, but with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our enemy is real and his tactics are subtle. His weapons of sin and rebellion are devastating. We fight not for land, position, power or wealth; we fight for the glory of Jesus and for all to find their joy and satisfaction in Jesus.

How is this satisfying? That is what we want you to discover.

Enjoying Jesus with You,

Pastor Rodney

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

THE PERFECT CHURCH WOULD BE

write here

As part of a church family, you are a culture creator. Along with the rest of our church family, you have the chance to contribute in the creation of a gospel culture, a culture that visibly shows the beauty of our doctrine.¹ We want you to take this cultural creation task seriously. Our precious church family will only be as much of what you wrote in the box above as you are willing to become personally.

THE CHURCH DEFINED²

*The local church is a community of **regenerated believers** who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under **qualified leadership**, gather regularly for **preaching and worship**, observe the **biblical sacraments** of baptism and Communion, are **unified by the Spirit**, are **disciplined for holiness**, and scatter to fulfill the **Great Commandment** and the **Great Commission** as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy.*

This definition of the church gives us eight defining marks of a church.

1. Regenerate church membership (Acts 2:38-41)
2. Qualified leadership (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:5-9)
3. Preaching and worship (2 Timothy 4:2)
4. Rightly administered sacraments (Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11)
5. Spirit unity (Theological Unity, Relational Unity, Philosophical Unity, Missional Unity)
6. Holiness (Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 18; 1 Corinthians 5; Proverbs 27:17)
7. The Great Commandment to love (Matthew 22:34-40)
8. The Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8)

¹ For more on a Gospel Culture, refer to the set of sermons called "Gospel Doctrine + Gospel Culture."

² This definition came from Vintage Church, a helpful book on the church of Jesus Christ.

COVENANT MEMBERSHIP

OUR CULTURE AND THE CHURCH

When I say the word “church” what comes to your mind?

The word has fallen upon hard times in our culture. Sociologists describe our culture by saying we’re a culture of “believers” but not “belongers.” That is their way of saying that many who claim to “believe in Jesus” see little need for his bride. You can see the de-emphasized place of the church in the title of several books over the last few years:

Life After Church, Divine Nobodies, Quitting Church, So You Don't Want to Go to Church Anymore, and I like Jesus but not the church.

This way of seeing the church stands opposite of Jesus’ way of seeing it. In Acts 9:4-5, Jesus rebukes Saul by saying,

He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.

The church is so personal to Jesus that when it suffers, he suffers. It’s so special that Jesus “bought it with his own blood,” and it is so adored that Jesus calls the church his bride.³ When God thinks of the church, as imperfect as it is, his heart burst open with love. Jesus doesn’t view the church as something to be consumed by his people, but something to be committed to. However, the rugged individualism and give-me-mine consumerism that marks our culture, has created untold numbers of church daters. But Jesus isn’t asking his followers to date his bride, but to marry it, to give their lives away to see a local expression of the bride of Christ flourish. Listen to how J.I. Packer encourages us,

The church that Christ loves and sustains is the key feature of God’s plan for both time and eternity, and care for the church’s welfare, which is what love for the church means, is an aspect of Christlikeness that Christians must ever seek to cultivate. We are right to take the church on our hearts; we should be wrong not to. For our Lord Jesus says to us all, “Love me, love my church”...Church-centeredness is one way Christ-centeredness ought to find expression.⁴

Why should we marry the church through membership?

³ Acts 20:28, Ephesians 5

⁴ A Passion for Faithfulness: Wisdom from the book of Nehemiah, page xii.

REASONS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1: Church membership is implied in church gatherings.

The New Testament has no category for people calling themselves Christians while disconnected from a local church.

2: Church membership is implied in church discipline (what we refer to as “care and correction”).

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. 2 And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

1 Corinthians 5:9-13, *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people - 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler - not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? 13 God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”*

3: Church membership is implied in church leadership.

Hebrews 13:17, *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

1 Peter 5:1-2, *So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you.*

4: Church membership is implied in record keeping.

Acts 2 contains a numerical record. 1 Timothy 5 has a record of widows. In Acts 6, there were elections. In Hebrews 13, there's accountability. In Romans 16:1-16, there is an awareness of who the church members are.

5: Church membership is implied by the body.

1 Corinthians 12:12-20, For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

6: Church membership is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

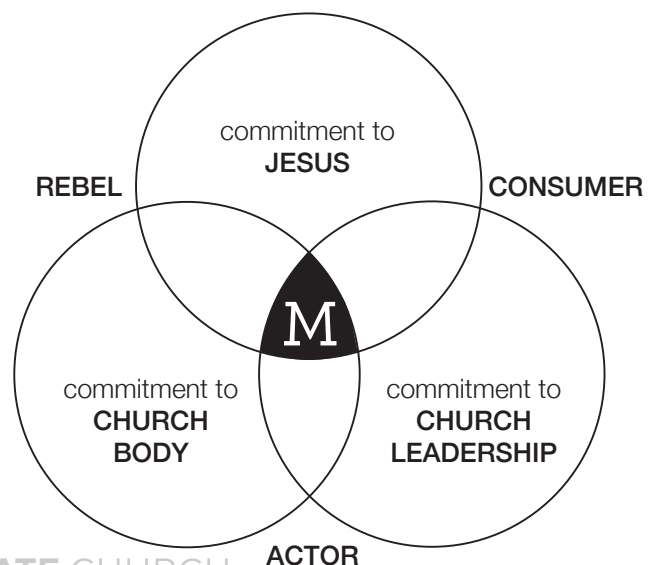
Hebrews 13:17, Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

WHAT IS A CHURCH MEMBER?

A COVENANT MEMBER HAS THREE COMMITMENTS

Think about the difference between a dating couple and a married couple. The primary difference is the married couple have looked one another in the eyes and before God and said, "I Do!" They made a set of promises to one another, and by saying "I Do" they have also said "I Don't" to hundreds of other things. That's a metaphor for church membership. A church member has made a three fold commitment, and they live in the overlap of those commitments.

1. **TO JESUS:** I believe in Jesus. I am pursuing Jesus and striving for a heart centered on the gospel. I'm submitting to the Scriptures and believe sound doctrine.
2. **TO THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP:** I support the mission, vision, values of the church. I'm joyfully placing my life under the pastors of the church.
3. **TO THE CHURCH BODY:** I belong to a body, I'm connected to a group,



serving the bride to help her flourish.

Just like in a wedding, you marry or become a member of a church in the moment the commitment to Jesus, to a body, and to its leaders are formalized.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF MISSING ONE COMMITMENT

The previous graphic also illustrates what happens when one of the three commitments is missing from our lives.

- **REBELS** want God and the fellowship of His congregation but don't feel committed to the mission, vision, values of the local church or have any real submission to the elders.
- **CONSUMERS** want what the church has to offer but don't really want the church. They are a relational one-way street. They expect the church to provide everything to them that they have personally withheld from the church.
- **ACTORS** want to check off all the organizational boxes in order to demonstrate their legalistic commitment to the church while having little to no connection with her head, Jesus Christ. This is the religious person, the elder brother, the Pharisee.

For the glory of Jesus and the good of your soul, we want to invite you into these three commitments. The church, in particular marrying the church, is not a take it or leave it issue. As Scotty Smith once said, *"Saying 'I need Jesus but not the church' is like saying 'I need Jesus but not everything Jesus says I need.'"*⁵ Together, we want to agree with Jesus and give our lives to his bride.

⁵ Scotty Smith tweeted that sentence.

THE MISSION

WE ENJOY JESUS. WE MAKE DISCIPLES.

That's our simple summation of what Jesus wants of his bride, the church. It's a way of describing the never-changing mission of the church. **Enjoy Jesus. Make Disciples.** Those two phrases capture our hopes and dreams as a church, and we pray they'll capture yours as a person.

PART 1: ENJOY JESUS.

We want to be known as a people who enjoy Jesus together. We take the enjoyment of Jesus seriously, because the Bible takes the enjoyment of Jesus seriously. Joy is so crucial to the Christian life that it commands Jesus enjoyment - "delight yourself in the Lord." By delighting ourselves in the Lord, we love and glorify Jesus, fight against sin, suffer well, etc. Every part of the Christian life is connected to our enjoyment of Jesus. We want to be people enjoying Jesus so much that we can say with the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:7-8:

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ...

Like Paul, we want to be a people who've found a joy in Jesus that's ruined us for anything else.

PART 2: MAKING DISCIPLES

**A disciple is someone who is becoming more like Jesus
in all of life through the power of the Spirit.**

This is what we do – Enjoy Jesus. Make Disciples. With some of his last words to his disciples, Jesus clarifies the mission of the church in Matthew 28:18-20,

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The mission of the church is to make disciples. This is the big E on the eye chart. We have a disciple-making mission. We agree with C.S. Lewis when he says, “If the Church is not making disciples, then all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible, are a waste of time.” We want to redeem, not waste, time and we do that by making disciples.

Enjoy Jesus. Make Disciples.

This is what we’re giving our time, energy, and effort toward, and we want to invite you into this mission we’ve humbly received from Jesus.

DISTINCTIVES

Distinctives help answer the question, “What makes a particular church unique?” The beauty of the body of Christ is that there are many expressions of it, and the various expressions of the body are beautifully distinct. In the culture of any church are areas of particular importance, and it’s vital for everyone in the church to know those distinct areas of emphasis. Below you’ll find four phrases we use to describe our distinctives.

DISTINCTIVE 1: PARENTS PASTOR.

THERE IS THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH.

When you hear the word “church” most people think of a building, a denomination, or at least a geographically based Bible study with a biblically qualified leader. While this thought is accurate, it is also incomplete. The Bible speaks many times of “the church” in both broader and more specific terms than this definition allows. For example, in Hebrews we find the church described like an “assembly” that is in heaven!

Hebrews 12:22-23, *But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.*

This passage obviously reveals that the church is much more than a building or a geographically-centered group of believers. The Bible also talks about Jesus being the “head” of the church (Eph. 1:22) or the “chief shepherd” or pastor of the church (1 Peter 5:4), so clearly there is a bigger “church” than the one we attend weekly. This idea of church is what is called the “universal church”, and it includes all believers who have ever lived for all time. Jesus is the pastor of this church and this is the “church” to which Jesus refers to in Matthew 16:18 where he tells Peter that he will build His church and the “gates of hell” will never prevail against it. While local churches collapse every year, the universal church will never close its’ doors and will never fail!

THERE IS THE LOCAL CHURCH.

Within the universal church there also exists the local church. The local church is the church you attend every week. Each local church has a pastor and a group of elders to lead them, protect them, and guide them under the guidance of the Chief Shepherd Jesus. There are numerous examples of the local church in Scripture.

- Church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1)
- Church in Galatia (Galatians 1:2)
- Church in Sardis (Revelation 3:1)
- Church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:2)
- Church in Thessalonica (1 Thes. 1:1)

The local churches in the New Testament are numerable and the role of the local church is essential within the context of the universal church. While our redemption and mission are given as a universal body our missional context, pastoral care, and mutual accountability are given within the local church. Every believer in Christ is commanded to attend a local church.

Hebrews 10:23-25, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

THERE IS THE FAMILIAL CHURCH.

While the necessity of the local church cannot be overemphasized, the depth of a local church body is dependent on the depth of the individual families that make up that church. The Bible is very direct in relating the local church to the familial church, even calling the local church the “household of God” (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

YOUR CHURCH IS ONLY AS STRONG AS THE _____ THAT MAKE UP THE CHURCH.

That blank determines a great deal of your philosophy as a church. We believe the answer to that question is FAMILIES. A church is only as strong as their individual churches, or families. Therefore, the family is very important to God and to the church. That explains why we will be very intentional about building God-pursuing, truth-seeking, family-loving men to serve their wives and children as pastors. The primary spiritual shaping force in a child’s life is the family, not the local church (consider Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

MOST DO LOCAL CHURCH AT THE EXPENSE OF THE UNIVERSAL & FAMILIAL CHURCH.

