

CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

(Rev. 6-17-09)

I. NAME

Who are we?

We are Lifehouse Community Church (Lifehouse). We are located in Roxana, Illinois.

II. PURPOSE

Why do we exist?

Our purpose is to bring the perfect love of Christ to an imperfect world and lead people to become fully devoted followers of Him.. This is accomplished by equipping and mobilizing believers to reach out with the relevant message of Jesus Christ and by reproducing campuses in the St. Louis Metro-East area and worldwide. (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 11: 19-16)

III. BELIEFS

A. What do we believe about God?

We believe there is one divine Being who has existed eternally. He exists and reveals Himself to man in three distinct, equally divine Persons -Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. While we cannot fully comprehend His divine nature, it is possible for people to know Him.

At the beginning of time this divine Being created the entire universe and all its creatures. He continues to exercise His supreme power to sustain this creation. Throughout history He has expressed His desire to be our God and to have a personal, eternal relationship with us.

We believe that God loves us and wants what is best for us.

B. What do we believe about Jesus?

We believe that Jesus is the second Person of God, His eternal divine Son. He chose voluntarily to be made in human likeness and was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Although He lived a sinless life, He allowed Himself to be executed by crucifixion. His death paid the penalty for the offenses of mankind against God. However, as prophesied, He rose from the dead three days after His execution. After appearing to witnesses on a number of occasions over a period of forty days, He ascended into heaven where He now serves as the only Mediator between God and man. We believe that at the end of time He will again visibly return to earth to complete His eternal plan.

C. What do we believe about the Holy Spirit?

The third Person of God is the Holy Spirit. We believe the Holy Spirit dwells in every believer. His indwelling presence gives spiritual life to believers and distinguishes them as children of God. The Holy Spirit guides believers in understanding and applying God's principles and values. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, believers are empowered to live Christ-like lives. The Holy Spirit also equips believers with talents and abilities for the purpose of building God's kingdom.

D. What do we believe about the Bible?

God divinely inspired human authors to write the 66 books of the Bible. He communicated through these writers the values, principles, and ideals which please Him and are in our best interests. We believe the Bible is entirely accurate, complete, and reliable. We look to the Bible as the final authority on all matters of faith and conduct.

E. What do we believe about Mankind?

God created mankind to live in a relationship with Him. However, the first man and woman were deceived by Satan. They rebelled and chose to be wrongfully independent from God. Their decision alienated them from God. Every human being since that time has suffered the consequences of that rebellion. We all fail to please God and are open to Satan's deception. Our failure to please God, unless a relationship is re-established with Him, results in condemnation under God's judgment and would cause us to spend eternity in hell. Furthermore, there is nothing we can do on our own to re-establish our relationship with God.

F. What do we believe about re-establishing a relationship with God?

Our inability to re-establish our relationship with God leaves us dependent on God's mercy. God graciously provides the means to reconcile ourselves to Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Our relationship is re-established when we make a commitment to accept Jesus as God's Son and our Savior and Lord.

Practically speaking, this acceptance is demonstrated through both a private and public commitment. We demonstrate our commitment privately by faith (acting upon our belief that God has the power to save us) and repentance (turning back to God and depending on Him to control our lives). At the same time, we publicly express our commitment by confessing our acceptance of God's salvation and submitting ourselves in Christian baptism.

G. What do we believe about the Christian life?

Once our relationship is re-established with God, we naturally want to spend time with Him and know Him better. The Holy Spirit enlightens us as we read God's Word, the Bible; as we communicate with Him in prayer; and as we enter into loving relationships with other believers. In this way we begin to know God more intimately.

As we become acquainted with God we desire to be like Him and please Him. This process of spiritual development motivates us to seek ways to serve God and prepares us to spend eternity in fellowship with Him.

H. What do we believe about the church?

We believe the church represents Jesus Christ to a needy world. The Bible speaks of the church as Christ's body. It is compared to a living organism with Jesus as the head. God arranges the parts of the body, the believers, just as He wants them to be. He gives each believer special functions to perform for the good of the body. To remain healthy, the body's members must work together. Each part contributes to the growth and maturity of the body. For this reason it is important for believers to regularly gather together for the purpose of worship. During worship believers are equipped, built up, and encouraged through teaching, participating in fellowship, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. Worship in this way enables believers to serve one another and the un-churched people in their sphere of influence.

