

The Role of the Elders

“For this reason I left you in Crete that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you.” (Titus 1:5)

“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock among whom the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” (Acts 20:28)

The New Testament is clear that the church is to be led by a plurality of godly leaders under the oversight and watchcare of elders. The elders are given ultimate responsibility and authority to see that the church remains on a true course biblically, that its members are being appropriately shepherded, that the body is being fed through insightful and accurate biblical teaching and that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders. They are to care about the spiritual and physical well-being of members, regularly praying for the sick. They are to guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or who are continuing in a pattern of sinful behavior. In doing so, they are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan, so that the truth of Christ will remain credible to both the congregation and the community (I Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31, Titus 1:9, James 5:14).

In response to the biblical pattern of leadership, members of the body are taught in scripture to lovingly support their leaders and submit to their leadership (Hebrews 13:17, I Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The Senior Pastor

Consistent with the New Testament concept of spiritual gifts, the Senior Pastor, like any member of the body, is uniquely gifted and should seek to minister primarily within his or her gift area.

In addition to the pastoring role as an elder, the Senior Pastor is primarily responsible to be a teacher of the Word of God and to provide strategic leadership and vision to the body. The goal of the Senior Pastor is to help transform believers through insightful and accurate presentation of biblical truth, equipping them to be the true “ministers” in the body. He or she must strive to teach and lead by word and example, and must stress both the understanding and the application of God’s truth.

The Senior Pastor should not be responsible to consistently minister in areas unrelated to his or her primary function and giftedness. To burden the Senior Pastor with other roles (administration, counseling, visitation, etc.) robs him or her of invaluable planning time, study time, and devotion to the Word. This can lead to watered down, inaccurate teaching or ineffective leadership, both of which, in turn, weaken the body. As shepherds of the church, the elders are responsible to appoint other leaders with complementary gifts to undertake areas and aspects of the ministry that cannot be filled by the Senior Pastor.

Teaching within the body should not be limited to the senior pastor. The New Testament emphasizes the need for teaching elders and/or the utilization of other members who are gifted in this area, thereby providing a variety of input and role models.

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The Executive Pastor

In addition to the pastoring role as an elder, the Executive Pastor is primarily responsible for the management and organizational leadership of the church. The Executive Pastor leads the staff by example, and provides positive and effective leadership that facilitates teamwork, relational integrity and professional excellence. He or she hires, develops and manages the Executive Management Team. His or her goal is to establish and maintain a sound plan of corporate organization to sustain continued growth towards meeting established ministry goals and ensuring financial stability. The Executive Pastor serves in a “behind the scenes” capacity facilitating, monitoring and evaluating programs, results, operations and development within the church. He or she also partners with the Senior Pastor and the Governing Board of Elders in casting the vision and drafting the long term plan in response to the leading of God.

Lay Ministers

The New Testament clearly states there are multiple spiritual gifts given to the members of Christ by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church. It also declares all believers in Christ are to serve as priests or advocates for each other within the church. Each member is commanded to use his or her gifts to build up one another. Therefore, most of the ministry of Church of the Open Door is done by lay ministers, each using the gifts given to him or her by the Holy Spirit, and facilitated by the pastoral ministry of the staff. Individual members with leadership gifts are given authority and responsibility consistent with their maturity and ability, and the manifested need of the community. As they minister it will become evident within the community that some lay ministers have the maturity, gifting and calling of eldership and may be asked to serve in that capacity.

Denominational Affiliation

Open Door is presently not affiliated with any denomination. We are a protestant church in the evangelical tradition which seeks to embrace the Word and worship, the sacraments and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Statement on Membership

Membership denotes those who belong to the community of faith (the church) of Open Door. Membership is important for the following reasons:

1. Transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ is facilitated by the Holy Spirit in the lab of relationships, especially committed relationships over time. Membership is a declaration that a person has committed to this journey of transformation in relationship with the community of believers at Open Door.
2. Membership is a means of being identified as a person who can be counted on to help build and sustain the vision and ministries of the church. Members also receive priority in the allocation of the resources and the solicitation of input regarding the vision and ministries of the church. Members also vote on specific issues and concerns as articulated in the bylaws.
3. Membership is a significant “defining moment” in the journey of faith. It is a public statement of faith, ownership, stewardship, and responsibility for the life and gifts God has placed in the individual member and this community of faith. It is an acknowledgment that these gifts are given to serve, not just ourselves, but God by ministering to others.

