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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLESHIP-ORIENTED  
NEW MEMBERS CLASS FOR FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
STERLING, COLORADO

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
John Eugene Roberts

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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLESHIP-ORIENTED  
NEW MEMBERS CLASS FOR FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
STERLING, COLORADO

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To Debbie, Laura and David,

God's greatest gifts to me

in this life.

Thanks for

not letting me give up.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BAGD* Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*
- BDB* Francis Brown, R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*
- ICC* International Critical Commentary
- LXX* The Septuagint
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*
- TDOT* *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*



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## PREFACE

In a project of this scope and duration, it is perhaps impossible to recall and appropriately thank all those whose contributions made it possible. Dr. Thom Rainer, former Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism, challenged me to take new strides in leadership. His successor, Dr. Chuck Lawless, expressed a deeply pastoral understanding of some difficulties I faced and encouraged me during a few dark and disturbing months not to give up my efforts to complete this project. Dr. Paul Chitwood demonstrated Christ to me in his willingness to endure my foibles and delays.

Certain members of my church have been especially supportive throughout this project. I would mention some of my personal intercessors, who have frequently encouraged me to press on. Willard and Shirley Inskeep, friends of my family for over two decades, and Roy and Angela Norling, weekly prayer partners of mine throughout my studies, have offered blessing upon blessing.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the support staff in the Billy Graham School office. Secretaries and assistants at various levels have endured my frustration, answered my questions, and calmed my fears for six years. They have certainly gone the extra mile in their assistance of me.

No amount of written appreciation is adequate to express my thanks to my wife, Debbie, for her patience and support during this unexpectedly long journey. I am confident that her patient prayers have sustained me more than I will ever know.

Finally, I thank my Lord Jesus Christ for his sustaining influence throughout

this project. His grace is indeed sufficient. His teaching and example to persist without giving up (Luke 18:1; Heb 12:1-3) have ultimately motivated me to complete this project.

To him belongs the glory, both now and forever, world without end. Amen.

John E. Roberts

Sterling, Colorado

December, 2011

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE MINISTRY PROJECT

#### **The Purpose of the Ministry Project**

The purpose of this project was to develop and implement a discipleship-oriented New Members Class in First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado to include all the new members ages twelve and up, beginning in the winter of 2010-11.

#### **Goals of the Ministry Project**

The first goal of this project was that the lay discipleship leaders and the pastoral staff discover more precisely the needs of the new and prospective members of First Baptist Church in Sterling, Colorado, so that the design of the class will be specific to the church and community. Previous membership classes have been generic in nature, and thus less than effective.

The second goal of this project was to develop a New Members Class that will both attract and motivate new and potential members to participate in the class. Despite occasional efforts over the last decade to encourage more participation in membership classes, very few potential members have done so.

The third goal of this project was that participants develop foundational personal spiritual disciplines that enable them to read, study, understand, and apply Scripture in their lives. Believing that the Word of God has power in itself to change lives, First Baptist Church must expect its members to learn and obey the Bible.

Undergirding this goal was the need of the entire church to establish a culture of regular Bible study that goes beyond the mere reading of devotional pamphlets.

The fourth goal of this project was that participants discover their spiritual gifts and commit to use them in one or more of the ministries of First Baptist Church. Accompanying this goal is the New Testament's explicit denial of the concept of so-called inactive membership in the Body of Christ.

The fifth goal of this project was that participants become active members of Sunday school in First Baptist Church. The New Members Class will be conducted during the Sunday school hour, and, at its conclusion, participants will be invited and encouraged to continue their Sunday school participation in an existing class.

### **The Context of the Ministry Project**

First Baptist Church in Sterling, Colorado is located in the southwest quadrant of the small city of Sterling. This area was formerly considered one of the more desirable neighborhoods in town. The building occupies approximately two acres of land. It has sixty-five off-street parking spaces in three paved parking areas on site, with ample street side parking immediately adjacent to the building. The sanctuary has a designed seating capacity of 240, but the functional capacity is approximately 200. The building has a flexible education space, which can be configured into 18 small classrooms or 7 large classrooms, plus 3 preschool and/or nursery areas. There are 2 separate office areas: one for the pastor, with the secretary's office adjoining, and another for the children's minister. The current building is 42 years old, and has recently undergone extensive repairs and upgrades to the heating and air conditioning systems, the roof, windows, sound system, storage facilities, and exterior fascia.

## **The Sterling Community**

Sterling is a small city on the northeastern plains of Colorado, approximately 120 miles northeast of Denver, situated along the South Platte River. It is the seat of Logan County. The population of Logan County was 20,574 in 2000, and increased by 10.8 percent to 22,709 in 2010.<sup>1</sup> The population of Sterling was 11,360 in 2000 and 14,777 in 2010.<sup>2</sup> Though the economic base was almost exclusively agricultural in the past, the recent growth of the community indicates an increasing shift to the retail service and technology sectors. The five largest employment sectors in the community are retail and services, corrections and law enforcement, health-care, education, and information technology.<sup>3</sup>

## **Pertinent Demographics of the Sterling Community**

A Percept Ministries religious-demographic study was consulted for information regarding the zip-code that covers the Sterling community, which is 80751. This 2005 study indicated Sterling has been growing faster than the national average since the mid 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

Lifestyle diversity is relatively high for such a small rural community, indicating that many kinds of people are available for the church to reach. Thus, church

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<sup>1</sup>U. S. Census Bureau [on-line]; accessed 27 August 2011; available from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/08/08075.html>; Internet.

<sup>2</sup>Colorado Department of Local Affairs [on-line]; accessed 27 August 2011; available from <http://dola.colorado.gov/dlg/demog/2010censusdata.html>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>City of Sterling [on-line]; accessed 17 August 17 2006; available from [http://www.sterlingcolo.com/?page\\_id=206](http://www.sterlingcolo.com/?page_id=206); Internet.

<sup>4</sup>Percept Ministries International, *First View, 80751* (Rancho Santa Margarita, CA: Percept Group, 2005), 3.

growth opportunities would seem to abound in the community. The community is, however, remarkably closed to participatory religion. In Sterling, people who say they have “no religious preference” number almost 50 percent higher than the national average.<sup>5</sup>

In May 2004, several local clergy conducted an informal, non-scientific phone survey of the average worship attendance of Logan County churches, which seemed to anticipate Percept’s assessment at this point. According to this survey, only about 30 percent of the local population could be considered actively involved in church life.

Ironically, the church is generally well received in Sterling. Local pastors are invited to pray at City Council meetings, and all local clergy are offered the opportunity to obtain reduced-cost passes to most of the area schools’ sporting events. Four area pastors write columns in our community’s two newspapers. First Baptist seems to have a particularly positive image in the community, perhaps in part due to the weekly religion column I write for the Sterling *Journal-Advocate*, the city’s daily newspaper, and the church’s weekly radio program. Despite the positive public image of many local churches, a substantial majority of the local population is not involved in the church in any effective manner.<sup>6</sup>

Regarding Sunday participation in the life of the church, a primary limiting factor identified by the Percept study is the overtly recreational lifestyle of Sterling’s under fifty population. Among the unchurched population, Sundays are almost entirely

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 5.

`dedicated to sports and outdoor activities.<sup>7</sup> The traditional ranching-farming economic base of the community plays into this limiting factor, as the many rodeos in the area are usually weekend-long events.

Another limiting factor for Sunday participation, well-known to the clergy of the area, is the nature of the largest employer in the community, Sterling Correctional Facility, the state's largest prison with nearly 3,000 inmates and almost 900 employees. According to several corrections officers who are members of First Baptist Church, approximately 40 percent of the Sterling Correctional Facility employees work on Sundays. (For security purposes, precise employment statistics for Sterling Correctional Facility are not available to the public.) The high stress of the employment results in a ministry burden to area pastors. Indeed, informal conversations among area pastors seem to indicate that their counseling load has increased significantly since Sterling Correctional Facility opened in 1999.

### **The History of First Baptist Church**

First Baptist Church was founded in 1883 with seven charter members, Rev. and Mrs. T. J. Salisbury, Mr. and Mrs. H. C. Hatch, Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Harris, and Mrs. John Propst, becoming the third church in Sterling.<sup>8</sup> The church met in the founding pastor's home or in the facilities of the Presbyterian Church until its first building was constructed in 1889.<sup>9</sup> For the first thirty years of its existence, the church remained

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>8</sup>Josie Barnes, *First Baptist Church of Sterling: The First 100 Years, 1883-1983* (Sterling, CO: Royal Printing Company, 1983), 6-7.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 9.



relatively small, as it focused on separation from the world rather than evangelism.<sup>10</sup>

Then, during the pastorate of the Reverend W. J. Bingham, this inward focus changed, at least temporarily. During the first year of his three-year ministry (1914-17), the membership doubled and Sunday school attendance grew to nearly 150. As the church continued to grow, Bingham sought to lead the church to erect a large new building to accommodate the expansion.<sup>11</sup> Despite several notable successes in growing the church and freeing it from debt, Bingham “continually met with opposition and finally resigned October 5, 1917.”<sup>12</sup>

Following Bingham’s departure, the church entered a three-decade long cycle of modest increase, followed by discord and decrease. The membership was as high as 239 in 1922, and as low as 145 in 1933.<sup>13</sup> In 1939 and 1940, the church required support from the Colorado State Baptist Convention to pay the pastor’s salary.<sup>14</sup>

Not until the ten-year ministry of the Reverend Glenn Calhoun, who served from December 1946 to February 1957, did the church gain evangelistic intentionality. There were frequent baptisms, and the youth ministry developed an extensive outreach. In 1954, membership was 366, and Sunday school attendance averaged over 250.<sup>15</sup> In 1955, a building committee was elected and property for a new building was purchased; but once again, controversy arose, and a large group of people left the church to start a

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 20-21.

Southern Baptist Church. Membership quickly declined to around 225, and Calhoun resigned in 1957.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the next several years, with attendance stagnated, the church struggled to maintain its aging building. After a five-year planning and fund-raising effort under the leadership of the Reverend Maynard Lund, the church moved into its present building on January 4, 1970.<sup>17</sup> Lund retired in 1975, and several brief pastorates followed, including one during which a large group of members departed in a controversy regarding church discipline.<sup>18</sup> The pair of ineffective pastorates that followed, punctuated by two lengthy and controversial interims, left the church in the mid-1980s facing a crisis of self-esteem and identity.

When I was called to the pastorate of First Baptist Church in April 1985, I soon discovered that the wounds the church suffered in the previous decade since Lund's retirement were crippling. Only after another ten years of prayerful healing, and the deaths or departures of some members who refused to be healed, was the church able to consider reaching out. Two attempts were made to generate outreach by hiring a youth pastor in 1996 and again in 2001, but these efforts were met by resistance from the older members, who complained that they felt neglected.

An upswing in church attendance and participation in ministry began in 2006, apparently and primarily as the result of two factors: first, the attempt to apply the principles I was discovering in the academic portion of the D.Min. program by

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 24-26.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 31.

establishing a church-wide evangelistic intentionality; and second, the hiring of a children's minister and the starting of an effective children's ministry centered around Awana.<sup>®</sup> Disappointingly, however, the 20 percent increases in worship attendance in each year from 2005 through 2008 seemed to produce little or no effective assimilation of new members during this period.

In 2007 and 2008, in an effort to accommodate the growth in children's ministry, the church engaged in a building program under the guidance of a consultant who recommended the construction of a seven thousand square foot multi-purpose addition. Though the church voted overwhelmingly in favor of this construction, a vocal minority of the members engaged in an active campaign to oppose the addition. Attendance and morale began to fall. When a capital stewardship campaign fell far short of the needed funds, the members voted to defer the addition, and instead to pursue only a program of necessary repairs and upgrades to the building. The controversy engendered by this decision caused more to leave. Worship attendance fell from around 220 in early 2008 to about 150 in mid-2010. The need for the addition evaporated, and when the repairs and upgrades were completed in May 2010, the building committee disbanded.

### **Growth Patterns of First Baptist Church**

The history of First Baptist Church shows a pattern of growth and decline. This pattern is dramatically revealed in five critical moments about a generation apart. In each period, the church made an intentional chose not to reach out to the community. The first such period was in the early 1890s, the time following the construction of the church's first building, when, as the church with the newest building in town, the membership had an opportunity to reach out to the community. Instead, they chose to

pursue their own comfort and adopted an inward focus.<sup>19</sup> The second critical moment was in 1914 to 1917, during the pastorate of W. R. Bingham, when the church chose to oppose his vision for evangelism.<sup>20</sup> The third was during the mid-1950s when the church split rather than unite to construct a new building.<sup>21</sup> The fourth was in the late 1970s when controversy once again drove members out of the church during a period when substantial outreach and growth were beginning to occur.<sup>22</sup> The final such growth-and-decline period is the most recent one, from 2005 to 2010, described above.

Throughout the history of the church, a primary internal factor contributing to the cycle of growth and decline has been the failure of the church to insist on equipping its members and fully assimilating them. Not until the constitution was revised and rewritten in 1994-95 did the church have an explicit definition of its expectations regarding church membership.<sup>23</sup> Prior to that, no process was in place for educating current or prospective members about the nature and functions of church membership.

### **The Heritage of First Baptist Church**

When First Baptist Church was founded in 1883 as an American Baptist Church, the denomination of which it was a member was a fully evangelical body. First Baptist's statement of faith, the conservative and moderately-reformed New Hampshire Confession, was widely held among American Baptist Churches. In the 128 intervening

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<sup>19</sup>Barnes, *First Baptist Church of Sterling: The First 100 Years*, 9.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>23</sup>*Constitution of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado* (amended and printed, March 2007), 1, 3.

years, First Baptist has held this doctrine steadily, while the denomination has largely departed from its reformed evangelical roots. Thus, First Baptist currently finds itself on the far conservative end of its denomination's rather diverse theological spectrum, tenaciously maintaining its biblical and evangelical roots. Through its association with American Baptist Churches of the Rocky Mountains, the regional organization of the American Baptist Churches, U. S. A., First Baptist is active in seeking to move the denomination back toward its evangelical heritage. The fact remains, however, that the church's connection with American Baptist Churches has been a limiting factor for many years, as many interested visitors and prospective members have chosen not to participate in the life of First Baptist after they discovered its denominational affiliation.

### **The Structure and Style of First Baptist Church**

First Baptist Church has a modified one-board structure, led by a Church Council composed of two sub-groups: the Business Council, responsible for fiscal matters, the physical plant, and personnel matters; and the Ministries Council, responsible for overseeing the major ministry and programmatic expressions of the church's six primary purposes.<sup>24</sup> These six primary purposes are based on the ministries mentioned in the life of the infant church, as recorded in Acts 2:42-47.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having

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<sup>24</sup>*Constitution of First Baptist Church, 5-6.*

favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.<sup>25</sup>

These purposes are also delineated in the First Baptist Church constitution as follows: worship, evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, service, and prayer.<sup>26</sup> Figure 1 displays these purposes. It was developed from the Acts 2:42-47 passage and the church constitution to illustrate the relationship of these six purposes. It is used on all of the church's printed materials.

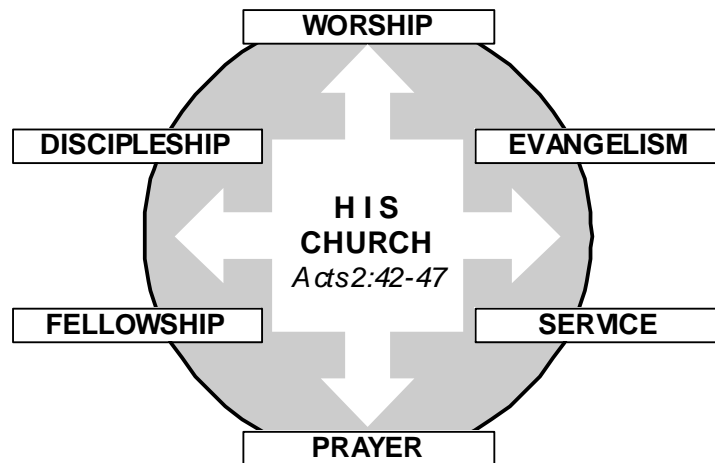


Figure 1: Six purposes of First Baptist Church

In style and demographics, the church is relatively diverse. There is a substantial age spread, with almost every age group well represented among the active members and attendees. There are two Sunday morning worship services. The 8:30 service is fairly traditional and is time-limited by the 9:30 start of the Sunday school hour. The 10:45 service is fully contemporary, and is not strictly time-limited, though the

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<sup>25</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The English Standard Version<sup>®</sup>, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001). Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>26</sup>*Constitution of First Baptist Church*, 1.

attendees understand that service will usually be over by 12:10 or 12:15. Both services are relatively informal. Dresses for the women and suits for the men are the exception rather than the rule, with jeans, shorts, and t-shirts being common and acceptable.

