

Bylaws

Monte Vista Chapel
Turlock, California

Organized May 16, 1966

Name (Article I)

The name of this church shall be MONTE VISTA CHAPEL.

Mission Statement (Article II)

Our mission is to bring people into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and help them become his fully devoted followers.

This includes worshipping God (John 4:23, 24), proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:19, 20), edifying believers (Eph. 4:11-13) and promoting missionary interest and endeavors (Rom. 10:14).

Statement of Faith (Article III)

1. Doctrine of Scripture

We believe the Bible, a closed canon of 66 books, to be the only inspired written revelation of God. Men "were carried along by the Holy Spirit" to write the words of Scripture. These original writings (autographs) were without error; the copies and translations of Scripture are the Word of God to the extent they faithfully represent the original manuscripts. The Bible is God's infallible (true/reliant) and authoritative standard for Christian faith, thought and practice. Responsible reading and interpretation of the Bible must be done in light of its intended purpose of revealing God's will for the redemption of sinful people through his Son Jesus Christ. We are mindful of the responsibility and honor that is ours to "correctly handle the word of truth" (Psalm 119:105,160, II Timothy 2:15, II Timothy 3:14-17, II Peter 1:19-21).

2. Doctrine of God

We believe in the one, true and living God, the Creator, Ruler and Sustainer of the universe (Genesis 1:1, Deuteronomy 6:4, John 1:3, Colossians 1:16), who has eternally existed in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:19, John 1:1, John 10:30, Galatians 4:4-6, Hebrews 9:14).

3. Doctrine of Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God (John 1:1), who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, took on human nature yet was without sin (Matthew 1:18-25, John 1:1-3, Philippians 2:7, Hebrews 4: 15). Jesus is fully God and fully man (John 10:30, 38, Hebrews 1:3).

4. Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

We believe in the deity and person of the Holy Spirit, who convicts men of their sin and need for salvation (John 16:7-8), draws them to the Savior, causes them to be born again spiritually (regeneration) (John 3:5, 6:63), indwells every true believer and fills each one as he/she surrenders to his will (John 7:38-39, I Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 1:13-14, 5:8). He bestows spiritual gifts to serve God through his church (I Corinthians 12) and provides guidance, power and understanding of spiritual truth (John 16:13-15, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:1-16, 26-27, Galatians 5:16-25).

5. Doctrine of Man

We believe that man was created in the image of God as male and female (Genesis 1:27). All human beings are equal in value and designed for relationship (fellowship) with God and each other (Galatians 3:28, I John 1:3-4). Man sinned (Romans 5:12, 18) and thereby incurred not only physical death, but also spiritual death (separation from God); everyone is born with a sinful nature (Genesis 2:17, Isaiah 53:6, Romans 3:10-23, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 2:1-3).

6. Doctrine of Atonement/Justification

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died for sinners (Isaiah 53, Romans 5:6-8, I Corinthians 15:3, I John 2:2) as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice (II Corinthians 5:21, I Peter 2:24, I John 4:10), and that all who place their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ are justified (declared righteous) by grace alone on the basis of his shed blood (Acts 13:39, Romans 3:24, 4:24, 5:1, 9, Ephesians 2:8-9, Hebrews 9:22).

7. Doctrine of Sanctification

We believe that salvation is God's gift (which cannot be merited by anyone through his/her own effort), and everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ should desire to respond with a life characterized by gratitude and good works (Ephesians 2:10). After trusting in Christ, we must choose to cooperate with the Holy Spirit as he transforms us to Christlikeness (Ephesians 4:11-13, Philippians 2:12-13, Colossians 1:28-29). A believer loves God by walking in obedience (holiness) to the commands of God contained in Scripture and will persevere in it by faith in God's keeping power (Ephesians 1:4, II Timothy 1:9, I Peter 1:2, 5, 14-16). In the world but not of it (John 15:19, 17:14), we must relate to the world as both aliens/strangers (Hebrews 11:13-16).

and as ambassadors/witnesses (Acts 1:8, II Corinthians 5:18-20) to make Christ known among the nations (Matthew 28:18-20) as we “act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God” (Micah 6:8).

