

WELCOME TO CORNERSTONE

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

CLASS 1

Welcome!

Over the next several weeks our goal is for you to get to know us and for us to get to know you. By the time we're done, we hope you'll have the information you need to decide if Cornerstone is the church for you. We hope it is!

The Path Ahead

Our membership class has five sessions designed to help you understand more about us:

1. Welcome to Cornerstone
2. What We Believe and Teach – a look at our Confession of Faith and three doctrinal distinctives of CFC
3. How We're Organized – elders, deacons, congregational expectations, church discipline
4. How We Do Life Together – Sunday mornings, home groups, ministry teams, one another's in the NT
5. How We Do Mission Together – the Great Commission, evangelism, loving our neighbor, church planting, mercy ministry, global partnerships

What is Cornerstone?

To start out, what *is* Cornerstone Fellowship Church? Well, it's in the name: Cornerstone Fellowship **Church**. We're...a "church." Not a Bible study or a mercy ministry or a school.

A church is a community of professing Christians governed by God's Word.

Let's look at each part of this definition.

A Church is...a Community

When we call a "church" a "community" we mean it's a group of people committed to one another and living a distinctly Christian life together.

On the day of Pentecost the Spirit falls, the gospel is preached, and then "three thousand souls" are saved and baptized (Acts 2:41). But then something else happens. Luke, the author of Acts, tells us they "were added." "Added"...to *what*? They were "added" to the church in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem church is described in terms meant to inspire and compel us:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

That's a picture of what we mean by a "community" of God's people living out the Christian life together. We'll study this community aspect of our life together more in session four.

A Community of *Professing Christians*

A church is also to be composed of men and women who profess sincere faith in the gospel:

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. (Rom 10:9-10)

To say "Jesus is Lord" and believe God resurrected him is really to believe all the New Testament says about Jesus, God and a whole set of related matters.

You can't believe in the biblical Jesus unless you also believe in God the Father. You can't believe "God raised him from the dead" unless you believe Jesus was also crucified.

This isn't to say you understand everything about these issues, but only that you have a basic understanding of them.

To be a professing Christian you can affirm a statement like the Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
And born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried;

He descended to the dead.¹
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy universal² church,
The communion of saints,
The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting.

Amen.

Profession includes Baptism

In the New Testament after people become Christians they are baptized by immersion in water:

But **when they believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, **they were baptized**, both men and women. (Acts 8:12)

Such a baptism is a sacrament (or ordinance) given so converts can demonstrate what has happened to them. Calling baptism a “sacrament” means it’s a “**visible sign of an invisible grace**.” The “visible sign” is going under the water, but this is meant to symbolize “invisible grace” the person has received. Calling it an “ordinance” means it’s something ordered/commanded by Jesus (Matt 28:18–20).

When a person is immersed in baptism, what “invisible grace” are we saying they’ve received? There are several parts to this:

¹ “He descended into hell” is how some versions have it. But the meaning is that Christ died.

² “The holy catholic church” is how many versions have it, but the meaning of “catholic” is “universal,” i.e., the church throughout history and throughout the world.

1. “My sins are cleansed.”

“And now why do you wait? Rise and be ***baptized*** and ***wash away your sins***, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16)

2. “I have died with, been buried with, and been raised with Christ.”

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been ***baptized*** into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were ***buried*** therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was ***raised*** from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might ***walk in newness of life***. (Rom 6:3–4)

3. “These things are true because I believe in Jesus.”

11 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, 12 having been ***buried with him in baptism***, in which you were also raised with him ***through faith*** in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. (Col 2:11–12)

We practice baptism by ***immersion*** because of Jesus’ example (Matt 3:16), John’s example (John 3:23), and the example of the early church (Acts 8:38).

It’s also an appropriate sign of what baptism represents. Death, burial, and resurrection are vividly pictured in a person going down into the water, being submerged completely, and then coming up out of the water.

A Church is Governed by God’s Word

“Governed by God’s Word” in simple terms means the Bible is what we believe, teach, and apply. It’s God’s definitive “rule of life” for us—and all God’s people.

The Bible is the 66 books contained in the Old and Testaments. What makes these books so special is they're "breathed out by God" (2 Tim 3:16) and therefore inspired, authoritative, inerrant, sufficient for all we need to live fruitful Christian lives, and necessary for us to gain the knowledge required to be saved.

For a church to be a true church it must be "governed by God's Word" in some areas very different from a family or individual Christian or parachurch organization or any ad-hoc gathering of Christians.