IV. PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

How do we minister?

Presuppositions: The Assumptions of the Ministry

1. All believers are responsible to be a witness in their faith and walk with Christ. (II Corinthians 5:20)

Every believer is responsible to reach out to others and share with them the need we all have for a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ. Though most believers do not possess the gift of evangelism, all are called to share their faith. The effectiveness of the church in reaching the un-churched is dramatically increased when we are able to mobilize a large percentage of believers who are not gifted evangelists. We are able to mobilize these believers' evangelism efforts by providing a service designed to communicate the message of Christ to their friends with relevance, creativity, and contemporary style.

2. The needs of the seeker differ from the needs of the believer. (I Cor. 9:19-23; Acts 15:5-21;17)

Individuals who have not made a commitment to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord may not understand Christian terminology. They are often reluctant to attend a church service, and when they do attend they come with little knowledge of basic Christian truths. It is imperative that we communicate the truths in a way they understand. Lifehouse Community Church provides a service that has been designed specifically to meet the needs of seekers (those who are searching for God). Recognizing that the needs of the believer must be met as well, Lifehouse Community Church focuses on encouraging, edifying, and equipping the believer for service. We are committed to the believer's continual growth toward spiritual maturity for the purpose of leadership development and ministry to the seeker.

3. Believers must recognize that spiritual development is a process which leads to a commitment to Jesus and continues toward spiritual maturity. (Romans 14:1; 15:1)

Theologically, it is recognized that there is a moment in time when an individual is born into the family of God through a commitment to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Practically, however, this event occurs during a process of examining, considering, evaluating, and weighing the costs of the Christian faith. Therefore, Lifehouse Community Church is not event-oriented: Conversion is not the end process, but rather the point on the journey between separation from God and maturity in faith. It is our task to point all people in the maturing process toward Jesus Christ.

4. Loving relationships are the best context for spiritual development. (Ephesians 4:15-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Spiritual growth, like emotional and mental growth, does not take place in a vacuum; it is fostered and enhanced by interaction in loving relationships. God created us to thrive in community. Being in a small group of caring people opens up a dimension of growth that cannot take place individually or in a large group. It is within the context of these small groups that many seekers make a commitment to Jesus Christ. For both the believer and the seeker, being in a small group is extremely important for spiritual development. Just as no one should attempt to climb a mountain on his own, no Christian should attempt to walk the Christian journey alone. Members of small groups are like mountain climbers roped together for the ascent, depending on one another to get there. Because of our understanding of how spiritual development takes place, Lifehouse Community Church has a variety of small groups that meet at various times, for numerous needs, and for a variety of people at different stages in life.

5. Every believer is a minister, gifted by God for the benefit of the church. (1 Corinthians 12:12-31; 14:12)

Recognizing that every believer is gifted by God to be a vital part of the equipping and maturing of the body of Christ, Lifehouse Community Church strives to mobilize the body for service and ministry. This is accomplished by challenging people to become servants and servant-leaders through discovery, development, and implementation of their spiritual gifts.

6. *The result of a maturing church is the planting of other reproducing churches. (Acts 1:8)*

Just as every mature believer produces fruit, a mature church will produce fruit that includes the planting of new churches. Our commitment to furthering the gospel not only includes evangelism and church growth, but also kingdom growth. Church planting is the most biblical and best method of extending Christ's church to the whole world.

Personality: The Character of the Ministry

Five key words describe the ministry of Lifehouse Community Church :

1. **Caring** - We show a genuine concern for people at every step in their spiritual journey.

2. **Excellent** - We strive for quality in every area of ministry.

3. **Innovative** - We promote creativity in all aspects of ministry, realizing that successful failures result in growth.

4. **Relevance** - We present a biblical Christianity that makes a difference in people's lives today and tomorrow.

5. **Challenging** - We encourage seekers and believers to take the next step in their spiritual development.

