

Desmond James Venter

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OBJECTIVE

God has given me a passion for the people of South Africa, my objective is to strengthen the church of God through the preaching of God's Word and the shepherding of God's flock. My ministry objective is based upon Colossians 1:28-29, **to proclaim Christ, admonishing and teaching everyman**, for the distinct purpose of **presenting everyman complete in Christ**.

FAMILY

- Born on February 9, 1973 in Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Married to Sharon on November 16, 1996.
- Meaghan Elizabeth our daughter born on May 24, 2001. (Lives in West Virginia)
- Caleb Braeden our son was born: May 29, 2004. (US Citizen enrolled at BJU)
- Micah David our son born: December 29, 2005
- Adopted our daughter Talitha Joy – DOB 22 April 2007.
- Adopted our son Benjamin Ezra – DOB 18 October 2006
- Adopted our daughter Zimkhitha – DOB 1 March 2010
- Adopted out daughter Sinthemba – DOB 4 July 2013

EDUCATION

2017 – 2020	The Master's Seminary <i>Doctor of Ministry</i>	Sun Valley, California
2001- 2004	The Master's Seminary <i>Master of Divinity</i>	Sun Valley, California
1992-1994	Witwatersrand Technikon <i>National Diploma: Quantity Surveying</i>	Johannesburg, SA
1986 – 1990	The Vaal High School <i>Grade 12</i>	Vanderbijlpark, SA

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

2008 – Present Grace Baptist Church Amanzimtoti, South Africa

Senior Pastor

- Preaching and Teaching Ministry (www.gracetoti.com)
- Overseeing Church Ministry Team
- Chairman of Board overseeing 7 Rivers Outreach (www.7riversoutreach.org)
- Chairperson Fellowship of Baptist Churches South Africa (FBCSA)
- Board member – Umuzi Training Center
- Academic Dean – Christ Seminary DBN (TMAI)
- Advisory Council – Biblical Missions Worldwide

2004 – 2008 Christ Baptist Church Polokwane, South Africa

Associate Pastor and Lecturer

- Overseeing Children's Ministry
- Overseeing Youth Ministry (Youth Leader)
- Overseeing Adult Family Ministry (Sunday School and Cell Groups)
- Regular Preaching Opportunities
- Lecturing in Christ Seminary (Hermeneutics and Exposition)
- Administration of Seminary (Assistant to Administrative Dean)

2002 – 2004 Grace Community Church Sun Valley, California

Ministerial Intern, Children's Ministry

- Overseeing 4th – 6th Grade Ministry Juniors (300 Children, 30 Lay Leaders)
- Teaching weekly, 30 Minute Sermon Message
- Planning and overseeing Winter and Summer Camp program
- Overseeing Servant's For Christ Ministry

2001 – 2002 Grace Community Church Sun Valley, California

Intern, Children's Ministry

- Assisting in Juniors Department.
- Teaching Small Group (Application Groups)
- Camp Counselor

2001-2002 Grace Community Church Sun Valley, California

Bible Study Shepherd, Children's Ministry

- Beginning a Bible Study for Children's Ministry Workers
- Teaching the weekly Bible Study (15 –20 members)
- Shepherding the Bible Study (Ages 20 – 50)

- 1999 – 2001 Christ Baptist Church Pietersburg, SA
High School Leader, Deacon
- Teaching High School Group Bi-monthly
 - Leading weekly Bible study group
 - Shepherding and counseling various teens

ADDITIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

- 2001 – 2004 Grace Community Church Sun Valley, CA
Weekend Custodial Supervisor
- Supervise the weekend Custodial Crew
 - Duties included, Setting up rooms, Bathroom detail, and general cleaning.
 - Master of the Mop, Prince of Porcelain, etc.
- 2000 – 2001 Concor Technicrete Pietersburg, SA
Project/Sales Manager
- Headed up Contracts Division (Contracts amounts 4 Million Rand Annually)
 - Headed Up Sales Division (Sales amounts 45 Million Rand Annually)
 - Training up of Sales Staff
 - Construction Management for Sub- Contractors
- 1997 – 2000 Group Five Civils Various, SA
Senior Quantity Surveyor
- Management of financial matters on several large Civil projects (Contracts amounts varied from 1 Million Rand to 270 Million Rand)
 - Report financially to Senior Executives
 - Controlling Loss of assets on Projects
 - Handling all sub-contract matters (tendering through final accounts)
- 1994 – 1997 McClauchlin du Plooy Quantity Surveyors Vanderbijlpark, SA
Junior Quantity Surveyor
- Management of Small Building Contracts (up to 1 Million Rand)
 - Finalizing previous contracts for Senior Staff
 - Handling Road Cleaning and Sewer Contracts on Site (Iscor)

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

- Golf, Running and Reading

REFERENCES

- Dr. Paul Shirley
Grace Community Church Wilmington, DE
(813) 298 9113
paul@gccwilm.org
- Dr. Clint Archer
Christ Fellowship Baptist Church, Mobile, Alabama
(251) 513 7636
pastorarcher@gmail.com
- More references available on request

Extended Doctrinal Statement – Desmond James Venter

The Holy Scriptures

I believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to man, and thus the sixty six books of the Bible given to us by the Holy Spirit constitute the plenary (inspired equally in all parts) Word of God (1 Corinthians 2:7 14; 2 Peter 1:20 21).

I believe that the Word of God is an objective, propositional revelation (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Corinthians 2:13), verbally inspired in every word (2 Timothy 3:16), absolutely inerrant in the original documents, infallible, and God breathed. I believe the literal, grammatical historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).

I believe that the Bible constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice (Matthew 5:18; 24:35; John 10:35; 16:12 13; 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:15 17; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:20 21).

I believe that God spoke in His written Word by a process of dual authorship. The Holy Spirit so superintended the human authors that, through their individual personalities and different styles of writing, they composed and recorded God's Word to man (2 Peter 1:20 21) without error in the whole or in the part (Matthew 5:18; 2 Timothy 3:16). I believe that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 7:17; 16:12 15; 1 Corinthians 2:7 15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations. Yet the truth of Scripture stands in judgment of men; never do men stand in judgment of it.

God

I believe that there is but one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5 7; 1 Corinthians 8:4), an infinite, all knowing Spirit (John 4:24), perfect in all His attributes, one in essence, eternally existing in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14)—each equally deserving worship and obedience.

