

Southwest Bible Church Position on Church Membership

Why is church membership important?

The idea of church brings a lot of different pictures to our minds, from a small white building in a rural field, to TV preachers, to different congregations we have been a part of. When a group of people bring together a variety of definitions about church membership it can lead to confusion, frustration and even division as people clash over their differing assumptions of what a church should be like. There is one person however whose opinion about what a church should be like outweighs all others. That person is Jesus.

As the builder of the church **Matthew 16:18**, as the one who decides who will be a part of a specific church **Acts 17:26**, as the Chief Shepherd of the church **1 Peter 5:4**, and as the leader of the church, **Colossians 1:18**, the only opinion that matters when it comes to what the church should be like is Jesus'. And Jesus' priority for the church is that it should be *close*. Jesus' priority for the church is that the relationships within the church reflect the closeness of the trinity!

In **John 17:20-23** we see Jesus' desire for the church in his prayer for it. *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."* The kind of closeness that Jesus is praying for the church is something that is almost unimaginable today where we change jobs, locations, relationship and churches so easily. The kind of closeness that Jesus is praying for requires long term, transparent, sacrificial, and deeply committed relationships. That is why we believe that membership in a local church is vital for us to become the people that Jesus prayed we would be.

What does it mean to be a member of a church?

A member of a church is someone who makes an enduring commitment to join a specific body of believers in coming under the authority of Jesus Christ, living in obedience to the Bible, serving the church body, submitting to God's ordained authority structure and supporting the work of the church. A member of a church is someone who makes a commitment to engage with and stay in a church family in order to help those in it grow in godliness and to let the church help them do the same. A member of a church is someone who has recognized that God has called them to move past being a consumer of the ministries of the church to being a provider of the grace, truth and love of Jesus to others.

What is the Biblical basis for church membership?

1. Formal, committed relationships of accountability, or membership, were practiced in every New Testament local church. Every church in the New Testament had leaders (Elders, Pastors, Overseers, Shepherds, Bishops) who were held accountable by God for the spiritual care of the specific Christians in their churches. The Christians in every New Testament Church were held accountable by God for their submission to their specific leaders.

Hebrews 13:17 *Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13* *We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. 1 Timothy 5:17* *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.* Formal church membership is essential for individual Christians to know who to obey and submit to as their spiritual leaders and it is essential for pastors to know who God is holding them accountable for.

2. The New Testament describes local churches as a flock, temple, body, and household. These descriptions are used specifically of local churches (**Acts 20, Ephesians 2, 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, 1 Timothy 3**). Each of these metaphors has a clear distinction of who is part of the church, and who isn't.

3. The instructions for pastoral oversight and spiritual leadership were to care for "all the flock" (**Acts 20:28-31, 1 Timothy 3, Philipians 1:1, Titus 1**). Since church leaders are accountable for the souls of the flock under their care (**Hebrews 13:17**), and specifically for "those in your charge" (**1 Peter 5:3**) church leaders need to know who is a member of their flock and who specifically is in their charge.

4. After the death of Ananias and Sapphira **Acts 5:13** says "None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem." This implies there was a distinction between people who had joined the church and people who had not.

5. The instructions for church discipline in **Matthew 18:15-17, & 1 Corinthians 5** explain when to remove a person from the church and treat them like an unbeliever. Since unbelievers were welcome at worship, removal meant removing them from the formal association of believers that made up the church. Also, if there was no church membership, there would be no defined group to take up the sensitive and weighty matter of church discipline. More specifically, in **1 Corinthians 5:12-13** Paul makes a very clear distinction between people who are in a church and those who are not when it comes to matters of church discipline.

6. One of the evidences that someone is in fact a Christian is that they will love and serve the Church. For most Christians this means that they are serving a particular local church in a committed and sacrificial way (**John 13:2-16 & 35, Acts 2:42-47, Romans 12:1-13, Ephesians 4:11-16, Philipians 2:1-11, 1 Peter 4:10**).

Expectations of the Members Southwest Bible Church

Worship –The purpose of our church is to glorify God. Worship moves our hearts toward the glory of God and away from lesser things. We ask our members to regularly participate in our weekly corporate worship services. *2 Corinthians 3:18* *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

Discipleship – We ask all of our members to consistently participate in smaller discipleship communities that allow for us to encourage one another toward Christlikeness. *Matthew 28:18-20* *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Mission - As a member of our church you are joining us in living as missionaries to our city by prayerfully engaging the people around us, lovingly investing in their lives, and showing them how they can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *John 17:18* *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world,"*; *John 20:21* *"As the Father has sent me," Jesus said, "even so I am sending you"*.