### **The Rationale for the Ministry Project**

As indicated in the history outlined above, First Baptist Church has a pattern of failing to educate its members as to the nature and function of church membership.

Based on simple observation, there seems to be a clear relationship between this long-term failure to train the members and the repeated cycle of growth and decline. Members who are neither committed to the purpose and ministries of the church nor involved in a discipling process have clearly not remained faithful to the church when increased commitment was expected or during times of struggle. Research bears out this informal observation. Thom Rainer has written two books that demonstrate the cause and effect connection between effective evangelism and membership classes in conservative evangelical churches. His research shows that when the membership class is more comprehensive, the assimilation of new members into sustaining relationships and ongoing ministry will be more effective.<sup>27</sup>

### **The Basic Need for a More Effective New Members Class**

Previous membership classes at First Baptist Church have been relatively ineffective. The basic need for a more effective New Members Class can be described in four primary areas.

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<sup>27</sup>Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 175-80; and idem, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 103-19.

**The need to move members to maturity and into ministry.** Because of its many years of neglecting to train and assimilate new members, First Baptist Church has many untrained and marginally committed members, who attend worship occasionally or even regularly, but neither participate in ministry nor give evidence of a discipleship commitment in terms of their relationship to Christ. According to research conducted by the Rainer Group, effective assimilation of new members moves them through the stages of spiritual growth with the goal that they become more Christ-like in character and more committed to the ministries of his church.<sup>28</sup> At First Baptist Church, there has been very little movement of new members through maturity into ministry.

**The non-committal attitude of the community.** The Sterling community is highly mobile, very focused on recreation, and reluctant to make commitments.<sup>29</sup> Guests in worship commonly maintain their anonymity through three or four visits to the church. Assimilation of these independent-minded persons requires a high level of commitment to making the New Members Class a more effective point of entry into life-giving relationships within the church.

**The diverse backgrounds of new-comers to the church.** Visitors, attendees and new members in First Baptist Church are an increasingly diverse group. For example, a survey of guests taken in August 2006 showed that First Baptist was visited by several Roman Catholics, a few lapsed Methodists, some former Mormons, a devotee of native American spiritualism, some former Nazarenes, and several people with no

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<sup>28</sup>Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 60-62.

<sup>29</sup>Percept, *First View*, 5.



formal religious background at all. The current membership includes a large minority of charismatics, a few five-point Calvinists, a smattering of Arminians, and a small number of fundamentalists. Any attempt to integrate this diverse group into a unified body requires a more intentional focus on assimilation to the purposes and ministries of the church than the church has endeavored in the past.

**A point of entry into Sunday school.** First Baptist Church needs a more effective point of entry into its Sunday school classes. For the past decade, average Sunday school attendance has varied between 40 and 50 percent of average worship attendance. Though the Sunday school classes are technically open small groups, and worship attendees are frequently encouraged to attend these classes, visitors seem to view the classes as being effectively closed. For every 10 participants in worship, only 4 or 5 make the commitment to study God's Word in fellowship with the other members of the church. This factor was a contributing reason that the New Members Class was planned to be conducted during the Sunday school hour, as an intentional point of entry for new and prospective members into the Sunday school. During the second-to-last class session, teachers of the youth and adult Sunday school classes were to visit the New Members Class to invite the participants to their respective classes. Each of the Sunday school teachers was to be given a list of participants in the New Members Class, and encouraged to invite them to their respective classes.

### **The Specific Need for a Discipleship-Oriented New Members Class**

The existing membership class curriculum was strong on assurance of salvation and the nature of the church. It was very weak in terms of how the new

member could become a growing disciple of Jesus and how he or she can participate in gospel community. The following observations highlight the specific need for the New Members Class to teach discipleship skills to its participants.

**Spiritual disciplines produce lives of ministry and leadership.** The result of the existing membership class was that members became at least formally committed to the church, but did not develop either the skills or the commitment to pursue spiritual growth on their own. They were not taught how to read and study Scripture or how to have a personal quiet time. They were not instructed about the importance of being in an open small group. They were not shown the importance of using their spiritual gifts in ministry within the church context. In short, a life of discipleship was simply not taught in the membership class. This deficiency was made apparent in the present situation of the church, as seen in the size of the Sunday school in contrast to worship attendance, and in the difficulty of finding leaders and participants in many aspects of the church's ministries.

**Intensifying cultural pressures require spiritual maturity.** The transition of the Sterling community from a rural-agricultural society to one increasingly dominated by urban values has produced intensifying cultural pressures that militate against participation in church life. These pressures can not be countered by a marginal form of Christian faith. First Baptist Church must no longer allow its members to remain spiritually immature, for their own safety. From the outset, members must be taught the basics of spiritual growth and the necessity of partnering with brothers and sisters in gospel community.

## **The Importance of Spiritual Disciplines**

According to Dallas Willard and Dieter Zander, new members in the church need to be taught to make the transition from spiritual immaturity to ministry. One of the most crucial aspects of this transition to ministry is the acquisition of the spiritual disciplines necessary for personal spiritual growth.<sup>30</sup> Ministry arises out of the development of Christ-like character, and Christ-like character is established by the long-term exercise of basic spiritual disciplines. If a local church intends to move its members into ministry and leadership, it must teach them how to study the Bible, how to pray, how to have a shared life in a Scripture centered small group, and how to identify and use their spiritual gifts.

## **The Expected Benefits of a Discipleship-Oriented New Members Class**

The successful and appropriate development and implementation of a discipleship-oriented New Members Class was anticipated to have several benefits for First Baptist. Among the minimum expected benefits were these six discernible and measurable outcomes:

1. increased participation in the New Members Classes by new and prospective members;
2. a greater percentage of new members participating in Sunday school;
3. a measurable increase in the number of new members committed to daily personal Bible study;
4. a discernible rise in the number of new members who transition into ministry within six months to a year after completing the New Members Class;

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<sup>30</sup>Dallas Willard and Dieter Zander, "The Apprentices: What Is Spiritual Formation? And How Does a Church Do It?" *Leadership Journal* 26, no. 3 (2005): 23.

5. a detectable increase in the agreement of the new members with First Baptist Church's statement of faith; and
6. increased participation of new members in the church's ministry of open small groups and Community Groups.

### **Definitions and Limitations**

The New Members Class developed in this project had several specific goals, in which some technical terms are used. Terms that will require definition include the following four, at minimum.

The first term to define is "discipleship-oriented." This term refers to those exercises and skills that focus on helping a believer to follow Christ more closely and obediently. Bill Hull identifies the "disciple's profile," based on John 15:7-17, as having these elements: a disciple abides in Christ through Bible study and prayer; a disciple obeys Christ; a disciple bears fruit; a disciple glorifies God; a disciple has joy; and a disciple loves as Christ loves.<sup>31</sup> In designing a discipleship-oriented New Members Class, the focus was on teaching and imparting the skills and habits that would lead the participants toward developing these characteristics in their daily lives, not simply toward becoming members in good standing of a Baptist church.

A second term needing definition is "personal spiritual disciplines." At its most basic, this term refers to the personal skills and habits that develop Christ-like character in a believer. The primary personal spiritual disciplines which the New Members Class would teach are these three: daily private Bible reading and study, including memorizing Scripture systematically; daily private prayer, employing a simple

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<sup>31</sup>Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: The Key to Church Revitalization and Growth* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 60-73.

pattern if necessary; and a weekly shared Bible study with other Christians in an open small group.

The third term to define is “open small group.” The most common such groups at First Baptist Church have long been the Sunday school classes. These groups are small by definition. Indeed, none of them meets in a room that would seat more than fifteen to twenty people. They are groups by design: each possesses a particular identity characterized by the demographics and personalities of those who attend, and by the curriculum emphasis of the instruction. They are open by intention: they welcome anyone who chooses to attend, and intentionally invite persons to do so—at least, that is what they should do.

Another expression of the church’s approach to “open small groups” is its newly developed ministry of “Community Groups.” The Community Group introduction pamphlet says, “A Community Group is a small gathering of believers who meet together in homes for the purpose of Gospel-centered, mission-driven relationship.”<sup>32</sup>

A fourth term needing definition is “membership in the church.” While there is no explicit command in Scripture to become a member of a local church, there are several Scriptures that imply the need for a stated and clear commitment to a local body of believers. Chuck Lawless identifies eight texts that imply membership in a local church: Acts 2:41; 2 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:25; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 13:17; Matthew 18:15-17; and 1 Corinthians 5:11-13.<sup>33</sup> His definition of

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<sup>32</sup>John Roberts, *Community Groups at First Baptist Church: An Introduction* (Sterling, CO: First Baptist Church, 2009), 2.

<sup>33</sup>Charles E. Lawless, Jr., *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Members Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 74.

membership is sufficient for the purposes of this project, and is used in the New Members Class curriculum: “Membership is a public pledge to find our role in the body, work alongside other members, and hold each other accountable to faithful Christian living.”<sup>34</sup>

Because the project was to be fifteen weeks in duration, some long-term results would not be immediately measurable. The intention of the project, however, was that the initial presentation of the class would be the start of its ongoing development and implementation, so that long term positive effects could and should eventually be realized by First Baptist Church.

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR A NEW MEMBERS CLASS

The Bible reveals that commitment to a local body of believers is God's will. The proposed New Members Class was built upon the solid foundation of this irrefutable truth. Thus, the class focused on encouraging the participants to pursue biblical discipleship as expressed in a covenantal partnership with the other members of First Baptist Church. The primary text for the class was the Bible. Five biblical texts pertinent to the nature of biblical partnership in the local church served as the foundation and framework for the curriculum.

#### **Introduction of the Biblical Texts and Topics**

The primary biblical support for the development of a New Members Class came from five important texts that deal with the subject of personal and corporate discipleship in a relational context: Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalm 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27; 2 Timothy 2:15; and 1 Peter 4:8-10. A full exegetical and expositional study of each of these texts was undertaken from the original languages. This textual study produced a series of the findings and implications for the New Members Class.

Other appropriate Scripture texts were incorporated into the curriculum. As part of the biblical focus of the class, participants were expected to memorize week by week certain passages of Scripture central to the development of their commitment to the

Lord and his church, their personal spiritual disciplines, and the discovery of their particular ministries in the church. These eight texts are listed in Table 1. This small body of memorized texts will form a core of biblical revelation upon which the Holy Spirit can build into the participants' lives a firm commitment to the life and ministries of First Baptist Church.

Table 1. New Members Class possible weekly memory verses

Session	Topic of the Session	Memory Verse
1	Assurance of salvation	1 John 5:13
2	Knowing the real Jesus	John 1:14
3	How to have a daily quiet time	Acts 17:11b
4	The importance of Scripture memory	Ps 119:11
5	Love and obedience	John 14:21
6	My spiritual gifts: my ministry	1 Pet 4:10
7	Growing together: small group Bible study	2 Tim 2:15
8	Finding my place in ministry	Eph 4:10-11

### **Old Testament Texts Informing the New Members Class Curriculum**

Of the five texts upon which the curriculum for the New Members Class was based, two are from the Old Testament. The first Old Testament text was Deuteronomy 6:1-9. This declaration of the covenant obligations of God's people is a formative text about the necessity of teaching his Word to the next generation. The gospel task of making disciples finds a solid foundation here.

The second Old Testament text was Psalm 1:1-3. This brilliant passage demonstrates the value of separating a portion of one's life from the influences of the world, and dedicating that time and energy to study and meditate on the Word of God. The blessedness of a life developed out of meditating daily on the Scriptures commends



itself in these verses.

### **New Testament Texts Informing the New Members Class Curriculum**

Three of the texts that comprised the basis for the curriculum for this New Members Class are from the New Testament. The first New Testament text was 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, which was the primary text for the curriculum, since it richly expounds the inter-relatedness of the members of the church, and the necessity of these members to support one another. Consideration of the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts was to provide background for the teaching in the New Members Class about the spiritual gifts of the class participants, and the importance of their discovering and using their gifts for the spiritual growth of the church.

The second New Testament text was 1 Peter 4:8-10. The three “one-another” commands in this passage (“love one another,” “show hospitality to one another,” and “serve one another”) highlight the mutuality of the church, and demonstrate the necessity of relational commitment to other Christians. The further instruction of verse 10 to use spiritual gifts “. . . to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace,” clearly connects service in ministry to the Christian’s stewardship of grace.

The third New Testament text was 2 Timothy 2:15. This text clarifies God’s mandate to study his Word diligently, specifying that each individual Christian has a personal responsibility to grow in godliness. In other words, while the church is responsible to teach its members, each member also has the duty to pursue a disciplined life of personal Bible study with a view to his own sanctification. If the church is to expect such discipline of its members, the church must train its members in the personal Bible study skills required to fulfill this mandate.

## **Underlying Considerations: Church Membership in Scripture**

Regarding the concept of formal church membership, two important underlying considerations were addressed. First, some Christians question or even deny that the Bible teaches church membership. Does the New Testament indicate the church should have membership *per se*? In other words, is there biblical evidence for formal church membership in the New Testament church? Second, if so, what are the biblical requirements for membership? The answers to these concerns would determine the extent to which First Baptist Church can expect people to make a commitment not only to the New Members Class, but also to the church and to each other.

### **Findings from the Biblical Texts**

The five primary biblical passages selected as the foundation for the New Members Class were examined exegetically. The following sections detail the pertinent findings from these five texts.

#### **Deuteronomy 6:1-9**

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

This formative passage presents the Lord Jehovah's foundational commandment to all his people: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (v. 5). As such, it is central to any proper understanding of the nature of the community of God's people. In his own ministry, Jesus declared this decree to be "the first and greatest command" (Matt 22:37-38).

The command to love God does not stand in a vacuum. It is presented within a framework of accompanying expectations. Specifically, the context indicates that for God's people to love him with all their heart, soul, and might, his Word must be in their hearts. The clear connection within this passage between the command to love God (v. 5) and the instruction to keep his Word in one's heart (v. 6) indicate that loving God means obedience to his commands. This passage's correlation between love and obedience was heightened and made more explicit by Christ and the apostles. They declared specifically that a defining aspect of the disciple's love for God was his obedience, insomuch so that love and obedience could be considered to be virtually coterminous (cf. John 14:15, 21, 23; 2 Cor 8:8; Gal 5:14; 1 John 5:2-3). Loving God necessarily implies obeying God; and obeying God means knowing and acting upon his instructions as revealed in his Word.

The clear implication of this logic is that the mandate to love God gives rise to the further charge to teach his Word to others. Two related terms in the text seem to provide a conceptual connection between these two commands. The first such term is in verse 1, לַמַּד (lawmadh) in Hebrew, which is translated in the ESV simply as "teach."

Strong indicates that the primitive root of this word means “to goad.”<sup>1</sup> *TDOT* says, “The underlying meaning appears to be ‘have experiences,’ perhaps also, ‘accustom oneself to something, become familiar with something’.”<sup>2</sup>

The second term is in verse 7, the Hebrew word שָׁנַן (*šanan*), translated in the ESV as “teach diligently.” The cultural background of this term was rooted in ancient times in the shops of the blacksmith and the stonecutter, and the imagery evoked is that of “sharpening” or “whetting.”<sup>3</sup> The connotative meaning, however, went beyond “to sharpen” and came to mean “to engrave.”<sup>4</sup> Eugene Merrill states,

The image is that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, but once done the message is there to stay. Thus it is that the generations of Israelites to come must receive and transmit the word of the Lord’s everlasting covenant revelation.<sup>5</sup>

Taken together, these two picturesque expressions suggest that the task of imparting the truth to the next generation of God’s people requires extended hard work and diligent effort, as in the task of engraving words or figures into stone or wood, where they then leave an indelible and permanent impression. Far from a casual pastime, this crucial ministry of impressing God’s Word upon the newer members of the covenant community should take up primary importance for the teaching ministries of the church.