God the Father

I believe that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8 9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1 31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Ephesians 4:6), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He has decreed for His own glory all things that come to pass (Ephesians 1:11). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; John 8:38 47), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4 6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as his own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5; Hebrews 12:5 9).

God the Son

I believe that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30; 14:9).

I believe that God the Father created according to His own will, through His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom all things continue in existence and in operation (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15 17; Hebrews 1:2).

I believe that in the incarnation (God becoming man) Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity but nothing of the divine essence, either in degree or kind.

In His incarnation, the eternally existing second Person of the Trinity accepted all the essential characteristics of humanity and so became the God Man (Philippians 2:5 8; Colossians 2:9). I believe that Jesus Christ represents humanity and deity in indivisible oneness (Micah 5:2; John 5:23; 14:9 10; Colossians 2:9).

I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ was virgin born (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23, 25; Luke 1:26 35); that He was God incarnate (John 1:1, 14); and that the purpose of the incarnation was to reveal God, redeem men, and rule over God's kingdom (Psalm 2:7 9; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:29; Philippians 2:9 11; Hebrews 7:25 26; 1 Peter 1:18 19).

I believe that, in the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity laid aside His right to the full prerogatives of coexistence with God, assumed the place of a Son, and took on an existence appropriate to a servant while never divesting Himself of His divine attributes (Philippians 2:5 8).

I believe that our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross and that His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Romans 3:24-25; 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24).

I believe that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead and that He is now ascended to the right hand of the Father, where He now mediates as our Advocate and High Priest (Matthew 28:6; Luke 24:38-39; Acts 2:30-31; Romans 4:25; 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 9:24; 1 John 2:1).

I believe that in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave, God confirmed the deity of His Son and gave proof that God has accepted the atoning work of Christ on the cross. Jesus' bodily resurrection is also the guarantee of a future resurrection life for all believers (John 5:26-29; 14:19; Romans 1:4; 4:25; 6:5-10; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23).

I believe that Jesus Christ will return to receive the church, which is His Body, unto Himself at the rapture, and returning with His church in glory, will establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Acts 1:9-11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 20).

I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the One through whom God will judge all mankind (John 5:22-23):

- a. Believers (1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10)
- b. Living inhabitants of the earth at His glorious return (Matthew 25:31-46).
- c. Unbelieving dead at the Great White Throne (Revelation 20:11-15).

As the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), the Head of His Body the church (Ephesians 1:22; 5:23; Colossians 1:18), and the coming universal King, who will reign on the throne of David (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 1:31-33), He is the final Judge of all who fail to place their trust in Him as Lord and Savior (Matthew 25:14-46; Acts 17:30-31). I believe that on the basis of the efficacy of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the believing sinner is freed from the punishment, the penalty, the power, and one day the very presence of sin; and that he is declared righteous, given eternal life, and adopted into the family of God (Romans 3:25; 5:8-9; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18).

God the Holy Spirit

I believe that the Holy Spirit is a divine Person, eternal, underived, possessing all the attributes of personality and deity including intellect (1 Corinthians 2:10-13), emotions (Ephesians 4:30), will (1 Corinthians 12:11), eternality (Hebrews 9:14), omnipresence (Psalm 139:7-10), omniscience (Isaiah 40:13-14), omnipotence (Romans 15:13), and truthfulness (John 16:13). In all the divine attributes He is coequal and consubstantial with the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; Acts 5:3-4; 28:25-26; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Jeremiah 31:31-34 with Hebrews 10:15-17).

I believe that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to execute the divine will with relation to all mankind. I recognize His sovereign activity in creation (Genesis 1:2), the incarnation (Matthew 1:18), the written revelation (2 Peter 1:20-21), and the work of salvation (John 3:5-7).

I believe that the work of the Holy Spirit in this age began at Pentecost when He came from the Father as promised by Christ (John 14:16-17; 15:26) to initiate and complete the building of the Body of Christ, which is His church (1 Corinthians 12:13). The broad scope of His divine activity includes convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ and transforming believers into the image of Christ (John 16:7-9; Acts 1:5; 2:4; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 2:22).

I believe that the Holy Spirit is the supernatural and sovereign Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Holy Spirit also indwells, sanctifies, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13).

I believe that the Holy Spirit is the divine Teacher, who guided the apostles and prophets into all truth as they committed to writing God's revelation, the Bible. Every believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation, and it is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be filled with (controlled by) the Spirit (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 5:18; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 1 John 2:20, 27).

I believe that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church. The Holy Spirit glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

I believe, in this respect, that God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the perfecting of the saints today and that speaking in tongues and the working of sign miracles in the beginning days of the church were for the purpose of pointing to and authenticating the apostles as revealers of divine truth, and were never intended to be characteristic of the lives of believers (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 13:8-10; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Ephesians 4:7-12; Hebrews 2:14).

Man

I believe that man was directly and immediately created by God in His image and likeness. Man was created free of sin with a rational nature, intelligence, volition, self-determination, and moral responsibility to God (Genesis 2:7, 15-25; James 3:9).

I believe that God's intention in the creation of man was that man should glorify God, enjoy God's fellowship, live his life in the will of God, and by this accomplish God's purpose for man in the world (Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11).

I believe that in Adam's sin of disobedience to the revealed will and Word of God, man lost his innocence; incurred the penalty of spiritual and physical death; became subject to the wrath of God; and became inherently corrupt and utterly incapable of choosing or doing that which is acceptable to God apart from divine grace. With no recuperative powers to enable him to recover himself, man is

hopelessly lost. Man's salvation is thereby wholly of God's grace through the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus Christ (Genesis 2:16 17; 3:1 19; John 3:36; Romans 3:23; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1 3; 1 Timothy 2:13 14; 1 John 1:8).

I believe that because all men were in Adam, a nature corrupted by Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men of all ages, Jesus Christ being the only exception. All men are thus sinners by nature, by choice, and by divine declaration (Psalm 14:1 3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:9 18, 23; 5:10 12).

Salvation

I believe that salvation is wholly of God by grace on the basis of the redemption of Jesus Christ, the merit of His shed blood, and not on the basis of human merit or works (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8 10; 1 Peter 1:18 19).