Here are five examples:

1. Church Government – *A church will find in the New Testament a guide for how it should be organized and led.*
2. The Sacraments – *A church will practice baptisms and the Lord's Supper (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17–30).*
3. Sunday Worship – *A church will organize its weekly worship according to the Bible. It will seek to include certain elements commanded and modeled in the Old and New Testaments.*
4. Church Discipline – *A church will discipline its members according to passages like Matthew 18:15–17 and 1 Corinthians 5 and Titus 3:10.*
5. Discipleship – *A church will hold up a biblical standard of obedience and belief (Matt 28:18–20).*

But what makes Cornerstone Fellowship Church different?

Our vision and values are part of our difference.

Our Vision

To build a church filled with people growing in their love for God, for one another, and for their neighbor (Matt 22:34–40; John 13:34; Luke 10:25–37). These three loves summarize what the Bible calls us to.

Loving God involves obeying him, worshiping him, fearing him, knowing him, and yes, loving him and seeing him as more valuable and beautiful than anything on earth.

Loving one another summarizes the whole set of one anothers in the NT—love one another, serve one another, encourage one another, bearing one another’s burdens (John 13:34; Gal 5:13; 1 Thess 5:11; Gal 6:2).

And loving our neighbor comes from Jesus’ reply to the self-righteous lawyer in Luke 10. He said that loving our neighbor looks like a Good Samaritan who sees someone in need and shows compassion and has mercy on them. That could mean preaching the gospel to them, or it could mean helping them get on their feet financially.

Seeing people growing in these three loves is part of what drives us at Cornerstone.

Our Values

Four values flow through just about everything we do: Being built on **sound doctrine**, being **Spirit-filled**, being committed to **relationships**, and pursuing **spiritual growth** (Eph 2:18–22; 4:7–16).

We believe Christians will thrive when these four pillars are established in their lives. And...we believe a church strong in these four areas will overflow in mission throughout our community and the world. You can't really put your finger on anything in the church that doesn't in some way connect to one or more of these values.

What does it mean to *join* Cornerstone?

To be a member of Cornerstone you need to be an adult Christian (demonstrated by being baptized as a believer) sincerely committed to the life of this local church as much as you're able.

Membership is identifying with the Christians in this church as the ones you'll live the Christian life with. When the New Testament says, "love one another" (John 13:34) you'll know it's the Christians at Cornerstone you are to "love." It also means the Christians at Cornerstone will know you are one of those "others" they're called to love.

It means the elders of Cornerstone identify you as sheep under their care and concern (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4)—and likewise that you identify these elders as *your* elders and those "over you in the Lord" (Heb 13:17; 1 Thess 5:12).

What do we expect of members?

We expect our members to live out their Christian commitment by actively participating in the life of this church. This includes things like:

- *Regular Sunday attendance (Heb 10:25; Act 2:46)*
- *Active participation in our small group life, a key way we live out the one anothers of the New Testament (Acts 2:46)*

- *Serving on one of our ministry teams or finding an effective way for you to live out a life of service, ideally according to your gifting (Gal 5:13; 1 Peter 4:10–11)*
- *Supporting the church financially (1 Cor 16:1–2)*
- *Submitting to the leadership of the elders (Heb 13:17)*

Schedules and seasons of life and circumstances can make these difficult at times. We understand that!

But it's also true that for membership to mean something it needs to be reflected in how you invest your life, your time, and yes, even your money. Otherwise it's not really *membership*, just spectating.

Interested in more on these issues?

Here are some resources to check out:

1. See what Mark Dever has called "The 9 Marks of a Healthy Church" at <https://www.9marks.org/about/the-nine-marks/>.
2. *Believe and Be Baptized* (A book to prepare for baptism)

Our Next Class: What We Believe and Teach

WHAT WE BELIEVE AND TEACH

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

CLASS 2

One of the most critical things to know about a specific church is what it believes and teaches.

Many, maybe even most, things true of Cornerstone are true of all churches, especially Protestant *Reformed* churches. But Cornerstone, like all churches, has distinctives that make it different from others. That's one of the key reasons there are so many churches and denominations.

We want you to know what these things are so you're not surprised down the road by teachings you hear on a Sunday morning or class or small group meeting.

Our Confession of Faith

We'll start with our *Confession of Faith*, which you can find on our website.

Cornerstone is a "confessional" church, which means our elders (not all members!) subscribe to a specific confession, the one adopted by Trinity Fellowship Churches.

To develop our confession we started with the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. These Reformed Baptists did not start from scratch, but based their Confession on The Savoy Declaration (1659). Savoy was an only slightly amended version of The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646).