Membership Process

We take the Open Door Membership Covenant seriously and expect that members who sign it will abide by the covenant and be involved in our community. Currently, the membership process consists of completing The First Step class, being involved in the Open Door community, and completing The Journey class. If you have not yet begun to build some relationships with other members of Open Door through participation in groups, classes, or serving opportunities, we ask that you spend at least six months doing that before entering The Journey class. It is our desire that those pursuing membership both know and be known by existing members prior to entering into membership preparation. Taking The Journey class does not obligate you to sign the membership covenant, but it is designed to spiritually prepare those who wish to do so. At the celebration at the completion of The Journey, participants who choose to become members sign the Membership Covenant.

Membership Covenant

The Membership Covenant binds our community of faith to the process of life-long transformation. We believe it is important to consciously confirm your commitment to the process of transformation and the Open Door community of faith. The Membership Covenant is a two sided agreement or statement of intent between the leadership of Open Door and the individual members to live in a manner consistent with what we say we believe. A sample covenant can be seen on the following pages. Membership at Open Door is not transferable from or to other congregations.

Church of the Open Door – Participating Membership Covenant Part I

I affirm that I know Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I affirm the Statement of Faith, the Purpose, Vision, Core Values, and Core Beliefs and Practices of Church of the Open Door. I have completed “The First Step” and “The Journey.” While I am still in process, to the best of my ability and always by God’s grace, I will demonstrate my faith by:

Living my life in accordance with the Bible in the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

I will listen for and obey the direction and leading of the Holy Spirit.

I will take personal responsibility for the development of my life in all areas: body, soul and spirit.

I will participate in the sacramental ordinances of Church of the Open Door including public worship, biblical teaching, communion and baptism.

Living my life within the community of the Body of Christ at Church of the Open Door.

I will serve God and others through the use of spiritual gifts, practical care and respect for others and prayer.

I will give back to God and to others of the time, talent, money and other resources that God has given me.

I will love God and others by affirming and encouraging others, by service, by direct and honest communication.

I will submit to God and others; to godly, biblical authority and to the community of faith.

Living my life as a responsible participant in God’s plan world-wide.

I will love and honor my family.

I will love and pray for my neighbors and treat them with respect regardless of race, gender, or faith.

I will strive for God-honoring excellence, purity and integrity in my work and in my leisure time.

I will serve and give to others in need.

I will lovingly introduce others to Jesus Christ as I am given opportunity.

I will be a good steward of all the resources God has entrusted to me.

Signed

Date

Church of the Open Door – Participating Membership Covenant Part II

We, the community and leadership of Church of the Open Door, to the best of our ability and always by God's grace, commit to you as a member the following:

To live our collective life in accordance with the Bible in the power and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

We will listen for and obey the direction and leading of the Holy Spirit.

We are committed to the development of your life in all areas: body, soul and spirit.

We will make available the sacramental ordinances of public worship, biblical teaching, communion and baptism.

To nurture community of the Body of Christ at Church of the Open Door.

We will value your service to God and others. We will help you discover and use your spiritual gifts, offer you practical care and respect, and pray for you.

We will be wise stewards of the time, talent, money and resources you entrust to us as a gift to God.

We will love you by affirming and encouraging you, by serving you, and by being direct and honest in all our communication with you.

We will submit to God and to one another out of reverence for Christ. We will watch over the teaching and practice of our community of faith.

Together we will participate with you in God's plan world-wide.

We will love and honor your family.

We will love and pray for your neighbors and treat them with respect regardless of race, gender, or faith.

We will strive for God-honoring excellence, purity and integrity in our work and in our leisure time.

We will serve and give to others in need.

We will lovingly proclaim Jesus Christ.

We will be good stewards of all the resources God has entrusted to us.

Signed by the Chairperson of the Governing Board of Elders

Date

Conflict in the Church

Elders, staff, lay leaders, members, and attendees of Church of the Open Door may experience relational conflict within the community at some time. Conflict is a normal part of healthy, growing relationships and is an opportunity for personal and community growth and transformation. However, if not handled in a direct, humble and prayerful manner, conflict can cause division within the community of faith and discredit the name of Christ in the eyes of the wider community.

It is expected that all who attend or participate in ministry at Church of the Open Door deal with conflict in a manner consistent with Jesus' command in Matthew 18:15-20. Generally, grievances should be dealt with directly and privately between the parties involved before others are brought into confidence regarding the situation. No person should participate in a discussion regarding a conflict without first checking to see if the parties directly involved have attempted to resolve it. All rumors and potentially damaging second-hand information should be checked out directly. Do not repeat rumors. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached through direct interaction, then the person seeking resolution should ask a lay minister or pastor who has some relationship or authority relative to the other individual, for assistance in resolving the issue.