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<sup>1</sup>James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Hebrew Bible; With Their Renderings in the Authorized English Version* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1890), 60.

<sup>2</sup>*TDOT*, s.v. “לָמַד.”

<sup>3</sup>*BDB*, s.v. “שָׁנַן.”

<sup>4</sup>*TDOT*, s.v. “שָׁנַן.”

<sup>5</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 165.

God hereby calls his covenant people to a rigorous task. The church must take all necessary steps to make certain that its members acquire the skills to read and study the Word of God on their own, so they may understand how to interpret it, and develop the necessary disciplines for applying it to their daily lives.

Moreover, the Word of God must be put before his people repeatedly, even constantly. The instructions in verses 8 and 9 to inscribe the Word on one's hand and forehead and on the posts of one's gate and house could be read in contemporary terms as encouragement to write verses on memory cards and place them in highly visible locations to serve as constant reminders to hide the Word in one's heart. Memorization of Scripture must accompany the reading and study of it.

Therefore, the New Members Class curriculum must include instruction and encouragement in the development of personal Bible study skills. Indeed, as Christensen states in reference to the material in Deuteronomy, "The content of this book was the primary curriculum in an ongoing program of religious education in ancient Israel."<sup>6</sup>

### **Psalm 1:1-3**

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

This insightful Old Testament text demonstrates the value of separating a portion of one's life from the influences of the world, and dedicating that time and energy to study and meditate on the Word of God. The poetic description of the godly person in

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<sup>6</sup>Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6A (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 143.

these verses mentions three aspects of life that seem to describe the entirety of one's waking day: walking, standing, and sitting. These three complementary activities present a comprehensive view of the life of a dedicated follower of God, every facet of whose daily life harmonizes with the full counsel of his Word. The precise relationship among these three terms may be difficult to determine with certainty, yet it seems reasonable to assert with John Calvin<sup>7</sup> that they refer in general to the godly person's behaviors ("walk"), his deliberations and associations ("stand"), and his doctrines ("sit," the common posture of the teacher in the ancient Near East).<sup>8</sup>

The text explicitly promises that delighting in God's precepts and studying God's instructions will certainly and perhaps even inevitably produce a blessed life. The term translated here as "blessed," אֲשֶׁרִי (*'ašrê*), was sometimes used as a cry of delight, or even an exclamation of joy. The initial phrase, אֲשֶׁרִי־הָאִישׁ (*'ašrê hā'iš*), meaning "blessed [is] the man," was a typical formula for spoken blessings, and was typically the replacement in everyday speech for the more liturgical and formal term בָּרוּךְ (*barukh*), "blessed [by God]."<sup>9</sup> Thus, the beginning of the text might be translated as "how happy the man . . . !"<sup>10</sup> The one who thus delights in God's Word enjoys a richly blessed life, happy and joyous, a life with its foundation built upon the meditation and application of God's Word.

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<sup>7</sup>John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, in vol. 4 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 3-4.

<sup>8</sup>John Goldingay, *Psalms*, vol. 1, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 82.

<sup>9</sup>*TDOT*, s.v. "אֲשֶׁרִי."

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

Moreover, as Craigie and Tate indicate, this “blessedness is not a reward; rather, it is the result of . . . a life lived according to the plan of the Giver of life.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, meditation upon God’s Word produces as its outcome a life of obedience, which in turn is the most blessed kind of life that can be lived. The point is not that God gives blessing as a form of payment or recompense for delighting in his precepts, and which he might withhold from those who are not diligent in their studies. The point is, rather, that such study and delight inevitably produce blessedness as the natural consequence of the changes that are affected in the life of a lover of God as his Word reforms and realigns that person’s thoughts and values.

Two parallel terms in verse 2 combine to describe the approach to God’s Word that produces a blessed life. The first parallel term is “delight,” the ESV’s translation of  $\gamma\text{פ}\eta$  (*hāpēs*). The blessed man is described as one whose “delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.” *BDB* indicates the simple lexical meaning of  $\gamma\text{פ}\eta$  (*hāpēs*) to be “delight in.”<sup>12</sup> According to *TDOT*, the verb has several nuances of meaning, one of which seems to indicate that this “delighting in” something is no mere emotional response, but included additionally a positive volitional delight that moves one to action.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the one who meditates on God’s Word does more than delight in the Word by merely having pleasurable thoughts about it; he takes action to know and obey the Word. He is not merely a hearer of the Word, who enjoys the reading

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<sup>11</sup>Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E Tate, *Psalms 1–50*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 60-61.

<sup>12</sup>*BDB*, s.v. “ $\gamma\text{פ}\eta$ .”

<sup>13</sup>*TDOT*, s.v. “ $\gamma\text{פ}\eta$ .”

and contemplation of God’s instructions, but delights to be a doer of the Word (see Matt 7:21; Jas 1:22-25).

This implication is plainly laid out by the second parallel term in verse 2, “meditate,” the ESV’s translation of הָגָה (*hāgāh*). *BDB* gives a broad range of meanings for the term, including, “moan, growl, utter, speak, muse.”<sup>14</sup> In connection with this sense, *TDOT* points out the way the word could be used for the low guttural noises of certain animals. The term may be onomatopoeic in its origin, as “hagah-hagah-hagah” sounds remotely akin to the repetitious purring or growling of an animal. This sound was also reminiscent of the sub-vocalized humming of a student reading and re-reading a text as he meditates on it, the “softly spoken oral recitation in connection with the study of the law.”<sup>15</sup> This image indicates that meditation on Scripture is quite different from other forms of meditation popularized in the culture. Biblical meditation means to go over the text repeatedly, to let the Word of God speak truth into one’s mind and heart. It is an exercise in objective truth, not a pursuit of subjective enlightenment.

Verse 3 shows more clearly the result of developing a lifestyle determined by delighting in and meditating on God’s Word. Such a life bears fruit. Goldingay says that those who practice the principles of Scripture, “find that their lives become fruitful.”<sup>16</sup> One can not emphasize too strongly or too often the connection of fruit-bearing with continually meditating on the Word of God, with a view toward specific application. Producing fruit in the service of Jesus is not simply a matter of learning certain skills in

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<sup>14</sup>*BDB*, s.v. “הָגָה.”

<sup>15</sup>*TDOT*, s.v. “הָגָה.”

<sup>16</sup>Goldingay, *Psalms*, 84.



church-work, but more a result of rooting deeply in Scripture. Discipleship is not so much an acquired craft as a lifestyle of loving God's Word.

This text underscores the importance of being regularly in the Word of God. The primary skills the Christian must learn are Word-skills: reading it, studying it, meditating on it, and learning how to apply it to one's life.

The text further teaches that the fruit of one's life also stems in no small measure from his associations. Habitual companions clearly affect one's behavior. Gerald Wilson points out that the ungodly person, who according to the text "walks . . . in the counsel of the wicked, . . . stands in the way of sinners, [and] sits in the seat of scoffers" automatically develops a "culture of association that dominates and shapes [his] worldview."<sup>17</sup> The New Members Class will therefore seek to encourage participants to deepen their relationships with other members of the church to instill in them a sense of community, both as a source of personal blessedness and as a protection against straying into the evil that may arise from ungodly associations.

### **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one

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<sup>17</sup>Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol.1, The NIV Application Commentary, vol. 16 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 94.

body.

The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

Perhaps the most obvious fact about this text is the extraordinarily repetitious vocabulary, in particular, the words “body” and “member,” as Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, presents this formative picture of the local church. Regarding this picture, Mark Dever notes that these terms arose out of Christ’s own identification of himself with the church: “Paul introduces the image of the church as the body of Christ, an image he was introduced to by the risen Christ when Jesus asked Paul, ‘Why do you persecute me?’ (Acts 9:4).”<sup>18</sup>

Nineteen times in this passage the apostle uses the word “body” to depict the church. Nine times he calls the individuals of whom the church is composed “members” of that body. This concept of members in a body is worthy of further examination.

The term “body” is used in reference to the church in 12 other New Testament passages. The following list of texts, along with 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, comprise a comprehensive description of the church as the body of Christ with members.

1. Romans 12:4-5—“For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”
2. First Corinthians 10:17—“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one

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<sup>18</sup>Mark E. Dever, *Twelve Challenges Churches Face* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 149.

body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

3. Ephesians 1:22-23—“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”
4. Ephesians 2:16—“and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.”
5. Ephesians 4:4—“There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.”
6. Ephesians 4:11-12—“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”
7. Ephesians 4:15-16—“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”
8. Ephesians 5:29-30—“For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.”
9. Colossians 1:18—“And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.”
10. Colossians 1:24—“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”
11. Colossians 2:19—“and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.”
12. Colossians 3:15—“And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”

The word translated as “body” all 19 times in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, and all 14 times in the texts above, is *σῶμα* (*soma*). According to *BAGD*, *σῶμα* (*soma*) has the simple lexical definition “body,” but with a figurative extension of this meaning to denote “a unified group of people.”<sup>19</sup> The obvious reference in each of these more than 33 New

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<sup>19</sup>*BAGD*, s.v. “σῶμα.”

Testament uses of the term is the united people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, the assembly of the regenerate brought together and organized by the Holy Spirit into a corporate entity whose identity can only be described as a body, each member of which has a definition and function established by the body's creator and head. Writing in *TDNT*, Eduard Schweizer comments, "Paul does not merely say that the community is like a body; he says it is a body. . . . Paul is calling the community to live out in actuality, bodily, what it already is by Christ and in Him."<sup>20</sup> Schweizer goes on to point out that the organic unity of a human body, in which its members as well as its functions are delicately interwoven and thus interdependent upon each others' ongoing connection and proper function, is the most appropriate picture of the church as seen in both its nature and its ministries. "Not tradition and office, but the unity with Christ granted to the total community is underlined. Every member of the body is basically equal in ministry."<sup>21</sup>

The image of the church as a unified body of diverse members shows that church members need one another, because their varied gifts complement and complete one another. The curriculum will seek to help participants discover how their spiritual gifts work together in the life of the church.

Moreover, because a primary theme of this text is the nature and function of the church, and in particular its mutual connectedness as a body, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 was chosen to serve as a focal point for the New Members Class, to help participants understand not only the biblical definition of the church and its proper operation, but their

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<sup>20</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. "σῶμα."

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, s.v. "σῶμα."

particular role and function in the fulfillment of this divine design. As Hodge wrote, “This passage . . . not only teaches us the nature of the church, but also the principle of its unity. It is one . . . in virtue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in all its members. And this internal spiritual union manifests itself in the profession of the same faith, and in all acts of Christian fellowship.”<sup>22</sup> His further comment is particularly insightful: “The nature of the church supposes, that . . . [the] distribution of [the Spirit’s] gifts are according to his sovereign pleasure. We are contending against him, therefore, when we contend against the position and the office which he has assigned us in the church.”<sup>23</sup> Garland agrees: “The diversity is not only necessary for the body to function; it is the will of God.”<sup>24</sup> Christians must learn that their spiritual gifts are the intentional and well-ordered endowment of almighty God, whose sovereignty extends not only to the conditions and accomplishment of their election, but to their calling and appointment as well, and whose choice is not only good but final; and that their primary response to his having given them such gifts is simply to learn to operate in them for his glory.

Thus the text teaches that the diversity of the church’s giftedness necessitates an abiding unity. The members of the church, by God’s own sovereign appointment, are put in a position not only of relationship with one another but also of overt need for one another. Unity is not a luxury for the church, but rather a necessity for its health and function. God has made Christians different from one another because he intends that

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<sup>22</sup>Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 255.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>24</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 595.

they would need each other and love each other. Soards writes, “God’s authority and purposefulness lie behind both unified diversity and diversified unity.”<sup>25</sup> These dual concepts of “God’s authority and purposefulness” must never be separated; God’s purposefulness would degenerate into a kind of wistful longing if his authoritative sovereignty were not exercised constantly to effect that which he purposes.

Referring to what Soards calls the “unified diversity and diversified unity” of the body of Christ, Grosheide puts it this way:

Unity and diversity quite naturally go together. . . . The Spirit dwells in the church and works His gifts; the church is thereby constituted a unity but manifests also great diversity. . . . In modern language that would be: the body is an organism, it has many members but it can only be what it is if it possesses all those members and if all those members are governed from the center; there is one life in all of them.<sup>26</sup>

In keeping with this principle, the New Members Class was designed to emphasize the importance of agreement on the sources of First Baptist Church’s unity, including its doctrine, summarized in its official statement of faith, the New Hampshire Confession.

The text also demonstrates how vitally crucial it is for Christians to live in active relational commitment to one another. More than just a beneficial remediation of the increasingly non-committal values of the culture, such commitment is an expression of the church’s relationship to Christ. In short, everyone connected to him is connected to everyone else connected to him. Such connections, in which Christians share mutually supportive and accountable lives, are not possible without commitment. Independent Christian living, which occurs when Christians withhold or keep for themselves what

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<sup>25</sup>Marion Soards, *1 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 265.

<sup>26</sup>F. W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 291.

God has given them for the life of the church, is a sin not only against the body, but against God who gave the gifts. In this connection, commenting on verse 21 (“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you’”), Thistleton writes,

It is not sufficient to follow many modern commentators in interpreting these verses merely as a legitimation of variety. . . . [M]uch more is at stake. . . . The sin of “autonomy,” self-sufficiency, or “the right to do what I like” (6:12) is precisely the “fleshly” attitude within the church (3:1-4), which Paul finds alien to Christlike experience “for others,” but reflects much secular culture (whether inside or outside the church) at the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>27</sup>

In view of this truth, the New Members Class will strongly exhort participants to make their commitments to the church deeply mutual, and to develop their commitments in accountable relationships through the small group opportunities the church offers.

## **2 Timothy 2:15**

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

One of the more effective outreach ministries of First Baptist Church is Awana<sup>®</sup>, the theme verse of which is 2 Timothy 2:15. Since this verse is memorized by the scores of children who attend Awana<sup>®</sup>, incorporating it into the New Members Class seemed fitting, since some of the class participants would certainly enter the church through that ministry. Though this verse was, in its original context, Paul’s personal exhortation to Timothy, it could be applied to every believer, inasmuch as Paul charged Timothy, “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).

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<sup>27</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1006.

This verse may be divided into three basic parts:

1. the exhortation to work hard to come before God as one under his approval;
2. that this approval relieves the workman of shame; and
3. that the necessary hard work of the approved workman consists primarily in his “rightly handling the word of truth.”

The first word in the verse is a particularly interesting one: σπουδαζω (*spoudazo*), which is translated as “do your best” in the ESV. BAGD gives the simple lexical meaning as “hurry, hasten . . . expedite . . . be zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort, be conscientious.”<sup>28</sup> TDNT states that since σπουδαζω (*spoudazo*) is “the opp[osite] of παιζω [*paizo*] it comes to be used for serious effort, for taking things or people seriously.”<sup>29</sup> Since σπουδαζω (*spoudazo*) is the opposite of παιζω (*paizo*), it should be noted that παιζω means “play, amuse oneself.”<sup>30</sup> The plain implication is that the study of God’s Word is not only worthy of being pursued by Christians with discipline and rigor, but must be made a priority for life.

This rigorous pursuit allows the student of God’s Word to come before him without shame. As Marshall comments in the most recent edition of the ICC, “In the context of being δοκιμος [*dokimos*, i.e., ‘approved’] the application is primarily to not feeling ashamed in the presence of God for failing to do one’s duty.”<sup>31</sup> Thus the unashamed workman comes before God as one who does his appropriate duty by both studying his Word rigorously and obeying it judiciously.

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<sup>28</sup>BAGD, s.v. “σπουδαζω.”

<sup>29</sup>TDNT, s.v. “σπουδαζω.”