At Stonegate Church we believe that the critical mission of the local church is two-fold: to expand and grow the universal church and to strengthen the familial churches. Our church is built around this distinctive. In many churches you would find very diverse programming with a busy weekly schedule, but we work diligently to provide simple opportunities for men, women, and children to be equipped to worship as a family. In other words, we want our church to pull families together, not push families apart. We

want to call and equip our men to become great pastors in their home (or familial church), who lead their families toward Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:4-5, *He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?).*

This is why we stress men studying their Bibles and praying with their wives, because the job of pastoral care and the provision of direction and wisdom should primarily happen by a loving, sacrificial husband and father. Likewise, our women are commanded in the Scriptures to live exemplary lives that produce kingdom-valued children. They are called to be good stewards of their family's resources, talents, and time.

Proverbs 31:10, *An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels.*

Proverbs 31:25, *Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future.*

Proverbs 31:27, *She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.*

This description of an excellent wife in Proverbs 31:28-31 concludes with this remark:

Her children rise up and bless her; Her husband also, and he praises her, saying: "Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all." Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates.

The husband/father and wife/mother of a family have a divine calling and responsibility for the spiritual well being of one another and their children. We wholeheartedly believe that the strength of the local church is dependent on the strength of our familial churches. Everything begins with the family. This distinctive impacts the philosophy in every area of our church. We will always ask the question, "Does what we are doing help parents pastor their families?"

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Everything we do will build the family.
2. Men must be built to be good pastors.
3. Ministries are partners, not primary, in the discipleship of your family.

DISTINCTIVE 2: REDEMPTION RECONCILES. (ESPECIALLY RACES)

Paul speaks with unbelievable clarity when he calls the gospel the “unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). The implications of the gospel spill out into every crack and crevice of the world (and our lives). One beautiful reality of the gospel is that it redefines our family. In fact, according to Jesus, every Christian has two families: a family by birth and a family by re-birth—or God’s rescue (Mark 3:31-35). While we want to put great emphasis on parents pastoring their family by birth, we also want to hold up the importance of our family by re-birth, or our church family. The Bible’s teaching on our family by re-birth is breathtaking. According to the Scriptures, our family by re-birth (or by God’s rescue) is more real and more lasting than our family by birth. In other words, it’s our family by re-birth (not necessarily by birth) that we’ll spend all eternity with. But what’s even more shocking is the multi-colored diversity of our family by re-birth. Consider Revelation 5:9-10:

“And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

This passage shows God’s intent to rescue people from every ethnicity. Heaven will be wonderfully diverse, full of people from every color, language, and culture. As your pastors, we want to do everything we can to prepare you, the people of Stonegate, to enjoy this future reality. Secondly, this passage reveals what it cost God to accomplish his intent, namely, the blood of his Son (v.9). God doesn’t just tolerate other races and ethnicities; rather, God celebrates, embraces, and loves all ethnicities to the point that He’d lay his own Son to redeem them. To say it another way, embracing men and women from every race and ethnicity is so important to God that He’d planned and purposed the death of his Son to accomplish it. That leaves an important question:

If racial reconciliation is that important to God, shouldn’t it be important to us?

We believe so. However, the sad reality is that the church is as racially divided today as it has ever been. The sad words of Martin Luther King Jr, spoken over fifty years ago, still ring true today, *“We must face the sad fact that at the eleven o’clock hour on Sunday morning when we stand to sing, we stand in the most segregated hour in America...and the most segregated school is Sunday school.”*

Diversity in churches is often measured by the 80/20 rule. A diverse church is a church that has no more than 80% of a single ethnicity. Using that measure, only 2.5% of all the Jesus loving churches in America would be considered ethnically diverse. We believe that really does sadden the heart of God and masks the power of the gospel of Jesus

Christ to unite people of all cultures (Ephesians 2). In light of that, we want to be very clear of our intention to pursue racial diversity. We want to be a church family that does more than tolerate other cultures, we want to actually embrace and celebrate other cultures. We have a deep desire to reflect the heart of God in this way.

On a personal level, we are not saying that everyone in our church needs to make racial reconciliation the number one emphasis of their life. We hope some will be called toward that, but it will not be for all. But we are asking you to make it **an** emphasis of your life. Our goal is for more than a diverse worship gathering. Our goal is for our church family to have diverse dinner tables.

In a racially-charged world, there are few pictures of the gospel more powerful than a diverse church. And as hard as that sounds, it is possible (see Ephesians 2). Let these words of John Piper encourage you:

“The bloodline of Jesus Christ is deeper than the bloodlines of race. The death and resurrection of the Son of God for sinners is the only sufficient power to bring the bloodlines of race into the single bloodline of the cross.”⁶

The cross of Christ is the great leveler. The cross shows us that before God, culture and color gain nothing. Rather, Jesus, and Him alone, gains us everything. Racial reconciliation is rooted in and empowered by the gospel. We were the outsider, the other, that God sent his Son to redeem. God’s heart for the outsider and the other now beats in us, the people of Stonegate Church.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. Let’s pray for it.
2. We’ll pursue it corporately through staffing and style.
3. Let’s pursue it personally by prioritizing it, being especially welcoming in our gatherings and welcoming in our homes.

⁶ See John Piper’s book “Bloodlines: Race, Cross, and the Christian.”

DISTINCTIVE 3: CHURCHES PLANT CHURCHES.

Matthew 28:16-20, *Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. 17 And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

In some of Jesus' last words to his disciples, Jesus clarifies the disciple-making mission for His church. The book of Acts then gives us a sense of how the early church interpreted the mission. In short, here's the pattern that emerges:

The disciples made disciples and planted churches.

The first church was planted in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7). And then a monumental moment occurred in church history, Christians from Jerusalem planted a multi-racial (Gentile-Jewish) church in Antioch (Acts 11:20-21). This church embraced the disciple-making mission of Jesus. Not only did they make disciples in their community, the church planted churches. While the church in Jerusalem became increasingly inward, the church in Antioch became the first great missionary sending church. As a church family, we want to be like the church in Antioch, not the church in Jerusalem. If you keep reading in Acts 13-14, the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas, two of their best leaders, to preach Jesus, see people meet Jesus, and to plant churches. Paul would then train up leaders in the new church, entrust the church to them, go to another city, and do it again. Many of these New Testament churches became sending churches. This is how the great commission was carried out. Matthew 28 was obeyed by disciples making disciples, and churches planting churches. Missiologist, Ed Stetzer, says it this way,

The accounts and details we've considered in Acts demonstrate that Paul and other early Christians believed in and practiced church planting as a normal part of their lives – and specifically in response to the commands of Jesus. Planting new churches was not a novel or unique concept for zealous believers. Rather, church starting was the normal expression of New Testament missiology. Intentional church planting, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was the method of the early churches. Church planting explains how the early church exploded across the Roman Empire during the decades following the resurrection of Jesus. The life of Paul and the action of the early church demonstrate that church planting was a primary activity. And any church

wishing to rediscover the dynamic nature of the early church should consider planting new churches.⁷

As a church, we want to be clear in how we corporately want to obey the great commission.

We are a church-planting church.

We help church plants (and planters) on many levels from financial assistance, to training and sending. One way all of these aspects come together is our Church Planting Residency Program. Stonegate's Residency Program fulfills many valuable roles: it provides future church planters with hands-on experience as they serve Stonegate in various ministry roles, equips them with the skills needed to plant a church, educates them on potentially devastating pitfalls, contributes to startup funds, and potentially provides people as our Stonegate family prays about relocating with a perspective Church Planting Resident.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. We will sacrificially give to church plants.
2. We will staff many ministry positions with potential church planters.
3. We will ask our church family to pray about relocating with Church Planting Residents.

⁷ Ed Stetzer, "Planting Missional Churches: Your Guide to Starting Churches that Multiply"

DISTINCTIVE 4: WE VALUE THE VULNERABLE.

***James 1:27**, Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

James uses a word we want to draw special attention to – orphan. It is used forty-one times in the Old Testament and twice in the New Testament. Orphan usually means that both parents have died, but depending on the context, could also mean that only a child's father has died. But more generally, the word is used to represent the most vulnerable, those living on a razor's edge, without the normal safety nets of parents and family. This is the reason James says we are to "visit" them "in their affliction." The word commonly appears in a triad – orphan, widow, and alien (foreigner). And those three words combined represent the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. As a church, we value the vulnerable.

We value the vulnerable, with a special emphasis on foster care and adoption.

In America we don't have orphanages, so it's easy for Americans to think we have no orphan crisis (especially when "orphan" is understood as representing those who are especially vulnerable, not just those without parents). But that's not true. Our orphan crisis works through our foster system, where there are currently some 500,000 children. Of those children, roughly 130,000 are currently awaiting adoption. And each year, some 18,000 kids age out of foster care. Of those aging out of the foster system, fifty percent won't have a high school diploma or GED, almost half will be convicted of a violent crime, and twenty percent will be homeless at some point in their life.

As a church, we care about these things because God cares. God, through James, tells us that one way we can test the authenticity of our faith is to ask, "Do I care about the vulnerable?" When James talks about "visiting" orphans and widows in their affliction, redemptive overtones abound. It's the same word used in Exodus 4:31, "The LORD had visited the children of Israel [in Egypt], and he had looked upon their affliction." To visit, God had to come down into the hopelessness of their situation. To visit, God took the burdens of His people upon His back. In the same way, for us to visit the vulnerable requires us to get close enough to allow our life to be wrapped up in the cause of the vulnerable. To visit, we have to enter in, bear another's burden, to make another person's problems our problems. This is the sort of life we're inviting you into.

A life of valuing the vulnerable is a life embracing risk, or faith. Rosaria Butterfield says in her book, *Secrets of an Unlikely Convert*, "To put the hands of the hurting into the hand of the Savior, you have to be close enough to get hurt yourself." This is the sort of Gospel culture we're seeking to create. We want to be a people who are continually taking vulnerable hands and putting them into the steady hands of our Savior, but that can only

be done by men and women willing to become vulnerable themselves. As Rosaria goes on to say, this is *“an often over looked spiritual truth: betrayal and risk are at the heart of the gospel life.”*

Over the next decade, we’re praying for hundreds of adoptions and for hundreds of families involved in the foster system. Rather than the foster system waiting for Jesus-loving families, we’re praying for Jesus-loving families to be waiting on children who need to be fostered.

For Jesus sake, we value the vulnerable.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

1. We’ll keep this question before our church family, “How I can value the vulnerable?”
2. We’ll support families directly involved in foster care and adoption through our Orphan Care ministry.⁸
3. We’ll celebrate stories of those valuing the vulnerable.

⁸ This team serves our church in three ways: 1) Assessing (helping people discern their readiness to foster or adopt); 2) Funding (assisting families who need financial help to adopt); 3) Supporting (those who are fostering or adopting).

THE MARKS OF A DISCIPLE

Our mission answers the question: “What are we about?” Our distinctives answer the question: “What makes us unique?” The marks of a disciple answer the question: “What do we want the people of Stonegate to become?” We define a disciple of Jesus Christ like this:

**A disciple is someone who is becoming more like Jesus
in all of life through the power of the Spirit.**

“All of life” is expansive, covering every moment and situation of our lives. And that’s appropriate because discipleship really does affect “all of life.” However, within that expansive category (all of life) every church has to develop language to express the particular areas they will prioritize and measure. How will a church know if they are making disciples? How will they measure their effectiveness? A church must develop a language to answer these questions. Our language is expressed through five marks of a disciple.⁹

A DISCIPLE...



ENJOYS JESUS.



NEEDS THE GOSPEL.