It is expected that staff employed by Open Door will abide by the problem resolution policy in the employee handbook entitled "Employee Concerns and Suggestions."

Lay grievances against a Governing Board Elder, or Executive or Senior Pastors may be submitted in writing to the Chairperson of the Governing Board of Elders only after direct resolution has been tried. Such a grievance may be given to a committee of the Governing Board of Elders to research and resolve. The Scriptural guideline in I Timothy 5:19 of receiving only accusations with two or three witnesses will be followed in cases of grievances against a person in leadership.

Disagreement

If any member has an issue(s) that cannot be resolved and they still find themselves opposed to the practice or teaching of the church, they shall not seek to disrupt its fellowship but shall quietly withdraw from its membership. A disorderly member may be subject to discipline and exclusion by official action of the church.

Discipline

Failure to preserve the Membership Covenant (included at the end of this section) may result in discipline by the Pastoral staff and/or Elders. If a member falls into either moral or doctrinal error, or causes division within the church, corrective discipline may be required. Any member found living contrary to the teachings of Scripture or the bylaws shall be admonished in accordance with the applicable principles of Scripture. In all cases, restoration and reconciliation shall be desired and prayerfully sought.

Statement on the Partnership of Women and Men in Ministry

We believe the Bible teaches that God created men and women and they equally bear His image (Genesis 1:27). God's intention was for them to share oneness and community (Genesis 2:23-24), even as the Godhead experiences oneness within the Trinity. Each had a direct relationship with God and they shared jointly the responsibilities of rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Genesis 1:26-28). However, human oneness was shattered by the Fall. The struggle for power and the desire to "rule over" another is part of the result of human sin. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

However, God has acted in Christ to redeem the human race, and to offer to all people the opportunity to be part of the New Community, His church. It is God's intention for his children to experience the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23). This means that old divisions and hierarchies between genders and races are not to be tolerated in the church, where all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). *(continued...)*

In the formation of the church at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on women and men alike, as had been predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:18). In the New Testament, women as well as men exercise prophetic and priestly functions (Acts 2:17-18; I Corinthians 11:4-5; I Peter 2:9-10). Further, the Spirit bestows gifts on all members of the New Community sovereignly, without giving anyone preferential treatment based on gender (Acts 2:1-21; I Corinthians 12:7,11). Every believer is to offer her or his gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8; I Peter 4:10-11). To prevent believers from exercising their spiritual gifts is to quench the work of the Spirit.

In all attempts to understand and put into practice appropriate relationships between genders in the body of Christ, our sole authority is the will of God as expressed in Scripture. A few passages appear to restrict the full ministry freedom of women. The interpretation of those passages must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their specific contexts. We believe that, when the Bible is interpreted comprehensively, it teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry.

Therefore, in our attempts to live together as a biblically functioning community, we are committed to the following values.

To provide opportunity for ministry based on giftedness and character, without regard to gender.

To pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between genders that led New Testament writers to describe them in terms of family: "brothers and sisters."

To use sensitivity in language that reflects the honor and value God desires for maleness and femaleness.

To be intentional, where appropriate, in overcoming sexist elements of our culture and to offer encouragement to women in areas where their giftedness has been traditionally discouraged.

To teach and model these values to members of our community, to the church, and to the world at large.

For further study and more complete discussion of the key scriptural passages pertaining to this issue, we recommend:

- Bilezikian, Gilbert, Beyond Sex Roles, Baker
- Barton, Ruth, Becoming a Woman of Strength, Shaw
- Hull, Gretchen, Equal to Serve, Fleming H. Revell
- Keener, Craig, Paul, Women, Wives, Hendrickson
- Mickelsen, Alvera, Women, Authority & The Bible
- Ogden, Greg, The New Reformation, Zondervan
- Spencer, Aida, Beyond the Curse, Hendrickson

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For further teaching on partnership in ministry visit the bookstore (onsite or online) or library. Women in Ministry by David Johnson; Tapes on the Masculine and Feminine from the PCM Conference with Leanne Payne and Mario Bergner.

Statement on Baptism

Adult

At Open Door, the Bible is the source of our beliefs, including our views on baptism. Throughout the New Testament, baptism is the means by which followers of Christ are identified.

We believe baptism is an important and vital step in the formation of Christ in us. Jesus was baptized (Matthew 3:13-17) and commanded all who believe in him to be baptized (Matthew 28:19-20). Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, practiced by individuals who are fully devoted followers. In the New Testament, when a person believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, he or she was baptized.