8. Doctrine of the Resurrection and Ascension

We believe in the bodily resurrection (John 20:11-29, Acts 1:3, 3:15, I Corinthians 15:3-8) and visible ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father in heaven (Luke 24:51, Acts 1:9-11, Ephesians 1:20-22, Hebrews 1:3) where he rules his kingdom (I Corinthians 15:24-28, Philippians 2:9-11), intercedes as High Priest for his people (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 4:14-16, 7:25) and prepares a place for each of them (John 14:1-4).

9. Doctrine of the Church

We believe that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23, Colossians 1:18), described as the “body of Christ” (I Corinthians 12:12-27), and is composed of all those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (John 1:12, 3:16-18, Acts 16:31, Romans 10:9-10, Ephesians 2:1-10). The purpose of the Church is to join God in bringing the gospel to all people groups (Matthew 28:18-20, Revelation 7:9).

10. Doctrine of Ordinances

We believe in the holy ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These two ordinances are direct commands to believers from Jesus. Baptism is an initiatory rite to the Christian faith (Matthew 28:19, Acts 8:34-39, Romans 6:3-4), and the Lord’s Supper is an ongoing memorial and proclamation of Christ’s death for our sins until he returns (Luke 22:19-20, I Corinthians 11:23-29).

11. Doctrine of Angels and Demons

We believe in the existence of immaterial spiritual beings who were created by God. Angels are sinless, ministering spirits whom God sends to serve the Church (Hebrews 1:14). Demons are fallen angels (II Peter 2:4) who chose to join Lucifer (Satan), a fallen angel himself, in his rebellion against God (Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:11-19). Cast out of heaven, Satan and his demons malevolently oppose God’s work on earth until they are “thrown into the lake of fire” (Ephesians 6:11-12, Revelation 12:7-17, 20:10).

12. Doctrine of Last Things/Future Events

We believe in “the blessed hope”—the imminent, visible return of Jesus Christ to Earth (Matthew 24:27, I Thessalonians 4:16-17, Titus 2:13). For all people there will be a resurrection of the body into the spiritual world and a judgment that will determine the fate of each individual (I Corinthians 15, II Corinthians 5:10, Revelation 20:11-15). Believers will enjoy everlasting life in the presence of their Lord and will be rewarded for works done in this life (I Corinthians 3:8, Ephesians 6:8). For rejecting Jesus Christ

unbelievers will be condemned to everlasting, conscious punishment, forever separated from him (Matthew 25:46, Revelation 20:15).

Membership (Article IV)

A. Commitment

Persons presenting themselves for membership in this church must subscribe to the Bylaws, including the Statement of Faith and the Commitment to Relational Accountability.

B. Qualification

An application for membership will be considered in accordance with the Membership Policy. Each membership applicant will give responsive, personal testimony of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as his/her personal Savior and Lord. The Board of Elders will either accept or reject an applicant and make public the names of those accepted.

C. Holy Ordinances

1. Baptism: Believer baptism by immersion is taught and practiced by this church. The mode of prior baptism will not be an issue in regard to membership and fellowship in this church.
2. Lord's Supper: Communion services will be administered at the discretion of the Board of Elders, not less than six times annually.

D. Termination of Membership

Membership in this church will terminate in the following ways:

1. By death.
2. By acceptance of written resignation.
3. By exclusion. Before any person is excluded or expelled from membership, he/she will be given reasonable notice of such proposed action and accorded an opportunity to be heard, in accordance with the Commitment to Relational Accountability as adopted by the congregation.
4. By inactivity. A person's name shall be removed from the church roll at the end of one year's inactive status.

E. Dedication of Corporate Assets

The properties and assets of Monte Vista Chapel are irrevocably dedicated to religious or charitable purposes. No part of the net earnings, properties or assets of this nonprofit religious corporation, on dissolution or otherwise, shall inure to the benefit of any private

person or individual, or any member, officer, or employee of this corporation. In liquidation or dissolution, all properties, assets and obligations will be distributed and paid over to an organization dedicated to Christian charitable purposes, provided that the organization continues to be dedicated to the exempt purposes as specified in Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3).

Government (Article V)

A. Board of Elders

1. Legal Authority

Recognized by the state of California as the legal Board of Directors of Monte Vista Chapel, a non-profit corporation [501(c) (3)], the Board of Elders is ultimately responsible for the management and control of the affairs of the church.