Regeneration

I believe that regeneration is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3 7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24), when the repentant sinner, as enabled by the Holy Spirit, responds in faith to the divine provision of salvation. Genuine regeneration is manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct. Good works will be its proper evidence and fruit (1 Corinthians 6:19 20; Ephesians 2:10), and will be experienced to the extent that the believer submits to the control of the Holy Spirit in his life through faithful obedience to the Word of God (Ephesians 5:17 21; Philippians 2:12b; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4 10). This obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such a conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification at Christ's coming (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2 3).

Election

I believe that election is the act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously regenerates, saves, and sanctifies (Romans 8:28 30; Ephesians 1:4 11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1 2).

I believe that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord (Ezekiel 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18 19, 36; 5:40; Romans 9:22 23; 2 Thessalonians 2:10 12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation as well as the gift itself, sovereign election will result in what God determines. All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37 40, 44; Acts 13:48; James 4:8).

I believe that the unmerited favor that God grants to totally depraved sinners is not related to any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but is solely of His sovereign grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:4 7; Titus 3:4 7; 1 Peter 1:2).

I believe that election should not be looked upon as based merely on abstract sovereignty. God is truly sovereign but He exercises this sovereignty in harmony with His other attributes, especially His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace, and love (Romans 9:11 16). This sovereignty will always exalt the will of God in a manner totally consistent with His character as revealed in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 11:25 28; 2 Timothy 1:9).

Justification

I believe that justification before God is an act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6 7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Romans 10:9 10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:5; Philippians 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20; 4:6) and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means God is enabled to "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Sanctification

I believe that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and is therefore identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification has to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2).

I believe that there is also by the work of the Holy Spirit a progressive sanctification by which the state of the believer is brought closer to the standing the believer positionally enjoys through justification. Through obedience to the Word of God and the

empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17,19; Romans 6:1 22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3 4; 5:23). In this respect, I believe that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict—the new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh—but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended. All claims to the eradication of sin in this life are unscriptural. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16 25; Ephesians 4:22 24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9 10; 1 Peter 1:14 16; 1 John 3:5 9).

Security

I believe that all the redeemed once saved are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37 40; 10:27 30; Romans 5:9 10; 8:1, 31 39; 1 Corinthians 1:4 8; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 7:25; 13:5; 1 Peter 1:5; Jude 24).

I believe that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word, which, however, clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion for sinful living and carnality (Romans 6:15 22; 13:13 14; Galatians 5:13, 25 26; Titus 2:11 14).

Separation

I believe that separation from sin is clearly called for throughout the Old and New Testaments, and that the Scriptures clearly indicate that in the last days apostasy and worldliness shall increase (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 2 Timothy 3:1 5).

I believe that out of deep gratitude for the undeserved grace of God granted to us and because our glorious God is so worthy of our total consecration, all the saved should live in such a manner as to demonstrate our adoring love to God and so as not to bring reproach upon our Lord and Savior. I also believe separation from all religious apostasy and worldly and sinful practices is commanded of us by God (Romans 12:1 2, 1 Corinthians 5:9 13; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; 1 John 2:15 17; 2 John 9 11).

I believe that believers should be separated unto our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:11 12; Hebrews 12:1 2) and affirm that the Christian life is a life of obedient righteousness that reflects the teaching of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:2 12) and a continual pursuit of holiness (Romans 12:1 2; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11 14; 1 John 3:1 10).

The Church

I believe that all who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual Body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:12 13), the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23 32; Revelation 19:7 8), of which Christ is the Head (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15; Colossians 1:18).

I believe that the formation of the church, the Body of Christ, began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1 21, 38 47) and will be completed at the coming of Christ for His own at the rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13 18).

I believe that the church is thus a unique spiritual organism designed by Christ, made up of all born again believers in this present age (Ephesians 2:11 3:6). The church is distinct from Israel (1 Corinthians 10:32), a mystery not revealed until this age (Ephesians 3:1 6; 5:32).

I believe that the establishment and continuity of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:23, 27; 20:17, 28; Galatians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) and that the members of the one spiritual Body are directed to associate themselves together in local assemblies (1 Corinthians 11:18 20; Hebrews 10:25).

I believe that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18) and that church leadership, gifts, order, discipline, and worship are all appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor teachers; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 4:11) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1 13; Titus 1:5 9; 1 Peter 5:1 5).

I believe that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ (1 Timothy 5:17 22) and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17).

I believe the importance of discipleship (Matthew 28:19 20; 2 Timothy 2:2), mutual accountability of all believers to each other (Matthew 18:5 14), as well as the need for discipline of sinning members of the congregation in accord with the standards of Scripture (Matthew 18:15 22; Acts 5:1 11; 1 Corinthians 5:1 13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6 15; 1 Timothy 1:19 20; Titus 1:10 16).

I believe the autonomy of the local church, free from any external authority or control, with the right of self government and freedom from the interference of any hierarchy of individuals or organizations (Titus 1:5). **I believe** that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well (Acts 15:19 31; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 5:4 7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1 4).

I believe that the purpose of the church is to glorify God (Ephesians 3:21) by building itself up in the faith (Ephesians 4:13 16), by instruction of the Word (2 Timothy 2:2, 15; 3:16 17), by fellowship (Acts 2:47; 1 John 1:3), by keeping the ordinances (Luke 22:19; Acts 2:38 42) and by advancing and communicating the gospel to the entire world (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8; 2:42).

I believe the calling of all saints to the work of service (1 Corinthians 15:58; Ephesians 4:12; Revelation 22:12).

I believe the need of the church to cooperate with God as He accomplishes His purpose in the world. To that end, He gives the church spiritual gifts. First, He gives men chosen for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Ephesians 4:7-12), and He also gives unique and special spiritual abilities to each member of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:5-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

I believe that there were two kinds of gifts given the early church: miraculous gifts of divine revelation and healing, given temporarily in the apostolic era for the purpose of confirming the authenticity of the apostles' message (Hebrews 2:3-4; 2 Corinthians 12:12); and ministering gifts, given to equip believers for edifying one another. With the New Testament revelation now complete, Scripture becomes the sole test of the authenticity of a man's message, and confirming gifts of a miraculous nature are no longer necessary to validate a man or his message (1 Corinthians 13:8-12). Miraculous gifts can even be counterfeited by Satan so as to deceive even believers (1 Corinthians 13:13-14:12; Revelation 13:13-14). The only gifts in operation today are those non-revelatory equipping gifts given for edification (Romans 12:6-8). I believe that no one possesses the gift of healing today but that God does hear and answer the prayer of faith and will answer in accordance with His own perfect will for the sick, suffering, and afflicted (Luke 18:1-6; John 5:7-9; 2 Corinthians 12:6-10; James 5:13-16; 1 John 5:14-15).

