



FAIRVIEW
BAPTIST CHURCH

MEMBERSHIP CLASS NOTES
2024

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT MEMBERSHIP

A church family is made up of individuals who have repented of their sin and placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. To be a member of a church one should be able to profess such faith. In line with the Scripture we also believe that one should be baptized by immersion after one has placed their faith in Christ.

Why do you request that everyone go through a membership interview or class?

This process allows prospective members to get to know us and allows us to protect the integrity of the church family. We want to make sure that everyone who joins our church understands our vision, values, and beliefs. One can complete this process by making an appointment with one of our pastors.

Will I have to be baptized to become a member?

Not if you are a believer and have been baptized by immersion in a church that has similar doctrine and practice. If you are unsure, one of our pastors will be glad to talk with you.

What if I am a believer, have been baptized by immersion, but I am coming from another denomination?

You may join Fairview on your statement of faith and previous baptism. This means you are making a public statement to our church that you are truly a Christian, and have been baptized by immersion.

WHAT ARE REASONS FOR LEAVING A LOCAL CHURCH?

Parting ways with a local church should never be easy. If you can leave a church family without feeling a sense of being severed you never truly joined that church. However, there are times when it is appropriate to find a new church family.

1. False doctrine, heretical teaching, or a refusal to confront false teachers in the flock.
2. Immoral, unethical, and unbiblical behavior either ignored or tolerated among the leadership and members.
3. Emotional pain that God intends to heal in another fellowship. [This refers to those rare times that someone suffers in some way and remaining in that fellowship hinders healing.]
4. When a geographical move makes immersion in the church body impossible. This is the most common reason people part ways with a local church.
5. Marriage. [This refers to an engaged couple where the man is a member of one church and the woman is a member of another. We expect them to be in fellowship together, meaning that one will need to break fellowship with their church.]
6. Church planting. [This refers to those being sent out to begin a new work.]

7. Complete dissolution of local church fellowship.

WHY IS MEMBERSHIP IMPORTANT?

“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35). Saying that church members are responsible to love one another is almost like saying birds have a responsibility to fly. Affection for God’s people defines our new identity in Christ (1 Jn. 4:7). In the New Testament, love is tangible, active, and expressed through service. Every church member is responsible to fulfill the “one another” passages of the New Testament, of which are over 50.

If we take responsibility to love one another, then we’ll actively seek to be discipled and disciple others. In this way, the whole church “builds itself up” in love (Eph. 4:15–16). We won’t be passive about the church’s unity, but eager to maintain and promote a spirit of unity in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). We won’t leave wandering members behind, but pursue them for their good (cf. Matt. 18:10–14). We’ll take prayer seriously (1 Thess. 5:16; Eph. 6:18), bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), show hospitality (Rom. 12:13), put others’ interests ahead of our own (Phil. 2:4), and seek to develop meaningful relationships.¹

There are more than forty “one another” passages in the New Testament, some are listed below. It is impossible to live in obedience to these commands if one is not committed to “one another” in a local church family.

“Be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50)

“Love one another” (John 13:34)

“Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom. 12:10)

“Live in harmony with one another” (Rom. 12:16)

“Welcome one another” (Rom. 15:7)

“Instruct one another” (Rom. 15:14)

“Comfort one another” (2 Cor. 10:12)

“Serve one another” (Gal. 5:13)

“Bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2)

“Be kind to one another” (Eph. 4:32)

“Forgive one another” (Eph. 4:32)

“Submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:32)

“Admonish one another” (Col. 3:16)

“Encourage one another” (1 Thess. 4:18)

“Build one another up” (1 Thess. 5:11)

“Do good for one another” (1 Thess. 5:15)

“Exhort one another” (Heb. 3:13)

“Stir up one another in love and good works” (Heb. 10:24)

“Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16)

“Show hospitality to one another” (1 Pet. 4:9)

¹ From Sam Emadi’s [“What Are the Responsibilities of Church Membership”](#)

WHAT DO WE HOPE FOR EVERY MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH?

Know and enjoy God together by deliberately doing spiritual good to one another!

“In your church, is it difficult to be a nominal, isolated, or anonymous Christian?”

In order for us to faithfully consider discipleship and discipling, we need a firm understanding of what the church is. A local church is a regenerated people who, baptized in the Triune name, regularly gather in the name of the Lord Jesus and under the authority of God’s Word to proclaim the gospel to those who are affirmed of heavenly citizenship visualized through the ordinances. Local churches are embassies of God’s kingdom to render decisions on earth on behalf of heaven.² With this biblical truth, the life of the congregation is consumed with the love of God, grace of Christ, and fellowship with the Spirit. It’s “one another-ly.”

Speaking of congregational life, let’s offer a couple definitions. Discipleship is our personal following of Jesus. Discipling is our helping one another follow Jesus by deliberately doing spiritual good to them. With this distinction, let’s offer the main goal for congregational life in five ways:

The congregation is eagerly discipling one another by:

1. Caring for one another with the Word through bearing sins and sorrows.
2. Building up one another with the Word through edification and exhortation.
3. Loving one another with the Word through forgiving and forbearing.
4. Encouraging one another with the Word through song and prayer.
5. Blessing one another with the Word through hospitality and service.

Regularly attend the corporate gathering and join a Life Group!

The Bible reminds us that we should not neglect gathering with one another (Hebrews 10:25). This holds true for our worship services and for our Life Groups. You can find a list of the Life Groups at fairviewchurch.org/LifeGroups

Find a way to use your gifts and talents for service!

God has given each and every believer gifts and talents to be used to build up the body of Christ. One of the ways to quickly find a place to serve is to visit fairviewchurch.org/serve

Give regularly to support the ministry of the church!

- Give Online: <http://fairviewchurch.org/give>
- Give in our worship services.
- Give through bill pay through your bank.

² See Jonathan Leeman’s [Church Membership](#) and [Don’t Fire Your Church Members](#).

There is no debate over the clear New Testament passages that state believers are to give generously and sacrificially (2 Cor. 8-9). Believers are commanded to support those who proclaim the gospel (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7; 1 Cor. 9:6-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). As God provides, we are to enjoy the good things God has given them, and also be generous to those in need (1 Tim. 6:17-19). The most heart searching New Testament passage on giving is 2 Cor. 8-9. Under severe trial, the Corinthians' "overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (8:2). Even so, they first gave themselves to the Lord (8:5). The question we must all ask ourselves is, "How can I manage my affairs so that I can give more to the efforts to make disciples through our local church, missions efforts, and parachurch ministries?" The New Testament gives us a pattern for faithful giving in 1 Corinthians 6:2:

"On the first day of the week, each of you is to set something aside and save to the extent that he prospers, so that no collections will need to be made when I come."