The differences in these three documents had to do with baptism, civil government, and church government primarily. They line up almost identically on matters pertaining to the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the doctrine of God, the Reformed view of salvation, and what is said about the end times.

But in keeping with historical practice, we amended the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith in two significant ways. One is to modernize the language (words used, sentence structure). A second is to add language about the Holy Spirit (see CoF chp 10), mission (see CoF chp 33), and gender and marriage (see CoF chp 5), and then to make the chapter on the Church (28) more in line with TFC.

Even with these changes, the bulk of the TFC Confession of Faith remains consistent with the Reformed tradition tied to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Changes like these were made because a confession of faith must be an actual, personal confession of what is believed. Further, the Bible is our final judge for matters of doctrine—not a man-made document, no matter how great that document is.

This reflex is fully consistent with our Confession itself:

The final judge for the examination and judgment of all religious controversies, decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits can be no other than Holy Scripture delivered by the Spirit. Our faith must rest when Scripture speaks.
Confession of Faith 1.10

This *Confession of Faith* is to the elders of Cornerstone a summary of what the Bible calls “sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1), so it’s what the elders “affirm, teach, and defend.”³

³ TFC *Book of Church Order* 1.1.

Three Distinctives

But now let's look at three Cornerstone distinctives. We are:

- *Reformed*
- *Continuationist*
- *Complementarian*

We are Reformed

Saying we're "Reformed" ties us to the *Reformation*—that 16th century move of God connected to men like Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, William Tyndale, John Knox, the 17th century Westminster Divines and Reformed Baptists and others. This was a massive rediscovery of the gospel and the full authority of the Word of God.

These leaders shared many convictions but also differed at points. And for most of their key understandings, they weren't the first to say them. They're simply the voices that have made a real impact on us. *So, what are the ways we identify with this tradition and are "Reformed"?*

1. Our View of the Bible:

The Bible is God's inspired, authoritative, and inerrant Word. There is no authority equal to or above the Bible—no man or woman (like a pope), no creed or council, no church or tradition. What the Bible says, God says and isn't to be questioned. What men say can always be questioned *by what God says*.

2. Our View of God

The Reformers had the high view of God consistent with the Bible, the church fathers, Augustine, and Aquinas. To them he was exalted, infinite, holy, unlike anyone or anything else, the Creator of and Lord over all things, and is one God but three persons who are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Further, he is *absolutely sovereign over the big and small details of life*. He “works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph 1:11). Everything that happens happens because of the will of God and for the glory of God (Rom 11:36).

3. Our View of Sin

Drawing on church tradition the Reformers held to a deep appreciation for the reality of sin. The fall of Adam instantly brought sin and death to all humanity (Rom 5:12–21) and took us from being spiritually alive to spiritually dead (Eph 2:1–3). This sinfulness is pervasive and affects every part of our being. Without the work of the Spirit we can’t understand or respond to the things of God (1 Cor 2:10–14).

4. Our View of Salvation

Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone for the glory of God alone. God is sovereign over each person’s salvation. Further, the Reformers clarified that there is one and only one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5). No priest or saint or Mary the mother of Jesus fills that role—only Jesus.

Part of this is believing that passages like Eph 1:3–14 and Rom 9:6–24 mean just what they appear to mean. God

predestines (chooses before the foundation of the world, not based on their choices or behavior) some to be saved and some to be condemned. He chooses some to be saved but not others. No one gets *injustice*, but not all receive *mercy*. Christians receive his mercy displayed in salvation. The ultimate explanation for this is his glory. Romans 9:23 says he did it to “make known the riches of his glory,” and Ephesians 1:14 says he did it “to the praise of his glory.”

There is more we could add, but these are the kinds of things that make us identify as “Reformed.”

As we said in the last class, though, we are *Baptistic*, holding to believer’s baptism. Most of the Reformers held to the baptism of the infants (paedobaptism) of believers in addition to adult converts. It wasn’t until the 1600s that Reformed Christians began to affirm believer’s baptism—i.e., *only* for believers, not their infant children.

But given passages like Matthew 28:18–20; Col 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21–22; and the numerous examples in Acts of baptism being administered *only* to believers, we believe the biblical model of baptism is immersing completely those who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The example of Acts is especially significant, because it covers around thirty years of history. This is an entire generation of the church, during which time thousands of children would have been born in the churches in existence in Jerusalem and the Mediterranean world. Yet, in all these churches and with these thousands of children been *there is not a single mention of any infant being baptized*.