I believe that two ordinances have been committed to the local church: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:38-42). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible Body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42).

I believe that the Lord's Supper is the commemoration and proclamation of His death until He comes, and should be always preceded by solemn self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). I also believe that whereas the elements of Communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Angels

Holy Angels

I believe that angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than man, they are created to serve God and to worship Him (Luke 2:9-14; Hebrews 1:6-7, 14; 2:6-7; Revelation 5:11-14; 19:10; 22:9).

Fallen Angels

I believe that Satan is a created angel and the author of sin. He incurred the judgment of God by rebelling against his Creator (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19), by taking numerous angels with him in his fall (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:1-14), and by introducing sin into the human race by his temptation of Eve (Genesis 3:1-15).

I believe that Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and man (Isaiah 14:13-14; Matthew 4:1-11; Revelation 12:9-10); the prince of this world, who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Romans 16:20); and that he shall be eternally punished in the lake of fire (Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

Last Things (Eschatology)

Death

I believe that physical death involves no loss of our immaterial consciousness (Revelation 6:9-11), that the soul of the redeemed passes immediately into the presence of Christ (Luke 23:43; Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8), that there is a separation of soul and body (Philippians 1:21-24), and that, for the redeemed, such separation will continue until the rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17), which initiates the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-6), when our soul and body will be reunited to be glorified forever with our Lord (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:35-44, 50-54). Until that time, the souls of the redeemed in Christ remain in joyful fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:8).

I believe the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life (John 6:39; Romans 8:10-11, 19-23; 2 Corinthians 4:14), and the unsaved to judgment and everlasting punishment (Daniel 12:2; John 5:29; Revelation 20:13-15).

I believe that the souls of the unsaved at death are kept under punishment until the second resurrection (Luke 16:19-26; Revelation 20:13-15), when the soul and the resurrection body will be united (John 5:28-29). They shall then appear at the Great White Throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15) and shall be cast into hell, the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41-46), cut off from the life of God forever (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41-46; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

The Rapture of the Church

I believe in the personal, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ before the seven-year tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Titus 2:13) to translate His church from this earth (John 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-5:11) and, between this event and His glorious return with His saints, to reward believers according to their works (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Tribulation Period

I believe that immediately following the removal of the church from the earth (John 14:1 3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13 18) the righteous judgments of God will be poured out upon an unbelieving world (Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 9:27; 12:1; 2 Thessalonians 2:7 12; Revelation 16), and that these judgments will be climaxed by the return of Christ in glory to the earth (Matthew 24:27 31; 25:31 46; 2 Thessalonians 2:7 12). At that time the Old Testament and tribulation saints will be raised and the living will be judged (Daniel 12:2 3; Revelation 20:4 6). This period includes the seventieth week of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 9:24 27; Matthew 24:15 31; 25:31 46). The Second Coming and the Millennial Reign

I believe that, after the tribulation period, Christ will come to earth to occupy the throne of David (Matthew 25:31; Luke 1:31 33; Acts 1:10 11; 2:29 30) and establish His messianic kingdom for a thousand years on the earth (Revelation 20:1 7). During this time the resurrected saints will reign with Him over Israel and all the nations of the earth (Ezekiel 37:21 28; Daniel 7:17 22; Revelation 19:11 16). This reign will be preceded by the overthrow of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, and by the removal of Satan from the world (Daniel 7:17 27; Revelation 20:1 7).

I believe that the kingdom itself will be the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel (Isaiah 65:17 25; Ezekiel 37:21 28; Zechariah 8:1 17) to restore them to the land which they forfeited through their disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15 68). The result of their disobedience was that Israel was temporarily set aside (Matthew 21:43; Romans 11:1 26) but will again be awakened through repentance to enter into the land of blessing (Jeremiah 31:31 34; Ezekiel 36:22 32; Romans 11:25 29).

I believe that this time of our Lord's reign will be characterized by harmony, justice, peace, righteousness, and long life (Isaiah 11; 65:17 25; Ezekiel 36:33 38), and will be brought to an end with the release of Satan (Revelation 20:7).

The Judgment of the Lost

I believe that following the release of Satan after the thousand year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:7), Satan will deceive the nations of the earth and gather them to battle against the saints and the beloved city, at which time Satan and his army will be devoured by fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9). Following this, Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10) whereupon Christ, who is the Judge of all men (John 5:22), will resurrect and judge the great and small at the Great White Throne judgment.

I believe that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (Romans 14:10 13), they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment in the lake of fire (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:11 15).

Eternity

I believe that after the closing of the millennium, the temporary release of Satan, and the judgment of unbelievers (2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:7 15), the saved will enter the eternal state of glory with God, after which the elements of this earth are to be dissolved (2 Peter 3:10) and replaced with a new earth wherein only righteousness dwells (Ephesians 5:5; Revelation 20:15, 21 22). Following this, the heavenly city will come down out of heaven (Revelation 21:2) and will be the dwelling place of the saints, where they will enjoy forever fellowship with God and one another (John 17:3; Revelation 21-22). Our Lord Jesus Christ, having fulfilled His redemptive mission, will then deliver up the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24 28) that in all spheres the triune God may reign forever and ever (1 Corinthians 15:28).

A Philosophy of Ministry¹

A. Philosophy of ministry?

A philosophy of ministry is a compass, a road map, for ministry. A philosophy of ministry defines its direction. It describes the church's purpose, or reason for being. It is a purpose statement of sorts, not a vision statement. Purpose defines vision. The philosophy of ministry is the church's purpose statement that describes what the church is to do, while the vision statement describes how. Without purpose there can be no vision. The philosophy of ministry, therefore, guides the ministry.

Why have a philosophy of ministry? It keeps the church on the right path according to biblical principles. Too often churches lose sight of their purpose and stray off the right path into pragmatism or heresy. Writing to Timothy, Paul said:

1 Timothy 3:14-15, "14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; 15 but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."