Giving Should Be Regular

1 Cor. 6:2 says "on the first day of the week", which is when the early church met on Sunday. Give when the church is gathered to prevent a lack of funds when needed for ministry. Regular giving, unlike sporadic gifts – allows the church leaders to plan ministry effectively, it allows missionaries to focus on their work and not worry about their funds. "On the first day of the week...each of you". This is also personal. No other practice allows you to exercise your faith and trust in God on a weekly basis like giving.

Giving Should Be Planned (Prioritized)

Notice that in 1 Cor. 6:2, Paul says "put something aside". This means be intentional about your obedience in giving. 2 Cor. 9:7, he also says, "Each person should do as he has decided in his heart—not reluctantly or out of compulsion, since God loves a cheerful giver." Decide in your heart to first give to God. Give what is right, not what is left.

Giving Should Be Proportionate

Also, in 1 Cor. 6:2, Paul says that each person should give "as he may prosper", or as he says in 2 Cor. 8:3, give "according to their means". People, who have been entrusted with more, should give more. Even those who have been entrusted with little, should give according to what he has. As Jesus says in Luke 6, "Give, and it will be given to you; a good measure--pressed down, shaken together, and running over--will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."

Giving Should Be Generous

As Paul concludes his instructions in 1 Cor. 6:2, we see that giving is to be generous so that "there will be no collecting when I come". A heart transformed by God, which prioritizes the work of

discipleship and stores treasures in eternity will hold the material possessions of this world with open hands. Indeed, most Christians cannot help but be generous towards God's work and his people, often (if not usually) leading to voluntarily giving beyond what was required in Old Testament tithing laws.

Worshipful giving of our resources to God demonstrates that we do not worship our resources as god.

As Matthew 6:19-24 reminds us: *“Don't store up for yourselves treasures† on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

“No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

WHAT IS OUR NEXT STEPS PROCESS FOR EVERY PERSON OF OUR CHURCH?

Our desire is to see every person that attends our church move through the “Next Steps” process. We have intentionally laid that process out in three movements: from Connected, to Committed, to Commissioned.

CONNECTED

- Attending Fairview Baptist Church.
- Connecting with a Life Group or Fairview Ministry.

COMMITTED

- Joining Fairview Baptist Church.
- Participating in a Fairview Ministry of Life Group.
- Contributing and volunteering regularly.

COMMISSIONED

- Helping multiply Life Groups to connect the unconnected.
- Serving on or leading a Ministry Team.
- Living on mission – locally, nationally, internationally.
- Investing in the mission of Fairview Baptist Church.

An “active member” of Fairview is someone who attends worship and a Life Group repeatedly, serves regularly, and gives to the church routinely.

OUR MISSION

"We exist to make disciples of Jesus Christ."

OUR VALUES

GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

We are a church family that focuses on heart transformation and character growth by applying the gospel to all of life.

LOVING COMMUNITY

We are a church family that loves one another in a way that reflects the power of the gospel.

MISSIONAL LIVING

We are a church family that defines our lives by mission in all that we do both here and worldwide.

OUR SEVEN MINISTRY ANCHORS

1. We will pray for faithfulness and fruitfulness.
2. We want every member on mission.
3. We will equip every disciple to be a disciple-maker.
4. We will commit to maturing leaders in order to multiply and minister to more people.
5. We will allow disciple-making to drive our decision making.
6. We will measure our success by our sending capacity, not our seating capacity.
7. We will protect our unity even when there is not uniformity.

OUR MISSION, VALUES, AND MINISTRY ANCHORS

Without a clear vision or established values guiding the ministry, we will end up like Israel without a King, "*...everyone did what was right in his own eyes*" (Judges 21:25).

Without a mission or values, the church can find herself pulled in different directions trying to figure out what she must be about. It is possible to have a lot of good things going on, but the lack of focus can have negative implications on scheduling, planning, and coordination of church life.

Therefore, a church mission statement helps align everything with a desired end goal. In other words, the vision helps guide our decisions, priorities, and actions towards the desired long-term effect of the church's work.

Moreover, the church's values reflect the celebrated principles or standards that support the overall vision of the church. These values help align everything the church does with guiding vision.

First, mission and values help us answer the question, why are we doing this? Does this effort or ministry help our church accomplish our biblical vision? Does this effort or ministry align with the biblical core values of our church?

Second, the mission and values help us answer the question, how are we going to do this? As a church, it is important to prioritize ministry efforts in order to ensure wise use of our time and energy.

OUR MISSION

“We exist to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”

This mission statement is prescriptive from Matthew 28:18-20.

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

Discipleship is the on-going ministry of the church that is centered on presenting and applying the truths of the gospel with the aim of transforming hearts and lives. In this passage we see several things that provide us confidence in pursuing this vision. First, it is the vision Jesus gave to the disciples before he ascended to the Father.

The great commission consists of clear commands from our Lord. We are called to make disciples of all nations. In other words, we are called to proclaim the gospel, and call for a response from all people without distinction. The gospel is the power to save all who believe.

We are called to baptize those who have believed. Baptism is the public profession of faith. Not only is visible it a sign that God has brought them into the family; it is also a sign that the believer desires to enter the fellowship of the Church.

We are also called to teach and observe all that Christ has commanded. This means that we are not only called to live according to His teaching, but also pass on the faith to others. All disciples are called to make disciples.

We find great confidence in the fact that Jesus is the sovereign authority over *heaven and earth* (28:18). At the same time, we find great comfort that Jesus is present with us at *always, to the end of the age* (28:20b).

OUR VALUES

Our values of *Gospel Transformation*, *Loving Community*, and *Missional Living* are descriptive of the church in Acts 2:42-47.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 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 (ESV)

GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

We are a church family that focuses on heart transformation and character growth by applying the gospel to all of life.

[42] 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. – Acts 2:42-43

This is a reference to the body of material considered authoritative because it was the message of Jesus proclaimed and accredited by the Apostles, namely, the entirety of the Bible. Therefore, the Christian community finds its sense of center in the good news of the word of God. And this, Luke tells us, was predominantly the reason for existence and the focus of the early Christian community. The church should be devoted to the apostles' teaching.

Though the Apostles are gone, their voice is still heard in the text. It is often noted that disciple means “learner”. The church is a fellowship of disciples that focuses on heart transformation and character growth by applying the gospel to all of life. It has often been said that growth in the Christian life rarely happens in isolation from other believers. Therefore, it is central that Christians seek gospel transformation in fellowship with one another through the study of God’s word, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.