LIVES IN COMMUNITY.



MULTIPLIES.



EMBRACES RISK.

⁹ For additional resources, go to the set of sermons in November of 2018 called “Disciple.”



MARK 1: A DISCIPLE ENJOYS JESUS.¹⁰

You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.
- Augustine

Far too many people carry misconceptions about Jesus and about what life with Him is like. Far too many have been seduced into thinking:

It is either Jesus or joy.

Those are the options in life. It's follow Jesus and forsake your joy, or follow joy and forsake Jesus. You can hear this misconception creep out in commonly accepted language like: "God isn't worried about your happiness, but your holiness." Is that really the best way to frame what God's worried about? That phrase contains partial truths, but there's more wrong in it than right. It obscures more of the heart of God than it illuminates. It has a way of falsely reaffirming the myth that it's either Jesus or joy, either holiness or happiness. It makes Jesus the enemy of joy rather than the source of it. The Scriptures present something altogether different.

It's not Jesus or joy, it's Jesus as your joy.

It's not happiness or holiness, but ultimate happiness in our holiness. There are many things you will lose when you follow Jesus, but joy isn't one of them. Joy is crucial to the Christian life. Listen to the Psalmist express his enjoyment of God.

Psalm 16:11, *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

That is not a command, but a declaration of truth. The Psalmist is pointing us toward the location of joy. With that declaration of joy's location, there is an invitation.

¹⁰ For further study see the sermon "A Disciple Enjoys Jesus" from November 18, 2018. We also recommend a small book called "The Dangerous Duty of Delight," by John Piper.

PLEASE, COME AND GET YOUR JOY.

In Ecclesiastes 3 the Scriptures say that God put “*eternity into our hearts.*” In other words, we were made with longings that go too deep for temporal things to satisfy! God created our souls with an ache, a hunger, a thirst, and that ache makes human beings joy hunters, pleasure pursuers, satisfaction seekers. We are a joy-motivated people, and contrary to how many think, the bible isn’t against our joy! If anything, the Scriptures rebuke us for being half-hearted in our pursuit of joy. As C. S. Lewis famously said,

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.¹¹

The Bible invites us to come and get our joy, but then it locates joy for us.

PLEASE, COME AND GET YOUR JOY IN JESUS!

The Scriptures present Jesus as a person, a person to be enjoyed. Do you think of God that way? All of God’s good gifts (food, kids, marriage, intimacy, etc) are appetizers of joy, pointing us to the main course of Jesus.

Psalm 16:11, *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Psalm 34:8, *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!*

John 6:35, *Jesus said...“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

God, the happiest of all beings in the universe, invites us to share his boundless joy. The human problem isn’t our passion for joy, but the paths we take to get it. As John Calvin said, “*While all men seek after happiness, scarcely one in a hundred looks for it from God.*” We really are “*half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us.*”

¹¹ See C.S. Lewis’ book, “The Weight of Glory.”

WE ENJOY JESUS BY SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS IN THE SCRIPTURES

In Psalm 19:7, The psalmist reminds us that “*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.*” God has given us the Bible, this precious means of grace, to keep our hearts happy in Jesus. When we open up the Bible with the intent of knowing more of Jesus, our hearts are refreshed. Listen to George Mueller encourage us,

We have, through the goodness of the Lord, been permitted to enter upon another year, and the minds of many among us will no doubt be occupied with plans for the future and the various fears of our work and service for the Lord. If our lives are spared, we shall be engaged in those: the welfare of our families, the prosperity of our business, our work and service for Christ may be considered the most important matters to be attended to; but according to my judgment the most important point to be attended to is this: above all things see to it that your souls are happy in the Lord....I specially commend this point to the notice of my younger brethren and sisters in Christ: the secret of all true service is joy in God... But in what way shall we attain to this settled happiness of soul? How shall we learn to enjoy God? How shall we obtain such an all-sufficient, soul-satisfying portion in Him as shall enable us to let go the things of this world as vain and worthless in comparison? I answer, this happiness is to be obtained through the study of the Holy Scriptures.¹²

Stonegate, let's enjoy Jesus together.

FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. “Jesus or Joy” versus “Jesus as our joy,” which of those two ways of seeing Jesus and joy have you most consistently believed?
2. Spend a moment meditating on John 6:35. Do you think of Jesus as a person to be enjoyed?
3. If reading the Bible is one of the main ways we enjoy Jesus, how is the habit of Bible reading working in your life? What's one step you can take toward more consistency in Bible reading?

¹² George Mueller spoke these words at a New Year's Eve service in 1859.



MARK 2: A DISCIPLE NEEDS THE GOSPEL¹³

ROMANS 3:21-26, *But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it - 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The word “Gospel” shows up over 100 times in the New Testament. It’s all over the Bible because it’s the point of the Bible. “Gospel” means good news. The word was often used in the first century in a military context. When the battle had been won, the general would send back an evangelist with “the gospel,” the good news of victory. Good news is fundamentally different from good advice. And every system of belief outside of Biblical Christianity is advice, telling us what we need to do to get to God. But the Scriptures don’t announce good advice on how we’re to reach up to God, but good news of what God’s done to reach down to us. We often use this definition for the Gospel:

The Gospel is the just and gracious God of the universe looking upon hopelessly sinful people and sending His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God forever.¹⁴

An even more simple way to think of the good news of Jesus is in four words,

Jesus in our place.

¹³ For further study see the sermon “A Disciple Needs the Gospel” from November 25, 2018. We recommend “Gospel Fluency,” by Jeff Vanderstelt; “The Gospel Centered Life,” by Bob Thune & Will Walker;

¹⁴ The section on the gospel is taken from David Platt and his sermon “The Gospel: What We Need.”

Jesus lived a perfect life in our place. He died in our place, for our sin. On the cross our sin crushed him, and his perfect life was credited to us. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21, *“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Then on the third day Jesus rose from the dead, showing that God the Father was pleased with Jesus’ sacrifice. The Scriptures shout the good news of Jesus with great joy, announcing that Jesus has fought our battle and won our victory, and for all those who turn from their sin and trust Jesus, they will enjoy his victory forever.

TRUSTING IN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Every human being relates to the Gospel in one of three ways. First, some are lost. They are living in rebellion against God and they know it. Think of Luke 15 and Jesus’ parable of two sons. Lost describe the younger brother. He’s in rebellion against his father (who represents God), and he’s aware of it. Second, others are religiously lost, those who are unknowingly living outside of the grace of God. In Luke 15 these people are represented by the prodigal’s elder brother. The elder brother is obedient. He’s moral. He is where he’s supposed to be, doing what he’s supposed to be doing. But in a surprising twist, when the story ends, it’s the repentant prodigal who’s rescued by Jesus, and the moral and very religious elder brother who finds himself refusing the Father’s grace. Lastly, there is the redeemed, those who are living in and enjoying the rescue of Jesus.

We live in a culture that abounds with the religiously lost. Like the elder brother in Luke 15, they are doing right things, but for the wrong reasons. They are trusting in their right living to secure their place before God, rather than in Jesus’ right living. We live in a culture that must reckon with Jesus’ words in Matthew 7: 13-23.

“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. 14 For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few. 15 Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. 21 Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

WHO IS THE GOSPEL FOR?

Many rightly say the gospel is for non-Christians. The gospel is the door through which every man or woman must enter to be rescued by and reconciled with God. The gospel is the door that leads to the incredibly bright future God's prepared for all His sons and daughters! Everything in the Christian life begins the moment God breathes life into our spiritually unresponsive hearts, causing them to cry out in faith to God.

The problem is that most believe the gospel is only for non-Christians. They believe gospel is for, and only for, getting people into the Kingdom of God; and once inside, a person moves on to deeper things. However, the Scriptures show us something different.

The Gospel of Jesus is for both non-Christians & Christians.

There are two ways to see the Gospel, one is narrow while the other is broad. The narrow way, which many are familiar with, sees the Gospel as saving us from the penalty of sin. This is a great gospel reality. The gospel is the good news that Jesus paid the penalty for our sin (Romans 3:23-24). Moreover, this is how the gospel is most commonly talked about. The broad perspective does not say less, but more. The gospel not only saves us from the penalty of our sin, but also from the present power of sin in our lives. To put it another way, the narrow perspective sees the gospel as only for non-Christians, while the broad way sees that the gospel is for both Christians and non-Christians.

There's no such thing as a gospel graduate. The good news of Jesus isn't just something a Christian needed in the past, it's something they need presently. The gospel is God's means by which a Christian's life is renewed and sin is overcome. The gospel is renewing and relevant to every area of a Christian's life. Listen to Tim Keller describe this reality.

The gospel is not just the A-B-C of Christianity, it's the A-Z. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom...It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier.

After Jesus rescues a person, they don't move on to bigger and brighter things. Rather, we move deeper into the biggest and brightest thing, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We never out-grow our need of it! By God's grace, we are learning as a church family to allow all Jesus has accomplished on our behalf to saturate everything about us.

FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. How would you define the gospel?
2. What does it mean to be religiously lost?
3. How is the gospel currently changing you?

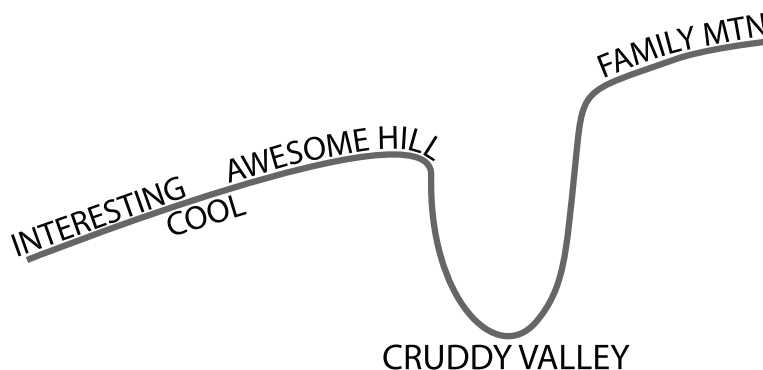


MARK 3: A DISCIPLE LIVES IN COMMUNITY¹⁵

The church is our family.

The gospel is a deep and wide reservoir of riches (Ephesians 3:8). Community, or the creation of a new family, is one prime part of these riches. When God saves you, the good news is that He becomes your perfect Father. He adopts you and makes you His own. He pledges and promises that He will work for your eternal good every minute of every day for the rest of time. But God doesn't just become a good Father, he also gives us a new family, called the church. As you read about the church in the New Testament, various metaphors are used to describe the church (body, temple, bride). But the dominant metaphor for the church is family or the household of God. In light of God making us his children and placing us within his family, we want to grow practically into what God has made us positionally.

This graphic illustrates the journey toward family mountain. The line represents the journey of any church becoming practically (a family) what God has made the positionally (a family). Family mountain is when there is no pretense or pretending, people are 100% known (strengths and weaknesses). But that journey takes these very predictable turns.



The journey starts at “interesting”: it’s the moment you look across a room and see a person that’s interesting enough to take a step toward getting to know. “Interesting”

¹⁵ For further study see the sermon “A Disciple lives in Community” from December 2, 2018. We also recommend “Gospel Fluency,” by Jeff Vanderstelt.

soon transitions into “cool.” As you take the first few steps toward them, the intrigue builds. When their name comes up in your mind it’s associated with really good thoughts (they are wise, insightful, nice, etc), and this leads to “Awesome Hill.” Awesome Hill is when we’ve actually taken several steps toward a person, then toward us, and a friendship forms. We like them, they like us. But here’s the problem with Awesome Hill, our friendship is still superficial. We just know the parts of them that they’ve allowed us to know. We’ve seen their best characteristics, but their worst is saved for later. For the journey toward family mountain to continue, the bone shattering fall has to occur.