2. Powers

All corporate power (subject to limitations of the articles and to the provisions of the law requiring action to be authorized or approved by the members) shall be exercised by or under the authority of the Board of Elders. The business and affairs of this corporation shall be controlled by its Board of Elders. Subject to the same limitation stated above, the board, by the unanimous decision of those members present, shall have the following powers as well:

- a. To appoint, compensate and discharge officers and employees of the church and to create and appoint committees to carry out the work of the church. Such officers, employees and committees will have such powers and terms as may be delegated to them by the Board of Elders.
- b. To establish rules for the licensing and ordination of qualified candidates for the ministry by Monte Vista Chapel.
- c. To make rules and regulations not inconsistent with law or the articles of this corporation for the guidance of the officers and management of the affairs of the church and her organizations.
- d. To discipline members, as necessary, according to our Commitment to Relational Accountability.

3. Qualifications

Prospective elders are men who have shown involvement in the life and ministries of Monte Vista Chapel and have been a member for at least one year. They hold to the deep truths of the faith with a fully examined heart before God and are intentional in

following, obeying and becoming more like Jesus Christ. Their character, abilities and contribution in leadership and shepherding capacity will be confirmed through evaluation by the nominating committee.

Biblical standards for elders are listed (1 Timothy 3: 1-7; Titus 1:5-9 NIV) as follows: a person above reproach; faithful to his wife; temperate; self-controlled; respectable; hospitable; able to teach; not given to much wine; gentle; not quarrelsome; free from the love of money; manages his own family whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient; not a new convert; good reputation with outsiders; not overbearing; not quick tempered; loves what is good; is self-controlled and disciplined; upright; and holy.

4. Motive

Elders are not to serve in pursuit of personal agendas. An elder's primary motive is to help advance the kingdom of God through service at Monte Vista Chapel. If the same Spirit guides all the elders and all have the mind of Christ, there should be unity in the decisions they make (I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3; Phil.1:27, 2:2). If there is division, all elders should study, pray and seek the will of God together until consensus is achieved. Elders demonstrate unity as they live out this principle.

5. Role

The biblical role of the elder includes the following tasks:

- a. Shepherd the flock and lead through example (1 Peter 5:1-3)
- b. Teach and exhort (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9)
- c. Pray for the sick (James 5:14)
- d. Refute those who contradict truth (Acts 20:29-31; Titus 1:9)
- e. Manage the church (1 Tim. 3:5, 5:7)

6. Membership

The Board of Elders will normally be composed of a minimum of seven voting members. The term of all elected elders will commence on the day of the annual congregational meeting; outgoing member terms will expire December 31. Each member of this board will be selected for three years and may succeed himself for one additional three-year term. After an absence from the board for one year, he may be re-elected. The senior pastor is a permanent member, and he is the only paid staff member with the right to vote. Other paid staff members, if appointed to the Board of Elders, will serve in an advisory capacity only.

7. Election Process

- a. A nominating committee will be appointed to evaluate those members of this church to be submitted as candidates for the Board of Elders. This committee will be composed of five members from the voting membership of the congregation, appointed as follows:
 1. Three members possessing the same qualifications as members of the Board of Elders shall be appointed by the elders from the voting membership of this church.
 2. Two members shall be appointed by the Board of Elders from their membership whose terms do not expire.

The nominating committee shall serve for a term of one year. The senior pastor is recognized as an ex-officio member.

- b. The congregation will be provided with instruction regarding the biblical qualifications for elders and their scriptural role. They will be encouraged to prayerfully submit names of members for consideration as elders to the nominating committee after first clearing permission to do so with that person. Those whose names are submitted shall be informed and will be asked to engage in self-appraisal and personal evaluation in light of scriptural standards. Any person may withdraw his name at that point.
- c. The nominating committee shall review the names of the nominees, conduct interviews and then make final recommendations to the Board of Elders. The committee shall inform those nominees whose names were submitted by the congregation but not recommended to the board.
- d. At least thirty days prior to the annual meeting, names (with a written biography/testimony) of prospective elders will be presented to the membership. At the annual meeting the prospective elders will be presented to the members of the church for affirmation.

8. Interim Additions and Filling of Vacancies

The Board of Elders may add additional elders by submitting the name of each proposed candidate to the congregation in printed form. One month after submitting the name to the congregation, the board may, by unanimous agreement, appoint the proposed one. The candidate will be subject to affirmation at the next annual meeting of the congregation. The term of service is to be specified by the Board of Elders.