Just as a Christian needs to run with purpose (1 Corinthians 9:26), so does the church. A philosophy of ministry is a practical guide to biblical efficiency for the church. Anything that is inconsistent with a church's philosophy of ministry is filtered out, freeing the body from unnecessary, unbiblical, and therefore unprofitable distractions which divert time, treasure, and talents away from the cause of Christ. The philosophy of ministry establishes and codifies the priorities for the Church.

B. The Church

The church is a called assembly of believers (ekklesia) (Ephesians 1:3-14). It is an assembly, a gathering, or congregation of those who have been engrafted into the body of Christ by salvation through faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is not a building, or location; rather it is the unity of the people of God expressed locally and internationally.

What is the purpose of the Church? The purpose of the Church is the fulfilling of the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) and simultaneously bringing glory to God's name, being to the praise of God's glory and grace (Ephesians 1:6). Each

¹ Much of this Material has been taken and adapted from various other Philosophy of Ministries from previous TMS Graduates, Stephen McAteer, Robert Macgee, Keith Crosby and others.

member of the Church is to be continually renewed and conformed to the image of God (Romans 12:1-2) as living sacrifices for God who deny themselves daily, take up their crosses and follow Christ as His disciples (Matthew 16:24) living according to His commandments and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ into the dying world.

How does the church fulfill the Great Commission? The church fulfills the great commission in three ways: by preaching and teaching God's word (2 Timothy 4:2); by coming together to strengthen and edify the saints (Hebrews 10:24-25); by evangelizing the lost (1 Peter 3:15). All three of the actions are acts of worship.

C. Worship

Worship is honoring God and giving Him the glory due His name (Psalm 29). Our lives are to be acts of worship (Romans 12:1); (Matthew 16:24). Our speech is to be consecrated as worship (James 3:9-10). Our prayers are worship (Philippians 4:6-7)

What does worship look like and how is it characterized? Worship is characterized but not limited to the following principles:

- The focus must be upon God alone (1 Corinthians 14:25; Exodus 20:3-4). There is time and a season for everything under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11).
- All that is done must be orderly and decent (1 Corinthians 14:26-33). The worship service should not be done, led or performed haphazardly. Moreover, worship should be free from legalistic constraints and libertine excess.
- All things must be done for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 14:26; Hebrews 10:24-25). God's people must be strengthened in the faith.
- The worship service requires careful direction and planning with all things done in an orderly manner (1 Corinthians 14:40)
- There must be liberty in worship with some room for spontaneity (1 Corinthians 14:29-32; Psalm 100). There is no place for vain repetitions or meaningless liturgies (Matthew 6:7-8). This does not preclude the reading or recitation of creeds, however.

Who worships God? The church is the called out, or chosen believers, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:3-6). All believers present in the assembly worship God during the formal service. Worship is led and facilitated by the elders and or their designees, chosen from among the congregation. Only believers may truly worship God, as He does not hear the prayers of the unbeliever, excepting a plea for salvation through faith in Christ.

Each believer is a member of the body of Christ, with diverse gifts exercised in Christian unity (Ephesians 1: 3-14, 4:1-7, 13-16).

How are worshippers selected? They are chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him, having been predestined to adoption as sons (and daughters) according to the kind intention of His will (Ephesians 1:3-4).

Where does the pastor fit into the equation and how? The pastor's role is to facilitate the church's (the congregation's) fulfillment of its purpose, fulfilling the great Commission.

What is the primary task of the pastor? His primary task is to shepherd the flock of God (Col 1:28) and preach God's word to the congregation, while overseeing the spiritual growth and care of the congregation within the church context (2 Timothy 4:2).

Does the pastor have any other responsibilities? At the same time, he is to labor among and love the congregation as a mother caring for her children and as a father encouraging, exhorting, and imploring his children (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11). His is the work of a shepherd, leading, feeding, and protecting the flock of God (Psalm 23); protecting them from wolves in sheep's clothing who would scatter and devour the flock (Matthew 7:14; 1 Peter 5:1-2) until the Great Shepherd returns. Like all believers he is to "admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men." (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The pastor's role is also that of a servant leader (John 13:4) who labors along side the people of the congregation. The pastor also has financial responsibilities to the church in terms of giving and oversight. He must tithe and he must maintain an awareness of the church's financial condition.

What does this look like? The pastor facilitates, spearheads, or encourages the following activities: evangelism; discipleship; assuring the unity of the flock; protecting the flock from heresies; protecting the flock from the effects of immorality; growing the church spiritually and numerically.

- **Evangelism**

Evangelism takes many forms, from personal evangelistic efforts originating from within the local church, including church planting. Over the lifetime of a church, church planting becomes the most effective means of evangelism of a mature church. However, in the near term, personal evangelism by the pastor and the congregation is vital to church growth because new believers are being added to the body of Christ and both the invisible church and the local church are growing. Transfer growth (moving memberships from one church to another) is acceptable if believers are leaving a church that is not

honoring God, or teaching heresy. Real church growth comes through evangelism.

How does the church evangelize? Evangelism takes many forms: door to door; special evangelistic services; prospect/visitor evangelism; special social outings; banquets and dinners; outreaches to certain communities; spring and holiday concerts; home Bible studies.

- **Discipleship** – Discipleship is critical to the spiritual growth of the church body, as it is vital to the spiritual growth of every church member.

How is discipling done? Discipleship takes two forms: formal, organized discipleship and casual, informal discipleship.

What are the tools and means of discipleship? Tools and means of discipleship will be discussed by category: formal and informal.

Formal Discipleship – First and foremost, discipleship occurs at the broadest and lowest level in the worship service, where God's word is proclaimed to the largest group of people at the broadcast level. There is little opportunity for interaction. However, everyone is at some level being challenged by the proclamation of God's word. There are numerous types of worship services which inform, disciple, and edify: baptism services, the Lord's Supper, wedding services, parent dedications, evangelistic services, ordination services, weddings, funerals, and church discipline services. All occur with varying degrees of frequency. However, every worship service represents an opportunity to equip, edify and disciple.

Other means of discipleship include - "Sunday School", baptismal training, carefully arranged small groups, premarital counseling, marital counseling, men's and ladies' functions, Bible studies, special training efforts, and other functions involving groups of people.