LOVING COMMUNITY

We are a church family that loves one another in a way that reflects the power of the gospel.

[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, – Acts 2:44-46 (ESV)

The church has a distinctive form of loving community as compared to the outside world. According to the text this fellowship is marked by sharing all things in common and regularly breaking bread with one another. The sense of unity of these early Christians is expressed in their communal living. There was a voluntary generosity in sharing possessions, which is commendable.

The language of breaking bread is often used for ordinary meals, along with referring to the Lord's Supper. The Christian community is a place where hearts are warmed by devotion, an occasion for joy, love, and praise connected to Jesus. Christian community also included a commitment to worshiping together as a gathered church, and sharing life together in groups scattered throughout the city with gladness and sincerity of heart.

MISSIONAL LIVING

We are a church family that defines our lives by mission in all that we do both here and worldwide.

[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 2:46-47 (ESV)

There is something about the message, quality of life, and unity of the church on mission that draws others to Christ. The Christian community, though far from perfect, is sufficiently different and impressive to attract notice, to invite curiosity, and to inspire discipleship. The gospel message is the foundation and reason for such missional living.

We are called to praise God, and find favor among all people. This is the foundation for missional living – both here and abroad. We scatter out into the world praising God and calling people to Him. In the text, it is noticeable that as the church is faithful in these things, God brings to fruitfulness as He adds to their number through salvations.

OUR SEVEN MINISTRY ANCHORS

We need a few commitments to our mission and to one another that keep us on mission. An anchor is a device used to connect a boat to the bed of a body of water. The purpose of an anchor is to prevent the boat from drifting due to wind or current. These anchor statements are meant to keep us focused and prevent mission drift.

WE WILL PRAY FOR FAITHFULNESS AND FRUITFULNESS

We cannot rely on our own wisdom or methods, we will not rely on gimmicks or attractions, we need to be dependent on God and ask for His wisdom in prayer for all matters. We must remain

faithful to the Word, and trust in God for the fruit. Prayer is central to the life of our church, and the effectiveness of our ministry.

WE WANT EVERY MEMBER ON MISSION

Everyone who is saved by God, is sent by God. Everyone who is called is commissioned. Our expectation is that everyone sends or is sent internationally, nationally, or locally (church planting or revitalization or in local parachurch ministries).

WE WILL EQUIP EVERY DISCIPLE TO BE A DISCIPLE-MAKER

We disciple in worship services (hundreds formally), Life Groups (15-30 people informally), and discipleship groups (4-6 same-sex people, intimately). Every disciple is called to make disciples. We need to take responsibility for encouraging one another's spiritual growth. We need to multiply Life Groups on-campus and off-campus, raise up new leaders, and establish discipleship groups (prayer, Bible study, accountability). Resources for discipleship groups can be found at fairviewchurch.org/resources.

WE WILL COMMIT TO MATURING LEADERS IN ORDER TO MULTIPLY AND MINISTER TO MORE PEOPLE

We need to mature leaders through leadership training, teaching experience, and empowering. We need to multiply our Life Groups and discipleship groups to connect the unconnected. Maturing leaders and multiplying groups is how we will minister to more people. We need to pray that God sends us men called to pastor and enable them to prepare in our Ministry Training Center.

WE WILL ALLOW DISCIPLE-MAKING TO DRIVE OUR DECISION MAKING

When it comes to ministry endeavors, money investments, and mission's partnerships we need to ask "how does this help us make disciples" or "how does this enable trusted partners to make disciples". The ultimate goal is not more decisions for Christ (and leave it there), but more disciples who make disciples of Jesus Christ.

WE WILL MEASURE OUR SUCCESS BY OUR SENDING CAPACITY, NOT OUR SEATING CAPACITY

Our ultimate goal is not to build a monument on a corner, but to multiply ministry in our community. We must be willing to send out our best leaders for mission, and trust that God will send others in their place. Again, think army over audience. Battleship over cruise ship. We will begin developing a plan to partner with other churches to plant and revitalize.

WE WILL PROTECT OUR UNITY EVEN WHEN THERE IS NOT UNIFORMITY

As a church grows or changes it is nearly impossible to achieve consensus in decision-making. If that is the goal, conflict will often arise and halt the process. If we cannot achieve uniformity in every decision, we must protect our unity. As we adapt to our changing community, change will take place in the church more often than it used to. In order to do this, we must trust the leadership and teams that we have voted in.

Our pastors, leaders, and teams must work to earn trust, and be committed to clear communication, and open to feedback. As a congregational church, all major decisions will be voted on. At the same time, we must entrust the leaders and teams to lead.

OUR DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY

As a church family, our focus will be on people over programs. Sending over seating. For this reason, all of our primary discipleship focus points will be centered on cultivating gospel-transformation, loving community, and missional living in four primary venues.

WORSHIP

Our corporate worship service is the most formal discipleship gathering we have. In other words, there is one-way communication from the stage to the audience. We follow the New Testament descriptions of corporate worship. According to the Bible, very specific things took place as the church gathered.

- Reading and instruction from God's Word (1 Tim. 4:14)
- Congregational Singing (Eph. 5:18-19, Col 3:16).
- Prayer (1 Tim 2:1-2, 8).
- The ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:17-26).
- Giving (Acts 2, 4; Phil. 4:10-20; 2 Cor. 8, 9).

In planning our worship services we are very specific with how we shape these gatherings. The form of the service is important, just like the content of the service is important. For this reason, our worship services are planned with a specific framework that is outlined in many Biblical instances where people encounter God (Leviticus 9; Deuteronomy 5:4-33; 2 Chronicles 5-7; Isaiah 6:1-13; Revelation 4-22).

1. Call to Worship
2. Adoration: Acknowledgment of the holiness and grandeur of God
3. Confession: Awareness of sin before a holy God
4. Assurance: Promise of grace provided by God himself
5. Thanksgiving: A response of thankfulness
6. Instruction and Invitation: An instruction for obedience
7. Sending: A promise of blessing, and call to live on mission.

Again, this is a framework. There is freedom within the framework for creative use of different worship elements, but the overall movement of the service will reflect how one encounters God. When the pattern of the service itself is shaped by the gospel, it honors Christ as Savior and King, who makes worship to the triune God possible.

LIFE GROUPS

Life Groups are central to our ministry as a church family. God has designed us for community and fellowship. The church is to be a learning-and-teaching fellowship in which the passing on of what we learn becomes a regular part of the service we render to one another.

