

Church Membership Q&A

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A couple of things as we begin here. To help give us some structure for this evening's discussion, Dan and Dane, our two elders, are going to pass out copies of our Membership Application. We just finished this over the weekend and so we're going to pass these out so that you can see them. Take one per couple, one per household until we make sure that we have enough. This will just kind us a little bit of a framework for tonight's discussion. For those of you that are guests here, we are a new church. We are moving out of the church plant stage into the formal establishment of the church and we've been at this for about two years now. Recently we've been doing a lot of teaching on the church, the nature of church membership and things like that, preparation for what will be our charter membership. That's very exciting to think about. It's not often that you have an opportunity to be a founding member of a church that God is planting and, hopefully, will take root and last long after we're all gone. So this is an opportunity for us to join together in heart and mind and commitment to be able to do that together. That's what we've been preparing for with our teaching on church membership.

What I want to do tonight as I go through this kind of section-by-section: Dan and Dane, after they empty their hands of the applications are going to have a mic in their hands and it's an opportunity for you to ask questions here in this environment and this is not the only opportunity to ask questions. If you're not comfortable asking a question in public, then you can approach one of us elders privately and we'll be happy to interact with you on anything that might be on your heart about church membership. That's our privilege and our delight to do.

Does everyone have access to an application right now? Good. That will get us started anyway and I'm just going to do a couple of things and put a couple of things up here for reference if need be.

Last time we were here on Tuesday, I preached from Psalm 5 and you preach for 65 minutes or so and you kind of put that message out of your mind getting ready to go on to the next one. Well, I got home and got an email saying, "Don, we didn't get the audio of that message," and so what I did was I re-preached that message by myself in my study and so a few people have said, "That message sounds different than what I remember." Well, there's a reason why. In my study, I have some biographies of great Christian men that have their pictures on it: Jonathan Edwards; Archibald Brown, who was Spurgeon's

successor; J. Gresham Machen, who was a founder of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church; and on the right hand side, one of my favorite preachers, Martyn Lloyd Jones. So I'm preaching by myself and I've got an audience of four pictures of dead pastors looking at me, but it was actually pretty invigorating to do that because as you're looking at their pictures and you're remembering their faithfulness to ministry and preaching on being set apart for God, that was different and I liked it, actually. But if you noticed a difference in the message, that's what happened and this is the life of a pastor, I guess, to make sure that that stuff gets taken care of.

Here's what we want to do tonight with this Membership Application. I just want to give you a little bit of an overview of it and then feel free to interact with questions. Everything that is in this application in one way or another is something that we've already taught on at length from our Sunday pulpit and so there's nothing new. There are no surprises anywhere in this document for those that have been following our pulpit. Here's what I want to say just as a little bit of an overview: in that passage that I read from Acts 20 where Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders, he said, "Be on the alert for the flock of God." The whole application process and approaching it in a formal, substantial way is a means of protecting the church of Christ. That's what we're trying to do here. We want to make sure that people that join our church are genuinely born again and that membership in our church would not deceive somebody into thinking that they are saved when they're really not. That would be terrible if our church became a means of perpetuating someone's self-deception. We don't want to do that. This is also a way for us to give full disclosure about everything that we expect from membership, who we are as a church. It identifies that our confession of faith is the Baptist Confession of 1689. There are no secrets about that and it identifies our bylaws, this is how we operate our church. All of our cards are out on the table to use a bad example. There is nothing to hide here and so this is just a way of making full disclosure and to get to know the people who would like to be members of our church and to perhaps prompt questions or something like that where there might be questions or uncertainties about what's going on.

Let me just stop there. Are there any questions thus far with that little bit of introduction? Let's move on then. Just in general terms as you're looking at the application, it really divides into two sections: you telling Truth Community about yourself and your spiritual experience and then Truth Community telling you about us. The first section that you'll see there is about your conversion. Now, in order to be a member of this church, you must be a born again Christian. The body of Christ is for those that have been born again by Christ. Only people who are truly regenerate actually have the Spirit of God dwelling in them are eligible for membership in the local church because the local church is simply a local manifestation of the universal body of Christ and the only people that belong to the body of Christ are those that he has actually claimed for his own. So the section on conversion is designed for you to say, "I'm a true Christian and here's how I know."

So church membership is going to require you to write out a short version of your testimony about how you came to saving faith in Christ. If you've done that in the past and you've written out a testimony that looks something like what we're asking for here, you can just attach that. You don't have to write a brand new one. I'm assuming it's the

same testimony that it always was, right? So feel free to reuse something that you've used in the past. But what I have found as we have dealt with baptism candidates and things like that is that a lot of people surprising have never written out their testimony and if that's you, well then, this is a great opportunity for you because it's not only going to help you advance in the membership process but it's going to clarify in your mind the reality of your salvation.

There's a three part outline that we ask you to follow to make it as simple as possible. What your life was like before you were a Christian. How you heard the Gospel. And explain how your life now shows the mark of being a true Christian. That's all in that section on your conversion there. If you've never done this, it's going to help you with clarity in your own mind, help you share your faith and the people that were doing it for the first time in the waters of baptism, I think would tell you that they were really encouraged that they got that done.

So that's going to be it. It's the only way that we have as elders to be able to know if you're a genuine Christian or not. It's a way to formalize that and let's think about it and look at it. Look, I thoroughly expect that they'll be occasional times in the future of our church if not now, where someone will apply for membership and we'll say, "You know, let's talk about your testimony." We'll have questions about it. That's not because we're trying to be difficult to live with, it's because we're trying to be faithful shepherds of your soul. We don't want anyone to be deceived about whether they're a Christian because there are just too many consequences of that if you're mistaken. So this is an opportunity for us to open our hearts and you to open your heart and everyone that is a true Christian is going to be glad to say, "Let me tell you how Christ saved me. I'll tell you once again, I'm glad to know and I want to tell people."