V. AMENDMENTS

What happens if we need to make changes?

This Constitution may be revised by the following procedure:

- 1) the proposed amendment shall be approved by the Leadership Council;
- 2) a notice specifying: a) the proposed amendment, as approved by the Leadership Council, and b) the time and date of a meeting to discuss the proposed amendment, shall be conspicuously posted for not less than four weeks,
- 3) an announcement concerning the proposed amendment shall be made in each regular worship service for four weeks; and
- 4) A two-thirds majority vote shall be necessary for adoption. Covenant Partners who have been in covenant with Lifehouse for four weeks prior to the meeting shall be eligible to vote.

Bylaws of Lifehouse Community Church

I. HOW ARE WE ORGANIZED / GOVERNED?

A. What type of government do we have?

Our government is organized according to biblical principles of *servant leadership*. *The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ*. We recognize Jesus as the head of the body. We believe the highest calling in the kingdom of God is the calling to servanthood.

Therefore, all our leaders are servants. In addition, we believe the extent of our ability to effectively serve people directly affects both our spiritual and numerical growth. For these reasons, we strive to equip, encourage, and empower believers to serve others through a system of decentralized caregiving. Our small groups facilitate this system.

B. Who are our leaders?

For the sake of unity and accountability, only Covenant Partners will be eligible to serve in any of these leadership positions.

1. Leaders of ten (X)

Reliable men and women are entrusted with the responsibility of serving the members of the groups they lead. The main goal of these leaders is to foster a sense of belonging and security in the members of the group. This provides a safe place for people to relate the story of their spiritual journey and seek help and support for their struggles on their way back to God.

2. Leaders of fifty (L)

The leaders of fifty (L) serve as coaches for up to five small group leaders (X). They are responsible for encouraging and assisting the group leader in their ministry to their small groups. They are mentors to the group leaders. The coach holds the small group leader accountable for both their spiritual life and for the leadership of their small group.

3. Leaders of one hundred (C)

The leaders of one hundred are responsible for organizing large group events designed as outreach to people on their way back to God. Through their efforts people are attracted to both the celebration services and small groups.

4. Staff (D)

Lifeshouse Community Church employs a paid staff selected on the basis of their giftedness and passion for their area of ministry. Candidates are screened by the senior pastor. The Leadership Council interviews the final candidates and gives final approval on the hiring of staff. The senior pastor oversees and directs the work of the staff. An annual performance evaluation is prepared on each staff member. The senior pastor is responsible and accountable to the Leadership Council for his performance and the performance of the staff.

5. Council

The senior pastor and a minimum of three people appointed from the above leaders make up the Leadership Council. The Leadership Council is responsible for the practical functions of congregational oversight, corresponding to the biblical roles of elder, bishop, and overseer.

These include:

***Doctrine** - Assuring that the teaching of essential beliefs is consistent with biblical truths.

***Discipline** - Guiding and correcting believers in biblical conduct to insure the unity and health of the body.

***Direction Setting / Decision Making** - Establishing the vision for the future of the church along with determining and implementing plans and policies which enable the body to accomplish this vision. This includes oversight of staff and lay leaders in matters such as finances, hiring, and church programs.

The Leadership Council is accountable to Jesus and the body of believers at Lifeshouse Community Church .

6. Christ The Bible describes the church as the body of Christ.

We recognize Jesus as the head of the body. All our leaders are in submission to Christ. He is our final authority.

C. What are our leaders' qualifications?

The following are the expectations of those who become a part of the leadership.