Life Groups are a more informal but structured time of discipleship, usually consisting of 10-20 people. In general, our Life Groups open up with a time of fellowship and prayer. Then, the majority of the time in a Life Group will center on discussing God's word with an aim to apply it to the heart and live it out in life.

In Colossians 3:16 Paul tells us that we are to "teach and admonish one another." It's hard to do this when we're not regularly together with other members of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). For this reason, in biblical times God's Word was almost always studied in the context of community (Deuteronomy 31:12; Nehemiah 8:1; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 13:44).

Christian sanctification is as much a group project as it is an individual pursuit. In community study, we also benefit from the insight, wisdom, and perspective of others. We're able to hear from those who are at different life stages, enabling us to see through the rich prism of the experience of others.

In fact, a recent study, published in the book *Transformational Groups*, found that 42 percent of Protestant churchgoers who are actively involved in a small group say they also regularly study and reflect on God's Word on their own throughout the week. That drops to 10 percent for those who aren't part of a small group.

The majority of Life Groups meet on campus on Sunday mornings. However, there are several off-campus Life Groups. One of the questions that we should constantly ask ourselves is, are we just meeting or are we on mission?

Philosophy of Life Groups

In their impactful book, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne address crucial questions on the life of the local church. Through the metaphor of a trellis and a vine, one of the primary ways we fulfill our mission to make disciples at Fairview is through the trellis of Life Groups. Here, we seek to cultivate an environment where Christians grow in relation to God and to one another. Life Groups function as one of the primary vehicles for Fairview to prayerfully proclaim God's Word to one another. While we don't require members to be a part of one, we have consistently found godly fruit as a result because Life Groups are a ministry to individuals who, in the context of community, grow as faithful Christians. In other words, life groups provide the trellis where what the church is learning as a body can be applied more individually and deliberately.

Purpose of Life Groups

The purpose of Life Groups is quite plain and ordinary: to help members build relationships, based on our shared unity in Christ, that result in richer integration into the larger community of the church. These groups facilitate relationships for mutual encouragement and edification. Additionally, these groups are not purely study nor are they purely social times. Rather, in an ordinary and informal way, these groups are informed by Scripture for member's building up one

another in love and good works. This may find itself working out in one-on-one discipling relationships. Our fundamental desire is for group members to encourage each other in the various discipling relationships for accountability, edification, and prayer.

In sum, we desire regular biblical content in these groups because reminding one another of God's truth reminds us why we get together with each other on a regular basis: building community around a shared love for God and his truth. The overarching purpose of groups is to aid in the building up and maintaining unity of the members of Fairview. For more, see the [DNA of Life Groups](#).

Place of Groups in the Life of the Congregation

When visiting a church for the first few times, it can be intimidating to make yourself known to so many people. With life groups, you're introduced to a microcosm of the congregation representative of the whole. So, when thinking about the role or place of life groups in the congregation, consider the illustration of a cul-de-sac and an on-ramp. Our desire is not for groups to function as communal cul-de-sacs of retreat to settle in the status quo. Rather, our desire for groups is to function as on-ramps into the life of the whole congregation. In other words, when someone becomes a member, we pray they get plugged into a life group and join them in deliberately doing spiritual good toward one another. But after a few years, we pray they expand that horizon of relationships to the congregation more broadly to love and serve them for Christ's sake.

EQUIP CLASSES

Philosophy of Equip Classes

In order to fulfill the one another commands in Scripture, Christians need equipping and community. They need biblical foundations to grow in the knowledge of God (equipping) so that they can walk in a manner worthy of Him (community). Through the Equip Classes, we offer a series of courses so Christians can be trained in our discipleship of Jesus Christ by exhibiting a faith that seeks understanding. The Christian faith is not a static one in which we can progress in shallow water. If we only wade in the shallows, we will never be able to swim. By God's grace, the Christian seeks to equip and develop the faith given to them by God's grace.

Furthermore, the apostle Paul instructs Timothy to be a model to the Ephesians by "watching his life and doctrine." It is clear from the teachings of Jesus, and even the structure of the New Testament letters, that biblical doctrine leads to biblical living. Thus, Paul's exhortation to Timothy to watch his life and doctrine.

Purpose of Equip Classes

In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul uses the analogy of athletic training to demonstrate that training and equipping are vital elements of the Christian life: "Everyone who competes in the games goes into

strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.” (NIV) Similarly, Hebrews 5:14 notes that the mature intake of solid food for training: “But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.” (ESV) Finally, Ephesians 4:13 notes the end of the saints’ work of ministry: “until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ’s fullness.” (CSB) If the standard measure of maturity is Christ Jesus, then we are to devote our entire lives to training and equipping one another in the Christian faith. Therefore, the purpose of equip classes is to equip and train Christians in their life and doctrine.

The Place of Equip Classes in the Life of the Congregation

Equip classes are a series of 8-12 week courses designed to train Christians to grow in and make disciples of Jesus Christ. They cover several areas such as biblical theology, systematic theology, and applied theology. The format of each course is designed in such a way that attendees not only receive instruction but also consider the practical implication of the topics by applying biblical truth and principles to each sphere of their lives.

Our desire is not for the Equip Classes to be privatized education. In other words, we desire for the training and equipping to bear fruit in the lives of the hearers. So, this could look like a life group going to a class on Suffering so that they can better care for the group member(s) who are suffering. This could look like singles in the church going to a class on Dating so that they can live a holy life and honor the Lord in relationships. Or this could look like a few friends going to a class on Theology so that they can better understand the Christian faith and defend the hope within them to their unbelieving neighbors and coworkers.

DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS

Philosophy of Discipleship Groups

Everything we do at Fairview is centered around and governed by God’s Word. As such, we entrust the desires of our souls and work of our hands to the glory and enjoyment of our Triune God. Therefore, with our definition of discipling as deliberately doing spiritual good toward one another, let’s offer five encouragements toward meaningful membership at Fairview Baptist Church.

Intentional - In the great kindness of his mercy, God chose his people before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before him. In his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated loving initiative toward his disciples. Thus, as we imitate Christ, we should imitate him as we intentionally and deliberately do spiritual good toward others.

Purposeful - In the great wisdom of his power, God has a purpose for his choosing his people: “...go and bear fruit—fruit that will abide” (John 15:16). It is a wonderful testament to God’s splendor that

he is able to use our feeble, weak, and sinful lives to bear fruit that glorifies God as we deliberately do spiritual good toward others.

Relational - In the great love of his will, God in Christ has called us friends. Once we were enemies of darkness toward God, but in the immutable love of Christ, we are reconciled to the immortal, invisible, all-wise God. If we are to imitate God in Christ, our love for one another ought to be characterized by relational friendship that is captured by the majesty and kindness of God.