That's the idea of your conversion. 1 Corinthians 12:13. Let me try to give you a verse for each of these sections.

13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Every true Christian that belongs to the body of Christ has been baptized by the Spirit into that body. It's a spiritual baptism, not a water baptism that's being spoken of there. But this is why we would ask you to give a testimony of your conversion is that we could know and that we could know better how to be a pastor and elders to you and to care for your soul.

So that's the point of the first section is because church membership is limited to people who are truly converted to Christ. By the way, with each section, we try to give you a little bit of an explanation of why we're asking for this information. You'll notice that we say that evidence of true conversion and have the maturity to undertake the responsibilities of formal membership. A young person might be a Christian but it might

not be fitting for them to be a member just yet and we'll deal with those things as they come up.

That's the first section on conversion and there will be a time at the end if you have questions that I don't cover here, there will be a time for you to ask those questions but if we can just kind of go section-by-section, that will kind of help everything stay on track and clear and keep me from getting distracted.

Any questions about why we're asking for a testimony or anything else related to that section? Anyone intimidated by having to write it out in a three part outline? If so, you can talk to any of us and we'll be happy to help you with that. By the way, please don't write a book. Don't tell us about your third grade teacher of mathematics because we don't need to know that. You can fit this into a page. It doesn't have to be real complicated. It doesn't have to be real involved. We just want to see that you understand that you had a conviction of sin that caused you to go to Christ alone for salvation and that there was a change in your life as a result of that. That's the flow of a good written testimony and the outline there is designed to help you with that.

Yes, a question. Is that you, Lou? "Is there an age limit restriction?" Is there an age limit on being too old for membership? There is no age ceiling on it. There might be a floor. It would be unlikely that anyone under the age of 17 or 16, we'd probably encourage them to wait a little bit on membership. You know, there's not a hard and fast rule on that but for older people, there is no limit. Those are just the people that are closer to glory. Does that answer your question, Lou? Okay, good.

Let's talk about the section on baptism and for that, I'd like you to turn to Matthew 28 just to kind of set the stage here. Matthew 28 is a very familiar passage. Jesus said in Matthew 28:18,

18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Truth Community is a Baptist church when it comes to this and what I mean by that is that we're credo-Baptists which means that we baptize based on a confession of faith, a credible confession of faith. We do not baptize infants. We're not a Presbyterian church that way. So believer's baptism by immersion is a condition of membership at Truth Community Church. That's what we believe the Bible teaches, that the Bible teaches that baptism is for those who are conscious disciples of Christ which I believe is indicated here in that passage in Matthew 18. You have to a cognitive, sentient being to be disciplined and to be taught. You have to be able to receive instruction and we don't believe that it's talking about infants there and so we believe in believer's baptism and we believe in baptism by immersion. We believe that that is the picture that best pictures the

conversion process of being dead in sin, buried in Christ and raised to new life in him. It pictures a spiritual reality that we believe is important.

So if you have been baptized by immersion in another place based on a true believer's testimony, we accept that baptism. You don't have to be baptized again if you've already been baptized as a believer. If so, if it had to be a new baptism for Truth Community, I'd have to get baptized again and I don't want to do that even though it would be wonderful to testify to Christ all over again. But if you were baptized as an infant coming up in a different Christian tradition and you have a testimony of conversion, we would ask you before you would be admitted to membership to undergo believer's baptism because that's what we believe disciples are supposed to do. They are to repent and they're to be baptized after their repentance. And baptism does not save anyone. The moment that we put our faith in Christ, we are perfectly forever justified by his righteousness and by his shed blood and so baptism doesn't improve our salvation or complete it, it's simply the symbol of new life that Christ has commanded us to follow.

That's what we believe as a church and so membership in our church would require believer's baptism by immersion and that's not to pick a fight with our Presbyterian brethren or anything like that, that's just what we believe. That's what we hold to and that's our practice as a church and we believe that that's going to create the best unified testimony and the best unified spiritual life is if we're all on the same page on what Scripture teaches to be the preeminent symbol of true conversion.

That's the section on baptism there. One other thing: we don't have a copy of it with us here tonight but we do have a separate position paper on baptism that we ask you to read beforehand. We've distributed that in the past. I think it's available on our website. If it's not, Mr. Moneymaker, if you'd make sure that we could get a link to that paper soon and you'll be able to find it and download it. Okay?

Yes, Kelly? "I also wanted to ask, I was baptized at the age of ten. Actually, my faith in the Lord, I was 29." When you believed you were truly converted? "When I actually believed. Should I be immersed again?" Great question. You would think that I planted Kelly to ask such good questions but I didn't. Kelly, thank you for being so open about your past spiritual experience. Her question for benefit of the tape was: "I was baptized as a child at about the age of ten but now as I understand my spiritual life, I wasn't truly converted until I was age 29. Should I be baptized by immersion under those circumstances?" That's your question, right? The short answer to your question is: yes, we would say that you should because your first baptism based on what you're telling me, was not a believer's baptism. You weren't a true believer as shown by the subsequent 20 years of your life and then you came to a point at age 29 where you said, "I'm not a Christian," and you put your faith in Christ. I supposed that it was at that point where you saw your life change. That's when you started to first really have desires for God's word. Is that true? Yeah, and see that's the mark of true conversion.