Cruddy Valley is the moment in a friendship where we realize this person is more than nice, wise, insightful, etc. They are also self-centered, self-exalting, and self-seeking! At this moment we’ve fallen into Cruddy Valley. Now, think about the person sitting at the front of the path looking down the road ahead. It would seem that Family Mountain is just one small step from Awesome Hill. From the front of the path, it’s impossible to see the cliff and the fall into Cruddy Valley. But falling into Cruddy Valley is absolutely necessary to get to Family Mountain. It’s only after falling into Cruddy Valley (where the worst of people is seen) that the climb up to Family Mountain can begin.

There is a reason most churches do not have rich community. Almost every relationship in the church is on Awesome Hill rather than Family Mountain. The disconnect happens when people fall off the cliff and land in Cruddy Valley. At that point, most people disengage with the person who pulled them over the cliff. Rather than walking with them through Cruddy Valley and starting the climb up Family Mountain, they short circuit the process and find another person who’s interesting to start the journey over with.

We invite you into the family.

And we want to be honest about the invitation, we have not arrived at perfect. We, the people of Stonegate, are on the journey toward Jesus. We still struggle with the sin remaining in us. We love Jesus, but imperfectly. So the journey toward Family Mountain will eventually take us into Cruddy Valley. Cruddy Valley offers unique opportunities to grow up in Jesus, to pursue peace in conflict, to forgive, and to seek forgiveness. In Cruddy Valley, we commit not to quit. Rather, we covenant to climb Family Mountain together, so we can experience one of the Gospel’s sweetest gifts - community.

COMMUNITY COMES IN A STONEGATE GROUP

The best environment for vibrant community to form at Stonegate is in a Group. It's a normal expectation that every member of the Stonegate family finds a group.

WHAT IS A STONEGATE GROUP?

Stonegate Groups exist to provide an environment for disciple-makers to enjoy Jesus together, be known by one another and transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A group is a place for you to enjoy Jesus with others.

Jesus is a person to be enjoyed, but not alone. In Matthew 22:1-10, Jesus says the Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast. In Revelation 19:1-10, John pictures heaven as a marriage supper, with a great multitude enjoying king Jesus. A Stonegate Group is intended to be a foretaste of what's to come, a place for us to enjoy Jesus with others.

A group is a place for you to be known by others.

Honesty is hard. We all have parts of ourselves we'd like to hide. But the good news of Jesus eventually leads us to honesty with others, not just in our strengths but also in our weaknesses. When we refuse to be known by others, we also refuse God's precious gift of friendships. But when we allow ourselves to be known by others, we receive from Jesus genuine friends, people who know all of us yet still love us, people committed to helping us look more like Jesus.

Becoming fully known by others involves confession and repentance before the Lord and gospel-centered community. Rather than covering up our sin and insecurities or projecting a false version of ourselves, a group is a place to practice James 5:16,

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

Jesus invites us to walk in the light, and being known by others in a Stonegate Group is one way to respond to that invitation.

A group is a place for you to be transformed by Jesus.

We all want to change. We all need to change. And the Scriptures shows us how change happens - by beholding Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18)! As we behold our risen Savior, who lived and died in our place, we become more like Him. But beholding Jesus is a

communal pursuit. We need others who will point us to the risen Jesus, and others will need us to point them to the risen Jesus.

Every Sunday the good news of Jesus is preached, and each week those in a group have the privilege of applying the gospel to one another's heart. Each person in a Group is encouraged to be in-tune with one another's life with Jesus, both their current struggles and successes, to pray for one another, and to "stir one another up to love and good deeds." When this happens, we slowly "become more like Jesus in all of life through the power of the Spirit."

WHICH GROUP IS RIGHT FOR ME?

We have dozens of groups spread across Midlothian, Cedar Hill, Waxahachie, Mansfield, May Pearl, and the surrounding area. As you begin to narrow down Groups to visit, here are the questions we would like for you to consider:

1: Where do I live and where do Groups meet?

Proximity is primary. It is the best way to determine what Group to attend. The closer you are to your Group, the better the chance for rich community. The further you are from your Group, the more likely that Group will turn into a weekly meeting rather than rich community.

2: What night of the week works best?

A Group is more than a weekly meeting, but meeting consistently needs to be a priority for everyone in the group. Selecting a night of the week that works consistently for you (and your family) is crucial. So look at the groups in your general area and choose those meeting on nights of the week that work.

3: Which Groups have a similar (or dissimilar) affinity to me?

Groups gravitate toward sameness in stage of life. For many, this will be another important fact in deciding which Group to attend. While there are many benefits to organizing Groups based on life stage, we intentionally encourage (but in no way force) multi-generational groups. We believe there are unique benefits to being in a Group with people in various life stages.

4: Where are friendships already established?

Deep friendships are precious. They should be paid attention to. When you have friendships that uniquely help you enjoy Jesus more, it makes sense to prioritize that group over others.

HOW DO I CONNECT TO A GROUP?

There are several ways to find the Group that will work best for you and your family:

1: Go to: Stonegate.Church

Go to “Life at Stonegate” then select “Groups” to see all Stonegate Groups. You can see every Group on a map, or you can filter then by neighborhood and day of the week. Once you find a Group that interests you, email the leader for details on the next Group meeting, weekly rhythms, childcare details, etc.

2: Email: Groups@Stonegate.Church

If you prefer personal recommendations, we would be happy to recommend Groups based on your particular needs or circumstances.

3: Meet us on Sunday morning.

Our team stands in front of the Groups display (in the foyer) every Sunday morning to help those looking for a Group. We have a “Group Flyer” with information on every Group, along with individual handouts for each Group.

TAKE THE STEP TO CONNECT

There’s never a great time to commit to community. With jobs, we have demanding work loads. With school, we have overwhelming amounts of homework. With babies, we have a lack of sleep. With toddlers, life (primarily our sanity) feels unstable. With young children, we have activities to attend. With teenagers, time becomes so precious. With empty-nesting, we have parents to care for, grandchildren to chase, a job to work, etc.

Every stage of life carries reasons for community to wait. Don’t buy into the lie your stage of life carries. Fight against the path of least resistance. Community is essential to your growth in Christ. We need others, and they need us. Ultimately, our encouragement for any one seeking a Group with whom they can enjoy Jesus, be known, and be transformed by Jesus is simple: **Don’t give up!** Don’t give up on finding a Group. When you find one, don’t give up on the (very broken) people in that Group! Let’s climb up family mountain together and enjoy one of the Gospel’s sweetest riches - community.

FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Are you in a Stonegate Group?
2. Think back over your life, how has God used people to make you more like Jesus?
3. Do you currently have people in your life who know the real you?



MARK 4: A DISCIPLE MULTIPLIES¹⁶

Mark 4:30-32, *And he said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable shall we use for it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when sown on the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and puts out large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”*

Jesus, the King, pictures his kingdom in a parable. It’s like a mustard seed, so small and insignificant. But over time, seed turns into tree. What begins in humility becomes huge. Jesus uses this the parable to make a point.

The Kingdom of God grows by multiplication.

Multiplication is a big biblical theme. Multiplication is woven into God’s world and His word. In Genesis 1, God creates plants and animals, but he creates them in a unique way. They are created for multiplication, “to bring forth according to their kind.” On the sixth day after creating Adam and Eve, God speaks his first words to our first parents, “Be fruitful and multiply...”

In Genesis 3 our first parents sinned against God and their hearts grew dark. The darkness grew and was so grievous to God that in Genesis 6 God sent a flood. But in his grace he rescued a remnant. In Genesis 9 God repeats his first words to our first parents, this time to Noah and his family, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.” In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham and then makes him a multiplication promise, “I’ll make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the skies.” In Exodus, the second book of the Bible, the people of God are enslaved in Egypt. But even enslavement didn’t stop the multiplication promise of God. We learn in Exodus 1:6-7: *“Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.”* God eventually rescued his people from slavery and led them to the promised

¹⁶ For further study see the sermon “A Disciple Multiplies” from December 9, 2018. We also recommend “The Master Plan of Evangelism,” by Robert Coleman.

land, where they could be fruitful and multiply. Deuteronomy 6:3 says *“Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.”* But then, in a re-enactment of Genesis 3, the people turn from God, and God removes them from the promised land. But God desires multiplication, even in Exile. Jeremiah 29:6, says *“Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease.”*

In the New Testament Jesus continues and clarifies the multiplication theme. Jesus’ last words to his disciples are a restatement of God’s first words to our first parents.

MATTHEW 28:18-20, *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

Jesus show us that to “be fruitful and multiply” has less to do with physical offspring, and more to do with spiritual offspring. Then in the book of Acts, the church erupts. The people of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, multiply by making disciples.

Acts 6:1a, 7, *“Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number...And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.”*

Acts 12:24, *“But the word of God increased and multiplied.”*

Acts 13:49, *“And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region.”*

Acts 19:20, *“So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.”*

Acts 9:31, *“So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”*

The book of Revelation shows us the fulfillment of the Scripture’s theme of multiplication. The story starts with a small mustard seed, two people in a garden, but the small seed turns into a massive tree.

Revelation 7:9-10 *“After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”*

This is the story of multiplication, and God invites His people into it.

MULTIPLICATION THROUGH DISCIPLE-MAKING

MATTHEW 28:18-20, *And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

As the gospel sinks deeply into our souls, it begins to send us out as disciple-making missionaries. As a Christian you have been commissioned by Jesus as missionaries, as disciple makers. This disciple making call isn't for a few of Jesus' followers, but for all of them.

DISCIPLE MAKING, MEETING JESUS

For a disciple to be made, a person first has to meet Jesus. Jesus emphasizes this first step of disciple making by telling his disciple to “go” and “*baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*”

So, disciple makers keep their lives connected to people they love who don't love Jesus. Fruitful disciple makers courageously invite those who are far from Jesus to Jesus and into their church community. And all the while, they pray, pleading with the Spirit of God to do what they cannot - rescue and redeem.

DISCIPLE MAKING, MATURING IN JESUS

Jesus doesn't just want more disciples, He wants more mature disciples. So Jesus says, “*teach them to observe all that I have commanded you.*” God wants every disciple to become more like Jesus in all of life through the power of the Spirit.

So disciple makers keep their Bibles and lives open with those who have met Jesus, to help them grow up in Jesus. A disciple maker models that Titus 2 woman, who trains up younger women. A disciple maker is like Paul, who invests his life into a young Timothy. They are like Jesus, who identified a few people and over three years invested his life into them. In Matthew 28, Jesus is simply saying, “Now do what I did.”

DISCIPLE MAKING, THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF JESUS

Two beautiful promises surround this command to multiply by making disciples. In verse 18, Jesus promises to meet us with his power when we make disciples. And in verse 20, Jesus promises to meet us with his presence when we make disciples. As we multiply, Jesus promises to meet our every need.