Joyful - In the great grace of his glory, God has brought together the unlikeliest of people together under the name of the Triune God. What joy this brings to those bought by Christ. More than that, what hopeful joy this brings in the messiness, hard, and trialsome times in the church.

Normal - In the great splendor of his holiness, God has given this command to all Christians in every local church of all time. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to "encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." In Romans 12:10 we are told "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." And in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 we read "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." We could keep going; one of the main concerns of the New Testament writers is that all the Christians in the various churches would be active in encouraging one another in the faith. As a member of Fairview Baptist Church, we want you to help us foster and sustain this culture of discipling.

Vision and Goals of Discipleship Groups

Together, that every member would grow in their knowledge of God so as to walk in a manner worthy of Him. Together, through men's and women's discipleship groups, we seek to create and foster a culture of:

1. Deliberately doing spiritual good to one another.
2. Knowing and enjoying God together.
3. Raising up bible teachers and increasing biblical literacy.
4. Advancing the gospel through evangelism, discipleship, and holiness.
5. Seeing God's glory made known to the heavens.

Practice of Discipleship Groups

1. Discipleship groups consist of 3-5 individuals of the same gender.
2. There are semester bookend events of teaching and fellowship.
3. Groups rotate each year so as to create meaningful relationships.
4. Biblical literacy and training Bible teachers is a central practice.
5. The goal is that every member would grow in their knowledge of God so as to walk in a manner worthy of Him.

WHY DO WE HAVE A MEMBERSHIP COVENANT?

One might ask, “why is a membership covenant” helpful to the local church? Here are three considerations.

The Membership Covenant is a discipleship tool to help people understand the Biblical expectations of genuine Christians.

A church covenant simply attempts to summarize the 1,050 New Testament commands for the Christian life. In a culture where local churches interpret the Bible in various ways, membership covenants attempt to clarify the biblical expectations of Christians according to the understanding of a particular autonomous local church. Our church has a “statement of faith” that articulates a summary of our theological *beliefs* according to Scripture, a church membership covenant functions to articulate Christian *behavior* as commanded in Scripture. The church covenant serves as an effective discipleship tool in the pursuit of sanctification. It can also be an effective tool to qualify members who – by virtue of their membership - will vote on the church affairs, potentially teach, and eventually rise into leadership positions. It is a commitment that we make to one another as members of this local autonomous church family.

The Membership Covenant is a discipleship tool to help people understand the importance of membership in a local autonomous baptist church.

Baptist congregations have been using covenants since the 1600’s, when the protestant church broke off from the Catholic tradition. Baptist churches have historically established themselves and how they will function by documents such as a constitution and bylaws, statement of faith, and membership covenant. As the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 (our statement of faith) states “*a New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.*” In our culture, such documents are needed, especially when many Christians do not understand the importance of church membership and many churches no longer practice membership. Therefore, a membership covenant is helpful in that it provides a church family with a tool for explaining and teaching potential (and current) members the expectations of those who desire to join the church. In the Bible it is clear that there are ongoing responsibilities and expectations of those who claim to follow Christ, which have implications on how we live together in unity as a church family.

The Membership Covenant is a discipleship tool to help guard and protect the local autonomous baptist church.

A church membership covenant clearly defines the boundary lines of belief and behavior in a particular local autonomous church. In order to protect the church, such a document would help discourage people who refuse to agree with the Biblical standards that it outlines. In this sense, a covenant functions as a filter for church membership. So, this requirement might discourage people

from joining who should not join, which is a good thing for the unity and health of the church. Finally, it might actually be the case that for a good number of Christians, requiring that new members agree to a membership covenant will attract people to the church because they will see that we take following Christ and the commitment to one another seriously in order to maintain the health of our local church family. Moreover, the church covenant can function as a tool in discipleship to teach new believers what the Bible expects of all Christians and thus help in their Bible guided, Spirit empowered sanctification.

OUR MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Having been led by the Holy Spirit to repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ according to the will of the Father, and having been baptized as believers in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we desire to be obedient to God's Word, and therefore, with the gracious aid of God, commit to:

GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

Pray for and seek the salvation of others through the proclamation of the gospel;
Fight against sin in the pursuit of sanctification through personal and group discipleship;
Confess, believe, and defend biblical doctrine as summarized in our statement of faith;
Speak the truth in love to one another in a way that is edifying and receive admonishment as occasion may require; and
Be slow to take offense and always ready to reconcile and to offer forgiveness freely to one another.

LOVING COMMUNITY

Pray for the church as a whole, for her members, and for our mission partners;
Participate in worship gatherings, the ordinances, Life Groups, and members' meetings regularly and faithfully;
Pursue our church's mission in a spirit of loving cooperation, submitting to the leaders who have been granted authority by the congregation;
Protect the unity of the church by walking together in Christian love; and
Serve one another as members of one body, using our spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and resources.

MISSIONAL LIVING

Pray for boldness and opportunities to share the gospel with gentleness and respect, always ready to give the reason for the hope that is within us;
Be zealous in our efforts to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ, submitting our preferences and comforts to the mission of making disciples;
Commit to equip, send, and support one another for international, national, and local missions efforts;

Give of our finances generously, sacrificially, and regularly in support of the ministries of the church and our mission partners; and

Be faithful kingdom witnesses in all areas of life by walking in the fruit of the Spirit and aiding those in need.

Now to Him who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.

OUR THEOLOGICAL BELIEFS

Fairview Baptist Church is an autonomous church. At the same time, we voluntarily associate with the Southern Baptist Convention. In 2000, Southern Baptists prepared and adopted a statement of faith called the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) that reflects the generally held convictions of her churches. It serves as a guide to understanding who they are, and what they hold as common theological beliefs.

THE SCRIPTURES

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

GOD

There is one and only one living and true God. He is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. God is infinite in holiness and all other perfections. God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. The eternal triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence, or being.

GOD THE FATHER

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. He is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise. God is Father in truth to those who become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. He is fatherly in His attitude toward all men.

GOD THE SON

Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself human nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with mankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal obedience, and in His substitutionary death on the cross He made provision for the redemption of men from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the person who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God where He is the One Mediator, fully God, fully man, in whose Person is effected the reconciliation between God and man. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to

consummate His redemptive mission. He now dwells in all believers as the living and ever present Lord.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. He inspired holy men of old to write the Scriptures. Through illumination He enables men to understand the truth. He exalts Christ. He convicts men of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He calls men to the Saviour, and effects regeneration. At the moment of regeneration He baptizes every believer into the Body of Christ. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers, and bestows the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals the believer unto the day of final redemption. His presence in the Christian is the guarantee that God will bring the believer into the fullness of the stature of Christ. He enlightens and empowers the believer and the church in worship, evangelism, and service.