I'm going to take the opportunity, Kelly, to say something. Thank you for your questions. I'm going to take the opportunity to say something that kind of distinguishes our church

on this important issue and this is a great time of instruction and helping us understand the realities of spiritual life and why we do things at Truth Community. We deliberately do not baptize young children: ages 6, 7, 8, 10, maybe all the way up to 12 or 13 even for exactly that reason. What happens is when you baptize children at that young age, maybe they're genuinely converted but very often they're not and they've just made a simple statement, "Oh, I asked Jesus into my heart," and everybody gets excited and throws a party and the pastor who is trying to keep his baptism numbers up so he can keep his job, puts that kid in the water just as quickly as he can. Look, that is spiritually irresponsible. That is pastoral malpractice to conduct ministry that way because what happens is exactly like what happened with Kelly. You condition children to think that they are Christians before they've even had a chance to mature to the point to really be able to evaluate that and to understand those issues. When they get older and they start living a life of sin and they start living out the desires of their unregenerate heart, you have no position as the pastor who baptized them to go back and say, "I don't think you're a Christian," because you have cut the feet out of your pastoral interaction with them because you baptized them a long time ago and you put the seal of your approval on their testimony.

So while everybody gets excited right now for the youngster in the baptism and takes lots of cute pictures and all of that, the problem is that later on you've got a lot of damage to undo and it's very difficult to undo that and you condition people to think that they're Christians when they're not. So our practice is as a church is that we encourage those early childhood affirmations, "God bless you. You keep loving Jesus. You keep pursuing Jesus." And you just watch over time to see if their testimony at that early age is consistent with the pattern of their life later on. There is always time to baptize them later. There is no opportunity to undo the damage when you baptize an unconverted person. So we just don't do ministry that way and we think that that's what's best for families, best for the children, best for the testimony of the Gospel in the long run. I'm willing to be that those of you that are adults that have grown up in the church, you look back on your experience in youth group and all of that and with a better understanding, maybe, of the Gospel, you can look back and say, "There is no way that most of the people in my youth group were converted." They're now on their third marriage and they've had multiple sins in their lives.

So that's why we don't do that. That's why we don't baptize young children. It's for their benefit. It's what we think is the responsible way to protect and help people over the long haul but our desire is to minister to children and to encourage them and to love them and to make them feel welcome at church. It's not that we're trying to exclude them, we just don't want to put hands on them and have confirmed their testimony prematurely because we think that causes a lot of damage long term and we're not willing to do that. You know, we've had people that have left our church over that issue that have heard me speak that way and God bless them. I hope that they go and find a place where they can serve and minister for Christ and be effective in ministry there but that's an issue that we're not going to change on just to keep a few extra families around. Our desire here is to just provide clarity and to let people know where we stand and why we stand there.

Yes, Mr. Mills. "Some folks were baptized by sprinkling. This is just a clarification type question." Yes, I dealt with that in my ministry before. The question is, "I was baptized by sprinkling as a believer." Let me answer that question on two levels. If someone said, "I was baptized as a believer by sprinkling" and they are outside our church or whatever, I would fellowship with him. I would receive them as a brother and it's not a test of spiritual unity that way but when it comes to the practice of our church, we believe in baptism by immersion and so in times past, back in California when I had the privilege of ministering back in that other church, people like that I encouraged to be baptized by immersion. I remember one man in particular who gave a very good testimony. And part of the testimony in the waters of baptism and an opportunity like that, it's an opportunity to say, "My convictions on baptism have changed and I want to honor what I believe the word of God teaches and also I want to identify with this church and with the people of this church and what they believe. I don't want there to be a degree of separation between me and the body in which I worship. This is a body that believes in baptism by immersion and therefore I want to honor that as well." And so baptism by immersion is the standard at Truth Community as a believer. Believer's baptism by immersion and that's some of the reason why. If you remember, part of the teaching that we did on the church was the importance of spiritual unity. You know, I think it's important for a church to be going in the same direction on one of the ordinances that the Lord instituted. The Lord gave us baptism and he gave us the Lord's Supper by which to remember him. I'm not going to pick a fight with someone else, a pastor who baptizes believers by sprinkling, I'm not going to fight with him over that issue. Internally, what we're going to do is we're going to be united and go the same direction in our practice of the ordinances. Does that help Charlie? Great questions, great questions and, you know, baptism there are a lot of different approaches to it and this is what we do as a church. This is where our elders are at, okay?

Let's move on to the next page, the doctrine of Truth Community Church. Again, for those of you that are new, that are visiting, I did an 11 part series at the beginning of this year. The series is entitled "What We Teach" and I did 11 messages that went through why do we believe the Bible? Who is God? Who is Satan? What is sin? Answering 11 key questions about the nature of biblical doctrine. And so from our doctrine of the Bible to our doctrine of the end times and all points in between, we covered that at the beginning of the year and that was kind of an overview and introductory thing but we've taught what we believe. Again, there are no secrets but part of the formal doctrine and the formal articles of our church is that we hold to the Baptist Confession of 1689 and there are copies of that available in back if you don't have a copy of that, if you would like to pick one up but our official doctrine is represented in the 1689 Confession. There are a couple of minor points that are related to the Sabbath and whether the Pope is the antichrist or not, that in the future we'll introduce clarifying statements but this is the standard by which we evaluate doctrine is in the 1689 and that 11 part series was kind of a summary overview of biblical doctrine but this is it in detail.