THE STRATEGY FOR MULTIPLICATION

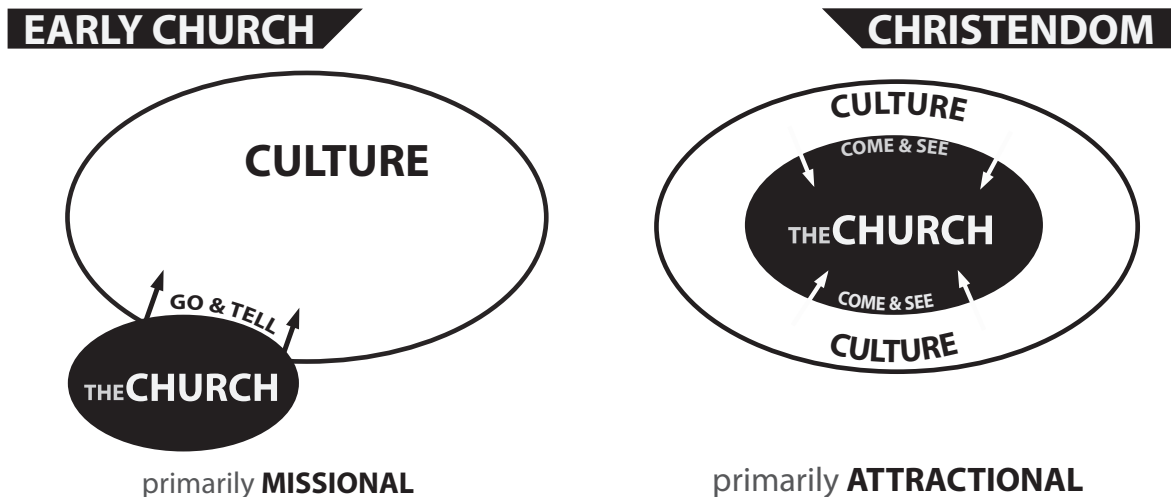
It is vital that every church clearly answers the question: “How are we going to reach people with the gospel of Jesus Christ?” Every church has an answer to this question, but not every church clarifies it. The following statements describe our strategy.

OUR STRATEGY IS BUILT ON PEOPLE, NOT ON PROGRAMS OR PROPERTY.

This means we are not looking for the biggest and best building, the latest tool, or the next gadget, but for the people of God, empowered by the Spirit of God, to live on the mission of God. The people of Stonegate on mission with Jesus every day of their lives is our strategy to reach and bless our city.

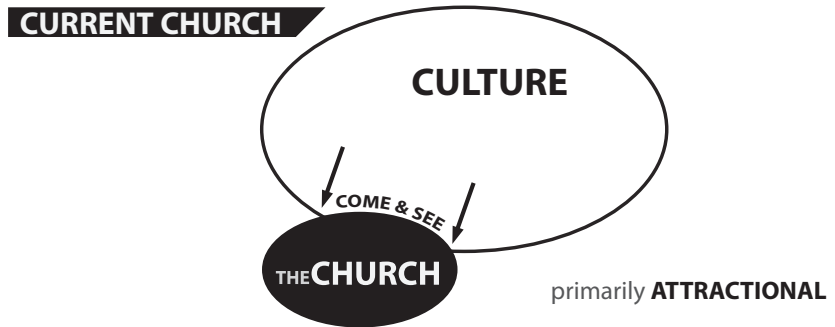
OUR STRATEGY IS PRIMARILY MISSIONAL, SECONDARILY ATTRACTIVE.

We are first a “go and tell” church, not a “come and see” church. Our primary strategy to reach the community is not by them coming to see our church on Sunday morning, but by our church family going and telling throughout the week.



The graphic above illustrates how the relationship between the culture at large and the church has changed. The first graphic illustrates the early church and culture. As you read through the book of Acts it is clear that the church is on the margins of culture at large. The Jewish leaders disliked the church (Acts 8). Moreover, even the Romans disliked Christians. Ironically, they considered Christians to be atheists because they did not worship their plethora of gods. The church was in the margins but the church had a clear mission (Acts 1:8). In that context, the church exploded.

This graphic illustrates the relationship between the church and the culture during Christendom (4th-20th century). During the 4th century, the Roman Emperor Constantine turned the entire empire toward Christianity. Christianity went



mainstream. It moved the church from the margins of culture to the center of culture and ushered in what is known as Christendom. Christendom is a term used to describe how the church relates to culture at large. In Christendom, Christianity is central to the culture. The culture respects, likes, and is even favorable toward Christianity. Christian beliefs sit under and support the culture. Christianity sits over culture, influencing the way people talk and see the world. In Christendom, behaviors that are biblical are valued and behaviors that are unbiblical are stigmatized. And culture, with its' institutions and systems, is "Christianized", while many in the culture were still not converted to the gospel. In Christendom the church adapted to its' new circumstances. Rather than being a "go and tell" people, it shifted to a "come and see" attractational posture. However, the result was not all bad, the church was fruitful and faithful for much of that time.

Our problem is illustrated with the current situation illustrated in the next graphic. The problem is simple, Christendom is crumbling in America. The last remaining remnants of Christendom lie in the deep South; however, it is also disappearing quickly. We have (and are) moving back into a first century relationship with culture. The church is on the margins, rather than the middle, of culture. The church has less and less influence, the percentage of people who grow up in church continues to decline, and Christianity has been pushed from the public square to the privacy of our homes.

We hope this does not leave you with a pessimistic outlook on the church, or the mission of God. Rather, we hope you are encouraged. The first century church thrived under the same conditions. However, we do want you to see the difference between the posture of the first century church and the current church. While the first century church was fiercely missional (go and tell), the 21st century church is still primarily attractational (come and see), while the culture at large does not care to come or see.

To reach our current culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ, it requires a church that both goes and tells, and invites people to come and see.

OUR STRATEGY INVOLVES CHURCH PLANTING.

The Kingdom of God multiplies as disciples make disciples, and churches plant churches. In the same way we are to multiply on an individual level by making disciples, a church is to multiply by planting other churches. For more information, see distinctive 3, “Churches Plant Churches.”

OUR STRATEGY HAS A LOCAL AND A GLOBAL EMPHASIS.

The Great Commission does not give the church the luxury of solely focusing on their local area. Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of “all nations.” That means our church must have a focus to make disciples in both the South Dallas area and around the world.

FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Have you filled out a Top 5 card?
2. Are you consistently talking about Jesus with those who are far from Jesus? If not, what’s one step you can take toward faithfulness in this area?
3. Do you have anyone you’re currently investing your life into to help them grow up in Jesus? If not, who’s a person you could begin discipling?



MARK 5: A DISCIPLE EMBRACES RISK

“Jesus, I want my life to count!”

Jesus presents the “parable of the talents” (Matthew 25:14-30) for every courageous heart crying out those words! There are three players in the parable. There’s an owner representing Jesus. There are talents representing all that God’s gifted to his sons and daughters. There are stewards who have been entrusted with another’s wealth or property and charged with managing it in the owner’s best interest.

As the story goes, one man was entrusted with five talents, another with two talents, and another with one. The men entrusted with five and two talents faithfully steward what the owner entrusted to them, increasing what the owner had given them. When the owner comes back, he pronounces over them, *“Well done my good and faithful servant.”* Rather than stewarding his talent, the man with the one talent buried it. Upon the owner’s arrival, he dug up his talent and gave it back. And in a shocking twist, rather than hearing *“well done,”* this man was thrown into hell.

A life of faith is so intertwined with stewardship that Jesus feels the freedom to say: if there is no stewardship, we have no faith. Or we could state it positively by saying:

Living by faith leads to good stewardship.

Jesus isn’t teaching salvation by stewardship. Salvation is always by grace, but salvation always shows itself in stewardship. The life of faith in Jesus is bound up in stewardship! But Jesus takes us one step further in the parable.

Good stewardship requires a willingness to risk for Jesus’ sake.

This parable shows us that under the poor stewardship of the one talent man is a desire to play it safe, an unwillingness to risk for Jesus’ sake. He didn’t lose his money. He didn’t spend it recklessly. He simply buried it and waited for his master’s return. It was that unwillingness to risk for Jesus that exposed his unbelief. On the other hand, the faith of the five and two talent men revealed itself in a willingness to risk for Jesus. My friend, Ray Ortland Jr., makes this observation.

What's the insight here? It's this...we think our job in this life is to not do certain things. And as long as we're not doing those things and we just maintain, we're okay. But look at the parable. This servant is judged not for bad things done but for daring things left undone...He sat on his opportunity and failed to do good things. Our job in this life is not to avoid doing things but to do things. Our job in this life is not to preserve what he's given us but to multiply what he's given us. Our job in this life is to do new and creative and smart and risky things, to develop the Master's enterprise further. The bad servant wastes his opportunity, and he ends up in hell.

The one talent man was condemned not for bad done, but for the good left undone. Ray Ortlund goes on to say, *"One day we'll stand before God...the legitimacy of our faith won't just be tested by the bad we avoid...but by the risks we took to accomplish good for Jesus sake!"* This parable shows us that the fundamental disposition of a follower of Jesus is toward risk, not temporal safety! The parable shows us that:

Risk is right for followers of Jesus.¹⁷

WHAT IS RISK?

In his book "Risk is Right," John Piper defines risk as *"any action that exposes you to the possibility of loss or injury."* Seeing risk in this way illustrates how it is embedded into virtually every moment of obedience to Jesus. Risk is involved in moments of generosity, in evangelism, in hospitality, in caring for the vulnerable, confessing sin, loving your neighbor, etc.

HOW DOES RISK RELATE TO A LIFE OF FAITH?

What is the purpose of our life? It's to glorify Jesus. How do we glorify Jesus? We glorify Jesus through living by faith in Jesus. We glorify Jesus by living moment by moment trusting him (Romans 4:20). Living by faith shows that Jesus is dependable and trustworthy. So, how does Jesus cultivate a life of faith?

God cultivates our faith through risk.

It can be helpful to define faith in light of risk. *Faith is the willingness to risk anything on God.* I love how John Wimber said it, *"Faith is spelled...R.I.S.K."* Faith in action feels like risk. And Hebrews 11 reminds us that what makes risk right is not that every risk turns out well. What makes risk right is that risk reflects the worth of God!

¹⁷ There is a difference between wise and foolish risks. We aren't called to risk for risk's sake, but for Jesus' sake.

ARE YOU EMBRACING RISK?

God is currently cultivating faith in you, and he's doing that by drawing you into risk. But our flesh hates living by faith. Our flesh loves temporal safety. It's always urging caution with God. One of the critical questions of our lives is, "Which voice will we listen to?" Our flesh urging caution, or to the voice of God urging risk? Think about the totality of your life; very little happens of any significance apart from risk! And we want Jesus to do incredible things in your life and in the life of our church. The good news is that we don't have to be extraordinary people to see Jesus do extraordinary things, we just need to be people willing to embrace risk. Let's be those people together.

FOR PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Think about your life, are you a person who embrace risk easily?
2. Every follower of Jesus should have something risky they are currently embracing.
What new risk is Jesus asking you to embrace?

ELDERSHIP AT STONEGATE

Philippians 1:1, *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.*

Though we have all come from different ecclesiological traditions, it is important that we agree on how the Bible paints the picture of church leadership. God intends the church to be comprised of three different levels of human leadership: elders, deacons, and members (Philippians 1:1). Elders primarily prepare the deacons and members to do ministry through their leadership, oversight, and teaching (Ephesians 4:11-16).

WHAT ARE ELDERS?

Elders are the group of rescued, qualified, and competent men who God has charged to shepherd the local church.

Elders are male leaders of the church who are also called pastors, bishops, and overseers (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 5:2). They are qualified (1 Timothy 2:11–3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9) and tasked with shepherding or pastoring the church. Elders are always spoken of in plurality because God intends for more than one man to lead and rule over the church as a safeguard for both the church and the man.

ALL NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES HAD ELDERS.

Elders were in all the churches that Paul founded.

Acts 14:23, *When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

Elders were in the Church at Jerusalem.

Acts 15:2, *And when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue.*

Elders were in Ephesus.

Acts 20:17, *From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church.*

Elders in All the Churches of Crete

Titus 1:5, *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.*

Elders in All the Churches of the Dispersion of the Roman Empire

James 1:1; 5:14, *James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings....Is anyone among you sick?*

Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

Elders in All the Churches in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia

1 Peter 1:1, *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen....*

1 Peter 5:1, *Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God.*

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS GOVERNED BY CHRIST (MATTHEW 16:18).

This governance was mediated through the authority of the apostles and their close associates (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 7:17; 14:37-38; 2 Thessalonians 3:14). Today, Christ still rules through the words of his apostles as they are preserved for us in the inspired writings of the New Testament. Therefore, every effort will be made to conform the structure, procedures, and spirit of church governance as closely as possible to New Testament guidelines, with a constant eye to promoting the glory of God and the advancement of faith (1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 1:25).