9. Meetings

Regular meetings shall be held. In all congregational, board and committee meetings, all rules of order not provided for in the articles will be decided by the chairman of the Board of Elders. A special meeting of the Board of Elders may be called by the senior pastor, the chairman or by written request of four members of the Board of Elders to the pastor or chairman.

10. Quorum

No meeting shall transact business unless the majority of the board is represented, except to adjourn, from day to day, until such time as may be deemed proper.

11. Records

The Board of Elders shall maintain (1) an open book of the minutes of all meetings for the elders and membership of this church, (2) adequate and correct books of account of the priorities and business transactions of the church, and (3) a membership register with all the forms prescribed by the law and showing all details required by law.

12. Appeals

Any church member with an appeal or request, desiring consideration by the Board of Elders, is encouraged to submit the same in writing to an elder, who will call it to the attention of the chairman for inclusion in the next agenda.

B. Deacons

1. Qualifications

All deacons must be members in good standing of this congregation and meet the following Scriptural (I Timothy 3:8-12 NIV) qualifications: a man worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, not pursuing dishonest gain, holding to the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience, first be tested (to be a member of MVC for a minimum of one year), whose wife is worthy of respect (not a malicious talker but temperate and trustworthy in everything), and who manages his children and household well.

2. Membership

Deacons serve as members of an appointed committee of the Board of Elders. The term of each deacon will normally commence on the day of the annual congregational meeting; outgoing member terms will expire December 31. A term will be for three years (on a rotating basis so that the terms of one-third of them will expire each year) and may succeed themselves one additional term (for a total of six

years). After an absence of one year, a deacon may be reappointed. There are to be twelve deacons appointed from the congregation, but the elders, at their discretion, may increase that number.

3. Appointment Process

The nominating committee (cf. V, A, 7a) will prayerfully select qualified individuals to fill annual vacancies. Candidates will be interviewed by the nominating committee and then officially appointed by the Board of Elders to serve. At their discretion elders may select a qualified member of the congregation to fill an unexpected vacancy in midst of a deacon's term. Term of service is to be specified by the Board of Elders.

4. Duties

Regular meetings shall be held to conduct business as it relates to the following four areas of oversight: finance and administration, policies and procedures, buildings and grounds, and benevolence. As part of the leadership team, there will be ongoing communication and a close, working relationship between the deacons and the elders. Deacons may perform other functions as assigned by the Board of Elders.

C. Congregational Meetings

1. Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of the congregation will be held the first Sunday of November. It will be announced in September at a time and place established by the Board of Elders for the purpose of affirmation of elders, the filling of vacancies, the transactions of the annual business of the church and any other business properly brought before the voting membership of this church.

2. Special Meetings

A special meeting of the congregation may be called by (1) the senior pastor, (2) the Board of Elders, or (3) by five percent or more of the members by written notice of the meeting including the matters to be considered at the meeting on Sunday at least fourteen days prior to the meeting.

3. Quorum

Fifteen percent of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

Officers (Article VI)

A. Election

The elders will elect officers of the church from their membership at the first regular meeting following the congregational meeting.

B. Officers

The officers will be a chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, treasurer and such other officers as the Board of Elders may deem necessary.

C. Term

The officers will hold office beginning in January for one year and/or until their successors are elected. They will be subject to removal or replacement at anytime by the unanimity of the remainder of the Board of Elders.

D. Duties

1. Chairman

The chairman will preside at all meetings of the congregation and of the Board of Elders. He will execute jointly with the secretary and in the name of the church all deeds, bonds, contracts and other obligations and instruments authorized by the Board of Elders or the congregation. He will be chairman of the pulpit committee to consider a new senior pastor, an ex-officio member of all committees and will be responsible for leadership of the public worship service in the absence of the pastor.

2. Vice-Chairman

The vice-chairman will be vested with all powers and will perform all the duties of the chairman in the event of the absence or disability of the chairman. He will also have such other powers and perform such other duties as may be assigned to him by the Board of Elders.

3. Secretary

The secretary will keep the minutes of all meetings (Board of Elders and congregational) in books provided for that purpose. He will attend to the serving of all notices of meetings of the congregation and the Board of Elders. He will execute jointly with the chairman and in the name of the church all deeds, bonds, contracts and other obligations and instruments authorized by the Board of Elders of the congregation.