And so think about it in terms of full disclosure or informed consent as somebody comes to join our church. There are no secrets what we believe is out for everybody to see and that's why we adopt this. And so to become a member of Truth Community, you need to

read this Confession and acknowledge that you've done that. And let me say something important, this is really, really important right here: for some of you, maybe for a lot of you, to read all of the detail of this might get a little bit thick. It might seem a little bit complex to you and that's okay. You don't have to understand everything that's in here. You don't necessarily have to agree with everything that's in here. The key is to say, "I understand that this is the doctrinal standard of our church and I agree to abide by it. I agree to receive instruction under it. If I start to believe or teach something that's contrary to this, I will submit to what the elders say. I won't create division by teaching contrary to this doctrinal statement, to this Confession of Faith." Membership does not require absolute conformity of belief with this Confession but it requires an agreement to abide by it. To live peaceably under it and also if you know that you have particular disagreements with it, to identify that. There's a section here, "I disagree with the Confession in the following ways," and just jot that out and that gives the elders an opportunity to understand, to talk with you perhaps, and to decide whether your differences on doctrine are still compatible with being a member of our church.

Again, it's just a matter of disclosure. We're telling you what we believe and so as you come for membership you say, "Here's what I believe. I accept this Confession. I have no known disagreements with it." It's just a way for us to know each other and to make sure the way that we believe as a church is consistent with what you believe enough so that you could in good conscience join our church as a member and say, "I support the teaching of this church. I want to identify with the teaching of this church." And one other thing and then I'll open it for questions here. The language of this is a little bit antiquated in the book that we're passing out. This green book, the language is a little bit antiquated. There is a more modern version online if you will Google Spurgeon 1689, you can get a link where the language has been updated but the content is unchanged. If you find the old English a little bit cumbersome to try to deal with.

And so if you look at the bottom of that section on the doctrine of Truth Community Church, the qualifying affirmation or statement that a member would make is that, "I understand that Truth Community Church holds to the Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. If I have identified any areas of disagreement above, I understand that the elders will determine whether my disagreements are consistent with membership and I will accept their decision without dissent. I agree to abide by the Confession as it is interpreted and applied by the elders." The elders are responsible for upholding the doctrine of the church. That was reflected in that passage that I read from Acts, chapter 20, and so that's the doctrinal section of the application. You know, in all transparency as I stand here, none of this should be a surprise. There's nothing new that I'm saying tonight that hasn't been said many times before and so this is just a way of commemorating that and bringing in people maybe who came in later and didn't hear all of the teaching or something like that.

So any questions about the doctrinal Confession of Faith or how that relates particularly to membership? No? Alright well, there is always opportunity later on. I haven't taught on the subject matter of everything in the Confession yet but I've done a lot of teaching on it and if you have questions about a particular section, we'll probably be able to point

you to a message which will clarify and help you understand better what we believe on that.

Now, the next section then if there are no questions, on the life of Truth Community Church. Membership involves more than Sunday attendance, it means serving the body of Christ and following the leadership of the elders in the spirit of the Bible's teaching. So this is an opportunity for us to get to know you again a little bit better and also for you to acknowledge that you recognize the structure that is in place at Truth Community and your agreement to live within that structure and so there are a couple of questions that I always like to know about members. Why do you attend our church? And why do you want to become a member of Truth Community? You know, whatever your answer to that question is, I know it's not because you like the youth program, the youth group, because we don't have one. I know it's probably not because of the coffee or anything like that. There's not a whole lot to attract people to our church except for one or two main things and those of you who have been with us any amount of time at all, I know that you share those convictions. I know you share those commitments and I love you for it and I'm excited to minister together and to think about us coming together formally as a church like that. But we do want to just give people an opportunity to express that and to express their understanding of what it means to be a member.

Then on the next page, there's a question about Hebrews 13:17. This is kind of an important question. Let me read Hebrews 13:17 and we've taught on this in the past. Hebrews 13:17 has a strong statement in it about the responsibility of church members to their leaders and we carry this lightly in our leadership. It's a biblical responsibility but it's not one that we lord over people and you just have to be around us for a while to see that that's true. But Hebrews 13:17 says,

17 Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

Basically what Scripture is saying there is that there's a leadership structure in a church just like, if you think about it this is true in every area of society biblically: submit to your government; wives submit to your husbands; slaves submit to masters. This principle of leadership and submission is woven throughout every human relationship in the word of God and so the church is no different than that. And so the point of this section, the point of that question is for someone to acknowledge as a member, "I recognize that there's leadership in place and I agree to support that leadership and to receive their oversight in a peaceable spirit." 1 Thessalonians 5:13-14, if you want to look that up later, talks about giving honor to the leaders within a church. It's not that we're after the honor public or anything like that, but we have a responsibility to say, "This is what Scripture teaches about the church," and to uphold that. It's not personal, it's about the office and what Christ wants his church to look like.

And just to give a sense of balance to it on the other side, the responsibility that all of us elders feel with great weight, it can be found in 1 Peter, chapter 5. I'd encourage you to

turn there. There's the instruction that's give to the members and there's the instruction that's given to the leaders that balance this out in a beautiful harmony and a beautiful symmetry that expresses the way biblical life in the church is supposed to go. Look at 1 Peter chapter 5, verse one, he says,

1 Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed,

So he's talking to the elders, to the leaders of the church here here, you

2 shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Now I know for a fact that there are many, many, many people in here that have suffered under abuse of spiritual leadership and I'm sorry that that's been your experience in your church life. It's not supposed to be that way. The biblical pattern for elders is that they would be a loving encouragement to you and that you would be a loving encouragement to them. God wants somebody to be in charge of making decisions and he entrusts that, we believe, to the leaders of the church, to the elders of the church and it's that the congregation is responsive to the elders, not that the elders are subject to the direction of the congregation as some of our other Christian friends would believe with congregations vetoing budgets and things like that. We don't do it that way because we don't think that's the biblical way to do it. And so at the same time, I want you to know as we're talking about church membership, I haven't talked to them about this but I promise you that I speak for Dan and Dane, our other two elders on this, that we are far more concerned, we have our own responsibility not to wield our position by lording it over people and bossing people and getting involved in intimate details of their lives: where they work, where they go all that. That's not what we want. Look I've got six kids. I've got enough trouble keeping all of them going in the same direction let alone trying to direct the lives of people who are living in good conscience before the Lord as believers in Christ. And so there is that principle of leadership and submission and we ask you to acknowledge that in your membership application.

