

## **Cross Walk Church**

### **Position Statement: Church Membership**

It is the conviction of the Elders of Cross Walk church that voluntary and intentional membership in a local church is both an obligation and a privilege. In a day when many have sought to soften the biblical teaching on membership, it is our purpose to clearly and biblically assert that membership in a local family of believers pleases God who designed the church and honors Christ who loved the church and gave Himself for it.

All Christians must understand that the universal church and the local church are inextricably linked together. While the word church (ἐκκλησία - *ekklēsia*) is used 108 times in the New Testament, at least 90 times the word refers to a specific local gathering of believers (a local church). Too many modern Christians want to be members of the universal church but want nothing to do with membership in a local church. The Epistles were written to specific local churches. For example, Paul told the Colossian Christians: *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea* (Colossians 4:16 ESV). Each town had its own local church.

The next thing that must be understood is this: God never gave any commandments to the universal church. There are no universal elders or deacons. Every instruction concerning behavior in the church was directed to local churches. Paul told Timothy: *I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth* (1 Timothy 3:14–15 ESV). Notice that Paul called the local church the “household of God” and wanted people to behave decently and in a God honoring way in the local church (household). The same Greek root word used for household [οἶκος (*oikos*)] in 1 Timothy 3:15 is used just a little later in 5:8 where Paul states: *But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever* (1 Timothy 5:8 ESV). It is abundantly clear that the household [οἰκεῖος (*oikeios*)] identified in the latter verse refers to a close familial relationship where one is an intimate member of that household. Paul’s choice of the word “household” in 3:15 intentionally conveys membership in a local family in the same way that household (5:8) conveys that a relative must provide for those of his own family or he has denied the faith.

In a local church family, God has appointed elders as the leaders. In Acts 20:28, Paul was addressing the Ephesian elders and told them: *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood* (Acts 20:28 ESV). The phrase “in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers” is a very strong statement. God in His sovereignty, made some men overseers. The word “made” [τίθημι (*tithēmi*)] means “to appoint or cause to be”. The blessing of God for the local church is that God appointed godly men to lead the church and care for it. Since the church is made up of people not brick and mortar, then we can conclude that God appointed elders to care for the people who make up the local church in which God has placed them as overseers. Overseers (elders) are only responsible for those who become members of the local flock. A Christian must either submit to God by joining himself or herself to a local flock, submitting to the oversight of the elders or refuse to submit and become a person who wanders from flock to flock without any spiritual oversight. This lack of connection to the family of God leads to confusion and ultimately

false doctrine. This is one of the fundamental problems of the modern Christian, and is ruining whole households (Titus 1:11).

The local church must be led by godly men who take their responsibility seriously. These elders are responsible for the spiritual and moral health of the local church and will stand before the Chief Shepherd one day and give an account for those under their care:

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 ESV).

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 (Hebrews 13:17 ESV).

Notice that these verses teach that the godly leaders are placed “over” Christians who are commanded to submit to their leadership with respect. Some might argue that these believers are to submit with respect only when their godly leaders teach them obedience to overt biblical commands. However, a closer look at the text gives us a better view. If the issue were the clear commands of Scripture, then it only stands to reason that the text would have said something like “obey the scripture as your leaders teach it to you”. However, because the text says nothing about submission to the scripture but simply states that Christians are to obey and submit to their leaders who keep watch over their souls, we can accurately deduce that there are things which are not clearly taught in Scripture which Christians should respectfully submit to. For example, the Bible says nothing about how bills should be paid, when is the right time to build, what songs and what type of songs should be played and sung, what time should services be held, etc. In all areas where the leaders are not asking (or demanding) that Christians sin by violating the clear commands of God, then cheerful, respectful obedience can be reasonably expected.

Since church membership is taught in Scripture (though not as “thus saith the Lord”) through biblical principles and contexts, it is the responsibility of the true believer to cheerfully submit to this teaching and seek to become a blessing to the local family of believers. To argue any other way from Scripture is to seek to read one’s own opinion into the text and ultimately rebel against God’s appointed leaders.

Our desire is that every believer who attends Cross Walk Church will move from attender to member...cheerfully and purposefully. The process of church membership is very intentional. Wayne Mack and David Swavely have identified five benefits to church membership in their book entitled *Life in the Father’s House* (pp23-26).

1. Membership clarifies the difference between believers and unbelievers.
2. Membership causes the visible church to better reflect the invisible church.
3. Membership is essential to an orderly administration of the church.
4. Membership promotes involvement from those on the “fringes” of the church.
5. Membership provides an opportunity to educate people about the nature and distinctives of the church.