The ministry of the church is primarily the work of the members in the activity of worship toward God, nurturing each other, and witnessing toward the world. Internal structures for church governance are not the main ministry of the church, but are necessary for equipping and mobilizing the saints for the work of ministry. Governance structures should be lean and efficient to this end, not aiming to include as many people as possible in office-holding, but to free and fit as many people as possible for ministry. Christ is the head of the church and, spiritually, all his disciples are on a level ground before him, each having direct access to Him and responsibility to intercede for the good of all as a community of priests.

Not inconsistent with this equality, God has ordained the existence of officers in the church, some of whom are charged under Christ with the leadership of the church. The leaders of the church should be people who are spiritually mature and exemplary (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), gifted for the ministry given to them (Romans 12:6-8), have a sense of divine urging (Acts 20:28), and are in harmony with the duly established leadership of the church (Philippians 2:2).

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE ELDERS.

The elders' duties include ruling (1 Timothy 5:17), managing (1 Timothy 3:4-5), tending (1 Peter 5:2-5), giving account (Hebrews 13:17), living exemplary lives (Hebrews 13:7), using authority (Acts 20:28), teaching (Ephesians 4:11, 1 Timothy 3:2), preaching (1 Timothy 5:17), doctrinal instruction (Titus 1:9), and discipline (Matthew 18:15-17). Members are the

Christians who are actively participating in the life of the local church so that it is built up for God's purposes (1 Corinthians 12:1–31 especially 12:24). The early church had a notion of membership that included numerical record (Acts 2:37–47), records of widows (1 Timothy 5:3–16), elections (Acts 6:1–6), discipline (Matthew 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1), accountability (Hebrews 13:17), and an awareness of who was a church member (Rom. 16:1–16).

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER (WHO CAN BE AN ELDER?)

Because of the distinct responsibility of leadership in the church, God gives very practical and measurable standards that dictate who can become an elder in the local church.

1 Timothy 3:1-7, *The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

The first thing we see about eldership is that it is to be aspired to. It is a noble task and mature Christian men should aspire to this office.

- **Above reproach...** This means that elders should be without any character defect. This is Paul's way of letting us know that this list was not meant to be exhaustive but rather showing us that we should set the bar of eldership high. This does not mean elders are perfect but that they have seen measurable victory over sin in their life and they are consistently watching for and repenting of sin in their lives.
- **Husband of one wife...** There are many interpretations of this (never divorced, not a polygamist, not cheating) and the arguments are just as numerous. We fall in the category of the "spirit of the law" rather than the "letter of the law". We take each man's case individually. We, as a rule, will discount divorced believers in the same way that Scripture discounts Christians who live consistently in sin. If a man is divorced we will deal biblically with the divorce. There are occasions for divorce in the Bible and circumstances where God allows people to break the covenant of marriage (adultery, Jesus; desertion, Paul), though Christians are to seek reconciliation.
- **Sober minded...** This qualification speaks to the emotional life of a pastor. He must be able to control his desires and emotions through submission to the power and authority of the Holy Spirit. He must have a measurable amount of freedom from debilitating excesses or rash behavior.

- **Self-controlled...**He must have a sound mind, good judgment, and common sense.
- **Respectable...**He must have a well-ordered life. When this man's name is mentioned, there is widespread agreement that he is the sort of man worthy of leadership.
- **Hospitable...**He loves strangers, specifically those outside the faith.
- **Able to teach...**This qualification is not found on the list given for deacons. This does not mean that an elder has to be an excellent preacher. Rather, an elder must be able to handle the Scriptures well by helping people understand what is meant in its original context and in its contemporary application.
- **Not a drunkard...**He must not abuse alcohol or other mood-altering drugs.
- **Not violent, but gentle (peaceable)...**Not a fighter for the sake of fighting, but rather for the sake of peace. A man who loves unity, peace and protecting the people, but will stand up to defend his people.
- **Not quarrelsome...**A pastor cannot be a man who is always looking for his next fight.
- **Not a lover of money...**A man who does not allow money to motivate his life's decisions. Money is not bad, but the Spirit leads us, not the love of money. This does not mean that elders should be poor or that elder's wives should dress in rags but rather elders would be motivated by the Spirit and hopefully blessed by God through the church
- **He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?** This qualification disqualifies many men from eldership. Wives are the first level to watch because our wives reveal our true character. The true reflection of the man is seen in his wife. Children are the next level. Kids are supposed to be loud and boys are supposed to be dangerous, but if your children are not growing, learning, and respecting dad, then eldership must be postponed.
- **He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.** Young believers should not get too much power or they will become conceited, feeling like the church owes them (power, money, respect) and eventually will fall by the same sin of the devil. While the term "elder" describes maturity and not age, new believers must be given time to mature in Christ before taking on this level of leadership.
- **Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.** This guy is good in business and in the community. He lives in such a way that people want to imitate him and thereby learn to imitate Christ.

SERVING AT STONEGATE

SERVING THE WORLD, THE CITY, THE CHURCH

Serving is one way we represent our servant Savior to the world. Describing the purpose of his own life, Jesus said in Matthew 20:26-28: “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus came to give his life away as a servant. So every follower of Jesus should be serving Jesus in these three ways.

WE SERVE THE WORLD

We serve the world by participating in mission trips, supporting long-term missionaries, or even through programs such as Compassion International.

WE SERVE THE CITY

We serve the city by seeing and meeting the needs of our city, by making the problems of the city our problems. Serving the city allows us to be a light in our community for the glory of Jesus (see Matthew 5:14-16).

WE SERVE THE CHURCH

Serving is a normal expectation of covenant members. Serving the body can take many forms and should be done consistently to help the body grow up in Jesus. We see this in the following verses:

Ephesians 4:15-16, *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

1 Corinthians 12:2, *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

The illustration Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians is that we are all part of a body. If one part is not functioning properly, the whole body doesn't function properly. It would be like the kidney saying, “I'm tired of cleaning everything up. Get someone else to do it.” This would cause the body to suffer or die, just as if people in the church stop serving.

FINDING YOUR FIT

Discovering where to serve requires patience. There is no test or quiz that can tell you where you are to serve. It often takes time. But there are a few helpful things you can do to discern where you should serve.

1. Discovering your spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts are special abilities given by the Holy Spirit and distributed to every believer according to God's grace for the common good of the body of Christ.

Spiritual gifts are special abilities, divine endowments. They are used for spiritual purposes, tasks, and functions. Spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:8-10, *For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by one Spirit, and to another prophecy. . .*

Spiritual gifts are given to every believer, according to God's design and grace. We do not earn them or choose them. Therefore, unbelievers do not have spiritual gifts. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift for the good of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:7, *Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.*

1 Peter 4:10, *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

2. Discover your ministry passion.

Ministry passion is a heartfelt desire that compels us to make a difference for the kingdom of God. Your passion may right a wrong, meet a need, solve a problem, serve a cause, change a life, etc. While spiritual gifts are functions or tasks you perform, ministry passions are feelings or desires that motivate you to serve in a particular ministry. It's what drives you. Your ministry passion could be for a certain people group (youth, poor, young marrieds, etc.) or even a social issue (childcare, poverty, education, AIDS, etc.).

3. Consider your opportunities.

After evaluating your spiritual gifts and ministry passions, look for opportunities within the church and your circle of influence. As God brings opportunities, give your life away

serving. Within the church, the place to start is often times the place of highest need. So find a need and plug your life into that need. Your first stop may not last forever, but it will start the process of God refining your passions and sharpening your gifts.

**Pick up a serve card to find the various ways you can serve.*

4. Pray.

It takes time to discover your area of service. You can think you are called to a specific ministry and when you get involved, you realize it isn't for you. That doesn't mean you aren't called anywhere. It means you need to continually ask God through prayer to reveal the "where."

If you have trouble finding a meaningful place to serve, we are here to help. To set up a meeting with our volunteer coordinator, email (serve@stonegate.church).

PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. What are your unique spiritual gifts?
2. Describe your ministry passions.
3. To find the areas of highest need, email (serve@stonegate.church).

CARE AND CORRECTION

1 Corinthians 6:1-8, *When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—even your own brothers!*

Write Observations

1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 9-13, *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler — not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.*

Write Observations

Throughout its pages, the Bible sounds a recurring theme: Those God loves, He disciplines.¹⁸

Discipline is a sometimes challenging process of God correcting His people's thoughts, words, and behavior so they can fulfill their calling to become like Him. God disciplines His people through a variety of means.

He calls His people first to self-discipline. Each Christian is called to hear the Word of God as he reads the Bible and hears the Bible taught and applied. As he compares his life to God's Word, he adjusts himself to conform to his Savior. But individual interaction with God through His Word is not the only means God uses to make His children holy.

God also uses His people. "Brothers," writes Paul, "if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness ..." (Gal 6:1) As members of Stonegate Church, we take seriously our responsibility to "restore" members who fail to allow God to discipline them personally for their sins. This means that beginning with private confrontation and, if necessary, leading to public rebuke, we seek to help one another overcome any refusal to repent of those words and actions that the Bible clearly defines as sin.

This includes not only sinful words and behavior, but also refusal to turn from heretical doctrine. Jesus outlined a process for addressing another believer's sin in Matthew 18:15-17. **As a church we agree that this is the way for us to approach someone who refuses to appropriate God's grace for change.**

Initially, church discipline should be informal: **If a Christian sees sin in a brother or sister that appears to be continual, he should approach that person and inquire about it.** If, in fact, there is unrepentant sin and a refusal to repent, then the concerned brother or sister should involve one or two others, which may include a pastor and/or an elder. If this group confirms that, in fact, sin continues without repentance, the process must move to formal church discipline, because...

God also uses pastors to make his children holy. When the church begins to formally discipline a member, the church's pastors and/or elders inquire with the individual member in question to confirm fact and to appeal for change. If change is not forthcoming, the elders will inform the church of the member and his/her sin, urging members to contact the member and appeal for repentance. During this time, the member under discipline may not participate in the Lord's Supper or attend meetings for

¹⁸ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." (Hebrews 12:5-6 ESV, see also verses 7-13)

the purpose of fellowship. Instead, his participation with members should revolve around his need for change. If, after a reasonable period of appeal, no repentance is forthcoming, the elders will inform the church again, this time announcing that they must revoke membership and that the church must now treat the unrepentant person as they treat unbelievers. In other words, when they interact with this person they should have “fellowship” as the Bible defines it, but they should appeal for the former member to put his faith in Jesus’ work on the cross for them and to turn from his sin.

Church discipline has nothing to do with “shunning” a person. It involves first confronting in love and gentleness and, if unsuccessful, withholding fellowship. **It is not rejection of a relationship but a change in the nature of a relationship.** If a person under discipline is not factious, disruptive or a harmful influence, he is welcomed to attend all church meetings that are open to unbelievers. The elders may decide to abbreviate or eliminate the process of appeal for repentance if the sin is especially notorious, or if the member proves to be factious, disruptive, or leading others into sin or error. In these cases, the elders may ask church members to avoid all contact with an individual in order to mitigate his sinful influence.