One other thing that I would say about that, particularly in our American culture that's kind of a foreign idea and people kind of shrink back from that. Maybe two things that I should say about it. First of all, the protection and the guard that God has put into place for the life of a body to make sure that the leaders are what they should be, are the biblical qualifications for elders found in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. No man receives that office if he doesn't qualify according to those standards and there's also this restraint in 1 Peter 5 that true elders who are not in it for position or whatever, true elders, their consciences are keenly sensitive to the fact, "I can't lord this over the flock," and so a true elder is going to be as much, if not more, conscious of his responsibility to the flock than the flock's responsibility to him. And the other thing that I would say about it is: if you're

not comfortable with that role but you want to stay at the church, okay, that's alright. You do that. But there comes a point where a person in a church has to realize that his responsibility to leadership in the church is to the office and the one who instituted the office of elder is Christ himself. Sooner or later you have to have leaders, spiritual leaders in your lives if you're going to be obedient to Christ because Christ says, "This is what I want from my people. I want them to obey their leaders. I want them to submit to them," and so ultimately a deep-seated rejection of that principle bumps you up against biblical principles in a negative way.

But with that said, for those of you that have been under difficult leadership and it's brought a lot of sorrow into your life and you kind of instinctively shrink back from it because of your recent history, look just take your time to be with us. Don't worry about membership. Just come and worship with us. Come and learn from us and the Lord will show you in time whether this is leadership that you can trust or not and we're going to be patient with that. We're not going to compel anybody. We're not going to call anybody and say, "Hey, why aren't you a member." That's not the way we're doing this. That's not what we're about. We want membership to be a joyful, voluntary unity that says, "I agree with what this church is doing. This is what I believe. These are the people that I love and I want to publicly commit to this body as part of my offering of my life to Christ." And it's a loving, voluntary, glad commitment, not one that's done under compulsion under the influence of a human leader. So that's that section and also there's the bylaws are important on that. We ask you to read the bylaws and acknowledge them especially the section on church discipline which is important and so that's the section on the life of Truth Community Church. I'm sure there are questions about that. The only question at this point is whether anyone will actually vocalize them or not.

So let me open it for questions there. We have nothing to hide. Anybody? Dane, why don't you ask me a question of any kind just so I can get some kind of feedback from anything? Help me out here. Dane's just back from New York. "I really don't have any questions, Pastor." Alright, thank you, Dane. Dane, had no questions for those of you listening at home.

So yes, Kevin? "Pastor Don, just curious in going through the Baptist Confession, really good in-depth and wonderful things in there I haven't had the opportunity to dig too far into the bylaws yet but based upon the contents, perhaps it might be helpful if there was a class or some kind of synopsis covering of it from the elders or the pulpit to help to guide and to help, you know, maybe some people might get through some of those tough things so that's basically what I'm bringing up." Yeah, thank you. We might do that in the future. Part of point of my 11 part series was to kind of give a little bit of an overview. It doesn't go through line-by-line of the Confession but the point of the 11 part series was to show the spirit of the Confession even though I didn't make a big public connection between my teaching and the 1689. But in the future, we may do that. It just wasn't feasible to try to go through the Confession line-by-line on Sunday morning. It would take us away from verse-by-verse exposition of the Scripture and so that's why we handled it the way that we did but if there are questions as you read through this, if you have questions about

what a particular section means or anything, by all means let us know. We'll be happy to work through those questions with you. Okay?

Yes, Nancy? "Just something that I thought you might want to clarify is does church discipline, does it apply to people who are regular attenders but not church members?" If you read the bylaws, we drafted them broadly enough to cover that contingency and the reason that we did that is this: just picture a situation here with me where somebody has been an established attender at the church for multiple years and has a prominent position but for whatever reason never took the step of membership and they are known as being someone who attends Truth Community Church, okay? And with that position, having separated themselves from membership in that position, they scandalize the name of Christ with some kind of public scandal: a financial scandal or a scandal of immorality. In that case, we would go to that person and try to call them to repentance and walk through the steps of Matthew 18 with them seeking their repentance, seeking to restore them but we have allowed in our bylaws for us to deal with them from a perspective of church discipline so that we are able to protect the name of Christ, protect the body of Christ from someone who would try to game the system and try to stay outside the authority of the elders and then engage in scandal that would bring disrepute on the entire church. And so it would be an extraordinary case. It's not that we're going to be chasing after nonmembers because we saw them smoking a cigarette or something like that, that's not the point. The bylaws give us the authority to deal with a scandal like that even if the person is not a member of the church.