Baptism is a public profession of your faith that signifies our union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection and our fellowship with his church. Romans 6:4 says, "So through baptism, we were buried with Him in death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, so we too should live an entirely new life." We believe the immersion mode of baptism best illustrates the work of Christ. While validating the convictions of Christians who have a different understanding, the only form of baptism we practice is believers' baptism by immersion. We invite those who have been baptized as infants to re-affirm their baptism through immersion. When you were baptized as an infant, the intent of your parents was to bring you up in the Christian faith and life so you would become a follower of Christ. Your believers' baptism reaffirms your parents' desire for your life and expresses your choice to follow Christ. *(continued...)*

A person desiring to be baptized must:

Be a believer in Jesus Christ;

Attend a preparation class;

Be able to articulate his or her sacred story of faith in Christ;

Share his or her preparation process with a sponsor; and

Be willing to participate in the life and fellowship of the church.

Child

Throughout the Bible there are several references to children, the development of their faith and capacity to believe. We desire and pray that children will make a decision to believe in Christ. Your child's decision to believe in Christ is not diminished by his or her age or childlike faith. You, as the parent or guardian, have a responsibility to affirm a decision that is appropriate for the child's stage of faith development. When your child expresses a sincere desire to be baptized, you need to give serious consideration to their desire.

A child desiring to be baptized must:

Be a believer in Jesus Christ;

Attend a class with a parent/guardian;

Be able to tell about his or her relationship with Jesus and answer the question, "Why do you want to be baptized?" in an interview setting;

Together with the parent/guardian, work through special materials designed to guide the child into a deeper understanding of baptism; and

Continue to be a part of the life and fellowship of the church.

Statement on Child Dedication

In the Bible we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them, prayed for them, and told his disciples to welcome them. As a church we desire to bless you and your child and to stand with you in your desire to see your child grow in faith and the knowledge of the Lord.

We believe that child dedication is an invitation to the Spirit of God to work in the heart and life of a child, to bring him or her to faith in Christ. Dedication does not produce salvation, but it is the beginning of the journey toward faith. For Christian parents, child dedication is a sacred act of intentionally placing their child in the hands of the loving God. By dedicating their child they are affirming that only in God will their child find fullness of life.

We believe that by bringing your child to others in the faith community for prayer and blessing you are affirming the importance of the relationship between your family and the church. As a church we desire to bless you and your child and stand with you in your desire to see your child grow in faith and the knowledge of the Lord. We will pray with you for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to raise your child in love and truth.

Parents desiring to dedicate their child must:

Have an active faith in Jesus Christ;

Discuss/meet with pastoral staff for preparation; and

Teach and train your child in the ways of the Lord.

Statement on the Sanctity of Human Life

Church of the Open Door firmly believes that all life is sacred and is, in its broadest definition, pro-life. The fetus, infant, child, youth, adult, elderly, disabled, variety of races, poor, rich – all humans born and unborn, are bearers of God's image. We support personal and social responsibility for all human life.

Statement on Marriage and Sexual Purity

Church of the Open Door believes that marriage is sacred and represents the relationship between Christ and the believer (Ephesians 5:22-33). Therefore, marriage can only exist within the bonds of moral commitment and be sustained in an environment of purity and holiness.

We believe that sexual activity outside the bonds of marriage is sin. God's plan for a strong marriage requires living within the Biblical boundaries of moral fidelity. We also believe that singles are to live out their lives within the Biblical boundaries of abstinence.

We believe the heterosexual union between one man and one woman expresses the nature of God and is the design of God for marriage and the family. We believe there is grace and healing for those who struggle with homosexual desires, but that participation in same sex (homosexual) relationships or partnerships is sin.

For further teaching on sexual purity visit the bookstore (onsite or online) or library for the series entitled: The Pain of Porneia.

Statement on Divorce and Remarriage

Because God has established marriage as an indissoluble union, and since it is an earthly copy of the relationship between God and His people, it is to be kept inviolate.

However, because of the fallenness of human nature, the Scriptures permit divorce in the following cases as an accommodation to human sin for the protection of the innocent party:

Divorce for the cause of immorality—with the understanding that the obligation to maintain or reinstate the marriage may not be imposed upon the betrayed spouse.

Divorce for desertion—desertion being defined as behavior equivalent to abandonment of the marriage relationship.

In such cases, the betrayed or abandoned spouse is not bound. He or she is free to remarry in the Lord (though seeking repentance and reconciliation should always be the first recourse).

The remarriage of believers may not be approved when:

Divorce is being used as a vehicle to seek a different mate, since such pre-intent makes the divorce adulterous.