MAN

Man is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. The gift of gender is thus part of the goodness of God's creation. In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation. Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore, every person of every race possesses full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

SALVATION

Salvation involves the redemption of the whole man, and is offered freely to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, who by His own blood obtained eternal redemption for the believer. In its broadest sense salvation includes regeneration, justification, sanctification, and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Regeneration, or the new birth, is a work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. It is a change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit through conviction of sin, to which the sinner responds in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith are inseparable experiences of grace.

Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. Faith is the acceptance of Jesus Christ and commitment of the entire personality to Him as Lord and Saviour.

Justification is God's gracious and full acquittal upon principles of His righteousness of all sinners who repent and believe in Christ. Justification brings the believer unto a relationship of peace and favor with God.

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes, and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life.

Glorification is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed and abiding state of the redeemed.

GOD'S PURPOSES OF GRACE

Election is the gracious purpose of God, according to which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies sinners. It is consistent with the free agency of man, and comprehends all the means in connection with the end. It is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable. It excludes boasting and promotes humility.

All true believers endure to the end. Those whom God has accepted in Christ, and sanctified by His Spirit, will never fall away from the state of grace, but shall persevere to the end. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, whereby they grieve the Spirit, impair their graces and comforts, and bring reproach on the cause of Christ and temporal judgments on themselves; yet they shall be kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

THE CHURCH

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its two scriptural offices are that of pastor/elder/overseer and deacon. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus. It is a testimony to his faith in the final resurrection of the dead. Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

EVANGELISM AND MISSIONS

It is the duty and privilege of every follower of Christ and of every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations. The new birth of man's spirit by God's Holy Spirit means the birth of love for others. Missionary effort on the part of all rests thus upon a spiritual necessity of the regenerate life, and is expressly and repeatedly commanded in the teachings of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the duty of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.

LAST THINGS

God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end. According to His promise, Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly in glory to the earth; the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell, the place of everlasting punishment. The righteous in their resurrected and glorified bodies will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

CHURCH STRUCTURE

“Congregationally governed, elder-led, deacon-served.”

CONGREGATIONALLY GOVERNED

The final description of Fairview’s polity is congregational governance. Composed of covenant members who affirm one another as Christians who declare the gospel of Christ, the members exercise final human authority to discern God’s will for the life of the church. Whereas the elders lead, teach, and shepherd the congregation and the deacons unify and serve the congregation, as a unified congregation, the members govern and conduct affairs in these areas:

- Receive new members and have the final word in issues of church discipline if the issue cannot be resolved by the elders, deacons, or smaller groups of members.
- Affirm Scripturally qualified men to lead the congregation as elders (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5).
- Affirm Scripturally qualified deacons to serve the congregation (Acts 6:3).
- Commission qualified members out for the Great Commission (Acts 13:2-3; 15:22).
- Adopt and amend the bylaws, covenant, and statement of faith.
- Approve and amend budgets.

ELDER LED

At Fairview, we gladly uphold Scripture’s teaching that the office of elder and its pastoral functions are reserved for qualified men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9). According to Scripture, God raises qualified men in, through, and by the local church to serve as her pastors/elders/overseers, where they lead the church in the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the fellowship of the Spirit. Additionally, when the New Testament mentions elders, it is regularly in the plural form (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1) and uses pastor/elder/overseer interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9; 1 Peter 5:1-2).

1. **Preach and Teach the Church:** Pastors/Elders are to be gifted and responsible for leading and overseeing the teaching in the church.³
2. **Pray for the Church:** Pastors/Elders are called to pray for the members of the church individually and collectively.⁴
3. **Shepherd the Church:** Pastors/Elders are called to shepherd the church by providing spiritual nourishment to the congregation through biblical instruction and spiritual protection by watching over their souls.⁵

³ Acts 20:31; Titus 1:9; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2, 5:17; Heb. 13:7.

⁴ James 5:14; Acts 6:4.

⁵ Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; 1 Pet. 2:2; Matt. 4:4; Heb. 13:17; James 5:14.

4. **Oversee the Church:** Pastors/Elders are responsible for providing oversight and directional leadership to the church's ministries, members, missionaries, and budget.⁶
5. **Equip Leaders for the Church:** Pastors/Elders are called to teach and train members and future ministers and missionaries to do the work of the ministry.⁷
6. **Model Following Jesus for the Church:** Pastors/Elders equip the church through their own life of godliness as a model for members to imitate.⁸

DEACON SERVED

According to Scripture, the deacons are to focus on the unity of the church and administrative tasks related to the needs of the church.⁹ We are given a proto-typical image of the function of deacons in Acts 6:1-7. While there are varying opinions on translating 1 Timothy 3:8-13, we see the office of deacon as categorically different from that of an elder. Elders preach, shepherd, oversee, and equip through the ministry of word and prayer, and deacons support the elder's ministry by attending to the unity of the church and ministering in areas of need through service. Based on the scriptural qualifications, deacons serve in three primary ways:¹⁰

1. Caring for the physical and administrative needs of the church.
2. Working for the unity of the body.
3. Support the ministry of the Word.

⁶ Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2.

⁷ 2 Tim. 2:2; Eph. 4:12.

⁸ 1 Cor. 11:1.

⁹ Acts 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

¹⁰ 1 Tim. 3:8; 1 Tim. 3:12; 1 Tim. 3:11; Acts 6:1-5; Acts 6:1-5; Rom. 16:1-2; Eph. 4:3. Areas of service and administration may involve hospitality, AV, grounds, facilities, security, website, etc.

APPENDIX: BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE ORDINANCES

Throughout church history the term used most often to describe these two events has been sacrament, which comes from a Latin word used to describe the oath of loyalty a Roman soldier would make to his commander. Typically Baptists do not use the word sacrament because of its use by other denominations that have different understandings of baptism and the Lord's Supper. For example, some of these denominations understand baptism and the Lord's Supper as the vehicles through which God's saving grace is applied to each individual, thus making these ordinances into works contributing to one's salvation.

Baptists practice baptism and the Lord's Supper without the idea that these acts automatically convey God's saving grace. Baptists believe that God gives grace through faith in Christ alone. In other words, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not the active agents that achieve forgiveness in Christ.