<sup>30</sup>BAGD, s.v. “παιζω.”

<sup>31</sup>I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, The International Critical Commentary, vol. 48 (Edinburgh: & T Clark, 1999), 748.



Towner asserts that Paul desired his disciple Timothy to grow and be able to come before God without feeling ashamed for failing to do his duty. There, Towner says, Paul tells his student (and by extension, every Christian) that his “responsibility with respect to ‘the truth’ is set out with a seldom-used term that means, literally, ‘to cut straight.’”<sup>32</sup> Referring to this term, Mounce points out, “The most difficult issue in the verse is the precise meaning of ὀρθοτομεῖν [*orthotomein*], ‘to handle correctly’.”<sup>33</sup> Johnson explains this compound verb by dissecting it into its composite parts: “It is derived from ortho- (rightly/correctly) and the verb tomein/temnein (cut). The verb is used in LXX Proverbs 3:6 and 11:5 for ‘cutting a path in the right direction.’”<sup>34</sup> The term can refer either to teaching or living, i.e., that the Word of God is taught correctly or obeyed rightly.<sup>35</sup> Thus, the term means that the worker who comes unashamed before God is the one who has both studied the Bible accurately and obeyed it comprehensively. The point, of course, is that Christians must interpret Scripture accurately for their Bible study to be profitable. The underlying implication is that there is a correct way to handle God’s Word. The New Hampshire Confession, which is the official doctrinal statement of First Baptist Church, suggests that handling the Bible accurately necessarily involves developing a Christocentric view of Scripture, in which the entire Bible is seen as one unified message of God’s plan to redeem for himself through Christ a people for his glory

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<sup>32</sup>Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed., vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 521.

<sup>33</sup>William D. Mounce, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 524.

<sup>34</sup>Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 35A (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 385.

<sup>35</sup>Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 749.

and possession.<sup>36</sup> Hendriksen explains this approach by suggesting that one “who handles the word of the truth properly . . . prayerfully interprets Scripture in the light of Scripture.”<sup>37</sup> The Christian seeking God’s approval will joyously “do [his] best” to learn and apply this right way to study Scripture. The New Members Class was therefore designed to devote a portion of instruction to helping participants learn to study Scripture in this way.

### **1 Peter 4:8-10**

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

The instructions in 1 Peter 4:8-10 demonstrate the absolute necessity of Christians’ living in connection with each other. Mutuality is a vital attitude to develop in new Christians and new members. Christians in isolation defy the very definition of the church. As Michaels points out, “Mutual love [is] the most urgent necessity for Christian believers.”<sup>38</sup> Hillyer agrees, stating, “As far as fellow believers are concerned, right relationships between them are paramount.”<sup>39</sup>

In a post-modern culture increasingly hostile toward Christianity, the need for church members to cleave to one another in mutual love and service is all the more vital.

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<sup>36</sup>J. Newton Brown, *The Baptist Church Manual: Containing The Declaration of Faith, Covenant, Rules of Order, and Brief Forms of Church Letters* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853), 1, 15-16.

<sup>37</sup>William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957), 263.

<sup>38</sup>J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 246.

<sup>39</sup>Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary, vol. 16 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 125.

One form in which the church's mutuality must grow is in the collective use of the spiritual gifts of its members. Wayne Grudem makes this clear: "Within the fellowship of the church, earnest love for one another (v. 8) will find expression in the use of spiritual gifts, not for self-advancement or to draw attention to ourselves, but for the benefit of others."<sup>40</sup> Davids amplifies this thought, indicating that mutual love seen in vigorous forgiveness and active service is, ". . . the most valuable virtue in a community that needs to preserve its solidarity in the face of persecution."<sup>41</sup>

Though secular society in the early twenty-first century seems to place high value upon individuality and relational independence, Christians are called by their Lord to a distinctly different way of living. They must learn to love each other in community and serve each other with their spiritual gifts. One of the critical deficiencies among church-goers in northeast Colorado, as noted in Chapter 1, is a failure to connect with one another meaningfully. The text of 1 Peter 4:8-10 addresses this lack by demonstrating that the peculiar sort of redemption accomplished by the gospel brings people into an overt mutuality that must find expression not in mere formalities of organization affiliation, but rather in the daily life of mutual love engendered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who moves Christians to forgive and to serve one another. Such outward expressions derive from the endowment of the Holy Spirit in the life of every genuinely regenerate person. The church, to be faithful to its call to make disciples, must not only teach believers how to live out these truths, but must also provide them with

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<sup>40</sup>Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, rev. ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentary, vol. 17 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.), 174.

<sup>41</sup>Peter Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, rev. ed., vol. 14 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990.), 158.

opportunities to do so.

The New Members Class was designed, therefore, to seek to develop among its participants a commitment to community within the life of the church. It would also teach participants the importance of discovering and using their spiritual gifts first “to serve one another,” as the text commands, and then to further the ministries of the church.

### **Underlying Considerations: Church Membership in Scripture**

A membership class that aims at developing biblical church membership must address two important underlying considerations regarding the concept of formal church membership. First, does the New Testament teach that there is such a thing as church membership *per se*? Second, if so, what are the biblical requirements for membership?

While there is no explicit command in Scripture directing believers to become members of a local church, there are several passages that imply the need for a stated and clear commitment to a local body of believers. Chuck Lawless identifies eight texts that imply membership in a local church: Acts 2:41-47; 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:30; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 13:17; Matthew 18:15-17; and 1 Corinthians 5:10-11.<sup>42</sup> By highlighting the following common practices of the early church, the texts listed by Lawless give substantial and conclusive evidence that as early as the New Testament era, the church established and maintained formal membership as a means of confirming the gospel and strengthening the ministry of the members.

1. The New Testament church kept lists of those who joined and of those receiving special ministry.

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<sup>42</sup>Charles E. Lawless, Jr., *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Members Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 74.

2. The New Testament church had clear doctrinal and behavioral standards for membership and a precise method for excluding members in violation of these standards who, after efforts to move them to repentance, refused to change.
3. The New Testament church had clear instructions for how the leaders of the church were to care for the members, as contrasted to how they were to relate to those outside the church.
4. The New Testament church understood that there was a distinct and discernible difference between those who were in the church and those who were not.
5. The New Testament church had an understanding of its structure based primarily upon four metaphors (body, living temple, flock, and family), all of which presuppose a sense of union and common belonging.<sup>43</sup>

The New Members Class will include a section dealing explicitly with the biblical rationale for church membership in which the texts that support church membership will be carefully considered. The point of such careful consideration, of course, is to develop in the new members a view of membership that is both biblically driven and coterminous with discipleship. Participants must learn that a membership commitment is not only biblically appropriate, but essential in practical terms for following Christ. The goal is that members would not think of themselves as Christians apart from the church. Indeed, a commitment to being Jesus' disciple must not be separated from a relational covenant with the other members of the church. As Jan Linn states it, "When one . . . takes the word of Jesus seriously, it is an enigma why churches continue to think they can let people join at the lowest common denominator of commitment and expect them to become more committed later."<sup>44</sup> Rainer comments on another aspect of this enigma, called "inactive members," with these cutting words:

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<sup>43</sup>Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 44-49.

<sup>44</sup>Jan G. Linn, *Rocking the Membership Boat: Counting Members or Having Members That Count* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 66.

“Most evangelical churches accept inactive members as a normative term rather than as a theological oxymoron.”<sup>45</sup>

Among the study pieces in the New Members Class curriculum was included the First Baptist Church Membership Covenant, which states twelve relational commitments in four broad areas of church life, undergirded in every point by God’s Word. Participants who complete the class and wish to join First Baptist Church will be asked to sign the Membership Covenant. The Covenant will then be read in Sunday morning worship with the New Members Class at the front of the sanctuary. The text of the Membership Covenant is found in Appendix 1.

### **Summary of Implications for the New Member Class**

The five primary Scripture passages undergirding the New Members Class combine to suggest several complementary emphases for the curriculum. The dominant theme of the class had to be, of course, the centrality of the Word of God to every aspect of the life of the Christian. Every text in the curriculum must underscore the importance of regular and steady Scripture reading. The primary commitments Christians must make are Word-centered: they must read the Bible, study it, meditate on it, and learn how to apply it to every detail of life.

Thus the class must train participants to pursue personal sanctification through the basic disciplines of biblical discipleship. The development of a private devotional life, however, does not suffice. True discipleship is a shared life. Participants must be taught to pursue biblical discipleship in a covenantal partnership with the other members

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<sup>45</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 112.

of First Baptist Church. Mutuality and accountability must be overtly emphasized. Relational commitment must be stressed. Partnership and community must be highlighted, not as options for the spiritual elite, but as the basic equipment of the gospel in life. Covenantal partnership offers more than personal blessedness; it affords the church both fruitfulness and protection.

The study of spiritual gifts would harmonize well with the emphasis on shared discipleship. As participants learn about their spiritual gifts, they see the importance of combining their gifts with those of the other members. The unity of the church is a function of the submission of the disciples' diverse gifts to the call of God not only upon their lives, but upon the entire church as well. The very existence of spiritual gifts in the Christian's life militates strongly against the notion of private Christian living.

Complementing the study of shared discipleship, class members must learn the biblical definition of the church and its proper operation. Thus, the class should consider carefully the First Baptist Church Membership Covenant and its official doctrinal statement, the New Hampshire Confession.

Finally, the New Members Class should include a section teaching the biblical foundation for church membership. This section must strive to develop in the participants a Scripture-driven understanding of church membership that is synonymous with discipleship, so that members do not think of themselves as Christians apart from the church. Those who complete the New Members Class would, therefore, make a commitment to First Baptist Church that both expresses and completes their commitment to Christ.

CHAPTER 3  
PRINCIPLES FOR ASSIMILATING NEW MEMBERS

**Introduction**

Evangelism is the mandate of the church. Though the church often does not do a very good job of it, most evangelical pastors and church leaders give at least verbal consent to the God-ordained priority of evangelism. The church seems to *say* that sharing the gospel with the lost is important, but often *acts* as if it weren't.

Sadly, the church also seems less than zealous about sharing the gospel with the saved. This oft-forgotten task of gospel-impartation to believers—what we usually call discipleship—is the other half of the evangelistic ministry of the church, without which evangelism is unfinished. As Win and Charles Arn state, “Evangelism is not complete without the new Christian becoming an active part of the church.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, they adduce that, “A strategy for successful incorporation of new members is a major part of any church’s commitment to making disciples.”<sup>2</sup>

Accompanied by Christ’s Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), the five texts studied in the previous chapter present a unified picture of the church’s ministry to the saved: to apply the Word of God in such a way as to lead believers into Christ-like living

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<sup>1</sup>Win Arn and Charles Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples: Every Christian an Effective Witness through an Enabling Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 138.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 140.



in the context of the believing church, so that they in turn share the gospel with the lost in evangelism and with the saved in making disciples. The basic principles of this task help to answer four sets or groupings of practical questions about developing and implementing a New Members Class at First Baptist Church in Sterling, Colorado:

1. Why is it important to develop and implement a New Members Class at First Baptist Church in Sterling, Colorado? What is the biblical mandate for members in the local church? What are the anticipatable benefits to First Baptist, the kingdom of God, and the individual participants?
2. What material and subject matter should the New Members Class include? Should it focus primarily on content and instruction or on relationship building?
3. Where and when should the New Members Class meet? Should it gather in a classroom in the church's educational area, in the sanctuary, or in a more informal setting? When is the best time for the New Members Class? Should it take place during the Sunday School hour, on a week night, or a Sunday afternoon or evening?
4. Who would be the best person to lead the New Members Class, and who should participate? What role should the pastor play? What about current Sunday School teachers and Bible study leaders? Should recent guests be included?

The answers to these questions were developed from the principles discovered in the best recent and current literature about assimilating new members.

### **An Overview of New Member Assimilation**

The operating goal for the New Members Class was that people who attend First Baptist Church for any reasonable amount of time should become members of the church. In order for them to make this commitment a functional and not just a formal matter, they need to become fully and intentionally assimilated into the fellowship, life, and ministries of the church.

#### **What is an Assimilated Member?**

The term "assimilate," as defined by *OED*, means, "To make or be like . . . To

absorb and incorporate.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, to assimilate new members means to bring them fully into the life and ministry of the church, so that they are fulfilling their God-ordained roles in vital relationship with the rest of the body.

Win and Charles Arn developed a profile of a fully-assimilated member that included nine specific factors. Such members demonstrate the following traits, behaviors, and characteristics.

1. They identify with the goals of the church.
2. They attend worship services regularly.
3. They experience spiritual growth and progress.
4. They become members of the local church.
5. They have new friends in the church.
6. They participate in appropriate ministries and tasks.
7. They are involved in fellowship groups.
8. They regularly tithe to the church.
9. They participate in the church’s efforts to fulfill the Great Commission.<sup>4</sup>

Following in the steps of Win and Charles Arn, Joel Heck added two more descriptors of fully-assimilated members. First, they attend Sunday school and have personal and family devotions. Second, they attend some of the weekday meetings and special events of the church.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, Thabiti Anyabwile wrote that a healthy church member exhibits

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<sup>3</sup>James A. H. Murray et al., eds., *The Oxford English Dictionary [OED]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.), s.v. “assimilate.”

<sup>4</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master’s Plan*, 149-56.

<sup>5</sup>Joel D. Heck, *New Member Assimilation: Practical Prevention of Backdoor Loss through Frontdoor Care* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 54.

ten identifiable attributes, most of which are recognizable in the foregoing lists as well.

Anyabwile's list follows much the same format as Mark Dever's well-known *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*<sup>6</sup>, and includes the following items.

1. A healthy church member is an expositional listener.
2. A healthy church member is a biblical theologian.
3. A healthy church member is gospel saturated.
4. A healthy church member is genuinely converted.
5. A healthy church member is a biblical evangelist.
6. A healthy church member is a committed member.
7. A healthy church member seeks discipline.
8. A healthy church member is a growing disciple.
9. A healthy church member is a humble follower.
10. A healthy church member is a prayer warrior.<sup>7</sup>

In total, the authors cited, Win and Charles Arn, Joel Heck, and Thabiti

Anyabwile, list twenty-one attributes of biblically-functioning church members. These attributes can be grouped into six broad areas of Christian living. A healthy, fully-assimilated member is one who exhibits the six following characteristics or elements of commitment and growth.

1. Genuine regeneration—the member is verifiably born again.
2. Gospel community—the member has healthy, gospel-centered relationships with several other members of the church.
3. Doctrinal harmony—the member agrees substantially with the church's doctrinal

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<sup>6</sup>Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 7.

<sup>7</sup>Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What Is a Healthy Church Member?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 7.

position.

4. Vision affirmation—the member affirms the church’s vision and participates in at least one of the church’s ministries in view of implementing that vision.
5. Life stewardship—the member knows his spiritual gifts, talents, and treasures, and uses them in the church’s life and ministries.
6. Personal piety—the member knows and practices personal spiritual disciplines, including prayer, bible study, and relational accountability.

The New Members Class was designed to seek to develop these attributes in each participant. New members’ core commitments should coincide with these attributes also.

### **The Need for Intentional Assimilation**

As long ago as 1988, Joel Heck asserted the overt connection between member dropout and failure to assimilate members effectively. “The problem of backdoor losses is a major one in virtually all denominations and congregations. . . . Assimilation helps to prevent both inactivity on the part of the new member and the eventual walk out the back door.”<sup>8</sup> In the following decade, the research teams of both Thom Rainer and Win and Charles Arn found the same thing to be true. Arn and Arn stated, “A strategy for successful incorporation of new members is a major part of any church’s commitment to making disciples.”<sup>9</sup> Note that the issue is more than simply *desiring* to incorporate new members, but actually having in place a fully-developed and implemented strategy. Rainer agrees: “The relationship between assimilation effectiveness and a new members class is amazing. Churches that require potential members to attend a new members class

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<sup>8</sup>Heck, *New Member Assimilation*, 4.