Individual discipleship efforts are the most targeted - Spiritually mature saints spend time equipping less mature saints. This is often a give and take process involving submission, mutual submission, and mutual accountability.

Informal discipleship – This includes but is not limited to family outing hosted by the church, men's gatherings such as prayer breakfasts, or simply through the friendships that develop within a Bible study, or within the church between believers. This also includes one to one discipleship as well (in teaching and non-teaching contexts). Informal discipleship is somewhat akin to friendship evangelism, where a Christian evangelizes his neighbors by living out a godly life: discipleship by example in word and deed.

- **Assuring the unity of the flock** – As shepherd the pastor is to protect the flock from harmful divisions which Satan often uses to attack the church from within.

How is this done? An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Preventive measure included seeing to it that leadership has prepared a clearly defined statement of faith and that the ministry has defined, understand, and or possesses a clearly articulated philosophy of ministry. If the church understands its beliefs, purpose, and approaches to ministry, then the opportunity of confusion and division is somewhat reduced (while never eliminated). Understanding the beliefs and philosophy of ministry of the church enables the pastor and the people to major on the majors and to minor on the minors without compromising biblical principles. The pastor has a high degree of personal responsibility in this realm in that he is the primary leadership figure in the church because his role is among the most visible. Therefore, he must be prudent and wise in discerningly making changes and being a good listener, willing to listen to opposing views. His openness to discussion and sensitivity to making changes does not free him from the responsibility of always doing what is biblical and right in the face of congregational preferences for so-called unity, or pragmatism.

- **Protecting the flock from heresies and popular fads that often border on heresy.** The Epistles repeatedly warn of false teachers. Jesus, Himself, warned that false teachers would come (Matthew 7:1-4). Nothing can be more injurious to the flock of God than false teachers spreading heresy, overtly or covertly.

What are heresies and what do they take? Heresy takes many forms, going beyond the glaring heresies of cults like the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons, Bahai, Moonies, and Orthodox Seventh Day Adventists. Many are subtle: legalism (exceeding God's standards); antinomianism (the polar opposite of legalism); modernism (relativism or pragmatism); experientialism (experience above scripture); idolatry (unbalanced desires and goals); existentialism (humanist philosophy).

How does the pastor protect the flock against heresy? There are a number of ways, including but not limited to the following: working with leadership to develop a clearly articulated statement of faith; sound, systematic expository preaching which informs the understanding of the flock of God; preaching on the cardinal truths of the statement of the Christian Faith; well planned, well developed discipleship efforts, when needed: exposing heresy from the pulpit; church discipline. Note that all of these remedies are done in concert with church leadership.

- **Protecting the flock, and him, from sins of immorality.** King David brought reproach upon the name of God and caused the pagans to blaspheme through his sin with Bathsheba. Today's church is often

rocked by tales of immorality by its pastors and leaders. These sins are incredibly injurious to the well being of the congregation and its individual members, discouraging the mature believer and new believer alike. Great pains must be taken to avoid putting oneself in any type of compromising position. Neither pastors, elders, deacons, nor others should allow themselves to be alone with members of the opposite sex in counseling sessions, one on one discipleship, etc. If a matter involves a member of the opposite sex, then prudence dictates the presence of a third person. Additionally, great care must be exercised in matters of finance fiduciary responsibilities, and issues relating to the tax-exempt status of the church. Immorality must be dealt with lovingly and in a biblically decisive way when discovered.

What does immorality look like? Immorality includes glaring sins like adultery, fornication, theft, drunkenness, drug abuse, homosexuality, etc... It also includes sins of the mind: pornography, lustful habit, etc... It is usually accompanied by "stealth behaviors." It also includes cheating on taxes, embezzlement, and other forms of dishonesty.

How is immorality to be dealt with? Immorality, like all sin, must be dealt with according to the tenets of Scripture, in particular: Matthew 18, Galatians 6, and James 5:19-20. Immorality (and sin in general) takes many forms. However, as a rule of thumb, public offenses need public rebukes (1 Corinthians 5); private offenses need private rebukes (Matthew 18; James 5). In any case, the sin must be confronted with love and yet firmly. The offenders must be directed to stop practicing the particular sin. Additionally, the pastor, elders, or other carefully selected and trained leadership must provide counseling within the church. Those unwilling to repent must be separated from the church in accordance with the dictates of Scripture, in particular with the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 18. The goal of this separation is restoration! Our purpose is not to boot someone out of the church but to remove an individual from fellowship so that they may reflect upon their sin and repent (and return to the fellowship), or show themselves to be an unbeliever by their failure to repent.

- **Growing the church both spiritually and numerically.** The lack of spiritual maturity and proper discipleship in a church is often reflected in one of two areas (or both areas): attendance/membership loss and giving.

What about spiritual and numerical growth? Many churches emphasize decision-ism conversion and rapid baptism. Consequently, people are "saved" and baptized and then they leave in rapid succession. This so-called "backdoor revival" is symptomatic of either easy believe-ism, inadequate discipleship, unrepented sin, or cliques within the congregation who fail to work to assimilate the new believer, or member into the family of God. Perhaps the most glaring cause is hypocrisy among the leadership (including the pastor)

How is membership loss stopped? The pastor must set the example for the congregation by showing love and concern to all as much as he is able. He must set the tone in making each member of the congregation to feel equally love and important. Both pastor and leadership must see to it that every new believer receives discipleship and a fellowship partner/family. This entails getting everyone into an “accountability group”. The pastor must be friendly in the pulpit, though not silly. The church must be family friendly in terms of hospitality and child-discipleship (including nursery access). The church must seek to meet the needs (not necessarily the desires) of its people – biblically.

What about church growth? The Church grows through the following means: evangelism and church planting. Evangelism is the process of sharing the gospel with individuals with the aim of being used by God to lead those who are appointed to salvation to Christ. Evangelism may be done on an individual basis (like Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8: 27-37) or on a group basis by proclamation of the word of God (Peter in Acts 2:20-41). Since salvation is a work of God (Acts 13:48; Romans 8:30) one can only assume that church growth is a work of God. This does not imply we do not seek to serve God by taking responsible, biblical steps for church growth.