Calling and Service– *Acts 17:26* says: *"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live."* Becoming a member of Southwest Bible Church is a declaration that you believe that God has brought you to this place at this time and is calling you to use the gifts that God has given you to help our Church become all that God wants it to be. To that end we ask each member to regularly service in a ministry to or through our church. *1 Peter 4:10* *"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*

Support – As a member of our church we ask that you make a commitment to faithfully support our church financially and to faithfully pray for our Church. We ask that the primary way you give to the kingdom of God be through our church. *1 Thessalonians 5:25* *"Brothers and Sisters, pray for us."*; *1 Corinthians 16:2* *"On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made."*; *Proverbs 3:9* *"Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;"* .

Submission to the biblical leadership of the Church Elders. *Hebrews 13:17* *Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Hospitality – We ask all members to help us develop an invitational culture by greeting people you do not know and if they are new, going out of your way to personally guide them so they can feel at home and know someone they can ask questions to. *1 Peter 5:14* *"Greet one another with a kiss of love."*; *Romans 12:13* *"...Practice hospitality."*; *Hebrews 13:2* *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it."*; *1 Peter 4:9* *"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling."*



Principles and Practices

This document contains the operating guidelines for Southwest Bible Church. It is intended to be a dynamic document and will likely be revised as the church grows and takes on a greater scope of ministry. Revisions will be made according to section V. below.

I. Government

Scripture provides general principles that serve as guidelines for church leadership. These guidelines have been followed in formulating a philosophy of government for Southwest Bible Church as follows: (Acts 6:3, 14:23, Col. 1:18, 1 Tim. 3:1-7, 5:17, Titus 1:5-9, Heb. 13:7, 17).

A. Christ (Col. 1:18)

Christ is the true source of all the Church is and does, and His glory is to be the objective of every act, function, and motive of the Body, both individually and corporately. (1 Cor. 10:31)

Christ has provided His thoughts and His direction for the Body in the Word. The Bible reflects and contains His mind, His commands, His counsel, and His purpose for every believer. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17)

The Body is to conform to His Word, thus carrying out His will to His glory. That is the Body's reason for being. (Col. 3:15-17)

B. Elders

Hill Country Bible Church has chosen to be an elder led church. The elders, as overseers of the local church, are responsible for the spiritual health of the Body. They are to glorify Christ by serving the Body according to the biblical principles of love and care. In practice, the elders establish the guidelines and policies for conducting services, programs, and the general conduct of church business. They are to lead by precept and example, realizing they are accountable to the Lord Jesus Christ for their efforts. (Heb. 13:17, Acts 20:24,28)

1. Qualifications

The qualifications for an elder are set forth in the scriptural passages 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:1-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-4. He is to be self-controlled, hospitable, able to teach, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, not a recent convert. He has a good reputation with outsiders, is not overbearing or quick-tempered, loves what is good, is upright, holy, disciplined, above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, respectable, not given to drunkenness, manages his own family well, sees that his children obey him, does not pursue dishonest gain, and keeps hold of deep truths. An elder demonstrates through leadership a commitment to the purposes, vision and the core values of the church.

2. Selection

Any man who aspires to the office of elder is first approved by a vote of the elders, then a vote of the membership assembled at a duly called congregational meeting.

3. Number and Term

There will be a maximum of seven elders at any time. Each man will serve for a three-year term. The Elder Board may extend an elder's term one year by majority vote, not to exceed five consecutive years. Upon conclusion of his term, he must function in a non-elder role for at least one year before becoming eligible for eldership again. A man filling an unexpired term of two years or less may be eligible to waive this one year at the end of his term and serve an additional term subject to the above prescribed selection process. The Senior Pastor serves as a perpetual elder and is one of the seven. The elders shall annually select a chairman to direct elder and congregational meetings. In the absence of the chairman, the elders will select an interim chairman.

4. Replacement

A vacancy created by departing elder may be filled in accordance with B.2 above. The new elder will complete the departing elder's term.

5. Dismissal

The dismissal of an elder because he is not fulfilling the responsibilities and/or qualifications of an elder is the responsibility of the other elders and is accomplished by a vote of these elders. The exception is the Senior Pastor whose dismissal is covered in III B., below.

C. Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor is the spiritual leader of the congregation. In this unique position he provides for the equipping of the saints through a regular ministry of preaching, training, and encouraging the congregation as a whole. His goal is to mature the saints through insightful and accurate presentation and proclamation of the Word, stressing both the understanding and application of divine truths and principles. He provides vital input on planning, ministry challenges, and biblical guidance to the elders during the decision-making process. He is often the primary agent in the implementation of the various programs and ministries undertaken by the church. He is accountable to the elders for the discharge of his ministry. He is also responsible for the management of the church office and supervision of all staff. (1 Tim. 4:11-13, 15, 16; Eph. 4:11, 12; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, 4:2-4; Matt. 5:13)

D. Deacons

At the discretion of the elders, deacons may be appointed to assist the elders in the discharge of the church ministry. They are delegated the authority for the execution of ministry. The elders appoint each deacon annually. At the end of each year the elders can invite individual deacons to pray about serving another year, with no term lasting more than 2 concurrent years. Deacons must be members of Southwest Bible Church and exhibit qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

E. Staff

1. Definition

Staff members are defined as paid employees of the church, whether full or part-time.

2. Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor will be recruited and hired by the elders with the approval of the voting membership. His salary and benefits will be established by the elders and reviewed annually.

3. Church Staff (other than Senior Pastor)

The Senior Pastor is the manager of the church staff. With the approval of the elders, the Senior Pastor may delegate responsibilities within the staff for the purpose of carrying out his responsibilities.

The Senior Pastor is responsible for the recruitment and management of all staff. Their salaries and benefits are established by the elders upon the recommendation of the Senior Pastor. Final offers of employment or termination require mutual agreement between the Senior Pastor and the elders. However, the hiring and termination of non-pastoral staff is at the discretion of the Senior Pastor within the constraints of the approved budget. Except for the Senior Pastor, staff members will not be eligible for elder nomination.

4. Performance Review

The performance of staff members will be reviewed on at least an annual basis. The Senior Pastor is responsible for church staff reviews. The elders review the Senior Pastor.

II. Membership

A. Qualifications

Membership in Southwest Bible Church is open to all who testify to two elders, or two elder delegates of their salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and agree with both the Purpose and Doctrinal Statements. Associate membership is available for those under eighteen years of age who testify to two elders, or two elder delegates of their salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Associate membership does not include the right to vote. Elders, pastors and deacons must be members of Hill Country Bible Church.

B. Expectations

Members of Hill Country Bible Church are expected to support their church by participation in worship, instruction and giving of their time, talents, and treasures to the accomplishment of the purposes of the church. Members should take seriously the Great Commission and the admonition of the Lord Jesus Christ to love one another. (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Cor. 9:7, Heb. 10:25, John 13:35)

C. Term

The term of membership is permanent unless one of the following occurs:

1. The member is not in attendance at regular services for a period of six months.
2. The member asks to be dropped from the membership roll.
3. The member is dismissed due to action, behavior, or speaking in opposition to the Purpose or Doctrinal Statements of Southwest Bible Church (see Dismissal below).

D. Dismissal

The dismissal process for any member of Southwest Bible Church must follow the pattern established by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. If the member refuses to repent and seek restoration of fellowship, as determined by the elders, that person's membership is terminated.

E. Reinstatement

A former member in good standing can be reinstated to membership following an interview with at least two elders and a one-month period of regular attendance. A dismissed member will be reinstated by repenting and seeking restored fellowship with the elders and then if deemed appropriate by the elders with the church assembled.

III. Voting

A. Elders

Voting within the eldership is preferably unanimous, but knowing the frailty of mankind, a simple majority will suffice. Exceptions are voting on major indebtedness, the purchase or long-term leases of real or other property, and the selection or dismissal of elders and amendments to this document. These exceptions shall be approved with no more than one dissenting elder vote.

B. Members

Voting by the membership is required for the following: The purchase of real property, calling or terminating a Senior Pastor, the appointment of elders, lease agreements of over 60 months and amendments to this document. A two-thirds majority vote of those present and eligible to vote is required for approval of the above-mentioned items.

IV. Congregational Meetings

A. Annual Meeting

In order to effectively communicate major issues and decisions, an annual congregational meeting will be scheduled in January.

B. Agenda

An Agenda will be prepared and distributed to the congregation the Sunday prior to that meeting date. Agenda items submitted by a voting member(s) will be placed on the Agenda at the discretion of the elders. Agendas for meetings called by the voting members will be part of the petition calling the meeting. In case of emergencies, the requirement for distribution of Agendas may be waived.

C. Special Meetings

A congregational meeting may be called by petition of 10% of the voting membership of the Church. Special meetings may be called by the elders as required.

D. Announcement

Except in extreme emergencies, congregational meetings will be announced in the church bulletin two Sundays in advance of the meeting date.

E. Quorum

The voting members present at a duly called congregational meeting will constitute a quorum.

F. Attendance

Congregational meetings are generally open to regular attenders and members alike, however voting is limited to members 18 years of age or older.

V. Amendments and Revisions to these Practices

Amendments and revisions to these Practices must be presented to the congregation at least one week prior to a congregational meeting and approved by a vote in accordance to paragraph 3B above.