And look, you say, "Oh, that's kind of scary," for lack of a better word. Well look, read Acts 5 if you want to find a scary example of church discipline. You know the story of Ananias and Sapphira? Boom, that's church discipline and we are not wielding the death penalty here, we are just saying that we have the right to publicly separate from people who refuse all of our calls to repentance and are bringing reproach on the name of Christ. It is so important for you to understand this and those of you who love Christ will identify with what I'm about to say: it is not about us having power over people, it's about us having the prerogative and the ability to protect the holy name of Christ from those who would bring reproach upon him. That's the point of what's called church discipline and really church discipline throughout most of the process, is designed to restore people, to bring them to repentance but if they are hard-hearted and say, "I refuse to repent. You guys go pound sand," we'll deal with it according to Matthew 18. Matthew 18 says, "When that happens you tell it to the church," and that's what we'll do and part of church membership is saying, "I understand that that's what Scripture calls for and I agree because I want to be in submission to Christ. I agreed to submit to that. I agree in advance that I understand the issue of church discipline. You've laid it out and I agreed to that as part of my application for membership." It is not about lording it over people and is done with great patience with a lot of pleading and a lot of prayer but in the end, an unrepentant person brings those consequences on themselves. It's not because leadership is being unkind. Okay, thank you for that good question, Nancy. I'll give her a smooch for that one later tonight. I kiss her every night so that wouldn't be anything different.

Yes, Karen Logan. "I don't know if you have anyone here that would need clarification based on your messages about the living church membership and the fact that the Bible gives us the example of people being marked out and set apart as part of a body. You made the comment that we will not be seeking people out and cornering them for membership and giving people the time to see whether they do indeed want to commit to this. By the same token, after years and years of being in a body and not committing themselves to it, would you make any comment about that?" Yes the question was twofold: one is that she alluded to my messages on church membership. There are two messages. There are some copies of those on CD that are on the back table. You can grab one of those on the way out if you haven't heard that where we talk about all of these practical issues about church membership. You'll want to get a copy of that. The other thing that Karen asked was, "Well, what about somebody who's at the same church for a long period of time but doesn't want to commit themselves to membership?" Here in this room, we're not going to be calling people saying, "Hey, where's your application?" There's not that kind of pressure. We are not that kind of church and we never will be as long as I'm the pastor here.

At the same time, over time, a Christian has to realize that he has an obligation to Christ himself, that Christ calls us to participate in the life of the local church and it's fine for somebody to say, "I'm not ready for that right now and I need six months. I need some time to figure you guys out. I need some more time. I've been bruised in the past," and we support that. But hypothetically speaking, if somebody's at the same church for three, four, or five years and never wants to make a commitment of membership to the church, they have to ask themselves other kinds of questions. What is it about church membership that you don't understand? Or why is it that you would hold yourself back from that which we believe Scripture is pretty clear you should be willing to do? You should want to do as a true Christian? And if it's not church membership here, okay, find a church that you can be comfortable with but Christians are not meant to be floating free agents spiritually, bouncing around from church to church and never settling down and committing themselves to a body. The very nature of New Testament instruction to Christians: serve one another, submit to one another, love one another, requires a commitment to a local group of believers, the same people over a period of time. And so it's ultimately an issue of obedience to Christ, not compliance with the practical structures of our individual church. Does that help? Thank you, Karen, good question.

Now the question are starting to come. Lindsay? "Along the same lines as Karen's question, if someone is hesitant for membership and is taking six months or so to figure out if they want to be a member, in this section it asks about areas of ministry where you want to serve, are there going to be certain service opportunities that will be restricted by whether or not you're a member?" Yes, there probably will be but I don't know what those would be. Membership certainly would be a condition of any teaching role whatsoever in the church and there might be other places as our church grows and matures where ministry would be limited to membership. One other thing that I would say is that I made this point in discussing membership in one of my messages, is that the primary commitment of the elders is going to be to the members. We view members as those that God has specifically given us and charged us with the oversight of their soul

and for a member, if I remember I would say, "That's really good. That means my elders are there for me. They are praying for me by name. They are committed to me. I know that they are there to support my family, to help me with my questions, to deal with my rebellious children. I have a biblical elder on my side as I go through life." That's a blessing. That is an umbrella of protection and so as people withhold themselves from membership, they step back a degree from that and, you know, we look at these things over time as I've said multiple times, I won't say it anymore, people need time to get to know a church before they make that commitment. I understand that. I get that. I'm talking about long-term over five, ten years kind of thing. So does that help, Lindsay? Good.

Dan Anderson. "Let's say that somebody's going through that church discipline process and the church has done what it needs to do. How does the leadership feel about the body's interaction with that individual? Are there guidelines for us?" Great question. A biblical pattern for church discipline is that someone would go privately. It's not the leadership's initial responsibility to do that. If you become aware of somebody that is being unfaithful to their spouse then you would go and address them privately. "Hey, you can't do that. You're sinning that way," and if they repent, you've won your brother. If not, you take one or two others and you witness to them and testify to them against their sin and then it ultimately gets brought to the elders. If they are still not repentant, we would make a statement probably at a Communion Service is the practice that I'm used to, "I need to tell you about John Smith. John is being unfaithful to his wife. We've met with him. We've pleaded with him to repent and he refuses to come back to his wife and so we ask you to pursue him. Those of you that know him, you go talk to him and call him to repentance," and you bring the weight of an entire church body to bear upon his conscience as Christ's appointed means to hopefully restore his sheep and if they won't repent, to protect the purity of the church. And if after a period of time after that the guy hasn't repented, then we would have another instance where we'd say, "You know, after all this time, John has not returned to his spouse. We've done everything that we can and in obedience to the Lord, we're putting him out the church." And you should deal in your interactions with him, you should share the Gospel with him, you should assume that he's not a Christian and you should call him to repentance and faith in Christ in your interactions with him. That becomes a limited context of interaction. Does that help? Okay, good, thank you, Dan. Good question on how does church discipline work itself out?