<sup>9</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master’s Plan*, 140.

have a much higher retention rate than those who do not.”<sup>10</sup> This finding confirmed Rainer’s earlier study about the expectations a church communicates to its new and prospective members: “How does a new member class impact the assimilation rate of churches? . . . In simplest terms, churches tend to receive in commitment what they expect from new members when they join.”<sup>11</sup>

When the local church intentionally emphasizes the vitality of a membership commitment, it demonstrates fidelity to the biblical vision of the church as an organic set of gospel-centered relationships rather than an organized institution. Loose connections, while initially attractive to some, typically result in substantial dropout rates, as Arn and Arn demonstrate.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, committed membership is the atmosphere in which functional connections flourish. Anyabwile states that “commitment is precisely how God intends his people to live out the faith and experience Christian love.”<sup>13</sup>

The implication is that for member assimilation to be effective, it must be intentional and focused. New member classes must be more than mere orientation sessions showing participants how the church works. Chuck Lawless’ research shows that effective membership classes not only teach the church’s expectations, but also encourage relational buy-in to those expectations.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 114.

<sup>11</sup>Thom S. Rainer, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 106.

<sup>12</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master’s Plan*, 153

<sup>13</sup>Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 64.

<sup>14</sup>Charles E. Lawless, Jr., *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Members Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 48-52.

## Some Questions Answered

A large majority of evangelistically effective churches implement required or expected membership classes, as much as almost seventy-five percent.<sup>15</sup> Obvious questions arise regarding these classes. Some common questions are answered here.

### **Why Should a New Members Class Be Implemented?**

Over twenty-five years ago, Alan Harre stated that any church wishing to keep its members active needs to close the so-called back door: “Planned approaches to assimilate new members into the mission and ministry of the congregation are critical if the congregation is going to be serious about retaining members.”<sup>16</sup>

In recognition of this truth, the constitution of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado states quite clearly that membership in the church is conditional upon completion of a “required membership class.”<sup>17</sup> This requirement was put in place when the constitution was completely revised in 1994, as an expression of the church’s conviction that both Scripture and experience mandate a trained, committed, and active membership. Sadly, First Baptist has not historically acted upon this requirement. At best, occasional and sporadic classes have been offered, with varying degrees of participation and almost no continuity in terms of either the course of study or the duration of the classes.

Though the New Testament has many implications for church membership, as

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>16</sup>Alan F. Harre, *Close the Back Door: Ways to Create a Caring Congregational Fellowship* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984), 32.

<sup>17</sup>*Constitution of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado* (amended and printed, March 2010), 7.

Anyabwile points out, “you can’t turn in the Bible to ‘the Book of Church Membership’ or to a chapter conveniently labeled by Bible publishers, ‘On Becoming a Member.’ The biblical data isn’t as obvious as that.”<sup>18</sup> Rainer asserts, however, that churches which express definitive expectations of their members are consistent with the biblical model. He writes, “Indeed, the high-expectation church of today seems to have some of the characteristics of the first-century church. Membership means ministry. Salvation by grace results in work. . . . inactive membership is . . . a contradiction in terms.”<sup>19</sup>

The scriptural principles for relationships in the Body of Christ clearly require a genuinely committed, rather than a casual, membership. As Mark Dever says, “By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastor and other members . . . know that we intend to be committed.”<sup>20</sup> One of most appropriate means of fostering such a commitment is a new member class.

### **What Should a New Members Class Cover?**

Four decades ago, Clifford Ingle wrote and The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention published a thirteen-week Sunday school curriculum for new and prospective members, as well as current members of its constituent churches. Complete with multiple choice exercises, matching quizzes, and true-false tests, this forty-eight-page course introduced students to biblical church membership with such subjects as “The Meaning of Conversion,” “New Life in Christ,” and “Sharing Your

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<sup>18</sup>Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 65.

<sup>19</sup>Rainer, *High Expectations*, 27.

<sup>20</sup>Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 157

Faith.”<sup>21</sup> Surprisingly comprehensive for its conciseness, the course taught simply and succinctly what new members ought to learn. Far more than how the church is structured and functions, this quarterly-sized booklet demonstrated that church membership entails a depth of commitment to covenantal relationships in the body.<sup>22</sup>

In his report on highly-effective churches, Rainer states, “New member classes . . . [are] the most-frequently-used point[s] of entry where the expectations of membership are articulated.”<sup>23</sup> At its most basic, the New Members Class should therefore indicate what the church expects of its members. Rainer goes on to say, “Churches that *require* membership class attendance *prior* to membership have significantly higher retention rates than other churches.”<sup>24</sup>

The working definition of a fully assimilated member, cited previously, states that the church expects its member to express commitment and growth in six specific aspects of biblical discipleship: genuine salvation, gospel community, doctrinal harmony, vision affirmation, life stewardship, and personal piety. It follows that the New Members Class must necessarily include these subjects.

### **Where and When Should a New Members Class Meet?**

The answer to this question depends in part upon the intentions of the class. If a membership class focuses primarily on sharing information, the time and venue can be

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<sup>21</sup>Clifford Ingle, *A New Commitment: An Introduction to Church Membership for All Church Members* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board, 1970), 1, 45.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>23</sup>Rainer, *High Expectations*, 25.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.



determined on the basis of where and when that information may be best disseminated. The sanctuary on a Sunday night might work best, because of the available technology for sharing detailed instruction. If, however, the class has a relational emphasis, a more intimate time and place would work best.

Since one of the anticipated outcomes of the New Members Class was that members be incorporated into a small group, such as a Sunday school class, an appropriate meeting was determined to be during the Sunday school hour, in one of the classrooms. For the sake of the participants' convenience, alternative times might include a class that meets on Friday evening and Saturday morning; for two hours on three consecutive Sundays; or even on one long Saturday. Of these options, the first is philosophically preferable, although practical considerations may drive any number of other possible schedules.

### **Who Should Lead and Participate In a New Members Class?**

Evidence suggests that there are clear advantages to the pastor's leading the membership class or some portion of it. Matthew Spradlin, research team leader for Chuck Lawless' book *Membership Matters*, "summarized [his] findings after interviewing dozens of [new member] class [participants]: 'Who they most want to get to know is the guy they listen to each week in the pulpit, and this class provides the opportunity. I can't tell you how important this was to the people in these classes.'"<sup>25</sup> Indeed, in just over seventy-one percent of the churches surveyed, the pastor led or helped lead the membership classes; and Lawless strongly encourages pastors to lead

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<sup>25</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 53.

such classes.<sup>26</sup>

The participation issue seems so obvious as to be assumed: every potential member would be encouraged participate. No assumptions should be made, however, as to why we would want every potential member to be in the New Members Class. Donald MacNair and Esther Meek emphasize the importance of including as many people as possible in each membership class. They assert, “No gift is superfluous or redundant: every believer matters. This means that I need the ministry of yesterday’s new member as much as he or she needs mine.”<sup>27</sup>

The desire to include as many potential new members as possible had implications for publicity and recruitment. As Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger point out, placing information in the church bulletin is not enough. Effective churches certainly put information “in the worship folder, but they do more. They have a . . . registration booth where leaders . . . meet people and answer questions. [Prospective participants] can go to the registration booth and meet the leader of the . . . group. While . . . at the booth, [they meet] other people who are inquiring about the group. The relationships alleviate . . . fears.” Rainer and Geiger explain the advantage of this approach: it “contains a small difference that makes a big impact. The difference is relational. Relationships, not information, bridge the process. Capitalize on the power of relationships.”<sup>28</sup>

In summary, because every believer is important, the church must do all within its power to inform and invite all non-member attendees to participate in the New

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>27</sup>Donald J. MacNair and Esther L. Meek, *The Practices of a Healthy Church: Biblical Strategies for Vibrant Church Life and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), 109.

<sup>28</sup>Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God’s Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 152.

Members Class. It was determined that the class must be offered frequently enough to make participation as likely as possible, and should be led by the pastor.

### **Priorities in New Member Assimilation**

For nearly two decades, First Baptist Church has sporadically implemented membership classes without any clear sense of purpose and intentionality. There has been little or no biblical foundation, and no consistent pursuit of principled convictions about the outcomes the class should have or what commitments its participants should be expected to demonstrate. Biblical principles and well-researched convictions must form the basis for the New Members Class. The following six focal understandings of biblical church membership serve to firmly establish the expectations of how participants will come to see themselves in relationship with First Baptist.

#### **Genuine Regeneration: Members Are Verifiably Born Again**

Anyabwile asserts, “As we’re thinking through a list of things a healthy church member must be, a good case can be made for beginning right here—with the fact that a healthy church member must be genuinely converted.”<sup>29</sup> Sadly, some new member classes fail to include either a review of the gospel or an opportunity for potential members to share their testimonies. In Lawless’ study, 20 percent of the churches that had membership classes did not specifically include the plan of salvation in their curricula.<sup>30</sup>

Addressing the need for churches to ensure that their members are truly

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<sup>29</sup>Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 48.

<sup>30</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 70.

regenerate, Mark Dever emphasizes the problem of offering unfounded assurance of salvation to new members. “One of the most painful tasks pastors face is trying to undo the damage of false converts who have been too quickly and thoughtlessly assured . . . that they are indeed Christians.”<sup>31</sup> Dever, of course, is not the first to stress the importance of regenerate church membership. From the earliest days of Baptist associations in the Midlands of England, Baptist churches agreed in their individual and shared confessions of faith that persons must show credible evidence of regeneration before being admitted to membership. Commenting on several such confessions, John Hammett writes, “In all these examples, we see the concern to preserve regenerate church membership; believer’s baptism is important because . . . baptism is limited to those who are regenerate (i.e., those who profess repentance and faith).”<sup>32</sup> Hammett further remarks about the American confession of faith popular among Baptists, the New Hampshire Confession (which is the doctrinal statement of First Baptist Church), explaining that this document contains “[t]hree requirements for church membership . . . [c]andidates must be Christians, they must have received believer’s baptism, and they must enter into covenant with the church.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, “central to the Baptist vision of the church is the insistence that the church must be composed of believers only.”<sup>34</sup>

Some eight decades after the New Hampshire Confession was formulated, Canadian Baptist pastor, the Reverend J. D. Freeman, speaking before the inaugural

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<sup>31</sup>Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 30.

<sup>32</sup>John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2005), 95.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

Baptist World Congress (later to become the Baptist World Alliance), said, “Since the Church is Christ’s body, membership in the Church should depend upon, follow and express a previous personal relationship to Him . . . To admit to the body those who are not joined to the Head by a living faith is to commit a mischievous incongruity.”<sup>35</sup>

Freeman’s logic is irrefutable. Much less clear, however, is determining how to ascertain and guarantee that all church members are truly born again. A good first step is to make the teaching of the gospel an integral part of the New Members Class curriculum.

### **Gospel Community: Members Are Joint Heirs of Grace**

When people become members of a church, they should understand they are engaging in covenantal relationships, meaning that because they are bound to God by the covenants of grace, they are also bound by the same covenants to their brothers and sisters. John Hammett writes, “Entering the church involves being joined to the Lord and to the other members in a covenant arrangement.”<sup>36</sup> Such a covenantal relationship needs visible expression, and that means community, life lived in harmony with other members, not only in the Sunday gatherings of the church, but throughout the weekday experiences of shared life in Christ. At a minimum, this means having friends in the church.

Win and Charles Arn compared the number of friends new members gain in their church to their ongoing participation in the life of the church. They write, “The following table shows one hundred people who recently made a Christian decision—fifty

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<sup>35</sup>J. D. Freeman, “The Place of Baptists in the Christian World,” in *Authorized Record of Proceedings of the First Baptist World Congress, London, July 11-19, 1905* (London: Baptist Union Publication Department, 1905), 23.

<sup>36</sup>Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 96.

who are now active and fifty who have since dropped out. The table compares the number of friends each group made in the church during the first six months.”<sup>37</sup>

Table 2: New friendships in the church related to new member activity

Number of new friends	Active members	Dropout members
0	0	8
1	0	13
2	0	14
3	1	8
4	2	4
5	2	2
6	8	1
7	13	0
8	12	0
9+	12	0

The correlations seen in Table 2 are quite strong, both in their negative and positive results. New members who made two or fewer friends in their first six months always dropped out, while those with seven or more friends always remained active. Obviously, relationships keep people active in the life of the church. The key issue that must be addressed by the New Members Class is how to help every participant in the class develop these relationships.

Arn and Arn address this concern in another of their nine characteristics of a fully-incorporated member, involvement in a fellowship group: “One of the most meaningful, rewarding, growing experiences the new Christian will have is in a small group within the church, in which the caring, loving fellowship of the body can occur.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples*, 153.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 154.

In Lawless' research, almost 70 percent of churches with new member classes included in those classes an emphasis on participation in small groups.<sup>39</sup> The importance of placing people into such groups is clear. Two primary means of doing so are at the disposal of First Baptist.

First, there is the Sunday school. The preferred time for the New Members Class was determined to be during the Sunday school hour. By attending the class during this time every Sunday for several weeks, participants would become accustomed to being in the church building during the Sunday school hour. During one session of the class, Sunday school teachers would come and invite participants to their classes. The intention was to quickly place new members into a Sunday school class where they could develop a set of relationships.

Second, there is the ministry of Community Groups. First Baptist defines these groups briefly as follows: "A Community Group is a small gathering of believers who meet together in homes for the purpose of gospel-centered, mission-driven relationship."<sup>40</sup> New Members Class participants would be asked to read through the Community Groups introductory pamphlet and encouraged to become a part of a Community Group as soon as possible. An excerpt from this pamphlet is included as Appendix 2.

### **Doctrinal Harmony: Members Believe What the Church Believes**

In his study of churches with membership classes, Lawless found that 100

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<sup>39</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 83-84.

<sup>40</sup>John Roberts, *Community Groups at First Baptist Church: An Introduction* (Sterling, CO: First Baptist Church, 2009), 2.

percent of these churches included an overview or study the church's doctrine in their classes.<sup>41</sup>

The importance of bringing new members into doctrinal alignment with their church is widely acknowledged. The doctrines of the church are its theological boundaries, the definitions by which members and potential members may discern whether they are truly in or out of the church. Dever points out the importance of a church's beliefs as the antidote to the culture's hodge-podge popular religion: "This inattention to belief fits our culture's impatience with detail. . . . After all, we think, so many beliefs are merely passing fashions or momentary expressions of individual wants or desires."<sup>42</sup>

Thomas White, in the introduction to an important book about church integrity, comments incisively: "In order for the members to take membership seriously, biblical expectations must be placed on them."<sup>43</sup> The appropriate grounding for these biblical expectations is the church's doctrine, as derived from Scripture. As one participant in a recent membership class at First Baptist put it after the class reviewed the church's doctrinal statement, "Why would anyone be a member of this church, or become a member, without knowing what we believe?"

### **Vision Affirmation: Members Align With the Church's Vision**

For Win and Charles Arn, the first characteristic of fully-incorporated

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<sup>41</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 69.

<sup>42</sup>Dever, *Nine Marks*, 58.

<sup>43</sup>Thomas White, Jason G. Duesing, and Malcolm B. Darnell III, eds., *Restoring Integrity to Baptist Churches* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2008), 19.



members is that they identify with the church's priorities, its vision for ministry. "For many newcomers," they write, "these . . . are the only thing they have in common with the other members."<sup>44</sup> Lawless' research lines up with this assessment. Ninety-two percent of the churches he studied include the church's vision and/or mission in their membership classes. He writes,

"[T]he churches we studied used membership classes to declare the direction the church was flying. Prospective members . . . then had to decide whether they were prepared and willing to fly in the same direction. While it seldom happened, we did hear about prospective members who chose not to join after learning about the church's intended direction. Pastors who told these stories lamented the loss of potential members, but they more strongly affirmed how important it is for church members to move in the same direction."<sup>45</sup>

### **Life Stewardship: Members Use Their Gifts in Ministry**

Lawless states that a membership commitment is only the start of a long process: "Getting attenders to join the church is only a first step in moving them into ministry. In fact, moving them to ministry is sometimes even more difficult."<sup>46</sup> Other research indicates that an effective approach toward overcoming the problem of moving members into ministry is to teach all new members that they are equipped by God with unique sets of gifts, talents, and assets, which in themselves constitute a call to ministry. Ken Hemphill eloquently describes the need for all church members to know their gifts and use them effectively in the ministries of the church. He writes, "The church deals with eternal issues! For this reason, we must not allow anything to stand in the way of

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<sup>44</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples*, 149.