1. A Commitment to a Growing Relationship with Jesus Christ

This is evident in the following ways:

A) Commitment to the Lordship of Christ

God's offer of salvation through Jesus Christ calls for a response of faith. That response is demonstrated throughout the New Testament by repentance, acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and baptism by immersion. Repentance involves a change of heart and

mind that causes us to want to put Jesus first in our lives. When we commit our lives to Christ, we put our faith in Him to receive forgiveness of sins, spiritual life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is the public demonstration by which a believer is identified with Christ, His body the church, and a life of discipleship. The act is one done in faith and submission to the Lordship of Christ. (Mark 1:9-11; Acts 2:38; Romans 6; Colossians 2:12)

B) Development of prayer and other spiritual practices

In order to grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ, a leader will begin to incorporate specific practices into his/her life. No relationship can grow without communication. As much as we need to communicate with our heavenly Father, He desires to communicate with us. In fact, he created us to fellowship with Him. The growing spiritual life of the leader will include practices such as regular prayer, Bible reading, and meditation on the Word. (James 5:13-16; I Thessalonians 5:16-18)

C) Finances/Stewardship--(moving toward 10%)

The Old Testament teaches the principle of tithing-giving to God the first 10% of everything you have. In the New Testament, we see a shift toward total stewardship of one's life and resources. God expects us to live conscious of the fact that everything we have belongs to Him. We are simply stewards/managers of the resources He gives to us while we are on earth. With this in mind, certainly giving 10% of our income to God would be a minimum expectation for many people. For others, it would be a goal to work toward. Whatever the case, a leader will be a model of stewardship to those who follow him/her. (Luke 12:13-21; 18:18-30; 21:1-4; Matthew 25:14-28)

D) Speech

As a leader, what we say has great influence. It is expected that a leader will be a model to those who follow him in his/her speech. The Bible speaks of our tongue as having tremendous power--both for good and evil (James 3). A leader is expected to guard his speech carefully, being positive and encouraging, building up the body--always "speaking the truth in love." (Ephesians 4:15)

E) Home/Family Life

The first ministry priority for every leader is family. While the demands of church ministry can become great, it should never be at the expense of one's relationship to their spouse or children. Lifehouse is committed to building strong families. A leader will model an authentic commitment to their family--an example that is consistent both in the home and in the church. (Ephesians 5 & 6)

F) Efforts/Actions (Using giftedness)

God gives every Christian gifts and abilities to be used to benefit His body, the church. A leader will seek to discover how God has gifted them to be most effective in ministry. In turn the leader will encourage other Christians to seek to discover their own gifts and abilities and use them in ministry to benefit the body of Christ. (I Corinthians 12, Romans 12,

Ephesians 4)

2. A Commitment to an Increasing Knowledge of Jesus Christ through prayer, personal study of the Bible and application to everyday life.

This is evident in the following ways:

A) A working knowledge of spiritual principles in the Bible

One of the best ways to grow in our relationship with Jesus is through a better understanding of the principles found in Scripture. A leader will continually seek to increase his understanding of Scripture. (II Timothy 2:15)

B) An ability to effectively communicate his/her faith

A leader will have many opportunities to communicate the meaning and significance of a relationship with Jesus Christ. This will encourage the believer and challenge the unbeliever. It is important that a leader is able to clearly and concisely communicate a gospel message within the context of their own personal testimony. This will be a valuable tool for personal evangelism. (Matthew 28:18-20)

C) Submission to the Word of God

A leader will seek to apply the principles learned from God's Word in their personal life. In addition, they should be capable of encouraging and exhorting others to do the same.

3. A Commitment to the Body of Christ at Lifehouse Community Church .

This is evident in the following ways:

A) Consistent participation in small groups and worship services

One of the best ways to continue to develop and grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ is to continue in fellowship with other believers (Hebrews 10:25). This is not only beneficial to the personal spiritual life of the leader, but it is also an encouragement to other believers. Lifehouse offers several opportunities to regularly participate in fellowship with other believers. A leader will be a model that communicates the importance of these activities by their own consistent participation in them.

B) Consistent participation in leadership training

A characteristic of a growing Christian is to be teachable. This is no different for the leader. A leader will model a teachable spirit through consistent participation in leadership training. Lifehouse is dedicated to providing excellent leadership training opportunities. Similar to participation in celebration services, small groups, and believers' worship, participation in leadership training opportunities is not only beneficial to the leader himself, but also an encouragement to the body of leaders.