We are Continuationist

A second distinctive at Cornerstone is our belief the gifts and experiences involving the Holy Spirit we see in the New Testament are for the church today. We believe they “continue” past the New Testament and have not “ceased.” That’s the heart of what being a “Continuationist” is.

We don’t expect our lives will look *exactly* like Peter or Paul in the Bible in exercising spiritual gifts, but we do believe that the Holy Spirit will continue to work in our day just as he worked in theirs.

This means we pray for and pursue spiritual gifts in our individual lives and corporate worship. All the gifts listed in passages like Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12–14; and Eph 4:7–16 and modeled throughout the book of Acts are for us today.

One day such spiritual gifts will cease—but not until Jesus returns (1 Cor 13:8–13; Acts 2:17–21; Eph 4:11–13).

The fact we believe all the New Testament gifts of and experiences in the Spirit—speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, miracles, etc.—are available today and not just some of them is distinct and the heart of Continuationism.

One thing to know about such a view of the gifts of the Spirit is with gifts like prophecy and tongues, we reject that these bring normative revelation (truth that is for all Christians everywhere). Rather, these give a personal and localized message that is meant for a person or a group of people right now.

We are Complementarian

Third, we’re a church that affirms what the Bible teaches about gender and gender roles in the church and family. We believe

that men and women are equal in profound ways but also different in ways meant to complement one another.

“Complementarian” accents the way we “complement” each other.

The foundation for this view is the foundation for all the Bible’s teaching, Genesis 1–2. These chapters start with what men and women have in common (1:1–2:3) and then unpacks how we are different but complementary (2:4–25).

Genesis 1:1–2:3 starts with how men and women are similar and equal. We’re together made in the image of God (1:26–27) and commissioned to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion” (1:28).

This “cultural mandate” (v. 28) is a comprehensive commissioning spoken to both the man *and* the woman.

But then in Genesis 2:4–25 we get a kind of slow-motion replay of day six of creation and the respective roles of the man and the woman are specified.

Adam is made individually of dust and given the breath of God to come to life (2:7), is made to “work” and “keep” the garden (2:15), is given God’s law to guide him (2:16–17), and is then called on to name all the animals, an action that communicates authority.

Eve is made as his “helpmate” or “helper fit for him,” because “it is not good that the man should be alone” (2:18). The two are made one in marriage (2:24) but still with distinctive roles in that marriage.

Throughout the Bible the foundation laid in Genesis 1–2 reverberates. Old Testament passages like Proverbs 31:10–31 and New Testament passages like Ephesians 5:22–33 and 1 Peter 3:1–7 echo these same understandings.

That's important because it means the fall of Adam (Gen 3) and the cross of Christ and the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost didn't change the essential relationship between a husband and wife defined in the Garden.

What is true before the fall remains true after the fall—and after Christ. The fall does not introduce gender roles, and the cross does not remove them.

Based on God's Word we also believe male headship extends to the church, so elders and deacons at Cornerstone are men (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). Elders and deacons are to be “husbands of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12), implying they are men.

This in no way is due to any inferiority or insignificance in women. It's simply part of ***God's good design for human flourishing***, just like he made plants to flourish with the right blend of rain and sunlight and good soil.

A Christian woman is made in the image of God and endowed with unique spiritual gifts and receives a glorious inheritance as a child of God, all identical to a Christian man.

Further, no church can become what God intends it to be without the full, robust, intentional, gifted, intelligent, creative, multi-faceted, and dynamic contributions of its women. Just like no family can thrive without the full gifted contribution of a wife, so no church will thrive without the diverse participation of its women.

Do you have to believe all that's in our Confession of Faith?

Actually, no. Our Confession is what the elders believe and what you're likely to hear in teachings and classes throughout Cornerstone.

But to join the church you don't need to affirm these. You might feel differently about spiritual gifts or the role of elders. That's okay. Our point in sharing these things is simply to give you a heads up if you weren't yet aware of our distinctives.

To join you need to be a Christian and believe all that's required for saving faith. But you can feel differently about these more detailed theological matters.

Interested in more on these topics?

Check out these resources:

1. "Our Sovereign God: When We Say, 'We're **Reformed**,' What Do We Mean?" (find it on the [Exploring Membership page](#))
2. "Understanding Spiritual Gifts: When We Say, 'We're **Continuationist**,' What Do We Mean?" (also on the [Exploring Membership page](#))
3. "Gender Roles in the Church & In the Home: When We Say, 'We're **Complementarian**,' What Do We Mean?" (also on the [Exploring Membership page](#))

Our Next Class: How We're Organized

HOW WE'RE ORGANIZED

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

CLASS 3

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Tim 3:14–15)

One thing important to know about a church is how its organized—its leadership structure or government.