<sup>45</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 80.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 100.

the proper functioning of the body.”<sup>47</sup>

Though Hemphill writes primarily about how important it is for Christians to discover their spiritual gifts, the matter of life stewardship is much more comprehensive. This approach sees all of life as a gift from God, an asset mix of sorts, issuing from the sovereign hand of God and endowing the church with everything it needs to fulfill its calling and ministry.

Various models exist that teach new members how to understand and use their gifts. Among these are “placement processes based upon Rick Warren’s SHAPE concept, Wayne Codeiro’s DESIGN program, [and] the *BodyLife* model.”<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, none of these courses places much emphasis on stewardship of finances, physical resources, or time. A fuller understanding of life stewardship must include a functional commitment of every aspect of life to the glory of God. The list of assets that must be devoted to Christ embraces not only one’s spiritual gifts and natural talents, but extends as well to one’s personal property, education, background, experiences (including tragedies as well as triumphs), personality, financial assets, and salvation testimony. Each and all of these are gifts from God, by which he fully endows the church with everything necessary for its calling and ministries.

### **Personal Piety: Members Pursue Biblical Sanctification**

The pursuit of biblical sanctification is the process to which Scripture calls every genuinely regenerate person. Scripture is very clear about enjoining all Christians

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<sup>47</sup>Ken Hemphill, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall: Discovering Your True Self through Spiritual Gifts* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 26.

<sup>48</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 101.

to pursue holiness. A brief list of biblical texts will demonstrate this injunction.

1. First Peter 1:16-17—“But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”
2. First Thessalonians 4:3a—“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”
3. Romans 6:19b—“For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.”
4. First Timothy 6:11—“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.”
5. Hebrews 12:14—“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.”

Commenting on the need for church members to grow in personal piety, Anyabwile writes, “[I]t may be the case that the most chronic problem facing churches and Christians is the lack of consistent spiritual growth and progress in discipleship.”<sup>49</sup> Arn and Arn also decry the readiness of churches to settle for what they call “decision making, not disciple making,” and go on to lament, “This decision-making mentality may be one of the reasons national church membership continues to decline.”<sup>50</sup>

New church members must learn the importance of participating in the common means of grace God has appointed to the church, which comprise at minimum corporate worship with biblically-driven preaching, personal Bible study and prayer, and gospel-centered small group relationships. As Anyabwile points out, the ordinary course by which disciples grow is not by means of extraordinary programs and special ministries, but rather through “the ordinary means of grace . . . [which] include the study of the Word of God, participation in the ordinances of baptism and communion along

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<sup>49</sup>Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 83.

<sup>50</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples*, 12.

with the gathered church, and prayer.”<sup>51</sup>

Ironically, not all churches consider training in such vital spiritual disciplines a high priority for their new member classes. Only 51 percent of churches in Lawless’ study include spiritual disciplines in their membership curricula.<sup>52</sup>

As they chastise the church for its *de facto* abdication of disciple making to the parachurch, Arn and Arn remind us, “Disciple making is most effective when it is church centered.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, a vital part of any membership class would be teaching participants not only the importance of the spiritual disciplines, but actually training them in how they can have a daily quiet time that includes a plan of Scripture reading and prayer, and the pursuit of holy living through union with Christ.

### **Summary of Implications for the New Members Class**

The most obvious implication of the foregoing study for the New Members Class at First Baptist Church in Sterling, Colorado is the need to consistently conduct such a class. The only way to make membership meaningful is to train all the members to the same standards, using the same materials, and expecting the same commitments from them all.

A second clear implication regards the nature of such a class. Rather than being a simple overview of how the church functions, the class must be a training venue for personal discipleship and relational commitment. The members must be led to see themselves growing in the Lord together, serving as a body, and ministering to one

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<sup>51</sup>Anyabwile, *Healthy Church Member*, 90.

<sup>52</sup>Lawless, *Membership Matters*, 51.

<sup>53</sup>Arn and Arn, *The Master’s Plan for Making Disciples*, 67.

another as a loving family. Their pursuit of holiness must not be considered an individual effort, but rather a covenantal expression of their unity in Christ.

A third implication concerns the expected outcomes of the class. The point of conducting a new member class is not merely to teach concepts and truths to the participants, but rather to provoke lifestyle changes. The class does not aim so much at bringing new information to the members as at leading them to live in a new way in relationship with Christ and his church.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this New Members Class should be viewed by the church and the participants not as a formality to endure, but rather as a privilege to enjoy, by which the church takes obedient steps to ensure that membership means more than having one's name on a list. It means being a partner with Christ and his body in the accomplishment of God's glorious purposes in the gospel, in Sterling and throughout northeast Colorado. Such a class can be a vehicle by which the gospel transforms individual lives, the church, and the entire community.

## CHAPTER 4

### DEVELOPING THE CLASS CURRICULUM AND THE PREACHING SERIES AND IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT

The principles noted in chapter 3 drove the development of the New Members Class curriculum and the preaching series based upon it, and specifically shaped their content. Chuck Lawless, then Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism, recommended several changes to the original plan for the curriculum, including reducing the number of class sessions from eight to six, and adding a six-week preaching series that would present to the entire congregation the information and instruction in the New Members Class curriculum. These changes required a complete revision of the anticipated contents of the curriculum as well as a total reshaping of the fifteen week implementation plan.

#### **Developing and Preparing the Curriculum and the Preaching Series**

In consultation with Lawless, who suggested the specific topics for the six sessions, I began writing the curriculum in late summer, 2010. First, I outlined the individual sessions, which were to be taught as one-hour units during the Sunday school hour on Sunday mornings, from 9:30 to 10:30. The original plan, which included eight sessions, was to have included separate student pamphlets for each session and a single teacher/leader booklet from which the class facilitator would present his materials. I

determined that this procedure would prove too cumbersome, and one booklet was developed containing all the materials, both for the students and the teacher. Table 3 shows the title for each session, its topic, and memory verse.

Table 3: New Members Class session titles, topics, and memory verses

Session	Title	Topic	Memory verse
1	How Can I Be Sure I'm a Christian?	Assurance of Salvation	1 John 5:13
2	What Do We Believe in First Baptist Church?	The New Hampshire Confession	Amos 3:3
3	What Does Church Membership Mean?	Partners in Gospel Life	1 Cor 12:27
4	How Can I Keep Growing in the Lord?	Your Daily Quiet Time	Jer 15:16
5	How Can I Live Out the Gospel in Relationships?	Small Groups and Community Groups	1 Cor 12:14,25
6	How Can I Partner with Others in Gospel Life?	The Membership Covenant	1 Pet 4:10

At the same time as I was writing the curriculum sessions, I also began preparing the series of messages based upon these materials. The intention was that I would preach to the whole church the basic content of the New Members Class, as a means of giving the current members the opportunity to have the same information about membership that the new members would have. During this time of preparation, I also attempted to recruit a co-teacher who would partner with me in leading the New Members Class. Unable to do so, I ended up asking my wife to help me.

Next, I obtained final approval for the proposed project implementation schedule from the Billy Graham School office. The fifteen week project was scheduled to begin on Sunday, December 26, 2011, that date being the final deadline for potential members to sign up for the New Members Class. The project would then conclude on

Sunday, April 10, 2011, when the preaching series post-surveys would be submitted to the church office. At that point, follow-up assessment would begin.

Third, I developed a proposed “Survey of Understandings of Church Membership,” to be completed by participants in the New Members Class both before taking the class and after completing it; and similarly, by a selection of current members of the church both before hearing the series of messages based on the curriculum and after hearing it. This proposed survey was submitted to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Ethics Committee in October, 2010, and approved on November 3. It was a five point Likert scale survey using twenty statements, three relating to each of the six sessions of the New Members Class, with two additional general statements. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix 3, formatted as distributed.

I completed the class curriculum in November. Two dozen copies of it were printed as a sixty-page 8-1/2-inch by 7-inch pamphlet. Copies of the curriculum’s Table of Contents and Session 3 are attached as Appendices 4 and 5. Preliminary preparation of the sermon series based upon the curriculum was finished in early December. Samples of the preaching outlines I used in presenting the first and third messages in this series are attached as Appendix 6.

Throughout the course of the curriculum writing, I had the support of Becky Romero, my secretary at First Baptist Church, and Mona Bowey, our Children’s Minister. Both of them helped me with proof-reading and, more importantly, with clarification of terms, with a view toward keeping the curriculum as easy to understand as possible.

In December, 2010, I began publicizing the upcoming New Members Class with an article in *The First Baptist Beacon*, our church newsletter, and with a series of



announcements on Sunday mornings. I also sent personal letters to several dozen people who had been visiting First Baptist more or less regularly over the previous three months, inviting them to sign up for the New Members Class. The target age for the class was fourteen years old and above. The deadline for signing up was Sunday, December 26, 2010, at which time the project implementation schedule formally began.

### **Implementing the Curriculum**

By the registration deadline of Sunday, December 26, a total of 17 prospective members of First Baptist Church had signed up for the class. Three of these registrants were between ages fourteen and seventeen. On Monday, December 27, I sent a letter to each of the registrants. Included in each letter to registrants age eighteen and older was a copy of the “Survey of Understandings of Church Membership,” with instructions for them to complete it and bring it with them to Session 1. Since the identical survey was to be distributed on four separate occasions, copies of it were color-coded as follows: the survey given to participants in the New Members Class before the class began was printed on white; the survey given to participants in the New Members Class after the class ended was on yellow; the survey of current members before the preaching series began was on blue; and the survey of current members after the preaching series ended was on green.

On Sunday, January 2, 2011, Session 1 of the New Members Class, “How Can I Be Sure I’m a Christian?” convened at 9:30 a.m., with all 17 registrants in attendance, aged fourteen through seventy-five. All 14 of the class members eligible to participate in the survey turned in their completed pre-survey forms at the beginning of the class session.

The group succeeded in covering all of the material for Session 1. A rousing discussion developed about how important it is for Christians to be certain of their salvation. After a quick review of the basic outline of the gospel included in the materials (an outline I have often presented in my preaching over the last several years), each of the 17 class participants indicated a high degree of certainty about his or her own salvation. Several of them took the opportunity to share how they came to be born again. The importance of offering credible evidence of regeneration was reaffirmed.

On Sunday afternoon, January 2, I collated the responses to the pre-survey. The results indicated that the class's weakest understandings were generally in the areas of scriptural teaching about church membership and the importance of being in a biblical covenant with one another as members of a local church. The survey responses seem to indicate that most class members believed the New Testament had little instruction about the importance of being a member of a local church, or about why such a commitment is vital to a Christian's walk with Christ. Based upon this information, I determined to give added stress to the materials in Session 3 about the biblical foundation for church membership, and in Session 6 about the nature of covenant commitment.

On Monday, January 3, after a day spent developing supplemental materials to strengthen the curriculum for Session 3, I had an appointment with my personal physician regarding a health problem that had recently grown much worse. During the appointment, my doctor told me corrective surgery would be necessary within the week. That evening, I began to develop frightening chest pains, and my wife took me to the emergency room at Sterling Regional MedCenter. After examination by the attending physician, I was admitted for observation of possible cardiac infarction. Through the

night and the following morning I underwent several tests, by which it was determined that my heart was in excellent health, and that the symptoms I had experienced prior to my admission were stress-related. After I was dismissed on Tuesday, January 4, I met with a surgeon, who scheduled outpatient surgery for hernia repair on Thursday morning.

The surgery proved to be more extensive than anticipated, and after I spent two nights in hospital, the surgeon instructed me to stay away from work for two weeks. I contacted the Billy Graham School office by phone to apprise them of my situation, and obtained permission for my wife to teach Session 2 of the New Members Class.

On Sunday, January 9, my wife taught Session 2, “What Do We Believe in First Baptist Church?” According to her report, the participants were very enthusiastic to learn about The New Hampshire Confession, the church’s doctrine. Their questions and interest were deep and insightful. They appreciated the church’s affirmation of a confession of faith that gave them a sense of historical connection to the broad scope of orthodox Christian beliefs over the centuries. Later discussion showed how deeply they sensed the need for basic doctrinal unity in the local church. They heartily endorsed the statement on page 10 of the curriculum, “[T]rue unity is based upon unity in the truth.”

Against my doctor’s advice, I returned to work on Friday, January 14, and continued teaching the New Members Class with Session 3, “What Does Church Membership Mean?” on Sunday, January 16. The pre-survey had indicated that the participants were weak in their understanding of the topic to be covered in this session, and I was concerned for them to grasp the biblical evidence for church membership. We were not able to cover all of the materials in the curriculum, but focused primarily on that portion of the session that most specifically addressed this concern.

The following Sunday, January 23, we completed all the materials for Session 4, “How Can I Keep Growing in the Lord?” This session included practical information about how to have a daily quiet time. To several class members, this material was new and exciting. They had never been taught the importance or the means of spending time with the Lord personally. We took a few minutes to demonstrate a sample quiet time plan, and everyone indicated a willingness to encourage one another to begin following this plan in the coming weeks. Upon request, I made several extra copies of the bookmark-style guide to a daily quiet time that was taught in this session. Several class members requested copies of Session 4 to share with their friends.

On Sunday, January 30, Session 5, “How Can I Live Out the Gospel in Relationships?” introduced the importance of being in accountable small groups. This session was perhaps the most disappointing of the six, as most of the participants openly anticipated conflicts for any kind of addition to their weekday evening schedules. Some of the participants were already regular attendees of a Sunday school class, and only a few others began attending Sunday school as a result of the class.

On Sunday, February 6, Session 6, “How Can I Partner with Others in Gospel Life?” focused on the Membership Covenant of First Baptist Church. By this session, all of the participants understood how vital covenant relationships are in the local church. As we discussed the particular elements of the Membership Covenant and reviewed several dozen of the New Testament’s “one another” passages, the participants seemed enthusiastic about making a formal commitment to First Baptist. At the close of the session, we scheduled Sunday, February 20 as the date for the covenant signing in morning worship.

The six sessions had an average attendance of 15. Low attendance was 12 on the Sunday I was recovering from surgery, which also happened to be a very snowy day. High attendance was 17 for the first and last sessions.

At the final session, I gave a copy of the post-survey to each of the 12 participants who had completed the pre-survey, and asked that it be returned by the following Sunday. Twelve of them completed and returned their surveys within the week, and I began collating and comparing the results of the pre-surveys and post-surveys. These results, which are reviewed more fully in following sections, indicated that class participants improved substantially in their understanding of biblical church membership in all six areas covered by the New Members Class curriculum.

After Session 6, I made personal contacts with all seventeen class participants about whether they intended to follow up the New Members Class by becoming members of First Baptist and signing the Membership Covenant. Sixteen of the 17 were enthusiastic about signing the covenant in front of the congregation. On Sunday morning, February 20, in both services of worship, the congregation read the Membership Covenant out loud. In the 8:30 service, 2 class participants came to the front of the sanctuary to be introduced and sign the covenant. In the 10:45 service, 14 class participants did so. In all, 16 of the 17 class participants signed the Membership Covenant. They were enthusiastically welcomed by the church.