C) Development of an apprentice leader

The apostle Paul modeled for us the importance of apprentice leadership (II Timothy 2:2). One of the most effective ways to reproduce and maximize your ministry impact is to be committed to doing ministry in pairs, a leader developing an apprentice leader. In order for the body of Christ to continue to make a difference, each leader must take upon himself the responsibility of leadership development. An excellent way to do this is through apprenticeships.

D) Facilitate care and spiritual growth of individuals under care

The leader accepts the responsibility to facilitate the care and spiritual growth of the individuals to whom they are ministering (I Peter 5:1-4). It is not the leader's sole responsibility to care for these individuals. It is the leader's responsibility to see that the individuals in the group provide care for one another.

4. Additional Qualifications for Leadership Council

Three additional qualifications exist for the Leadership Council. They are: giftedness congruent with the responsibilities, spiritual maturity, and conduct that is above and beyond reproach. (Romans 12:1-8; I Corinthians 12 & 14; Ephesians 4:1-16; I Tim. 3; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 4:10-11 & 5:1-4).

D. How are leaders (X, L, C, D) selected & how long do they serve?

We believe prospective leaders must first show themselves faithful before they are given positions of responsibility. For this reason, leadership is developed through an apprenticeship process, wherever possible. Leaders of the above groups are expected to select and train apprentices. They serve as mentors, teaching apprentices how to effectively serve the members of groups. Before apprentices become leaders they must successfully demonstrate the ability to begin and lead new groups on their own.

Since leadership grows out of service to others, our leaders serve as long as they are serving effectively. We expect a leader to make every effort to develop an apprentice to fill their position before resigning. A leader may also be asked to resign for disciplinary reasons or if they are no longer serving effectively.

E. How is the Leadership Council selected and how long do they serve?

Selection of the Leadership Council is through a biblical process of appointment. Those eligible for appointment must be a part of the church leadership (X, L, C, D) listed above. Written nominations are accepted from the leaders at the January Leadership Community. These nominations are based upon demonstration of each nominee's giftedness, spiritual maturity, and conduct. The existing Leadership Council appoints nominees to the Leadership Council. The appointments are announced to the February Leadership

Community, and to the congregation at the believers' worship for affirmation. All appointees will be considered affirmed unless the Leadership Council receives written notice within 30 days from the initial announcement that an appointee is not qualified. The Leadership Council will meet with both parties present to resolve the issue. The final decision on appointment will be made by the Leadership Council.

Service on the Leadership Council is in terms of two years.

Terms are staggered so that no more than half the Council's terms expire each year. Those individuals whose term expires may indicate their willingness to serve another term. The names of those willing to serve additional terms are presented to the leaders in attendance at the Lifehouse Community Church January Leadership Community.

In the event that the Leadership Council falls below four members or needs additional membership, the nomination and appointment process referred to above will apply. Appointees selected in this case will serve for the balance of the term of the person leaving.

The Leadership Council may ask one of its members to resign for disciplinary reasons or if he or she is no longer serving effectively. Individuals asked to resign from the Leadership Council for disciplinary reasons are not eligible for re-nomination and appointment until they sufficiently demonstrate repentance and, where appropriate, restitution.

F. How are leaders disciplined?

The Bible gives "the testimony of two or three individuals" as the criteria for taking disciplinary action toward a person. The person witnessing wrongful behavior on the part of a leader is encouraged to first discuss it with that leader privately. If this discussion fails to resolve the differences, the parties involved should obtain witnesses to the behavior. The leader should again be confronted privately in the presence of these witnesses. If this fails, those involved should bring the matter before the leader they are accountable to. Staff may be empowered with the authority to take disciplinary action up to and including removing the individual involved from leadership.

Matters not resolved by the staff, or matters involving members of the staff or Leadership Council should be referred to the Leadership Council for discipline. The Leadership Council is empowered to take whatever steps are warranted, in accordance with Appendix D of the Bylaws.

G. How does the Council make decisions?

Two-thirds of the Leadership Council members shall constitute a quorum, provided proper notice of the meeting has been given. A two-thirds majority vote of those Leadership Council members present is necessary to pass any motion.

II. COVENANTING TOGETHER

We invite seekers and believers to fellowship with us and to be a part of our family.