4. Treasurer

The treasurer will keep or cause to be kept full and accurate account of receipts and disbursements in books to be kept for that purpose. He will disburse or cause to be disbursed the funds of the corporation as may be directed by the Board of Elders, taking proper vouchers for such disbursements. He will also render or cause to render to the Board of Elders, whenever they may require, account of all transactions and the financial condition of the corporation.

Finances (Article VII)

A. Source

The work of this ministry is entirely dependent upon the prayers, service and gifts of its membership and others. Funds will be received through free-will offerings, donations and special gifts as each member faithfully supports the work according to the principles of God's Word (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

B. Disbursement of Funds

Each year the Board of Elders submits a general budget to the congregation for their approval. Any major expenditure (debt retirement, loans, additional staff) or item not allowed for by the budget that is in excess of five percent of the total general budget must be submitted by the Board of Elders for the approval of the church membership.

C. Designated Contributions

Monte Vista Chapel may establish various designated and benevolent funds to accomplish specific goals. Contributors may suggest uses for their contributions, but all suggestions will be deemed advisory rather than mandatory in nature. All contributions made to specific funds or otherwise designated will remain subject to the exclusive administrative and accounting control and discretion of the Board of Elders. The elders may consider suggested designations, but in no event are they bound in any way to honor such designations since they are accepted only on the condition that they are mere suggestions or recommendations. Donors wishing to make contributions to designated or benevolence funds subject to these conditions may be able to deduct their contributions if they itemize their deductions. Checks should be made payable to the church with a notation that the funds are to be placed in the churches designated or benevolence funds. No fiduciary obligation shall be created by any designated contribution made to the church other than to use the contribution for the general furtherance of any of the purposes stated in the church's Articles of Incorporation and any amendments thereto.

D. Conflict of Interest Transactions

A conflict of interest transaction approved and documented according to the provisions of this section is not voidable because of its nature as a conflict of interest transaction and may not serve as the basis for imposing liability on any person having a direct or indirect interest as defined herein:

1. A “conflict of interest transaction” is any transaction with the church (including a compensation arrangement) in which any of the following persons has a direct or indirect interest: a director, an officer, an employee or volunteer who is in a position to influence approval of the transaction, or a “disqualified person” as that term is defined in Section 4958 of the Internal Revenue Code and related regulations. A person has an indirect interest in a transaction if (1) another entity in which the person has a material interest or in which the person is a general partner in a party to the transaction or (2) another entity of which the person is a director, officer, trustee, or disqualified person is a party to the transaction.
2. A conflict of interest transaction must be approved in advance by the Board of Elders after the material facts of the transaction and the conflict of interest are disclosed or known to the Board of Elders based on a good faith determination that the transaction is fair to the church and does not constitute as “excess benefit transaction” as that term is defined in Section 4958. Approval requires the affirmative vote of a majority (consisting of at least two directors) of the directors on the Board of Elders after excluding from final discussion and voting any director who has any direct or indirect interest in the transaction.
3. The decision of the Board of Elders must be recorded in their book of minutes . This record will include the following:
 - a. the terms of the transaction and the date it was approved;
 - b. the members of the Board of Elders present during debate on the transaction and those who voted on it;
 - c. the comparability data relied on and how it was obtained;
 - d. the actions taken with respect to consideration of the transaction by any member of the Board of Elders who had a conflict of interest; and
 - e. any other information required to establish a rebuttable presumption that the transaction is not an excess benefit transaction under Section 4958.

Senior Pastor (Article VIII)

A. Selection

A pulpit committee will be appointed by the Board of Elders to consider pastoral candidates for senior pastor. Pulpit committee members will serve from appointment until the calling of a senior pastor. Candidates must be ordained, meeting the same biblical qualifications as that of the Board of Elders, and must be in agreement with these bylaws.

B. Calling

With the recommendation of the pulpit committee to the Board of Elders for its unanimous approval, the call will be extended for an indefinite period after acceptance by three-fourths majority of those members voting by ballot at a regular or specially called meeting of the church.

C. Privileges

By virtue of his position, the senior pastor will be a member of the church, a member of the Board of Elders and an ex-officio member of all committees.