### **Implementing the Preaching Series**

I developed the messages for the preaching series at the same time I was writing the New Members Class curriculum. The texts expounded in chapter 2 formed the overarching matrix of the series and undergirded its primary emphasis, which was

that being a growing Christian requires being an active member in a local church. The preaching plan, however, required some alteration, as the process of teaching the six New Members Class sessions and evaluating the pre-surveys and post-surveys seemed to show a need to deepen the emphasis on the biblical evidence for church membership and for covenant relationships in the local church. Therefore, each message received a complete revision. The title of the preaching series, “Partners in Christ’s Body at First Baptist Church,” reflected this adjustment in emphasis. The overall theme text was 1 Peter 4:8-10. The theme statement of the series was, “If you are a member of First Baptist Church, God is calling you to live and grow as partners in the gospel of Christ with your fellow members.” The individual message titles and texts are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Preaching series on membership, with titles and texts

Sunday	Title	Texts
February 20, 2011	Partners in Certain Salvation	1 John 5:11-13; John 1:10-13
February 27, 2011	Partners in Knowing the Truth	John 8:28-32; Amos 3:3; Rom 12:1-5
March 6, 2011	Partners in Gospel Life	1 Cor 12:12-27; Acts 2:42-47
March 13, 2011	Partners in Growing in Christ	Jer 15:16; 2 Tim 3:16-17
March 20, 2011	Partners in Gospel Community	Col 3:9-17; 1 John 4:18-21
March 27, 2011	Partners in Covenant Love	Col 3:9-17; Rom 5:1-5

On Sunday, February 13, 2011, I contacted 16 current members of First Baptist and gave each of them a letter of explanation and a copy of the “Survey of Understandings of Church Membership.” I asked each one to complete the survey and submit it to the church office before the next Sunday. Eleven of them completed the

survey and turned it in by February 20. On Sunday afternoon, February 20, I began collating the responses to the members pre-survey and comparing it with the pre-survey responses of the New Members Class participants.

When the sermon series began, the first message, on Sunday, February 20, “Partners in Certain Salvation,” was rather brief. Due to the amount of time taken by the reading of the Membership Covenant, and the signing of it by the 16 new members, the sermon that day had to be shortened. Enthusiasm ran very high. There had not been a Sunday in decades when the church had welcomed so many new members. The church was blessed and excited about these additions.

Attitudes toward the preaching remained very positive the next Sunday, February 27, when I preached “Partners in Knowing the Truth,” which highlighted several important elements of the church’s statement of faith, The New Hampshire Confession. Several members encouraged me to preach an entire series of messages based on this document, and heartily affirmed the blessing of being part of a church with such a rich and biblical statement of faith.

Enthusiasm began to wane, however, as the preaching series continued with the third message, “Partners in Gospel Life” on Sunday, March 6. This message emphasized the biblical evidence for genuine church membership. After this message, I began to hear questions about why I was making the current members learn the same things the new members had been taught. After the fourth message “Partners in Growing in Christ,” which taught the importance of a daily quiet time, and the fifth message, “Partners in Gospel Community,” highlighting the biblical mandate for all Christians to maintain accountable relationships in small groups, a few vocal critics complained that it

seemed as if I were questioning their commitment to the church. Though I worked hard at explaining that I was simply seeking to be sure all the members were operating with the same set of core understandings about what church membership is all about, suspicions increased.

It may be helpful to note that a matter of real conflict was at that time being much discussed among the membership, namely the church budget. Despite the fact that offerings were down, the Church Council had proposed an increase in the church budget for 2011. At a church business meeting in January, this budget had been rejected, and the Council was directed to present a balanced budget by cutting expenses. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, even outright suspicion on the part of a few, word was spreading that I was preaching about commitment to the church in an effort to increase offerings, so that my salary could be raised. These rumors were extremely discouraging.

On Sunday, April 3, I distributed a post-survey with a brief letter of explanation to those 16 members who had received a pre-survey. They were asked to return the surveys the following week.

By the final Sunday of the preaching series, April 3, when I shared the message about the Membership Covenant, “Partners in Covenant Love,” and asked the current members to sign it just as the new members had done, I found myself faced with overt disagreement. Of the current members in attendance that day, only about half signed the Membership Covenant.

I spent most of the next few days dealing with calls from upset members. Rather than increasing commitment to the church, the preaching series had apparently produced the opposite effect: dissension. Instead of building on the joy of witnessing



sixteen new members sign the Membership Covenant on February 20, the preaching series served almost entirely to quench the enthusiasm.

Nine members who had received post-survey forms turned them in by Sunday, April 10. The small number of respondents may reasonably call into question the validity of the results.

### **Assessing the Surveys of New Members and Current Members**

The reason for conducting identical pre-surveys and post-surveys was to obtain an objective record of changes in knowledge and attitudes about biblical church membership resulting from the New Members Class and the preaching series. The scores of the survey of potential new members administered before the New Members Class could be compared with the scores of the survey after the class. Similarly, the scores of the survey of current members administered before the preaching series could be compared with the scores of the survey after the series.

The Likert scale instrument used for these surveys was constructed in such a manner as to presume a preferred response for each of its twenty statements. According to social research author Earl Babbie, Likert scale surveys should typically not be analyzed using the numerical averages of the responses. Instead, the analysis should incorporate the statistical function known as “mode,” which simply means the most-frequently given response.<sup>1</sup> I did not believe, however, that the survey I used had enough participants for the mode to serve as an accurate statistical indicator of each group’s

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<sup>1</sup>Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1994), 179-81.

responses. There were between only 9 and 14 respondents to the four surveys, and this number did not seem to be statistically significant.

Therefore, I chose to use a rather different kind of analysis, a simplified variation of the “weighted mean” approach described by John McIver and Earl Carmines.<sup>2</sup> By averaging the numerical difference for the response to each statement from the correct or preferred response, I could see how far removed the survey respondents were from the truths I intended to teach them. An example will suffice to explain the rationale and the use of this technique.

For each statement in the survey, I assumed a best or most preferred response, the “right answer,” since there were, in fact, truths I wanted the respondents to affirm or acquire. For example, consider survey statement 3, “Genuine Christians can lose their salvation.” Because the class taught participants that Christians can not, in fact, lose their salvation, the best or most preferred response to this statement would be “definitely disagree,” indicated by circling the number “1” on the Likert scale. Thus, I hoped that no matter how many respondents marked their pre-surveys with a “1” for this statement, more would mark “1” on their post-surveys. If so, this would indicate that participants had learned what I wanted them to learn.

With this approach to the data in mind, I analyzed it by measuring the numerical distance of each actual response from the preferred response or “right answer.” If the respondent marked a “2” about a statement for which the preferred or correct response was a “5,” that response would be assigned a value of “3,” the difference

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<sup>2</sup>John P. McIver and Edward G. Carmines. *Unidimensional Scaling*. Sage University Paper Series on Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences 24. (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1981), 26-29.

between “5” and “2.” Similarly, if the respondent marked a “5” for a statement for which the preferred response would be “1,” this response is assigned a value of “4,” that being the distance or variation of the respondent from the knowledge I wanted him to have. The average of these values would then indicate the average statistical distance of all the respondents from the responses I would have preferred that they make. By comparing the average variations from the preferred responses in the pre-survey with those of the post-survey, a statistical picture would then be seen of the hoped-for improvement of the respondents, showing whether or not they, as a group, had demonstrated an increase in their awareness of the truths I wanted them to learn.

Of the New Members Class participants, all 14 eligible to complete the “Survey of Understandings of Church Membership” did so prior to the start of the class. Of these 14, 12 completed the same survey when the class was complete.

From the sample of 16 current members who were given the survey before the preaching series, 11 returned completed surveys. Nine completed the same survey after the preaching series was done.

The answers were analyzed as described above to evaluate the views of current members and class participants. Because the surveys were completed anonymously, as required by the Southern Seminary Ethics Committee, it was impossible to determine if individual participants grew in their understandings of the lessons taught.

### **The New Members Class Surveys**

Responses were tabulated and compared both individually and by statistical variation from the desired response for each statement. Statistical outliers were noted and taken into account in analyzing the results. The same process was followed in analyzing

the post-surveys. Table 5 compares the average pre-survey test responses for the New Members Class with the average post-survey responses.

Table 5: New Members Class, average pre-survey and post-survey responses

Survey statement	Preferred response	Average pre-survey difference from preferred response	Average post-survey difference from preferred response	Change
1	1	1.43	2.50	-1.07
2	5	0.43	0.50	-0.07
3	1	1.29	1.00	+0.29
4	5	1.21	0.58	+0.63
5	5	0.36	0.00	+0.36
6	1	0.43	0.17	+0.26
7	5	1.08	0.83	+0.25
8	1	0.86	0.08	+0.78
9	1	1.64	0.75	+0.89
10	5	0.64	0.09	+0.55
11	5	0.64	0.08	+0.56
12	5	0.07	0.00	+0.07
13	5	0.14	0.00	+0.14
14	5	1.36	0.08	+1.24
15	5	1.36	0.50	+0.86
16	1	0.29	0.08	+0.21
17	5	1.57	1.08	+0.49
18	5	0.21	0.00	+0.21
19	5	2.39	1.50	+0.89
20	5	0.64	0.33	+0.31

In Table 5, the most informative column is the last, with the heading “Change.” In this column, a positive number indicates an increase in the respondents’ average alignment with the preferred response. In other words, more respondents moved closer to the desired affirmations of biblical truth for that particular statement. A negative number indicates the opposite: a further departure, in knowledge or attitude,

from the truths taught in the New Members Class. The greater the absolute value of the number, the larger is the indicated change in the respondents' affirmation of the preferred response.

Because the pre-survey showed that the greatest lack of the New Members Class registrants was in their understanding of the biblical mandate and guidelines for church membership, I adjusted the materials for Session 3, and added greater emphasis to the large body of biblical information that supports First Baptist's practice of church membership. Not surprisingly, class participants showed the most significant increase in their understanding of the truths taught in this particular session. The three survey statements about the Scriptures and church membership, numbers 5, 6, and 7, showed an average improvement in this area of knowledge of 29.4 percent. Class participants clearly gained substantial fresh insight into the biblical mandate for church membership.

The second greatest growth was seen in the participants' understanding of their need to be in mutual accountability with fellow church members in small groups. This knowledge base increased by just over 25 percent.

The final area of significant improvement was in the class members' understanding of the importance of making and maintaining an overt and open commitment to biblical church membership. The participants' knowledge of this teaching increased by 17.6 percent.

The only marked anomaly, in which the knowledge base seemed to degrade dramatically, was in the first statement, which said, "In today's culture, being a member of a local church is out of date." The post-survey shows a substantial move away from the preferred response. Perhaps the odd wording of the statement confused the

respondents. A better wording would perhaps have been, “Being a member of a local church is out of date,” as the phrase “In today’s culture” may have cause confusion.

Overall, the participants’ affirmation of the biblical truths taught in the New Members Class grew significantly. In each of the six broad areas of information covered by the curriculum, the class grew in its knowledge of biblical truth. The post-survey respondents showed an overall average 12.8 percent greater agreement with the preferred responses to the statements than did the pre-survey respondents.

### **The Current Members Preaching Series Surveys**

As mentioned above, though the preaching series began with positive responses, the atmosphere of tension and conflict in the church produced an increasingly negative attitude toward the messages about church membership as the series progressed. This negativity seems to be reflected in the comparison of the pre-survey and post-survey results of the current members. Table 6 compares the average pre-survey test responses for the preaching series with the average post-survey responses.

The negative changes on survey Statements 3, 8, and 15 through 20 are fascinating. Without specific information regarding the respondents who completed these surveys, however, I can only speculate about the causes of these negative changes. Noteworthy, perhaps, is the fact that the bulk of the negative changes are evidenced in the last few items. I taught on the subjects referenced by these statements during a time of increasingly negative attitudes among the current membership in general. Conflict over the church budget and staff pay schedules was at a high and frustrating level. The negative responses to these statements on the survey may perhaps be attributed to this

general atmosphere in the church at the time.

Table 6: Current members preaching series, average pre-survey and post-survey responses

Survey statement	Preferred response	Average pre-survey difference from preferred response	Average post-survey difference from preferred response	Change
1	1	2.09	2.00	+0.09
2	5	0.18	0.00	+0.18
3	1	0.73	0.78	-0.05
4	5	0.27	0.22	+0.05
5	5	0.00	0.00	+0.00
6	1	0.27	0.22	+0.05
7	5	1.00	1.00	+0.00
8	1	0.91	1.11	-0.20
9	1	1.36	1.33	+0.03
10	5	0.64	0.44	+0.20
11	5	0.09	0.00	+0.09
12	5	0.55	0.22	+0.33
13	5	0.18	0.00	+0.18
14	5	0.36	0.33	+0.03
15	5	1.36	1.78	-0.42
16	1	0.09	0.89	-0.80
17	5	0.18	0.33	-0.15
18	5	0.00	0.11	-0.11
19	5	1.36	1.78	-0.42
20	5	0.18	0.44	-0.26

### Follow Up from the New Members Class

Sixteen of the 17 participants in the New Members Class became members of First Baptist Church and signed the Membership Covenant. Within a few days or weeks thereafter, all sixteen were contacted by various ministry coordinators in the church to participate in some area of service. Of these 16, 13 remained active in the life of the church for at least the next six months, and were involved in ministries and relationships in which they were not involved prior to the class. Two moved to other communities due

to job changes. Another experienced a change in her employment schedule to work all day every Sunday, but continued to participate when she could. The lone person that simply disappeared without explanation when the class concluded was the one who chose not to sign the Membership Covenant. I made several attempts to contact this person, but to no avail.

Thus, just over 82 percent of the New Members Class participants have increased their functional commitment to the church. These fourteen people have become involved in children's ministries (Awana<sup>®</sup>, Sunday school, and Vacation Bible School), worship ministries (greeters, worship team, reading Scripture, leading in prayer, and personal testimony times), prayer ministries (prayer chain, prayer groups, and monthly prayer vigil), fellowship ministries (food service, meals ministry, and funeral dinners), and caring ministries (home-care help and visitation of shut-ins). Several months after they signed the Membership Covenant, their participation in the life of the church shows no signs of diminishing.



CHAPTER 5  
EVALUATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

**Introduction**

Over the period from its inception to completion, this project incurred a number of substantial and unavoidable changes. While the title and overall scope of the project remained unaltered, other changes in focus, plans, and schedules were necessitated by personal and circumstantial difficulties.

**Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The originally stated purpose of the project was to develop and implement a discipleship-oriented New Members Class at First Baptist Church to include all the new members age twelve and up, beginning in 2007 or 2008. Due to changes in circumstances in the church, within the Graham School, and in my own life, I was granted a one year leave from the D.Min. program. In April, 2009, permission was given to change the focus of chapter 3 from a study of small-group methodology to research of principles of new member assimilation. Later that year, the schedule for the implementation of the project was shifted to the winter of 2010-2011.

In general terms, the project's purpose was fully met. I did, in fact, develop a discipleship-oriented New Members Class. The New Members Class curriculum I wrote had as a primary focus the development of personal spiritual disciplines in the lives of the

participants. Moreover, this class was successfully implemented, according to the altered schedule, and the curriculum will continue to be used in future New Members Classes.

### **Evaluation of the Project's Goals**

Briefly stated, the original goals of this project were five:

1. that the New Members Class curriculum be non-generic, designed with the specific needs of the prospective members in view;
2. that the New Members Class be designed and promoted in such a way as to increase participation of new and prospective members substantially beyond historic levels;
3. that participants develop foundational personal spiritual disciplines that enable them to read, study, understand and apply God's Word in their lives;
4. that participants discover their spiritual gifts and commit to use them in one or more of the ministries of First Baptist Church; and
5. that participants become active members of a Sunday school class at First Baptist Church.

In consultation with the Billy Graham School leadership, a sixth goal was added: that through the addition of a preaching series based upon the New Members Class curriculum, the current membership would learn the same principles being taught in the class, with the intention of assuring that both new and current members possess the same set of information and commitments.

The first goal, specific applicability of the curriculum, was entirely achieved. The curriculum was written with the needs and circumstances of the people of Sterling, and explicitly of First Baptist Church, in mind. The class was intentionally designed to be non-transferable in nature, but rather to address the particular situation and culture of First Baptist Church.

The second goal was that a higher percentage of prospective and potential

members would participate in the New Members Class than in its previous iterations.

This goal was substantially accomplished. Two factors played a part in this achievement.

First, the class was designed in six sessions of approximately fifty minutes, so that it could be conducted during the Sunday school hour. These small units of instruction meant that participants would register knowing that class attendance would not require a large block of time at once. Moreover, some prospective participants were already attending a Sunday school class, so there would be no added time requirement for them.

Second, the promotion of the class was quite vigorous. This effort included announcements in both worship services for several weeks and a letter of invitation sent to all non-members who had been attending regularly for three or more months. Most of these letters were followed by a personal contact or phone call from me. Almost half of those who received letters of invitation registered for the class. Participation in the weekly classes averaged just over 85 percent of the registrants.