The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use your gifts, and mutual accountability that you experience in a church can dramatically change your relationship with the Lord and with the people he places in your life. Therefore, we want you to take time to get to know our church, learn how we are fulfilling God's command to build his kingdom, and see how we love and relate to one another in daily life.

If you like what you see in our church, we invite you to attend our Starting Point Lifehouse Group. There you can learn more about our church's doctrines and vision for ministry, and about the privileges and responsibilities of entering into Covenant with us. Attending the class will not obligate you to enter into Covenant with us.

Covenant Partnership will allow you to enjoy certain ministry opportunities and privileges, including the following:

You may participate and vote in congregational meetings.

You can seek more opportunities to use your spiritual gifts, including those of teaching, serving and leading within the body.

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III. Handling of Funds

Section 1. All funds for the maintenance of this Church shall be provided by the voluntary contribution, tithes and offerings of the Covenant Partners and friends of the organization. Offerings shall be accepted by the Church at such times and in such ways as agreed upon by the leadership and shall be administered by the treasurer under their (the leadership) direction. (Mal. 3:10 Luke 6:38; I Cor. 16:1-2; II Cor. 9:6-8).

Section 2. All offerings shall be counted by at least two authorized persons before the funds are removed from the facility.

Authorized persons are Leadership Council or those persons who have been appointed by the Leadership Council as official "counters". Pastoral Staff and the church treasurer are prohibited from directly handling offerings.

These funds are to be taken to the bank deposit box immediately following the service by no less than two authorized persons.

An offering receipt form shall be signed in duplicate by those counting the offering, with one copy going to the treasurer and the other copy going to the secretary. The treasurer will give a monthly report of finances at each monthly meeting of the Leadership Council. A record shall be kept of all receipts and disbursements of the

Church. Accurate account shall be kept of all individual giving and receipts given at the end of each year showing the total amount and the departments to which it was given. All funds shall be deposited in a responsible, insured banking institution.

Section 3. All expenditures of the church shall be by check or credit card. A Petty Cash Account, not to exceed \$200.00, may be held at the church office for minor expenditures. The Petty Cash Account shall be reported and updated each month.

IV. Congregational Affirmation

While we are a leadership council ruled church, in certain circumstances, it is wise to obtain the affirmation of the congregation as a whole. Thus, the following circumstances require congregational affirmation:

The calling of a pastor

The purchase or sale of any real estate or of any item in excess of \$20,000.

An annual budget modification of more than 25% of the previous annual budget

The following procedure shall be followed:

1) A notice specifying: a) the proposed action, as approved by the Leadership Council, and b) the time and date of a meeting to discuss the proposed amendment, shall be conspicuously posted for not less than eight days; and

2) A simple majority vote shall be necessary for adoption. Covenant Partners who have been in covenant with Lifehouse for four weeks prior to the meeting shall be eligible to vote.

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V. AMENDMENTS

What happens if we need to make changes to the Bylaws?

These Bylaws may be revised by the following procedure:

1) a notice specifying: a) the proposed amendment, as approved by the Leadership Council, and b) the time and date of a meeting to discuss the proposed amendment, shall be conspicuously posted for not less than two weeks;

2) an announcement concerning the proposed amendment shall be made in each regular worship service for two weeks; and

3) A simple majority vote shall be necessary for adoption. Covenant Partners who have been in covenant with Lifehouse for four weeks prior to the meeting shall be eligible to vote.

VI. DISSOLUTION

What happens if we dissolve?

If Lifehouse Community Church were to dissolve, all remaining assets will be sold or distributed to likeminded kingdom ministries as seen fit by the remaining members of the leadership council.

APPENDIX A

Gender And The Governing Body of LifeHouse Community Church

Our Conclusion

We have decided not to exclude women from serving on the governing body based solely on gender.

Many Christian churches exclude women from the governing body (often called "elders"). That body determines the teaching and policies of the church, administers church discipline, and provides accountability for the staff. We have substantial respect for this position, and fully considered taking the position ourselves. However, we do not find the whole witness and testimony of Scripture sufficiently consistent with the position of male-only governance. Therefore, we felt it unwarranted to exclude women gifted with leadership from serving as a part of the governing body of the church.