Southwest Bible Church Membership Covenant

Believing that all men are sinful and that the just sentence of that sin is eternal separation from God (*Romans 3:23; 6:23*) and that Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin (*Romans 5:8*) and having personally received Jesus Christ as my Savior (*John 1:12*)

- and -

having completed the membership process, being committed to the doctrine, purpose, strategy and structure of Southwest Bible Church, I commit myself to God and to the other members to live out the following:

- Believing that God has called me to be a part of this church and to glorify God as my highest goal.
- Consistently participating in corporate worship.
- Discipling others and being disciplined through consistent participation in smaller discipleship communities that give us the opportunity to encourage one another toward Christlikeness.
- Living as missionaries to our city by prayerfully engaging the people around us, lovingly investing in their lives, and telling and showing them how they can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Supporting our church by praying for it and by regularly giving sacrificially.
- Regularly serving inside and outside the church.
- Showing hospitality to guests and other members to make them feel at home.
- Submitting to the biblical leadership of the church elders.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please print your name, as you desire it to appear on your membership certificate.

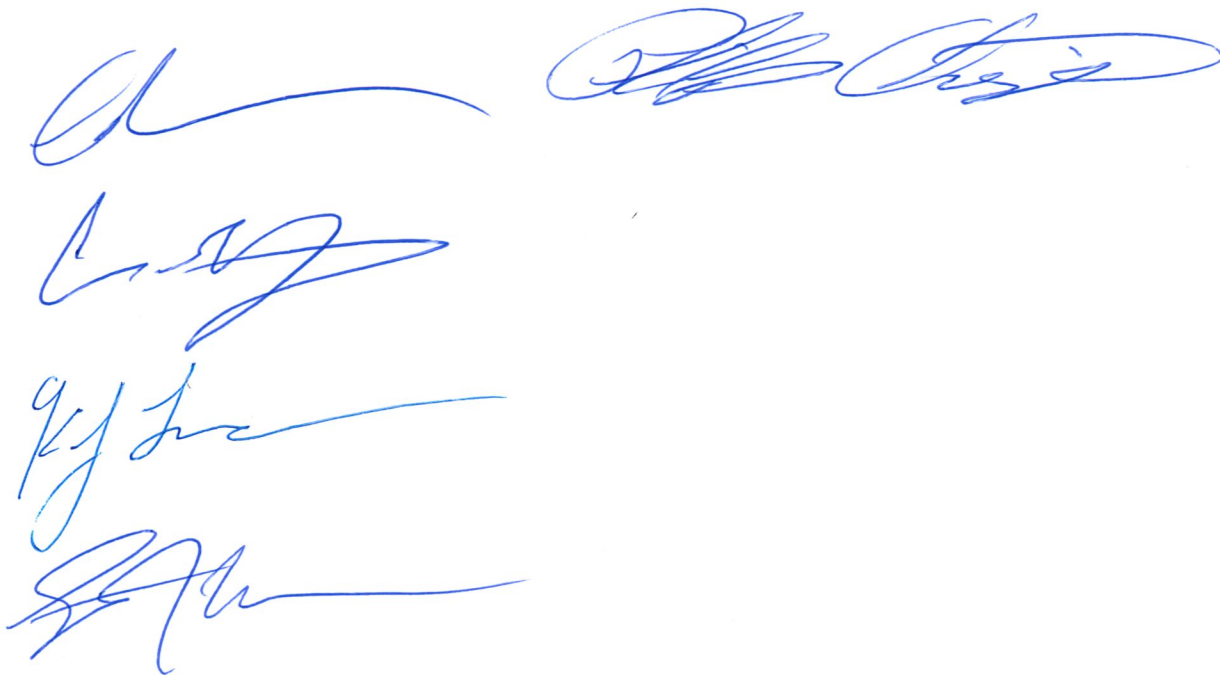
Pastor / Elder Signature _____

Pastor / Elder Signature _____

In response to this commitment, the elders will take the responsibility to ensure Southwest Bible Church will remain committed to the following:

- Prioritizing the glory of God above all else.
- Consistently teaching God's Word and providing opportunities for corporate worship that seeks to glorify God.
- Developing and discipling members and providing intentional opportunities to enter into discipleship in pursuit of Christlikeness.
- Leading and encouraging the hearts of our church to invest in the lives around us and to participate in Jesus' Great Commission.
- Responsibly stewarding the resources God has provided to us.
- Leading members of the church to follow Jesus' example of sacrificial service.
- Welcoming those both inside and outside the church to experience the love of Jesus and join us in showing His love to others.
- Submitting to the will of God, to Jesus as the Head of the Church, to the Holy Spirit, and to the Bible as God's inerrant word.

Elder Signatures:



Handwritten signatures of church elders in blue ink. There are seven distinct signatures arranged in two rows. The top row contains two signatures, and the bottom row contains five signatures.