We start with ***Jesus***: Jesus governs his church!

The ultimate governing Ruler of the church is Jesus Christ himself. He is “King of kings and Lord of lords” over all things, and head of the church, which is his body (Rev 19:16; Eph 1:22).

But Christ has also shown us how he wants his church governed at a human level.

There are **four broad types of church government**. These differ in where authority lies in the church, authority to make key decisions in the life of a local church.

1. Episcopal – The key place of authority in a church is in the hands of a bishop (Grk. *episkopos*) who likely has authority over several churches in a region (e.g., Episcopalians, Methodists).
2. Congregational – The key place of authority in a church is in the congregation as a whole. Such churches will typically have regular congregational votes to make decisions (e.g., Southern Baptists).

3. Apostolic – The key place of authority is in designated “*apostles*” who oversee various churches. These are “little-a apostles” and not the Scripture-writing apostles we find in the New Testament (e.g., New Frontiers International, a rarer form).
4. Presbyterian – The key place of authority is in the “elder” (Grk., *presbuteros*; e.g., Presbyterian denominations).

Cornerstone is “Presbyterian” (or modified-Presbyterian) in the sense that elders (Grk. *presbuteroi*) have the authority to govern the church (and the denomination). We sometimes refer to ourselves as an “elder-governed church.”

Why Elder-Governed?

We believe the New Testament establishes elders as the officers designated to lead local churches:

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. (1 Tim 5:17)

Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him....He said to them,.... “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.” (Acts 20:17, 28)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (Eph 4:11–12)

Note how these passages use the words “elder,” “pastor/shepherd,” and, “overseer” interchangeably. That’s why at

Cornerstone, “elders” and “pastors” refer to the same group of men. These titles are also one-word job descriptions. An “elder” is an “older” man endowed with wisdom to make decisions and good judgments. The word “pastor” is the same Greek word as is translated “shepherd,” and so speaks to the “shepherd care” he provides to the sheep entrusted to him by the Lord. An “overseer” has responsibility to “oversee,” to lead in this context.

Elders Don’t Serve Alone

The biblical model is that such elders would serve in a *plurality*—a group acting as one to govern the church. When “elders” are mentioned in the NT, it’s *always in the plural* (Acts 14:23; 20:28; Eph 4:11; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:5).

But also, a plurality of elders in a church isn’t to serve alone. They serve in cooperation with deacons commissioned by the church (Acts 6:1–7; Phil 1:1) and all members of the church as they are “equipped for ministry” (Eph 4:12).

Deacons: Serving God, Serving God’s People

Deacons are a second office at Cornerstone.

Like with “elder” and “pastor,” the name itself is a job description. “Deacon” comes from the Greek word, *diakonos*, which means “servant.” The fundamental task of this role is to serve—serve God, serve the church, and serve the elders.

Acts 6:1–7 shows the kind of service they perform. It is complementary to the work of the elders, but also different:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. 2 And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that

we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. 4 But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” 5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. 6 These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:1–7)

Do you see the deacons involved with the “ministry of tables” while the elders here are involved with the “ministry of the word”? Neither is unimportant. Both are essential for a church to be healthy and to thrive. Practical needs and spiritual needs must be met. These two offices working together help make sure this happens.

1 Timothy 3:8–13 spells out the kind of character and home deacons are to have:

8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. 11 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. 12 Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 3:8–13)

The Congregation

Elders and deacons are only two of the roles of leadership and service at Cornerstone. The congregation itself also has myriad ministries.

Ephesians 4:11–13 paints a picture of how elders and the saints within the congregation work together to build up the church:

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:11–13)

A few elders, many ministers: That’s important to us.

Sometimes we call this “**every-member ministry**.” Each person is gifted by God (Eph 4:7) and each person is to be equipped for ministry. That’s how the church will grow!

That’s why many of the **ministry teams** throughout the church are led by normal church members gifted for a certain area of service.

The congregation also performs an essential role when church discipline has reached the final step (more below):

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matt 18:17)

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. (1 Cor 5:11)

“Every-member ministry” doesn’t only happen on Sundays, however. The way a man serves his family or a woman cares for her parents or a person shares the gospel at work or a student cares for her classmates—all these are ways we minister throughout our lives. It’s often in these less visible contexts where our spiritual gifts really come out.

Our Denomination: Trinity Fellowship Churches

Just like a Christian isn't to walk alone but to be part of a church (whenever possible), so churches aren't to be alone but are to partner with other churches—for protection, accountability, fellowship, help, and mission.