Technically speaking there is no biblical warrant to choose between the words ordinance or sacrament. Because of the connotations carried with the word sacrament, many Baptists have long opted to use the word ordinance. The term ordinance simply signifies that baptism and the Lord's Supper are acts ordained by Christ for the observance of the church.

Why these two ordinances?

Biblically speaking there are two criteria by which Baptists have limited the ordinances to baptism and the Lord's Supper. First, these two ordinances are directly instituted by Jesus (Baptism in Matthew 28:19, and The Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:17-30). Second, they symbolically depict the realities of the gospel of Jesus Christ and our union with him (Baptism in Romans 6:2-5; Colossians 2:12, and the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 5:7; Luke 22:20).

How we understand the ordinances

Traditionally Baptist's have understood the ordinances as acts of obedience and powerful symbols of the gospel message. The ordinances are understood as symbols because they graphically depict the truth of the gospel and the inward change that comes with ones faith in Christ. The ordinances should be practiced with an understanding of the symbolism and the reality portrayed, as dramatic retellings of the gospel, where the Word is spoken and made visible.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper both symbolize the gospel message but in different ways. Baptism symbolizes the transformation affected by the gospel; it is thus the profession of faith to one's new birth and justification through Christ. The Lord's Supper proclaims the gospel message of Christ's death as the continuing sustenance of the Christian life. The very elements of bread and wine depict nourishment and refreshment.

BAPTISM

There are two important and distinctive Baptist beliefs concerning baptism. Baptists practice believer's baptism, which means that baptism follows a profession of personal faith. Baptists also practice baptism by immersion, which means that the one being baptized is completely immersed in the water.

What is the meaning of baptism?

First, baptism is an act of identification with Christ (Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:12). In the book of Acts it is explicitly clear that Christians are baptized (*on, in, into*) "the name of Jesus", indicating a transference of allegiance.

Second, baptism signifies incorporation into the church. Being identified with Christ means being identified with his body, the church. This is described in Acts 2:41, where those who were baptized were added to the church. Throughout church history baptism has been referenced as a profession of faith, and the initiatory rite into the local church.

Baptism is a visual depiction of Christ's death and resurrection, and the work of the Spirit to unite believers to Christ. When a believer is baptized the gospel of Jesus Christ is depicted symbolically.

Why baptism by immersion?

First, the biblical language conveys this particular mode of baptism. The Greek words *baptizo* (verb) and *baptisma* (noun) are generally understood as meaning, "to plunge, dip, immerse" or literally "surround" something in water. This is the commonly recognized and standard meaning of the term in ancient Greek literature both inside and outside of the Bible. While the case for immersion should not be based on linguistic data alone, "to immerse" is the most straightforward meaning of the Greek verb meaning "to baptize."

Second, the New Testament descriptions of baptism reflect this mode of baptism. Baptism by immersion seems consistent with biblical passages such as; Mark 1:5, where John was baptizing people in the River Jordan. In Mark 1:10, Jesus is described as "*coming up out of the water*" in his baptism. John 3:23 argues that John baptized "*where there was much water.*" Lastly, in Acts 8:36-39 when Phillip baptizes the Ethiopian they go "*down into*" and "*come up out of the water.*"

Third, baptism by immersion is a powerful outward symbol of an inward reality. Immersion symbolically depicts the truth that is being witnessed to (Romans 6:3-4, Colossians 2:12). In other words, baptism by immersion dramatically displays the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ like no other mode of baptism. The powerful symbolism of immersion representing the gospel is striking, and not unimportant. Immersion suitably proclaims the content of the gospel message.

For clarity it must be added that water baptism does not create the reality of saving grace or faith in the person being baptized. Rather it testifies to the presence of such grace and faith in the baptism candidate. Again, baptism is a public profession of God's saving work in the life of the believer.

Is baptism necessary for salvation?

The mere act of baptism does not save. In the book of Acts, Cornelius and his friends are described as receiving the Spirit before baptism (Acts 10:44-48), pointing to the reality that they were saved before baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 1:14-17 that baptism must be understood in light of the gospel. It logically follows that if someone understands that God instructs believers to be baptized and they refuse to do it, there is obvious disobedience.

It is important to note that while faith is possible without baptism (*salvation does not depend on one's being baptized*), baptism is a natural complement and the next step of faith. In other words, baptism is not necessary for salvation, but is the initial sign of obedience, a public proclamation of faith. It logically follows that belief and the ability to respond in personal obedience, necessitate that the subject must be of responsible age.

Who are the proper subjects for baptism?

Believer's baptism directly follows repentance of sin and profession of faith in Jesus Christ. In fact, it is arguable that there is a lack of any conclusive evidence that infants, or those not of responsible age, were actually baptized in New Testament times.

Many biblical scholars would argue that infant baptism was not a common practice until the 4th or 5th centuries. Most likely, the baptism of infants had something to do with a pastoral and parental concern for babies dying in infancy and the acceptance of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire. Moreover, the New Testament evidence for believer's baptism is strong.

In the New Testament those who evangelize are only commanded to baptize those who repent and believe (Matthew 28:18-20, John 4:1-2). Moreover, the recorded subjects of baptism in the book of Acts are individuals who have repented and believed (Acts 2:37-41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16). Finally, Paul's letters demonstrate the twin assumptions that those who have believed have been baptized, and those who have been baptized first believed (Romans 6:1-5, Galatians 3:26-27, Colossians 2:11-12).

What if someone was sprinkled, do they need to be baptized?

While we would affirm that the sprinkling experience was very significant in one's journey of faith, baptist congregations practice baptism by immersion for the reasons stated above. Therefore, in

most Baptist churches, anyone who desires to join that local body of believers must act in accordance with these beliefs regarding baptism and the Bible.

Generally speaking, if someone was sprinkled as an infant it was a decision their parents made regarding their covenant with God to raise them in a family of faith. Simply stated, sprinkling is different when compared to a believer's baptism by immersion.

Should someone be re-baptized?

Some Christians ask to be re-baptized after they experience a deep renewal of their faith, perhaps in conjunction with a re-dedication of their lives. However, the Bible indicates there is no need to be baptized several times. There is only one baptism meant to symbolize God's work in one's conversion (Ephesians 4:5; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-28).

Furthermore, some people look back on their baptism in the past and wonder if they were truly saved and thus want to be re-baptized. However, we must be cautious here because every Christian grows in their understanding of grace over time, and so we should not quickly jump to the conclusion that we were not a believer in their initial stages of faith. It is possible and even common for a person to become a Christian and then turn away for a time before the loving discipline of the Father brings them back into a life of repentance and faith. Thus, if a person has been baptized after a profession of faith as someone who was capable of making a meaningful decision, they should not be re-baptized at a later time.