Church growth does not involve comprising biblical principles, or doctrines, for the sake of making the church and its worship more appealing to unbelievers. Proven marketing methods used in businesses and social organizations are not necessarily conducive and appropriate to the church of God. Certainly, church hospitality is important. However, recruitment methods which exclude conversion and discipleship are unbiblical and lead to foundations not built upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ but on the sinking sand of the wisdom of man (for biblical description and definition of the wisdom of man see James 3:15).

How are methods to be evaluated? Pragmatism and experience are not the standards by which suitability and effectiveness are evaluated. Scripture is the only source of objective truth (John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16; Joshua 1:8).

Does this mean that we cannot be innovative in our outreach? Are all creative methods wrong? No! Innovation is good so long as it is biblical. There are creative and biblical ways to present the gospel and grow the church: sponsoring events like debates, evangelistic banquets and dinners, and bible studies are just a few examples. Individual churches often grow through transfer growth (membership switches); however this is a zero sum gain in the body of Christ.

Are there other methods for church growth? Church planting is another means of church growth. There are times when a church outgrows its facilities and a substantial membership group is perhaps commuting from a rather distant location. Under the proper circumstances it may be advisable to start a small church in the away location. This is one example of church growth. A church of

1,000 seeds a new church with 50 families with capable leadership in a community where there is a need. This must be one prudently and after much prayer. The goal is to make the daughter church self-sufficient and self-sustaining within 5 to 10 years as it adds new members.

Church planting is also a mission's function. The model for this type of church growth is found in the New Testament with the planting of churches in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and Philippi. Once again, the goal is self-sufficiency within 5 to 10 years.

Under no circumstances should church growth ever involve – “dumbing down” the gospel, watering down the message, or over-simplification of the gospel message in such away as to fill the church with “half-saved” (unsaved) people. Church growth, corporate growth, like individual Christian growth, is a spiritual phenomenon. It is no about numbers, statistics, dollars, or building programs. It is God centered and God accomplished.

Where does giving fit into the equation? Giving, more than relating to church growth, relates to worship. A church comprised of spiritually mature believers who have been well taught and carefully and systematically disciplined will be a church composed of cheerful givers who can be characterized by the following behaviors: they serve joyfully, they give willingly and joyfully, and they and their families attend worship consistently. Giving involves more than more. It involves giving back to God a portion of the time, treasure and talents that He has given us. All giving is worship.

Cheerful givers give willingly because after conversion they were taught, understand, and believe that all that they have comes from God and they are more than happy to thankfully give back a portion of what they have received from God (for the work of the church). A church that does not give cannot grow. God will not bless a congregation that is not thankful and giving. It will shrivel, wither, and die gradually. Therefore, a well taught, continually edified; church is the pastor's (and leadership's) responsibility.

What is edification? Edification is strengthening and building u the church so that it is well grounded and firmly routed in Scripture. The pastor and his co-leaders are responsible for edifying the church, much like fathers and husbands are responsible for edifying the members of their family (1 Thessalonians 2:7-12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ephesians 5:25-33; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:2; 2 Peter 2:1-5; 1 Peter 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:15). Biblically illiterate people cannot know the mind of the God they have not studied. They cannot grow in wisdom and truth if they have not been taught and do not desire the pure milk of God's word (2 Peter 2:1-5).

Who is edified? Only believers can be edified. Sinners cannot be edified because they have not been converted so they cannot understand the truth of God, or His wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:14-15).

D. More about the Church: what is the nature of the Church?

Some see the church as an organization (country club, civic organization, or service organization) that is spiritually focused. Others see the church as a living organism. One view lends itself to a group of members desiring to be served, who “observe the action” each Sunday. The other view lends itself to a model involving a group of participants taking things. The organism model lends itself to giving glory to God and caring for people. Hence, the “body” metaphors which occur throughout the New Testament (Romans 12:4-13; Ephesians 1:23; Ephesians 3:16; Ephesians 4:4-16; Ephesians 5:30; Colossians 1:18; Colossians 1:24; Colossians 3:15; Hebrews 10:5; Hebrews 13:3).

Where do the members fit in? The members give life and movement to the body of Christ, which is the church. They are the heart and soul of the church. They make the church, the body, live, breath and move, by God’s grace. Each member of the body of Christ has a gift and a role. Each is called to serve.

Romans 12:4-13 provides a clear indication of this.

“⁴ For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; ⁷ if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. ⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”

Do all members serve in essentially the same capacity, using their respective gifts? Yes and no. This is a difficult question that must be carefully answered. Members are at a different level of spiritual maturity, given their spiritual age in Christ. Therefore, not all members may serve in leadership roles. God, in His Bible, has given us standards by which leaders are selected for service. He breaks down leaders into two categories: elders and deacons. Each group performs similar yet somewhat different roles. However, they have traits in common. The essential difference being spiritual maturity. Elders are responsible before the Lord for the spiritual care of the flock of God. Their role has more of a teaching and discipleship emphasis; Deacons (waiters) are

responsible for the physical care of the Body of Christ (collecting offerings, ushering, finances, building, transportation, etc...). In secular terms, deacons are subordinate in function, not value, to elders. The difference in designation is seen in Acts 6:1-7. The difference in function, qualification, and roles is seen in 1 Timothy 3 (as well as Titus 1:5-7):

Elders

1 Timothy 3:1-7, *“It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. ² An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. ⁴ He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); ⁶ and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”*

Deacons

1 Timothy 3:8-13, *“⁸ Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, ⁹ but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. ¹¹ Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons be husbands of only one wife, and good managers of their children and their own households. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”*

Elders and deacons have the same spiritual qualifications with one exception: the ability to teach (“apt to teach”). Elders, like apostles before them (Acts 6) are to devote themselves to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and prayer. Deacons are to take care of the physical and material needs of the church. **One notices a progression.** An individual must be first tested, being shown to hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience, after which they may hold the office of deacon. The progression would then continue for men on that the elder candidate, one possessing the moral character necessary for the office of deacon, he would gain teaching ability commiserate with his depth of knowledge of God’s Word. Once apt to teach he could become an elder.

Why must elders and deacons be above reproach? Anyone singled out for service before the congregation is practically held up as an example to the

congregation. Therefore, they must be faithful believers who are above reproach both inside and outside the church. They must be examples to both the church and secular communities. These protections, instituted by God and not man, keep the church from embarrassing and confusing predicaments and charges of hypocrisy by preventing unspiritual people, unfaithful believers, and others from holding or assuming positions of heightened visibility within the church.