We have partnered with Trinity Fellowship Churches because we believe the New Testament presents to us the model of churches joining together for a variety of reasons.

For instance, Acts 15 describes a scene where a theological matter needs to be decided. An assembly is held where “apostles and elders” come together to debate and make a decision (15:2, 4, 6, 22–23; 16:4).

Something important is that this decision, decided by the entire assembly, is delivered to other churches so that they might obey it (Acts 16:4).

Throughout the New Testament we see churches sending people, money, prayers, and encouragement to other churches as they're able.

Church discipline

A church well-ordered according to the Word of God is one that practices church discipline rightly. This is one thing that makes a church a church and not simply a random gathering of Christians.

“Church discipline” is the name given to the series of steps taken when someone is walking in unrepentant sin.

Like a father who disciplines the child he loves (Prov 13:24), so church discipline is a loving act by the church to bring a sinner from unrepentance and harm to repentance and blessing. The

goal is rescue the sinner from his sin for his sake and also for the glory of God and the protection of the church.

Matthew 18:15–17 details how this process starts out as brotherly rebuke but it can end up with removing a person from the fellowship of the church. These steps are increasingly serious and are taken only as the sinner persists in NOT repenting:

15 “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matt 18:15–17)

During this escalation there is a change from a more informal/brotherly process to a more formal process that will involve the elders of the church.

Our *Member Handbook* details more of how this might progress.

Interested in more on these topics?

Check out these resources:

1. Our *Member Handbook* (on our [website](#)).
2. *Deacons: Serving God, Serving God’s People*, our book on deacons (at our Resource Center or on Amazon).
3. The *Trinity Fellowship Churches Book of Church Order*. See it on the website: www.trinityfellowshipchurches.com.

Our Next Class: How We Do Life Together

HOW WE DO LIFE TOGETHER

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

CLASS 4

A Vision that Compels Us

We mentioned Acts 2:42–47 in our first class. We believe it’s a God-crafted picture of the early church given as a vision to compel us, inspire us, and instruct us.

It’ll serve as a helpful outline as we look at how we do life together at Cornerstone:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. 43 And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. 44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42–47)

The Sunday Meeting

The early church models a rhythm of life that includes gathering corporately and then meeting in smaller contexts. We see them “attending the temple together” and then gathering “in their homes.”

The corporate gatherings allowed for a common hearing of “the apostles’ teaching” and “the breaking of bread” (i.e., the Lord’s Supper). In other words, preaching and the sacraments were part of their meetings. We learn in the New Testament their meetings also included:

- *Collections for the poor and for ministry (e.g., 1 Cor 16:1–2; 1 Tim 5:17–18)*
- *Praises (Eph 5:18–19)*
- *Prayers (1 Tim 2:1)*
- *Spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26–27)*
- *Affection and fellowship (1 Thess 5:26)*

Because of Jesus’ resurrection on a Sunday and Pentecost occurring on a Sunday, Christians since Pentecost have made Sunday “the Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10) and the time to gather for worship. For us, too, this is our regular time to worship our God.

Home groups

These larger meetings were combined with smaller ones, typically in people’s homes. We see that as a model, too. Relationships, service, hospitality, and discipleship need smaller settings like a home to really thrive.

Our application of that is our home groups, bimonthly small groups that typically meet in member’s homes. These are times where the Christian life can go from a bit big and theoretical to the circumstances and details of our lives. A big part of the fruitfulness and strength of Cornerstone has to do with our small groups.

Hospitality

Acts 2:42–47 also shows us a church engaged in regular hospitality. “Breaking bread in their homes” (2:46) isn’t the Lord’s Supper but the sharing of a meal as an expression of Christian love and commitment.

Hebrews 13:2 exhort us,

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Heb 13:2)

“Show hospitality” in the Greek is an interesting compound verb, *philoxenia*. It takes the word for “love,” *philos*, and combines it with the word for “stranger,” *xenos*. Biblical hospitality is “love of the stranger,” which reminds us that early Christians often housed Christian travelers they didn’t know. Remember, this was a time before Hampton Inns and AirBnB. A place to stay wasn’t a given. Hospitality in the New Testament, then, includes real generosity and sacrifice for those who come through our doors.

We, too, seek to be a place where relationships and ministry are fostered by extending hospitality to people inside and outside of the church.