Nevertheless, it is possible to have been through the act of baptism with no connection to a genuine repentance of sin and profession of faith in Jesus Christ. In these cases, they were not initially baptized in the biblical sense. Baptism should only follow the genuine reality of gospel faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:1-5).

THE LORD'S SUPPER

While baptism is a one-time initiatory rite, symbolizing and sealing our entrance into Christ and his church, the Lord's Supper is connected with ongoing covenant renewal and is to be observed repeatedly in the life of the church. The Lord's Supper emphasizes the ongoing communion we have with Christ and our fellowship with one another in the body of Christ. Various designations have been used for the Lord's Supper referring to in a variety of ways it is talked about in the New Testament.

These designations include; Breaking of Bread (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 10:16), Communion (1 Corinthians 10:16), Eucharist (from the Greek word meaning "*giving thanks*", cf. Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Corinthians 11:24), The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20) and finally The Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 10:21).

The designation “communion” emphasizes the fellowship we have with God and with each other through Christ. The designations “Breaking of Bread, The Lord’s Supper, or Table” emphasize the example of fellowship Jesus set at the Last Supper Passover meal he had with his disciples.

How we understand the Lord’s Supper

The Gospel accounts show Jesus instituting the Lord’s Supper during an observance of Passover with his disciples (Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-26; Luke 22:7-30). Therefore, it is important to understand the historical context of the Passover to grasp the significance of the Lord’s Supper.

The Passover was a celebration of God’s redemption of Israel from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. Part of this redemption event involved the death of the firstborn in all the houses of Egypt, when the Israelites spread the blood of a lamb on their doorposts and the Lord spared them from death. (Exodus 12). While the Exodus was a non-repeatable event, the Passover celebration preserved its significance in the history of Israel for future generations.

In the new covenant we identify Christ as “our Passover lamb” who offered his body as a sacrifice to deliver us from slavery to sin (1 Corinthians 5:7). While the Passover was a celebration of God’s covenant with Israel, the Lord’s Supper celebrates the “new covenant” established with the church by the blood of Christ (Luke 22:20).

The presence of Christ at the Lord’s Supper

Some denominations believe that as the minister consecrates the bread and wine an actual metaphysical change takes place in the elements. In other words, the substance of the bread and wine are actually changed into Christ’s flesh and blood. Therefore, those who partake in the Supper literally take the physical body and blood of Christ into themselves.

This view fails to recognize the finality and completeness of Christ’s sacrifice once and for all time. (Hebrews 9:25-28). In essence, the view summarized above perpetuates the idea that Christ’s sacrifice is continued or repeated in every Supper. Moreover, this view fails to recognize the symbolic language often used by Christ when speaking of himself (John 15:1; John 6:41).

We believe that the sacrifice for sin was finished and completed in Christ. (John 19:30, Hebrews 1:3) The elements of bread and wine used in the Lord’s Supper are symbols of Christ’s body and his blood. The Lord’s Supper is done “in remembrance”, as a memorial to our beloved savior Jesus Christ. Again, the words “this is my body” and “this is my blood” are to be understood figuratively, thus the elements are representative.

Therefore, Jesus is not literally present in the elements of The Lord’s Supper, but is present in relationship to the Christian’s partaking of the elements through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Remember that Jesus promised to be with his followers at all times (Matthew 28:20; John 14:23,

15:4-7). He has also promised to be in the presence of believers when they gather together. (Matthew 18:20).

What is the significance of the Lord's Supper?

One of the ways the Lord's Supper has been described is renewal. First, the Lord's Supper signifies a renewal to Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:24 gives the command "do this in remembrance of me." The word "remembrance" communicates the idea of a vivid reflection that is so powerful that it affects one deeply in the moment. As we genuinely, and biblically, remember we cannot help but renew our love and worship of Christ. The Holy Spirit also uses this occasion to nourish us spiritually as we come in faith. Faithful, believing remembrance has as its goal the renewing of our love for Christ.

Second, the Lord's Supper is a renewal of our commitment to Christ's church. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 shows the important link between the Lord's Supper and the unity of the body. The Lord's Supper should be the supreme occasion when the church renews its love and unity for one another.

Third, the Lord's Supper is an occasion of renewal for our commitment to Christ's mission. In the Lord's Supper the church proclaims the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). The very thought of his coming should remind us that our time on earth is limited. In looking to the future the Lord's Supper is a rehearsal and foretaste of the marriage feast of the lamb (Revelation 19:9).

The renewal called for by the Lord's Supper looks back to the past in remembrance, looks around in the present to the fellowship we experience with Christ and the body of believers, and looks ahead to the consummation when Christ returns. The Lord's Supper is a celebratory meal, reflecting on God's love for us as demonstrated in the work of Christ.

Who should partake in the Lord's Supper?

At our church we practice what is called "close communion", which means that everyone who can profess to have a gospel faith in Jesus Christ and has been baptized as a believer by immersion can partake in the Lord's Supper.

How should one prepare for the Lord's Supper?

An important prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper is self examination. 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 clearly warns those who do not take the Lord's Supper with serious attention. What does it mean to eat or drink in an "unworthy manner?" (1 Corinthians 11:27). In this passage, Paul is reminding the believers to consider all of their relationships within the body of Christ and evaluate if they are portraying unity or disunity. Examining oneself means that each member of the body ought to assess whether their relationships are reflecting the character of the Lord for whom we represent. Jesus proclaimed a general warning in Matthew 5:23-24 that would apply here.

As part of Christ's body how should one prepare for the Lord's Supper? The guiding principles for preparation are found in on-going faith and repentance. Christians should reflectively examine their hearts (1 Corinthians 11:27-28), confess and repent of sin (1 John 1:9). Where needed and able, Christians should seek reconciliation with others in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17). In doing these things, we should remind ourselves of the grace of God found in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:8). Lastly, we should use this time to hope and rejoice in the future consummation of God's kingdom, when all things will be made new (Matthew 26:29, Revelation 19:9).

To avoid approaching the Lord's Supper legalistically it is important to remember that it is by "grace you have been saved." (Ephesians 2:8) Too often believers mistakenly think that they should not partake in the Lord Supper if they are struggling with sin, but this is an ongoing battle in the Christian life (Romans 7:14-25). In the Lord's Supper we are reminded again and again that Christ died for sinners, and therefore we must come to fellowship at the table in faith and repentance (1 Corinthians 11:27). Remember the words of Jesus, who proclaimed that "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Corinthians 11:26).