How is this biblical precept expressed practically within the church? Those who serve in the congregation must be, at minimum, deacon qualified. To serve as a Sunday school teacher for children, to sing in the choir, to perform music, or serve on a committee an individual must meet the following qualifications:

1. Deacons likewise must be men of dignity, consistent in speech and conduct, and should not be known or prone to being drunkard or men of greed (1 Timothy 3:8).
2. Spiritually speaking, they must understand and embrace sound doctrine. They cannot be new converts (1 Timothy 3:9).
3. They must have proven character, having been watched and observed over a period of time, consistently found to be above reproach (1 Timothy 3:10).
4. Those who minister to women cannot be held to any less a standard: they must be above reproach, not known as gossips, and they must be even tempered (1 Timothy 3:11).
5. They must be monogamous, good husbands and good father, with children who are well behaved, faithful, and obedient – men who are managing their households well (1 Timothy 3:12).

Different churches take different approaches to church government.

However, one thing is clear. Those who step out from among the pews on Sunday, Wednesday, or Friday to take part in the conduct of the worship service must be examples to the person in the pew. They must be models who consistently strive to fulfill the office of deacon, or meet the standards for deacons set down by God in His word. Such high profile positions are not “tools” for outreach or evangelism according to God’s word. Those wishing to serve as such must be tested and proven to be faithful in attendance and obedience to leadership as the leadership seeks to honor God’s word.

What if you are not an elder or deacon? Not everyone fulfills the formal office of elder and deacon. However, they can still serve in the church in a number of ways. Their conduct must match those of an elder and deacon:

Titus 2:1-8, “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. ² Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. ³ Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, ⁴ that they may encourage the young women to

love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored. ⁶ Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; ⁷ in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ sound in speech which is beyond reproach, in order that the opponent may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.”

Older men should conduct themselves with self-control, dignity, common sense, soundness of faith, with love and patience. **Older women** should conduct themselves with reverence, without being gossips (careful in their speech), without the unnecessary consumption of alcohol, and instructing younger women with sound teaching. **Young women** must respect and honor their husbands, love their children, work diligently in the home, show kindness to others, and obey their husbands in order not to bring dishonor to Christ's name. **Young men** must be sensible and set an example of good deeds (worship; service; devotion to Christ), demonstrating their understanding and embrace of sound doctrine, the need for wise speech, and good conduct so as not to dishonor Christ's name. **Note:** this precludes from service those who are unfaithful, consistent in practice and attendance, and possessing a weak knowledge of the word of God.

What about children, children's church and children's programs? How does this affect children's choirs, public prayer of children in Sunday school, etc.? Must children be either elder or deacon qualified? Nowhere in the Old or New Testaments is any mention made of children's programs. However, there are principles here that may apply to little children. First, reference to younger and older men and women would indicate that these standards pertain only to adults. Second, following the tradition of Israel as it pertains to adulthood (bat and bar mitzvahs), the practice of the early church, and even the observations we can make about secular culture in general, it is clear that there is a difference between an adult who understands and rejects Christ's word and a child who still has much learning and living to do. The principle is this, children under 12 are not to be considered adults. Therefore, they can participate in children's choirs and children's program in areas like special music, singing, etc... However, incorrigible children are not to be allowed to participate in visible roles in children's worship.

Are such requirements overly strict? God's standards are not conditional. Little ones and adults will not be encouraged to aspire to a higher level if the standards are habitually, or even occasionally violated, lowered, and altered for the sake of convenience. Imagine the confusion, or disappointment, that a faithful child might experience to have risen to the biblical standard only to see leadership violate those standards for the sake of pragmatism, convenience, or politics.

When is service leadership? The argument may be made that such “rules” make the worship service and the church off limits to the unbeliever, or the new believer struggling for spiritual maturity. The un-churched and unbelieving cannot help but feel unwelcome. One must differentiate between presence within the service, participation within the service, and leadership within the service.

Is there any easy way to distinguish the boundaries for the people? Sitting in the pew, singing a hymn, or putting money in the offering plate is a position of relative anonymity in contrast with collecting the offering, singing a solo, playing the organ or piano, making announcements, and or singing in the choir.

Participation at a level which draws an individual out of the pew to a place of heightened visibility before the congregation constitutes leadership. For such leadership roles all adult participants must be deacon qualified (even if they do not “formally” hold such an office).

What does this look like in the daily church situation? They have been saved for a while. Since they have been saved, they have been consistent in the outworking of their saving faith (James 2:14-26), they have been faithful attendees to Sunday worship, Sunday school, and other church activities (Hebrews 10:24-25), and their conduct encourages others in the faith (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Deacons qualified people help encourage the body by singing in the choir, by playing instruments, and by participating in special music. They may make announcements, collect the offering, or perform other roles. They tend to high visibility individuals who serve along side the elders. Those who are men are tantamount to “elders in training.”

What does this tell us about those who are not deacon qualified?

Individuals who are not deacon qualified do not teach Sunday school, they do not lead music, play in the praise band, or church orchestra, or sing in the choir. They do not chair committees. Does this mean that they lack the administrative, organizational, or people skills to do so? No! It only means they lack the salvation, spiritual maturity, or consistency to be in anyway held up to, or put before, the congregation in anyway which might possibly serve to cause confusion relating to the church’s desire to operate biblically.

Many times committee positions, choir, and other programs and events are utilized “evangelistically” rather than for glorifying God, or edifying the Saints. Worship is to glorify God. Only God’s people can worship Him. Therefore, servants of God must be in all cases children of God and leaders official or de facto, must be both children of God and faithful examples to the flock of God. Suitably for service therefore, depends on salvation and faithfulness. Those wishing to serve must be at minimum deacon qualified, which is to say they are faithful attendees who are born again, demonstrate good, Christian character, are respected by those who know them, and reliable!

Are there other issues to be considered? We are all, by nature, weak and sinful. Too often in life we are tempted to “do what works,” relying on experience as opposed to God’s tried and true principles. Times may change but God’s word stand forever. His ways are not our ways! No philosophy of ministry can possibly cover all the bases that need covering. As a final thought we should take **Proverbs 3:5-6** to heart: *“⁵ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.”*