Hi, Kathy. "I might need a little bit of clarification. Since we have been meeting in December 2011, I've felt like you've made it clear areas of ministry 'aren't going to be like other churches' in that we have broken out Sunday school classes, children away from parents so when you have this question, are there areas of ministry in which you would like to serve? I'm not sure what Truth Community is going to be offering for areas of ministry exactly. So let's say someone came from a large church, they were the team leaders for the girls and they sang on the praise team and all those little things they used to do which we may not have here, I'm not sure." There are a couple of things that I would say about that, Kathy, and it's a great question. I realize our church is kind of still in its infancy; we're a toddler church, so to speak, and we don't have the whole breadth of

ministry opportunities that a church that's been around for 50 years is going to have. There's going to be a growth as we move ultimately into this facility and we have more opportunities just space wise to do things. Things and opportunities will come up naturally. There is a lot more ministry that goes on in this church and there are people serving in ways that aren't necessarily official slots that would be listed in a bulletin but we have people serving in nurseries, serving in AV, serving with meals, loving one another, counseling people. There's a whole lot of ministry that doesn't have a formal title attached to it and that kind of ministry is taking place just in the natural interactions of life. But in terms of the application question that you're asking, you know, in terms of areas of ministry, perhaps a better way to say it is: if you didn't know a particular existing thing to say, music is another thing that a lot of other people are involved in, just say what you have a heart to do. "In the past, I've served in this way," even though you don't see that opportunity immediately present here at Truth Community. Just say what you like to do in service and so rather than trying to say, "I see this opportunity at Truth and I want to fill that hole," just say, "These are what my desires are." I believe that the proper approach for a church ministry to get people into service is not to structure it around in a top down way that leadership says, "We want this program and now we've got to find people to fill it." The right way for a church to do membership and what's exciting as a member is to say, "These are my desires," and look to try to find ministry that is in accordance with people's desires. That's what's going to be most effective in the long run. But if you don't have anything particular in mind as you see that, write down how you've served in the past and that gives us an opportunity to get to know people and what the desires and opportunities might be in the future. Okay?

Alright, we're almost out of time here. There is a section on your prior church experience that I think is self-explanatory. It's helpful for us to know if you're coming from an Assemblies of God church or if you are coming from a Church of Christ church or something like that. It's helpful for us to know that. That tells us things and helps us know how to shepherd you better. In the off chance that anyone is applying for membership that has ever been subject to church discipline or is under church discipline, we would want to know that in case we felt like we needed to honor that discipline but we'll trust you to be forthcoming. It's not our intention, it's not our plan to contact prior churches. We just want to know where you're coming from to help us know better how to minister to you in the days to come. If somebody's coming from an Independent Baptist Church, we're going to know that you have certain things in mind that we can help you with. That's all that that's about.

Then on the back, I won't read through all of this. On the back is the membership commitment which I borrowed in part, not completely, I borrowed in part it may be been the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I'm not sure but I liked what they said. There's a five part affirmation that affirms your confidence in Scripture, your repentance of self that you're trusting in Christ alone for salvation and a commitment that, "I will serve this church with my time, talent and love as God enables me to do it. I'll live in submission to the doctrine and government of this church." That's the kind of public commitment that we're going to be making together as members eventually in the future. We put this on the application up front and, again, if I can say this, by showing you the public

commitment that we ask our members to make up front, it's our effort of trying to deal with you in good faith and that you wouldn't submit an application and sign an application, "I want to be a member," and then later on be told what the membership commitment is and say, "Well, I didn't know you were going to ask me to say that." This tells you up front what the commitment is and so it gives you an opportunity to read that and say, "Is that true of my heart or not?" If it is, then you can say, "Yes, I will make that affirmation publicly and I would like to be considered to be a member of Truth Community Church."

So that's kind of an overview of it. As elders, we believe that our application, that every line of that application can be supported biblically and that's the bottom line. We just want to be biblical and we want to be faithful to Christ who saved us, we want to be faithful to the word of God which changed our lives. That's what we want to do as a church. We believe in the authority of Scripture. We believe in the exclusivity of Christ and we exist to proclaim that and to defend it. Someone who is a candidate for membership would just say, "That's what I believe too. I want to be there with you." There's nothing more to it than that and there's nothing less than that. That's pretty comprehensive.

Larry? A question? "Is this application going to be online soon?" We don't have the online capacity to fill it out. That's a great question. It's possible that we could do that but right now the intention would be for you to fill it out by hand and turn it in to an elder. What we'll probably do. "Just to print it off, even? That we could do that so that you don't have to..." Yeah, what we can do is send it out in a pdf form by email and people could print it out at home and fill it out that way. There will also be more copies of it available on church on Sunday. Thank you, Larry. I know that's your way of saying you're with us and you and Judy have been that way from the start and I love you for it. Thank you, very much. That really encourages me that you would say that.

Here's initially what we want to do. We're looking to establish our charter membership and what I think that we'll do is we'll keep the opportunity to apply for membership as a charter member being one of the original founding members of Truth Community, if you want to be a part of that group, you should try to have your application in to us by the end of July. That's five weeks. If you have questions or concerns, that gives us time to work through that. If we find that there's just a flood of applications that we can't possibly process within that amount of time, we'll extend the deadline but July 31st gives us a date to work from and to work toward. It's possible that you may get a call from one of us elders and say, "Hey, could we meet? We want to talk." Don't let that frighten you. You know, we're just not elders like that. There just might be something that we want to clarify or we might just want to be encouraged by hearing more about your testimony. Something like that. We may ask to meet with you if everything's clear and we already know you well, then we may just let you know, "Yeah, you've been approved and you'll be one of our charter members."