Scriptural bases of our conclusion

We believe our position is consistent with the following Scriptures:

*Women in the New Testament church were leaders serving as prophets (Acts 21:9), teachers (Acts 18:26), ministers (Romans 16:1 3), leaders in worship services (I Corinthians 11:4-5) and co-workers with the Apostle Paul (Philippians 4:2-3);

*The Holy Spirit empowers both men and women, young and old to speak for God (Acts 2:17-18);

*Men and women are equal recipients of God's gifts (I Peter 3:7);

*In Christ all people, male and female, are to be submissive to one another and to serve one another in reciprocal love and obedience to Jesus (Ephesians 5:21; Philippians 2:3-4; Galatians 5:13);

*In the Old Testament a woman was appointed by God to be the principal leader of the nation of Israel (Judges 4-5).

We believe these passages suggest that no person be disqualified from any form of service in the body of Christ based solely on gender. Moreover, we believe the Bible teaches (and the leadership history of our church supports) that men and women are full partners in ministry in the kingdom of God. Giftedness by the Holy Spirit is the primary basis of qualification for ministry (Romans 12:1-8; I Corinthians 12 & 14; Ephesians 4:1-16; I Peter 4:10-11).

Response to other interpretations of Scripture

Though we base our conclusion on Scripture, we acknowledge that there are other views based on biblical texts that need to be addressed. In I Timothy 2:11-15, Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (NIV).

We do not hold that this verse prohibits women from leadership but rather prohibits a certain ungodly way of exercising leadership. In respect to this text as it applies to governance, no person, male or female, who is part of the governing body of the church will bear any authority as an individual over any other individual: *the authority of the governing body will not be vested in individuals but only in the body as a group of servants dedicated to the good of the church.* We will strive to prevent any practice or perception of any person serving on the governing body as having authority in and of themselves: leaders are the servants of the ones they lead (Mark 10:42-45).

Furthermore, some would question if the husband was head of his wife if she served on the governing body of his church and he did not (I Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22). However, since no individual on our governing body bears any individual authority over anyone in the church, the wife in this case cannot be said to "not be in submission to her husband." Again, however, the overarching principle of submission in the New Testament is one of mutual submission among believers (Ephesians 5:21) and not primarily of women's submission to men.

We hold the list of qualifications for elders found in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 (which to some seem to qualify only males for eldership) to be inclusive and neither exhaustive nor prohibitive. A purely literal interpretation of these passages would not only exclude women from eldership, it would also exclude all men except those currently married who have children. This interpretation of these passages would not seem to be consistent with the whole testimony of Scripture on the issues of gender, marriage, and spiritual maturity (I Cor. 7:32-35; Matt. 16:24 & 19:12; I Cor. 12; Rom. 12)

Concluding remarks on Scriptural concerns

After a thorough study of the Bible and numerous works by respected scholars from different and various points of view on this issue, we do not find that the teaching of Scripture on the issue of women in governance *per se* is entirely clear. We acknowledge that a significant case can be made from Scripture for both including and excluding women from serving as part of the governing body of a church. Through prayer and discussion we therefore decided which Scriptural view we found most consistent with the whole teaching of the Bible about God's ways of building His kingdom. We concluded that excluding women from serving on the governing body of our church could limit how God wants to do His work in our church. Therefore, in the absence of a clear scriptural mandate to exclude women from this form of service, we have chosen the less restrictive view so that God's Spirit may not be hindered in selecting gifted leadership in our church.

Our Intention

By our position we do not intend to identify our church with any churches or Christian leaders who have come to similar conclusions. Our only goal is to be responsive to God's call for our church to be the body He has called us to be. We have prayerfully sought His wisdom on the matter of women in leadership so that we would do nothing that could possibly hinder God's work in our church. We respect those who disagree with our position and we seek to be sensitive to them. It is our hope and prayer that this will not become a divisive issue. We are committed to explaining and discussing our conclusion in a spirit of unity and love that strives to remain focused on the primary mission of our church: "To reach and disciple people for Jesus Christ."