At times a member may seek to withdraw from the church to avoid church discipline and its consequences. **Just as a good shepherd will go after a sheep that has wandered from the flock, so shall the pastors, elders, and members of this church seek to restore a wandering member to the Lord through biblical discipline.** (Matt. 18:12-14; Ezek. 34:4,8-16) Therefore, discipline may be instituted or continued either before or after a member seeks to withdraw from membership if the elders determine that such discipline may serve to guard and preserve the honor of God, protect the purity of the church, or restore the wandering member to the Lord. While the church cannot force a withdrawing member to remain in this congregation, the church has the right and responsibility to encourage restoration, to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, and to make a final determination as to the person’s membership status at the time withdrawal is sought or acknowledged. In doing so, the elders, at their discretion, may temporarily suspend further disciplinary proceedings, dismiss any or all charges pending against the accused, or proceed with discipline and pronounce an appropriate censure. If a member leaves the church while he is under the disciplinary process or while a censure against him is still in effect, and if the elders learn that he is attending another church, the elders may inform that church that the person is currently under church discipline and may ask that church to encourage the accused to repent of his sin and to be restored to the Lord and to any people whom he has offended. Such communications enhance the possibility that a person may finally repent of his sin, and, at the same time, serve to warn the other church to be on guard against the harm that the accused might do to their members (see Matt 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 2 Thess. 3:6-14; 2 Tim. 1:15; 2:16-18; 4:9, 14-15; 3 John 9-10).

Once the elders make a sin publicly known, they also commit to inform the church of repentance and restoration to fellowship as appropriate to the situation and the good of the church. Christians who attend Stonegate Church and have been excluded from fellowship from another church will not be allowed to participate in fellowship of Stonegate Church unless they repent of their sins and make confession and restitution with their former church or the elders of Stonegate Church are able to determine that the former church did not apply church discipline according to Scripture.

BAPTISM AND COMMUNION

BAPTISM AT STONEGATE

Water baptism is intended for those who have been rescued by Jesus and have become His disciple. Baptism is the first act of obedience, that first public step of faith for a new disciple toward Jesus. Baptism is an expression of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that one's former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin.

1. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BAPTISM?

Baptism is a symbol of salvation; not a means of salvation. Baptism beautifully symbolizes two spiritual truths: 1) Christ's death, burial, and resurrection; and 2) our death to sin and new life in Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:3b-4a, *Christ died for our sins...He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day...*

Romans 6:4, *Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.*

2. WHO SHOULD BE BAPTIZED?

We practice what has been historically called "believers' baptism." This term brings clarity to any confusion on our beliefs and practice of baptism. What do we mean by it?

Acts 2:41, *So then, those who had received His word were baptized ...*

Acts 8:12-13, *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women alike.*

Acts 10:46-48, *For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered, "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized*

who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?” And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

In these verses we see baptism following saving faith, it does not create it or add to it. Acts 10:46-48 highlights a significant point. The Holy Spirit was given to the Gentile believers before baptism, not after. Therefore, faith is the only requirement for salvation, and even faith is given by God, so that our works (baptism) could not save us and so no one can boast.

3. CIRCUMCISION AND BAPTISM AS SYMBOLS.

Colossians 2:11-12a, *And in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith...*

In the Old Testament, God’s covenant people were the Israelites. The sign of God’s covenant for the Israelites was circumcision. Being circumcised did not make you an heir of the covenant; it was merely a sign that you were already an heir. In Colossians, the Apostle Paul compares baptism to circumcision in the way that circumcision was a sign for the old covenant, so baptism is a sign of the new covenant.

4. SHOULD WE BAPTIZE INFANTS?

This is an issue Christians should charitably disagree in, not divide over. We do not practice infant baptism, although many Christian churches that we greatly respect do. Those who baptize infants believe that the continuity between circumcision and baptism reveals the way we ought to practice baptism in the church. If all the physical sons of Abraham were circumcised as a sign of belonging to the offspring of Abraham and therefore heirs of the covenant, then we should practice the same with our children by baptizing them as infants as a sign of the new covenant. However, we believe this continuity between circumcision and baptism does not interpret our practice of baptism. Although baptism and circumcision have continuity, there is a discontinuity between the two because of the difference between the old and new covenant and the Israelites and the Church.

“But who are these spiritual sons of Abraham who constitute the people of God in our age? Galatians 3:7 says, know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. The new thing since Jesus has come, is that the covenant people of God are no longer a political, ethnic nation, but a body of believers.” - John Piper¹⁹

¹⁹ Brothers We Are Not Professionals.

The difference between circumcision and baptism as symbols is the difference between the covenants they signify. The Old Covenant was based on physical birth. However, the New Covenant is based on spiritual birth. Therefore, we conclude that from all New Testament passages, baptism is a sign of faith in Jesus and it happens as an outward sign of that faith. This means until someone is of the age to make a profession of that faith in Christ they should not be baptized.

5. HOW DO WE BAPTIZE?

Matthew 3:16, *And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water ...*

Acts 8:38, *...and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.*

We baptize believers in Jesus Christ by immersion. Wayne Grudem writes in his book Systematic Theology:

“The word ‘baptize’ means to immerse in water. The Greek word ‘baptizo’ means to plunge or dip, immerse something in water. The practice of baptism in the New Testament was carried out in one way: The person being baptized was immersed or put completely under water and then brought back up again. Baptism by immersion is therefore the mode of baptism or the way in which baptism was carried out in the New Testament.”

COMMUNION AT STONEGATE

Matthew 26:26-29, *“Take, eat; this is My body.” And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it with you in My Father’s kingdom.*

1. WHAT IS COMMUNION?

The ordinance of communion was established by Christ when He ate the Passover meal with His disciples in the upper room on the night He was betrayed. Like baptism, communion is an ordinance that is also symbolic. Communion is a symbol of the breaking of Christ’s body (bread) and the shedding of His blood (wine). We as a church (universal) do not only take communion because of the example of the last meal of Christ and His disciples but also because of the example of the early church which was established by the Apostles, who observed this act.

2. HOW IS COMMUNION A SYMBOL, AND WHAT DOES IT SYMBOLIZE?

“Remembrance” is a significant word in 1 Corinthians 11: 24-25, that helps us better understand communion as a symbol. If you remember something, you are calling to mind a past action. When we take communion, we are calling to mind two greater truths. First, we are remembering the suffering and death of Christ on our behalf for our sins and God’s wrath being appeased. This means Christ’s act of redemption is complete and acceptable to God. Therefore, justification, propitiation, adoption, sanctification, and glorification are all offered to those who believe.

Secondly, when we take communion we are remembering God’s present work in us. To “remember” isn’t just to imagine what it was like for Christ to die; there is substance to the body and blood. We remember the past work of Christ done for us, the present work of God being done in us, and anticipate His second coming.

“Proclamation” is the second way in which communion is a symbol. Look at verse 26: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” So communion is more than remembering, it is also proclaiming. There are three things we proclaim with communion. First, we proclaim His death. Second, we proclaim his resurrection. This is not implicit but implied in verse 26, “...*the Lord’s death until He comes.*” If Christ died and is returning again then He must be alive. Communion proclaims the risen Lord. Lastly, we proclaim His second coming. Every time we take of the bread and cup we proclaim the returning King.

3. WHAT DOES COMMUNION DO?

We believe that taking the elements of communion bring about no special grace and the elements do not become the literal body and blood of Jesus when taken. Notice we said that communion does not bring about any “special grace.” Communion is one of two ordinances; therefore, we should keep it in high regard because God does. However, we do not want to be confused with the idea that communion has some special persevering grace that is given with the taking. Praise, evangelism, prayer, accountability, the preaching of the word, etc., all release grace. Communion may release grace into our lives as do all things God has given us and called us to. The only significance of the elements is what they represent. When Christ said, “this is my body” and “this is my blood” he did not mean his literal body.

4. WHO SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

1 Corinthians 11:28-29, *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

We believe a person must be a Christian in right standing with God to participate in communion with us. To “examine yourself” is another way of saying that a Christian has asked the Holy Spirit to make them aware of any known sin, they have confessed those before God, and they are resolved to make a break from those things. Moreover, we practice open communion. Anyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ can participate in communion at Stonegate.

A.1 | MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

When anyone enters into a relationship with God by grace from, and faith in, the person and work of Jesus Christ, they are entering into two covenants. The first is to journey with God for the rest of their lives and love Him fully. The second is to journey with His other children in the community of the local church. Your membership in a church is an official recognition of this. The purposes of the Stonegate Church Membership Covenant are:

1. To join the Spirit in forming an authentic church community that reflects the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit.
2. To clarify the on-going blessings and responsibilities of each member.
3. To encourage consistency, accountability, and loving unity within the church family.
4. To accomplish God's call for the Stonegate Church family.

This agreement does not imply that you will never fall short of the goals, but that the desire of your heart is to fulfill to the best of your ability each of the responsibilities stated. We trust that your commitment will be a personal blessing to your own journey in Christ, as well as a blessing to those around you.

WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, THE CHURCH LEADERSHIP COVENANTS THE FOLLOWING:

1. We covenant ourselves to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ (Heb 13:17; Thes 5:12).
2. We covenant to provide teaching, preaching, and counsel from the Scriptures (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17-18).
3. We covenant that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27-28).
4. We covenant to help you in times of need (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35; James 5:14-17).
5. We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (1 Timothy 3:1-13 & 5:17-22, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4).
6. We covenant to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
7. We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
8. We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1).
9. We covenant to help you become equipped to serve Christ (Eph 4:11-13).
10. We covenant to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-5).
11. We covenant to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church members (1 Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, 1 Timothy 4:12).

WITH THE GUIDING HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, I, THE UNDERSIGNED COVENANT THE FOLLOWING:

1. I am a Christian who has **been saved from my sins by the grace of Jesus Christ**. I have been **baptized** to give testimony of my identification with the body of Christ and obedience to the Scriptures.
2. I have read and understood the **Stonegate Church doctrinal statement and agree to not be divisive** to its teaching. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Hebrews 13:7, 17; Ephesians 4:1-3).
3. I will endeavor to **maintain a close relationship with the Lord** through regular personal Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of the other spiritual disciplines. My journey in Christ will be evident through my regular participation in the corporate worship services and involvement in a Home Group (Psalms 119:97, 105; Acts 2:24-47; Hebrews 10:23-25).
4. I will strive to **properly manage the resources God has given me**, including my time, body, gifts and talents, attitude, finances, and possessions (Ephesians 4:1-16, 5:15-18; Romans 12:1-2; Galatians 5:22-26; Proverbs 3:9-10). **This includes regular giving to Stonegate Church that is sacrificial and cheerful** (2 Corinthians 8-9).
5. **I commit myself to the Stonegate Church family and agree to aid in fulfilling its' missional purpose** to both be and bring the gospel to the Midlothian/South Dallas area. I recognize that this will be accomplished by pursuing Stonegate Church's core values of Gospel, Community, and Mission.
6. **I commit to using the spiritual gift(s) God has given me for the building up of the church**, both at Stonegate Church and universally (1 Peter 4:10-11; Romans 12:1-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-31). I understand that serving regularly is an expectation and membership requirement. **I am currently serving in the following capacity at Stonegate Church:**

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7. By God's grace, I covenant to **strive toward both humility and holiness** in all areas of life as an act of worship to Jesus (1 Peter 1:13-16. 1 Peter 1:22-24). Believers should strive to put certain attitudes and actions to death while stirring and stimulating love and good deeds through the Spirit. Below are a few examples of actions addressed in the Scriptures:

- **I will practice complete chastity unless married and, if married, complete fidelity within heterosexual and monogamous marriage.** Complete chastity and fidelity means, among other things, that regardless of my marital status, I will pursue purity and abstain from sexually immoral practices such as adultery, premarital sex, pornography, and homosexuality (Romans 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, 1 Corinthians 10:8; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8; Hebrews 13:4).
 - **I will seek to preserve the gift of marriage and agree to walk through a process of marriage reconciliation** at Stonegate Church before pursuing divorce from my spouse (Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11; for the role of the church in the process of divorce, see Paul's concern for the resolution of legal matters within the assembly of the church in 1 Corinthians 6).
 - **I will refrain from drunkenness, gossip and other sinful behavior** as the Bible dictates (Romans 1:28-32; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:18; James 3:3-18).
8. I covenant to **submit to the discipline of God** through the Holy Spirit by:
- following the biblical procedures for church discipline (as outlined in our membership packet) when sin is evident in another, with the hope of such discipline being repentance and restoration.
 - receiving righteous and loving discipline when approached biblically by fellow believers (Psalm 141:5; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13; Hebrews 12:5-11).
 - to do the following when I sin:
 - confess my sin to God and to fellow believers.
 - repent and seek help to put my sin to death (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; James 5:16; 1 John 1:6-10).
 - to submit to the elders and other appointed leaders of the church and diligently strive for unity and peace within the church (Ephesians 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:5).
9. I covenant to submit to the authority of the **Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues** (Psalms 119; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
10. I covenant to do the following **should I leave the church for righteous reasons**:
- to notify the appropriate staff member.
 - to seek another church where I can carry out my biblical responsibilities.