Lives Marked by the Joy and Power of the Spirit

In this shared life of Acts 2:42–47 two things stand out that remind us of God’s presence among them, *a pronounced joy and an evident power of the Spirit*—“many wonders and signs...glad and generous hearts.” Truly, “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” is one of the hallmarks of the kingdom of God (Rom 14:17; cf. Acts 13:52). The world can do superficial happiness, but only God can do a deep joy amidst the tragedies and difficulties of life in this fallen world.

And then there's the presence of the Spirit's power. It's true this early church had the Twelve apostles who were given a unique ministry. But throughout the New Testament, power is connected with God and his people—not just the first apostles. God's power working in us and through us impacts our life together. It impacts how we pray for one another and minister to one another.

The One Others of the New Testament

One thing modelled by Acts 2:42–47 is seen throughout the entire New Testament. It's a set of commandments that unpack for us what it means to love one another. These fifty (*fifty!*) or so "one others" of the New Testament call us to be involved in each other's lives in ways that help us all to flourish in Jesus Christ:

- *"Love one another" (John 13:34–35; Rom 12:10; 1 Thess 4:9; 1 John 4:7–12)*
- *"Serve one another" (Gal 5:13; 1 John 4:10)*
- *"Build one another up" (1 Thess 5:11)*
- *"Encourage one another" (1 Thess 5:11)*
- *"Bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2)*
- *"Exhort one another every day" (Heb 3:13)*
- *"Teaching and admonishing one another" (Col 3:16)*

The one others are one of the reasons we know Christians are to be actively engaged in a church. Without a church you can love, but you can't "love one another." You can serve, but you can't "serve one another."

Ministry Teams

Our shared life means also that we're taking the gifts God gives to each of us and finding ways to serve others with them:

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet 4:10–11)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph 4:11–12)

At Cornerstone one of the ways we do that is through our ministry teams. Our Resource Center, children's ministries, ushers, sound team, worship team, prayer team, evangelistic efforts, Women's Planning Team, and a host of other teams of people are what we call "ministry teams."

We try as much as possible to match a person's gift with their area of service. We believe this maximizes their joy and effectiveness and fruitfulness.

Where Should You Start?

If you're new to the church and still adjusting to things, you might be wondering where to start with these ideas. Here are some simple steps for you:

1. Find a home group that meets near you (look on our website at the map and schedule of the groups).
2. Look at our newsletter or around the church on a Sunday to see how people are serving. Where do you feel drawn to get involved? Ask a person serving in that area how to do it.

3. Read the New Testament. As you do, ask yourself, *“What is this telling me about how the early did life together in their churches?”* Then, go and do it!

Our Next Class: How We Do Mission Together

HOW WE DO MISSION TOGETHER

EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP

CLASS 5

The Great Commission

By example in the book of Acts and by command in places like Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus gives the clear message that the church is to be a church on a mission:

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matt 28:18–20)

Our mission is that wherever we are and whatever vocations (callings) we have, we’re also to be ***making disciples*** as much as we’re able.

Making disciples is evangelistic (“baptizing them”) and also involves a whole life of discipleship (“teaching to observe all that I have commanded you”). It’s about spiritual growth that begins at conversion and, Lord willing, continues till we see Jesus face to face (Eph 4:12–13; 1 John 3:2).

With such a mission, praise God we don’t ever do it alone! The Christ of all authority (v. 18) is also the Christ who promises to be with us throughout every moment of every day until “the end of the age” (v. 20).

But...what does it look like for us to be involved in this mission together at CFC? What are we doing about it?

We Love Our Neighbors and Minister to those in Need (Luke 10:25–37)

Jesus once explained to a self-righteous lawyer what it means to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:25–37). The lawyer was certainly expecting a loop-hole so he could come out looking good. Jesus shattered his expectations.

Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan. In his parable the one and only person who saw the man in need and “had compassion” (v. 33) and “showed him mercy” (v. 37) was a Samaritan. The fact Jesus chose a Samaritan to be the hero and not the priest or the Levite was shocking to his audience, for Samaritans were despised and shunned by Jews at the time. Jesus was saying you can’t hide behind your religious pride when someone is in need. They need your compassion and mercy still.

At Cornerstone we strive to serve those in need as we have opportunity. Sometimes this is in the flow of our lives and within our sphere of relationships. But sometimes it’s through our involvement in ministries like:

- *Safe Families for Children – This ministry works with families in crisis to offer short-term care to get families back to a place of independence and strength.*
- *Gateway Women’s Care – This ministry works with women facing a crisis pregnancy to offer practical, spiritual, and emotional help. Its homes in Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill have served thousands of women and their babies over the years.*

We Share Christ As We're Able (Col 4:5–6; 1 Peter 3:15–16).