D. Duties

The pastor will be devoted to the service of the church, preaching and teaching the Word of God, administering the ordinances and faithfully giving himself to pastoral work. He will also give an annual report of the work to the church.

E. Resignation

The senior pastor will submit a letter of resignation to the Board of Elders.

F. Dismissal

All actions to dismiss the senior pastor will either originate in or be referred to the Board of Elders. If they deem dismissal necessary, a letter concerning the reason for the senior pastor's termination of office, along with the proposed date, time and place of meeting, will be submitted to the membership. A majority ballot of members voting will finalize the dismissal with the termination of the pastor's service at that time with his salary continuing for a minimum of two weeks.

Amendments (Article IX)

Amendments to these Bylaws may be approved at any regular or special business session of the church by a two thirds majority of those members voting. The proposed amendments must be presented by the Board of Elders in written form and discussed at a congregational business meeting at least three months prior to the time of its adoption, provided also that such alternatives do not conflict with the Articles of Incorporation of this church.

COMMITMENT TO RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

By the People of Monte Vista Chapel

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24).

The principles and practices described below apply to all who are members of Monte Vista Chapel.

A. Accountability and Discipline are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect his character, wisdom and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves his church so much that he sent his Son to die for her (Eph. 5:25). His ultimate purpose for his church is to present her as a holy and blameless gift to his Son (Eph. 5:27); thus, Scripture refers to the church as the "bride" of Christ (Rev. 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27).

While we strive to be holy and blameless, churches are made up of people who wrestle daily with sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). Therefore, God knows that church members will not live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

Mutual encouragement and accountability are an integral part of the process that the Bible calls "discipline." Our culture views discipline as negative, but from God's perspective it is restorative. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Ps. 94: 12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is primarily intended to be positive, instructive and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God wholeheartedly.

God's discipline also has a corrective purpose with the intent to protect his honor by bringing about cleansing in a person's heart (Ps. 51). When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right path. This process, sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep (Matt. 18:12-14). Restorative or corrective discipline is never to be

done in a vengeful or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal.6:1), protecting others from harm (1Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1Peter 2:12).

The leaders of this church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they strive to listen humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member of the congregation and, if necessary, to submit themselves to corrective discipline.

B. Most Corrective Discipline is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each person studies God's Word, seeks him in prayer, and draws on his grace to identify and change sinful habits and to grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or become so tangled in them that we can not get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, this church is committed to giving and receiving loving correction whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance (Matt. 18:15), Jesus commands that we ask other brothers and sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then the leaders may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, a teacher or other church leaders. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, the leaders will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If an individual persistently refuses to heed personal and informal correction--to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin-- Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his/her sin and repents, the matter usually ends there unless confession to additional people or further restoration is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin or cause division or disruption, our leaders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our leaders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including but not limited to private and public admonition, removal from office, withdrawal of normal fellowship and, as last resort, removal from membership (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

Our leaders will privately ask a straying individual to repent. If he/she does not, the elders may inform others in the church who may have a capability to influence or a willingness to pray for this person. This step to include others becomes urgent if others might be harmed by his/her behavior. Such a group could include close friends, a small group, a Christian Education class or the entire congregation if appropriate (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20).

If, after a period of time, the individual still refuses to change, then the leaders may formally remove him/her from membership and normal fellowship. They also may inform the church body of their decision and instruct the congregation to regard the individual as an unbeliever. This means that the congregants will be encouraged to look for opportunities to bring the gospel to him/her in love, remind him/her of God's holiness and mercy and call him/her to repent and put his/her faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

Often the natural human response to correction is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen the church's ability to rescue a person caught in sin, one must agree not to run away to avoid corrective discipline. Although a person is free to stop attending this church at any time, a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not be given effect until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage repentance and restoration and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If an individual leaves this church while discipline is in effect or is being considered and the leaders learn that he/she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage this person to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he/she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his/her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he/she might do to their members (See Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always lies at the heart of the disciplinary process. If an individual repents and our leaders confirm his/her sincerity, they will gladly imitate God's

forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

If an individual disagrees with the way discipline has been carried out, he/she may appeal the church's decision according to the established procedures set forth in our Reconciliation/Disciplinary Board Policy.

People who have been excluded from another church will not be allowed to be members until they have repented of their sins and have made a reasonable effort to be reconciled or until the leaders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of relational accountability, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10-11).