So we'll see how that goes. It's not a strict process that's in place. We're just trying to start moving in this direction. Once we have that charter membership in place, then we'll plan

a service of some kind where we all make these confessions and commitments together. That's going to be a really sweet, precious time under the hand of God to realize that we're acknowledging what God has done in our midst over the past 2 ½ years and that we're committing ourselves to go forward together as a body publicly committed and we belong to you and you belong to us in the sense that we're in this together. We want to serve Christ together because we believe in the same direction and we love each other and we just want to be a part of this and we want the world to know about what we do.

So one last question from Spencer and then I'm going to need to close because it's hitting 8:30. "Just a clarification question. To use my family as an example, would you be expecting one application for me and one for Becky, or....?" Yes, separate application for each of you. Just to make a spiritual point off your very good question, we enter the kingdom of God individually. We come through as through a turnstile and only one person comes through at a time through faith in Christ so we don't go in as husband and spouse together, we don't go in as a family together. We have to each one come by repentance and faith in Christ and so that would be the theological reason for separate applications and that way we get your testimony, Spencer, we get Becky's testimony and we're able to see those things separately like that. Great question.

I'm excited about this. This is a major step that represents a lot of people doing a lot of work and a lot of faithfulness over 2 ½ years and more than that, it's an indication of the hand of God on us that we're in a position to do this. God is working in Truth Community. God is working in your lives and he's working in mine and this is a way of us seeing that we're part of something bigger than ourselves. It's more than just me. It's more than just you. There is something bigger than all of us that's taking place here and we get to be a part of it and that's exciting and that's reason to give thanks to God.

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TRUTH COMMUNITY FELLOWSHIP

An Introduction to Baptism

1. Our Position on Baptism

Truth Community practices believer's baptism. All Christians should be baptized after they repent of their sins and believe in Christ for salvation. Scripture teaches that Christ commanded baptism for His repentant disciples (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:38). We baptize in response to His command as did the early church (Acts 2:41, 8:36-38).

We baptize by immersion in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:18-20). The scriptural examples of baptism are consistent with immersion, not sprinkling or pouring. For example, Jesus "came up from the water" at His baptism (Matthew 3:16). In Acts 8:38-39, Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch "went down into the water" and "came up out of the water."

Baptism by immersion is an outward symbol that testifies to a prior inward reality. It pictures the believer's death, burial, and resurrection in Christ (cf. Romans 6:3-5, Colossians 2:12). It is a critical step of obedience in which the Christian publicly identifies with Christ and associates with the local body of believers, regardless of any personal cost his confession may entail.

Baptism is important, but it does not obtain salvation for us. No outward act can save us from our sins. The Bible says it is "by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). We must be saved in order to be baptized, not baptized in order to be saved.

2. Our Practice of Baptism

A church's approach to the symbol reveals what it thinks about salvation itself. Baptism is a joyful and reverent time. We rejoice because we love to see Christ honored by the obedience of His disciples. We are reverent because baptism symbolizes our deliverance from God's wrath in our salvation.

Our baptism services will usually take place on a Sunday evening at a local church with a baptistery. We will enjoy a time of singing and teaching before the actual baptisms. Each candidate will read the personal testimony he/she prepared beforehand (3-5 minutes in length) before being baptized by our pastor. Following the service, the audience will greet those who were baptized and encourage them for their obedience to Christ.

It is not the practice of Truth Community to baptize young children. We realize that differs from the customs of some, so we want to explain our reasoning here.

We love children and affirm salvation is available to every child who comes to Christ. The Lord is gracious to children and said, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matthew

19:13-15). Christ saves many at a young age. We rejoice in that manifestation of His mercy. We preach the gospel to children and encourage their every expression of faith.

Yet we are mindful of other biblical truth as well. Scripture repeatedly warns against the dangers of false assurance and self-deception (e.g., Matthew 7:21-27; James 1:22-25; 1 John 2:4). Children are not exempt from those dangers. They are vulnerable to sincere but misguided spiritual impulses that do not necessarily express saving faith—while lacking the development to examine themselves to see whether they are truly in the faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5).

We protect them from their innate vulnerability by refusing to hurry them to baptism at their first interest in Christ. We prefer to be alongside parents, teaching children over time, and allowing them room to manifest the sustained fruit of true repentance. If a child persists in the desire for baptism in that environment, the proper timing will become evident to everyone concerned.

This position serves Christian parents as they raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). It allows them to help the child see over time whether his/her life is consistent with conversion without a premature baptism confusing the issue.

A truly converted child will not lose the desire to be baptized. God works in a true Christian's heart to promote the desire for obedience (Philippians 1:6, 2:13). By contrast, a child who loses interest in baptism and obedience to the Lord was simply never truly converted. In such cases, time proves the child never should have been baptized at all.

These things are not to be rushed. Genuine conversion and lifelong discipleship to Christ are infinitely more important than early baptism. Thus, we believe there is wisdom in the general practice of postponing baptism until the junior high school years at the earliest.

3. Our Preparation for Baptism

We want your baptism to be meaningful to you and for you to pursue it with excellence unto the Lord. Preparation starts with the paper that you are now reading. We want you to understand our approach to baptism before you proceed and are available for any questions you may have.

If you still wish to be baptized, we ask you to prepare a written testimony with three sections: (1) how you came to be convicted of sin and your need for Christ; (2) your conversion to Christ; and (3) the things you see in your life that are consistent with biblical salvation. Our pastor will gladly review your testimony with you before scheduling you for baptism.

We will let you know what to wear for the baptism when we schedule the date. Immediately prior to the service, our pastor will explain the actual immersion so you know what to expect.

Your joy in giving your testimony before other believers will be a lasting highlight of your Christian walk. It's something to look forward to! God bless you as you seek to be faithful to Christ in this important step of obedience.