There is no evidence of repentance and brokenness over the circumstances that caused the divorce.

Restoration of the original marriage remains a viable option.

It is understood that the concerns above do not apply to divorces that have occurred before conversion. In light of the above, each case of divorce or remarriage will be dealt with on an individual basis from the perspective of God's inexhaustible capacity to forgive human sin and to restore broken lives. Church of the Open Door believes that a new relationship should not be pursued until the potential of a healthy reconciliation has been exhausted and time for personal recovery has passed. Therefore, we recommend that the premarital counseling and class process not begin until at least one year has elapsed from the time the divorce was made (legally) final. We strongly encourage couples to go through the DivorceCare class or similar program before seeking enrollment in "Before You Say I Do Again."

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Statement on Christian Giving

In the Old Testament book of Genesis, chapter 14, Abraham personified the spirit of giving that is taught in both the Old and New Testaments. We have come to refer to this spirit or attitude toward giving as the “spirit of the tithe,” and it is characterized by the following:

1. A belief that everything I have belongs to God. Abraham said, “Lord God most high, possessor of heaven and earth, everything I have belongs to you...” In this spirit, Abraham gave a tenth of what he had to the Lord because a tenth in that culture was symbolic of the whole. The Scripture teaches that we are caretakers of the earth and its resources which belong to God, and we will be held accountable for how we use these gifts.

In the Old Testament, God required the Israelites to give a considerable amount, much of it the first fruits of their harvest, to symbolize their gratitude, their dependence, and their trust in Him to provide for them. This discipline of giving was designed to keep their devotion centered on God as their loving provider, rather than on the material things themselves which leads to idolatry and greed. This required giving was also the means by which the needs of the people as a nation were provided for.

In the New Testament, this principle of giving remains the same. The parables of Jesus repeatedly illustrate that we are stewards and heirs, not owners, entrusted with the resources of the kingdom of God. We will be held accountable for how we manage these gifts. The discipline of giving continues to keep our focus on God as our loving provider and our only hope both spiritually and physically, and breaks the bondage of materialism (idolatry) and greed. The discipline of giving a tithe is not for God’s benefit, but for ours. God has need of nothing, but he wants us to be in relationship with Him and with others. Giving generously and sacrificially reconnects us to our dependence on God and His gifts to us; it also connects us with the needs and lives of others.

In the New Testament, the discipline of giving is also the means through which the needs of the people in the community of faith are met. We are commanded to care and provide for one another, for our spiritual leaders, and for the poor. What is not needed to provide and care for our families is to be used to provide for and minister to the needs of others, the church, and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

This belief has practical applications for how we live as believers. First, we must endeavor to live simply, and without debt as much as possible so that we are free to give and to go where God calls us. Second, we give, not only of our money, but also of our time, our talents, our expertise, our bodily strength and energy in service to God, who gave all of Himself to us. Third, we give priority in giving to the church as the community or family that cares for us, like we care for our own families, and we give to other organizations and individuals seeking to minister to the needs of others so that the sacrificial giving message of the Gospel is declared in both word and deed. Fourth, a very practical, legitimate, biblical way to affirm and maintain this “spirit of the tithe” is to tithe - to give a tenth as a symbol of the whole. This is a good beginning exercise of faith and gratitude, which will produce in you the ability to give even more generously, sacrificially and joyously as God directs.

2. A celebratory attitude of gratitude. As Romans 12:1 instructs, we give everything we have --our very selves-- in response to the great mercy and love of God which he pours out on us in Jesus Christ. The act of giving for the believer is one of deep thanksgiving and praise. It is an acknowledgment and celebration of our dependent relationship with God and his generous and extravagant provision. It is an expression of our faith and an act of worship.

At Open Door you will hear us refer to “The Spirit of the Tithe.” for further teaching on Giving visit the bookstore (onsite or online) or library for The Spirit of the Tithe (Nov 21, 1993, Nov 28, 1993 and summer of 2000).

The following are passages on giving:

Matthew 6:19-34, 19:16-30, 25:14-30
Luke 9:23-25, 12:13-34, 16:1-13, 18:18-30, 21:1-4
Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-37
I Thessalonians 4:11-12
I Timothy 5:8, 6:6-10
II Corinthians 9:6-15
Galatians 6:10
I Timothy 6:17-19
James 2:15-16
I John 3:16-18

Leviticus 27:30-32
Malachi 3:10
Matthew 23:23
I Corinthians 9:11-14
Galatians 6:6
I Corinthians 5:10-11
Ephesians 5:3
Colossians 3:5
Acts 20:35