Even though we might not think of ourselves as an “evangelist” or a “missionary,” there’s a sense in which we are to be both. The calling to love others as the Good Samaritan means we’ll care about the needs of others. And the greatest need everyone has is spiritual: *Where are they in their relationship with Jesus? Is he Savior and Lord to them or nothing at all?* The consequences of this are massive and eternal.

And then there are places where we’re more directly called to be engaged in evangelizing others as we’re able:

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Col 4:5–6)

In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Pet 3:15–16)

Passages like these remind us that our lives and words matter in bringing Jesus to others.

And Peter even calls us to “always be prepared to make a defense” for “the hope that is in you.” “Defense” here is from the Greek, *apologia*, from which we get “apologetics.” “Apologetics” is the study of giving a defense of the faith, providing reasoned arguments for the faith we have. God often uses these conversations as he brings people to himself.

Part of our mission at Cornerstone is to equip our members to share Christ faithfully and clearly and effectively.

So, when you have the opportunity, be bold and share Christ with someone.

We Approach our Jobs, Families, and All of Life—All Our Vocations (Callings) in Missional Ways

Cornerstone is a “missional” church. We’re not just on a “mission,” but we’re “missional.” Being “missional” obviously connects to mission, God’s mission in particular. His mission is seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10), and he is using the church to do that (Matt 28:18–20)—all for the glory of his great name (Eph 3:10, 22). To be missional is certainly to be evangelistic—as individuals and as a church.

But being missional also includes seeing our vocations—i.e., all the various callings God has given to us—as vehicles to model the gospel and win others to Jesus. This is how we can “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” and make it appealing and understandable to the world around us (Tit 2:10).

Thus, we want our members to think of themselves as:

- *Missional mothers*
- *Missional computer programmers*
- *Missional college students*
- *Missional mechanics*
- *Missional husbands and wives*
- *Missional citizens*
- *Missional salesman and women*
- *Missional...in whatever callings we currently have.*

We Partner with Trinity Fellowship Churches (TFC)

The Great Commission is global. It's far beyond what any single Christian or church can accomplish. To happen it will take partnerships between churches to multiply our efforts.

At Cornerstone we have different partnerships to help us do this. Most important is our partnership with Trinity Fellowship Churches, which enables us to work with other churches to see church plants in the US.

Our partnership with TFC is about more than church planting, but the resources and gifting in TFC to plant in the US is one of the reasons we're excited to link arms with these churches.

We Partner with Ministries Dedicated to International Missions

But for us to make an impact *globally* we have also partnered with ministries engaged already in global mission work. This includes ministries like:

- *Trans World Radio – A ministry dedicated to using technology to get the gospel into areas closed to or inaccessible to missionaries. For decades this has involved radio, but it now involves a variety of digital efforts.*
- *Acts 29 Latin America – Acts 29 is based in the US, but it's church planting into Latin America and Europe makes it a good partnership for Cornerstone. Further, its values are closely aligned with ours, so the churches they plant are ones we're excited to support.*
- *Agua Viva School – We have been connected to this discipleship ministry and school in Guatemala for several years.*

What Should You Do Now?

Now that you've made it through this exploring membership class, here's what happens next.

- **Complete a quick survey.** There should be a very brief survey in your email inbox right now. **We'd love for you to take a few minutes here at the end of class** to help us know how you are thinking about becoming a member.
 - Yes!
 - Not right now.
 - Maybe, I still have some questions.

We understand that you may not be certain, and that is okay. We don't want to pressure you, but *we want to know how to serve you with next steps.*

Depending on your interest we'll follow-up with you with clear direction in the next week. If you do want to become a member, these are the things you'll do next:

1. Get involved in one of our **home groups**, if you haven't already.
2. Fill out the **Membership Questionnaire** (we'll send it to you).
3. Schedule your **baptism**, if you haven't been baptized as a believer. This can be on a Sunday morning or a more private event.
4. Think about areas where you'd like to **serve**.
5. Attend your **membership interview**. Once you turn in your Membership Questionnaire, we'll be in touch about your membership interview with one of the pastors. These are times to ask questions, get to know us, and confirm joining

Cornerstone is right for you. Let the pastor know where you'd like to serve.

6. **Be announced** as a member to the church on an upcoming Sunday morning.
7. **Celebrate** your membership with us at a welcome dinner this coming Fall!

Thank You

We appreciate you taking these weeks to work through this material. We hope it's served you and helped you discern the will of God for where to make your church home. We hope it's with us! But if it isn't, we pray God's grace, mercy, and peace on you and your family.