God enabling me, I will strive to consider my commitment to this membership covenant on a yearly basis. I understand that it is an evaluative tool, as well as an affirmation of my continuing convictions and purpose. My responsibility will be to notify the Stonegate Church leadership if at any time I can no longer commit to this covenant, or if I have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding Stonegate Church.

A.2 | STATEMENT OF FAITH

We recognize that the unity of the universal church is based solely on the person and work of Jesus and not on absolute agreement on other doctrines outside the atoning work of Jesus. While we as a local fellowship of believers understand that some believers do not agree with all of the following doctrinal beliefs, we ask that all incoming members agree with the following statement of faith:

1. GOD IS TRIUNE. There is one God: infinite, eternal, almighty; and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. In the unity of the godhead there are three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit; co-existent, co-equal, co-eternal. The Father is not the Son and the Son is not the Holy Spirit, yet each is truly Deity. One God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the foundation of Christian faith and life.

- **GOD THE FATHER.** God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By His word and for His glory, He freely and supernaturally created the world from nothing. Through the same Word He daily sustains all His creatures. He rules over all and is the only Sovereign. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is faithful to every promise, works all things together for good to those who love Him, and in His unfathomable grace gave His Son Jesus Christ for mankind's redemption. He made man for fellowship with Himself, and intended that all creation should live to the praise of His glory.
- **JESUS CHRIST.** Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is the eternal Word made flesh, supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary. He is perfect in nature, teaching, and obedience. He is fully God and was fully man. He was always with God and is God. Through Him all things came into being and were created. He was before all things and in Him all things hold together by the word of His power. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation and in Him dwells the fullness of the godhead bodily. He is the only Savior for the sins of the world having shed His blood and died a vicarious death on Calvary's cross. By His death in our place, He revealed the divine love and upheld divine justice, removing our guilt and reconciling us to God. Having redeemed us from sin, on the third day He rose bodily from the grave, victorious over death and the powers of darkness and for a period of 40 days appeared to more than 500 witnesses performing many convincing proofs of His resurrection. He ascended into heaven where at God's right hand He intercedes for His people and rules as Lord over all. He is the Head of His body, the church, and should be adored, loved, served, and obeyed by all.
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Through the proclamation of the gospel, He persuades men to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. By the same Spirit, a person is

led to trust in divine mercy. The Holy Spirit unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, brings about the new birth and dwells within the regenerate. The Holy Spirit has come to glorify the Son who in turn came to glorify the Father. He will lead the church into a right understanding and rich application of the truth of God's Word. He is to be respected, honored, and worshipped as God the Third Person of the Trinity (Phil 1:6, Acts 1:5).

2. THE SCRIPTURES. We accept the Bible, the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, as the written Word of God. The Bible is an essential and infallible record of God's self-disclosure to mankind. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Being given by God, the Scriptures are both fully and verbally inspired by God. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free of error in all it teaches. Each book is to be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide of all Christian life, practice and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation or worldly wisdom. Every doctrinal formulation, whether of creed, confession, or theology must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in holy Scripture.

3. MAN. God made man – male and female – in His own image, as the crown of creation, that man might have fellowship with Him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God. Being estranged from his Maker, yet responsible to Him, he became subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God. This depravity is radical and pervasive. It extends to his mind, will, and affections. Unregenerate man lives under the dominion of sin and Satan. He is at enmity with God, hostile toward God, and hateful of God. Fallen, sinful people, whatever their character or attainments, are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ.

4. THE GOSPEL. Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Christ's crucifixion is the heart of the gospel, His resurrection is the power of the gospel, and His ascension is the glory of the gospel. Christ's death is a substitutionary and propitiatory sacrifice to God for our sins. It satisfies the demands of God's holy justice and appeases His holy wrath. It also demonstrates His mysterious love and reveals His amazing grace. Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other name by which men must be saved. At the heart of all sound doctrine is the cross of Jesus Christ and the infinite privilege that redeemed sinners have of glorifying God because of what He has accomplished. Therefore, we want all that takes place in our hearts, churches and ministries to proceed from and be related to the cross.

5. MAN'S RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL. The proper response to the gospel is faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, a faith that is naturally accompanied by repentance from sin. Biblical repentance is characterized by a changed life, and saving faith is evidenced by kingdom service or works. While neither repentance nor works save, unless a person is willing to deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Christ, he cannot

become His disciple. This response to the gospel is rooted and grounded in the free and unconditional election of God for His own pleasure and glory. This gospel of grace is to be sincerely preached to all men in all nations.

6. MAN'S INHERITANCE THROUGH THE GOSPEL. Salvation, the free gift of God, is provided by grace alone, through faith alone, because of Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. Anyone turning from sin in repentance and looking to Christ and His substitutionary death receives the gift of eternal life and is declared righteous by God as a free gift. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. He is justified and fully accepted by God. Through Christ's atonement for sin an individual is reconciled to God as Father and becomes His child. The believer is forgiven the debt of his sin and via the miracle of regeneration liberated from the law of sin and death into the freedom of God's Spirit.

7. SANCTIFICATION. The Holy Spirit is the active agent in our sanctification and seeks to produce His fruit in us as our minds are renewed and we are conformed to the image of Christ. Though indwelling sin remains a reality, as we are led by the Spirit we grow in the knowledge of the Lord, freely keeping His commandments and endeavoring to so live in the world that all people may see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven. All believers are exhorted to persevere in the faith knowing they will have to give an account to God for their every thought, word and deed. The spiritual disciplines, especially Bible study, prayer, worship and confession, are a vital means of grace in this regard. Nevertheless, the believer's ultimate confidence to persevere is based in the sure promise of God to preserve His people until the end, which is most certain.

8. EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT. The Holy Spirit empowers believers for Christian witness and service. The promise of the Father is freely available to all who believe in Jesus Christ, thereby enabling them to exercise the powers of the age to come in ministry and mission. The Holy Spirit desires to continually fill each believer with power to witness and imparts His supernatural gifts for the edification of the Body and the work of ministry in the world. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit at work in the church of the first-century are available today and are to be earnestly desired and practiced. They are essential in the mission of the church in the world today.

9. THE CHURCH. God by His Word and Spirit creates the church, calling sinful men out of the whole human race into the fellowship of Christ's body. By the same Word and Spirit, He guides and preserves that new redeemed humanity. The church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, the church universal is made up of those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ and have personally appropriated the gospel. The church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will in the earth. This involves a commitment to see the gospel preached and churches planted in the entire world for a testimony. The ultimate mission of the church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the gospel. When God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women are added to a local church in which they devote themselves to teaching, fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer. All members of the church universal are to be a

vital and committed part of a local church. In this context they are called to live out the new covenant as the people of God and demonstrate the reality of the kingdom of God. The ascended Christ has given gift ministries to the church (including apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers) for the equipping of Christ's body that it might mature and grow. Through the gift ministries all members of the church are to be nurtured and equipped for the work of the ministry. In the context of the local church, God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service in relation to one another and to the world.

10. SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH. Water baptism is only intended for the individual who has received the saving benefits of Christ's atoning work and become His disciple. Therefore, in obedience to Christ's command and as a testimony to God, the church, oneself and the world, a believer should be immersed in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Water baptism is a visual demonstration of a person's union with Christ in the likeness of His death and resurrection. It signifies that his former way of life has been put to death and vividly depicts a person's release from the mastery of sin. As with water baptism, the Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become genuine followers of Christ. This ordinance symbolizes the breaking of Christ's body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf, and is to be observed repeatedly throughout the Christian life as a sign of continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we partake of the Lord's Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body.

11. THE CONSUMMATION. The consummation of all things includes the visible, personal and glorious return of Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead and the translation of those alive in Christ, the judgment of the just and the unjust, and the fulfillment of Christ's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth. In the consummation, Satan with his hosts and all those outside Christ are finally separated from the benevolent presence of God, enduring eternal punishment, but the righteous, in glorious bodies, shall live and reign with Him forever, serving Him and giving Him unending praise and glory. Then shall the eager expectation of creation be fulfilled and the whole earth shall proclaim the glory of God who makes all things new.

A.3 | COMMUNICATION

There are several ways for you to stay up to date around Stonegate. Each of these communication lanes are very important for those who call Stonegate home.

SUNDAY MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS

We provide a lot of information on Sunday mornings through our bulletins, announcements from the stage, and information at the Connect table in the lobby. If you need information about something on a Sunday morning and can't find it in one of these places, feel free to ask a staff member (wearing a silver Stonegate name tag).

WEEKLY EMAIL UPDATES

Each week we send out a Stonegate email (you may also receive one from the ministry you're serving within and/or the ministry your child is involved in). Be on the lookout for these emails and read through them for applicable information. These emails provide crucial communication concerning ministry opportunities, upcoming events, and updates.

In addition, if you have general questions regarding your Stonegate family, email:

info@stonegate.church

If you have giving questions, email:

giving@stonegate.church

SOCIAL MEDIA

Another crucial communication lane are the Stonegate social media accounts. Please follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, and Twitter for the latest updates.

STONEGATE GROUPS

Lastly, Stonegate Groups will help you stay up to speed. Each week our Group Leaders are given information to pass along to you.

A.4 | FOLLOW-UP CONVO

Thank you so much for completing our Covenant Membership class. You are now all set for your last step toward Covenant Membership at Stonegate - a follow-up conversation.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT DURING THE FOLLOW-UP CONVERSATION?

The follow-up conversation is a chance for us to get to know you (and your family), hear the story of how God has rescued you, hear about what God is currently doing in your life, and answer any questions you have. We view the follow-up conversation as a way to get to know and serve every person who becomes a part of the Stonegate family.

WHAT IS MY NEXT STEP?

There are three steps you need to take following the covenant membership class.

1: ACT LIKE A MEMBER BEFORE COMING ONE.

The best way to step into membership within a local church is to act like a member before coming one. Below you'll find some normal expectations of those within the Stonegate family. We would love to work with you toward each of the following before scheduling the follow-follow-up conversation.

Covenant members give sacrificially. Ask Jesus to grow you into faithful, consistent, and sacrificial giving to your church home. Sacrificial generosity doesn't equate to a percentage, but tithing is a great place to start.

Covenant members serve faithfully. Serving, like giving, allows for a sense of ownership of your church. The church you serve faithfully isn't just a church, it's your church. Your church will never be all God's designed it to be until your God-given gifts are at work.

Covenant members live in community. Every covenant members is connected to a group, where they are encouraged, cared for, and know.

2: COMPLETE ASSIGNMENTS FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CLASS

There were several assignments given out through email, including readings and podcasts. Make sure you've completed each of those assignments.

3: REGISTER ONLINE

Once steps 1 and 2 are complete, go to the link below to register for the follow-up conversation. The registration will take about thirty minutes to complete, so give yourself some time. After you complete registration, we'll contact you to schedule a time to meet.

To schedule a follow-up conversation, go to:

<https://sgchurch.churchcenter.com/registrations/events/126114>