The third goal, developing personal spiritual disciplines, was partially achieved, at least in the short term. The comparison of the pre-survey and post-survey results, as indicated in chapter 4, demonstrated in the New Members Class participants an increased awareness of the need for a daily quiet time, as well as a greater understanding of the method for meeting this need. In informal follow-up interviews of the participants conducted in the months following the class, just over half of them indicated that they were reading their Bibles more frequently and that their prayer lives had improved.

The fourth goal, discovering and using spiritual gifts, was not achieved. The original plan for the New Members Class had included a session on spiritual gifts, which

was to be followed by the completion of a spiritual gifts inventory and a matching of each participant's gift mix to potential ministry opportunities in the church. When the project implementation schedule changed, however, from the original eight sessions to six, and a six-week preaching series was added, the session on spiritual gifts was eliminated.

The fifth goal, that participants become active in Sunday school, was partially accomplished. Of the 17 participants in the New Members Class, 6 were already active in a Sunday school class. Of the remaining 11, 5 became involved in a class. The original plan for the New Members Class had included one full session about being involved in a Sunday school class. Teachers would visit the New Members Class and invite participants to join their classes. When the implementation schedule was changed, this session was eliminated. As a result, the connection between the New Members Class and further participation in the Sunday school was minimized.

The sixth goal, the addition of a preaching series based on the New Members Class curriculum, was fully achieved, but failed to accomplish its underlying purpose, that of giving the current members the same information as the participants in the New Members Class. Attendant upon this sixth goal, the preaching series was planned and implemented with at least three objectives in view.

The first objective of the preaching series was that the current members would grow in their functional awareness of what their membership commitment means. While the members at large might have grown in their understanding of the basics of biblical church membership, it is apparent from the post-survey that there was a shift in the feelings of the respondents. Though they may have acquired fresh knowledge, their attitudes seem not to have improved. Indeed, there was an apparent outward negativity

toward the Membership Covenant itself. Many refused to sign it, and some expressed their refusal in no uncertain terms to me and other leaders. This first objective remained largely unmet.

The second objective of the preaching series was to raise the sense of unity among the current members and the new members by teaching all the members, new and current, the same set of truths about biblical church membership. Despite the fact that the content of the preaching series closely paralleled that of the New Members Class curriculum, with the obvious implication that all the members had access to the same information, there is no evidence that this common set of truths resulted in an increased sense of unity. Indeed, the opposite seemed to be the case: several of the current members openly stated that they did not need this teaching because it was for new members and they were old members. Instead of greater unity, there seemed to arise a sense of division by which I am still being confronted on an almost weekly basis. This second objective was not met.

The third and most important aim of the preaching series was that the current members would take discernable forward steps in their commitment to gospel-centered relationships in the church, through increased participation in small groups and through life application of the commitments clearly stated in the Membership Covenant. How fully this objective will be met remains to be determined. While there seems to be a small increase in participation in the various ministries of the church, there has been no growth in the church's small groups ministry.

None of the primary objectives of the preaching series was fully accomplished among the current members of First Baptist Church. There are at least four likely reasons

for these failures.

First, the preaching series was poorly publicized. In contrast to the New Members Class, which was promoted clearly and enthusiastically for a month, I simply jumped into the preaching series. The congregation knew little or nothing in advance about what I would be sharing in the series, nor why I would be preaching it.

Second, none of the goals for the preaching series was shared with the congregation. While each of the sessions in the New Members Class had a clear goal that was openly stated to the class members, neither the purposes for the preaching series as a whole nor for the individual messages was announced to the church. To be sure, I wrote goals for each message during my sermon preparation. I did not, however, make them clear to anyone else.

Third, and in consequence to the above two failings, the congregation was taken by surprise about what would be expected of them at the close of the series. They were unaware that I would be giving them an opportunity to sign the Membership Covenant. Despite the fact that I made it quite clear that no current members would be required to sign the covenant, many seemed to feel they were forced to make a snap decision to do so, with no advance preparation, and were therefore reluctant to sign it.

Fourth, the entire preaching series took place at a time when the congregation was experiencing an atmosphere of suspicion. Concerns about the church budget and staff salaries set people against one another, and there was a growing party spirit. Money, or the apparent need for it, dominated the thoughts of many, and with those thoughts in place, my preaching about increased commitment sounded to some like a veiled pleading for more giving.

## **Strengths of the Project**

The project had two primary parts: the New Members Class itself, and the preaching series based upon the class curriculum. The curriculum and class were originally planned to cover eight sessions. In order to accommodate the addition of a preaching series into the fifteen-week implementation schedule, the number of lessons was reduced to six.

Despite this reduction in the number of lessons, the most obvious primary strength of the project was the curriculum itself. Its sixty pages comprise a comprehensive introduction to First Baptist's doctrine, values, practices, and overall vision for church life.

Moreover, the curriculum is a series of lessons that any capable teacher could lead. It includes all the necessary materials. Though it was designed to be conducted in six separate fifty-minute sessions during the Sunday school hour, it is easily adaptable for use in two three-hour meetings or three two-hour meetings.

To say that the New Members Class was a success seems a genuine understatement. At several points, the class exceeded my expectations. Despite the seasonal difficulties of publicizing the class during Advent and conducting it in mid-winter, more people signed up for the class than I anticipated. Weekly attendance was more consistent and higher than I had thought it would be. Participation was more lively and enthusiasm was greater than anticipated. I never would have supposed that all but one of the participants would be so enthusiastic to sign the Membership Covenant. Finally, the fact that 14 of the 17 participants quickly became active in the ministries of the church was beyond my greatest hope.

Another strength of the New Members Class was its overall clarity and specificity: from start to finish, the class was described and taught with the explicit outcomes in view that participants would examine first their relationship with Christ and then their relationship with His church, so that they would be fully committed to both relationships. The class invited and encouraged people to take specific steps to follow Christ in partnership with the church. Each class session had a well-defined and clearly-stated learning goal for the participants. The results of the class surveys indicate that these goals were not only understood but accomplished.

A third strength of the project, particularly as noted by the comments of the New Members Class participants, was its exposition of First Baptist's doctrinal statement, The New Hampshire Confession. Several of the new members indicated that what they learned about the church doctrine was the primary motive for making the membership commitment.

A fourth strength of the project was the fact that it presented to the whole church the value and biblical importance of being committed to a local church. In the months following the completion of the project, despite the negativities mentioned above with respect to the preaching series and signing of the Membership Covenant, First Baptist has experienced an increase in stewardship, both financial and relational. While proving a definite causal relationship between the project's completion and the growth in giving and ministry participation, the project's probable contribution to these changes seems reasonable to surmise.

A final strength of the project—specifically, of the New Members Class—was the follow-up plan. Immediately after the last session, I personally contacted all of the



participants to discuss with them whether they wanted to commit to the church and sign the Membership Covenant. Then, when sixteen of them made this commitment, their names were immediately handed off to ministry coordinators in the church, and each of them was personally contacted to become involved in one or more ministries. In other words, the class taught how church members should be serving in their church, and these lessons were quickly followed up by the presentation of real life opportunities to do so.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

I have identified five primary weaknesses in the project. Four involve aspects of scheduling and implementation, while the fifth weakness is perhaps inherent to the effort to complete a project at the local church as a means of acquiring an advanced degree in a seminary.

The first weakness in the project was the change from the original eight-session plan to a six-session New Members Class and a six-message sermon series. This change eliminated two important lessons from the class. Although the change was motivated by a desire that the current members would have the same information as the participants in the class, the addition of the sermon series, which necessitated the change, did not produce the intended results.

A second weakness was the timing of implementation. The original thought was that doing the New Members Class at the beginning of the year would motivate people to consider a new commitment to the church. This plan did not bear its intended fruit. Despite the extensive publicity and personal invitations, more people might have registered at a different season of the church year.

In addition to these controllable seasonal concerns, the weather proved to be a

factor. In northeast Colorado, churches generally consider it unwise to schedule long series of events in the winter. January and February 2011 proved to be a case in point, as heavy snow and cold weather reduced attendance for at least two of the six sessions of the New Member Class.

Other circumstantial difficulties weakened the project. The health problems I experienced during the New Member Class, along with the further complications of the church's financial situation and its attendant suspicions among the current members, caused the project to be less effective than it might otherwise have been.

A third weakness of the project involved the evaluation instrument. Even though the surveys were carefully developed from the six lessons of the New Members Class and the preaching series, the nature of the instrument itself was that it measured only knowledge and attitude, rather than behavior and commitment. The survey results indicate clearly that the knowledge base of the participants changed, more so as a result of the New Members Class than of the preaching series. What the survey was not able to quantify was whether their behaviors changed. For example, with regard to Session 4, about having a daily quiet time, participants clearly learned both why and how to spend time with the Lord every day. Are they, however, actually implementing these new skills in their every day experience? In addition, though participants in the New Members Class grew in their affirmation of the importance of being in an accountable small group, few of them have started participating in one of the church's Community Groups.

Out of this weakness, two as-yet unanswered questions arise. First, is it appropriate to expect participants' behaviors to change as their knowledge base grows? Second, how can the New Members Class be altered in the future to encourage more

change in behavior and commitment arising out of the increase in knowledge that participants will experience?

The fourth and perhaps most obvious weakness of the project was the implementation of the preaching series. Five of the six sermons were among the weakest and most muddled I have preached in several years, primarily because they were so cumbersome. The mandate for the message series was that the current members would acquire the same information as participants in the New Members Class. The curriculum, however, did not lend itself to being modified into sermons. Not only was each lesson in the curriculum twice as long as the time I am allocated for preaching, but the nature of the materials was more academic and less exhortational than my typical preaching approach. I did an inadequate job of adapting the curriculum from the classroom to the pulpit. Both the preaching series survey results, and the less quantifiable evidence afforded by conversations with members during and after the series, point to this weakness.

The fifth weakness is one that seems to be unavoidable in such a project, and that is its artificiality. The fact that I was doing the class and sermon series in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a D.Min. was met with resentment on the part of some. That their pastor was departing from his usual preaching and ministry routine in order to spend several months on a project whose benefits would not, in their view, extend to them or to the church, was a cause of some disgruntlement, particularly among the older members. Some of them viewed the project preparation and implementation not as a blessing to the church, but rather as a distraction at best, an actual impediment at worst, because it took time from my ministry, especially my ministry to them.

A conversation I had with one church leader midway through the preaching series typifies this resentment. “What were you trying to do?” he asked me. “What is your agenda? I feel like you’re using our church to prove a point on behalf of the seminary.” While this point of view was not widespread, it was common enough to have an injurious effect on the outcome of the project, especially of the preaching series.

I am willing to own my responsibility for a portion of this weakness. Knowing that northeast Coloradans have an almost endemic suspicion of so-called “experts,” and doubly so when the experts live at a distance far removed or in a culture dissimilar to their own, I was reluctant at any point to explain to the congregation that I would be implementing the project as part of achieving my degree, because I did not want members to devalue the messages as being imposed on them by a school almost one thousand miles away. When I failed to explain this aspect of the project’s purpose, and the members, not surprisingly, discovered its purpose anyway, some of them, like the church leader described above, wondered what I was trying to hide.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

There are two considerations to address at this point. The first is a look backward at what I perhaps should have done differently in the preparation and implementation of this project. The second is a look forward at what I will do differently in the future implementation of the New Members Class at First Baptist Church.

The first thing I should have done differently was not to delay the preparation, development, and implementation of the project as long as I did. At the time I was granted the leave of absence from the D.Min. program, it seemed unavoidable. In retrospect, however, I wonder if I ought simply to have labored through it. Indeed,

though the hand of a sovereign God may be seen in the delays, the accompanying substantial changes in the circumstances of First Baptist Church resulted in an almost complete revision of the original plan and goals of the project. In fact, I almost had to start the project over.

The delay was also accompanied by changes in the Billy Graham School: my original supervisor died, and the leadership of the D.Min. program changed. As a result, I felt no small distance and dissociation from the plan and guidance with which I started the project.

Secondly, from the very beginning of my participation in the D.Min program, I should have explained more clearly to the congregation the potential blessings for First Baptist Church of my acquiring the degree and of the church's participation in the project with which the program would culminate. Only the leaders of the church knew initially of my pursuit of the degree, because they were responsible for agreeing to grant me the requisite study leave. At no time, however, did I offer an extended explanation to the church regarding the purpose and nature of the D.Min. degree. No small amount of suspicion and complaining might have been eliminated by a more concerted effort to keep the church informed about my participation and progress in the academic aspects of the program as well as the development and implementation of the project itself.

A third change I should have made would have been to publicize the preaching series of the project more carefully and clearly. The preaching series should have been afforded the same promotion and advance explanation as the New Members Class. To accomplish this needed publicity, there should have been at least one more week of separation between the end of the class and the beginning of the preaching series.

Though I made mention of the upcoming series of messages in the weeks before it began, the congregation was never adequately informed of the purpose for the series. They apparently never grasped the need for the current members to have the same information regarding membership as the participants in the New Members Class. Though more adequate publicity might not have produced a more favorable outcome, it might have reduced the level of questioning and suspicion regarding my motivation in preaching the sermon series.

A final and simple implementation difference would have been to conduct the New Members Class and preaching series in the autumn of 2010. September is a month that brings an annual upswing of participation in church life at First Baptist, especially in regard to Sunday school attendance. Conducting the New Members Class in September and October might have taken advantage of this annual increase, and would have avoided the weather-related difficulties commonly experienced in mid-winter.

I will continue to use the curriculum written for and implemented in the New Members Class. I will rewrite it, however, to include two additional lessons, according to the original plan: one lesson on spiritual gifts and how they help indicate the specific ministries and relationships new members should pursue; and another lesson introducing to participants the leaders and curriculum choices of the youth and adult Sunday school classes so that they would feel invited and welcomed into a regular class after the completion of New Members Class.

These changes may result in a modification of the schedule. Portions of the curriculum will continue to be conducted during the Sunday school hour, but some sessions will likely be done during one or two extended meetings on a couple of Sunday

afternoons.

### **Theological Reflections**

The Scripture study detailed in chapter 2 above focused primarily on individual aspects of personal discipleship. In the course of the research described in Chapter 3, which looked at principles of member assimilation, and with the alteration of the project from an eight-week to a six-week class, there emerged a not so subtle change of emphasis for the class, not only in terms of its basic content, but, at a more foundational level, in its theological focus. This alteration arose out the fresh realization that healthy church membership is more than a formal and organizational commitment to the local church, but rather an expression of the innate character of the church.

Arising out of this realization, the theological foundations of the project may be expressed in three simple statements that summarize the convictions upon which the New Members Class and curriculum were built. First, the New Testament presents a clear call for regenerate persons to make a definitive commitment to the local church. Far from the post-biblical innovation some suppose it to be, church membership finds warrant in the life of the infant church itself, as demonstrated in chapter 3. This truth provided an air of confidence, even urgency, to the call for participation in the New Members Class; if a regenerate person is to become all that God calls him to be, membership in the local church is not merely an aid in this spiritual development, but is instead a necessity. Knowing that no regenerate person can follow Christ fully apart from a commitment to others provided a definitive and powerful impetus to the New Members Class.

Second, the pastor is the local church's primary source of vision for its

understanding of its nature and mission. The process of study and development clarified to me this aspect of my role in First Baptist Church: if the church is to have an unambiguous view of itself, I must make the vision clear. This redefined for me one aspect of leadership that had been sorely lacking in my ministry: namely, that one of the primary ways I am called to lead the church is constantly defining for them who they are, not only in terms of their relationship to Christ, but also in terms of their relationships with one another and the world around them.

Third, the church is a radical community of the regenerate who express the gospel in their commitment to one another. The lessons expressed in chapter 2 and chapter 3 indicate that in the absence of a biblically driven emphasis on community, the gospel might be misunderstood either as privatistic pietism on one hand or corporate legalism on the other. In addition, apart from the constant proclamation and application of the gospel, community could be misunderstood and so collapse into either mutual sentimentality or peer manipulation. To prevent both of these opposite errors, Christ has uniquely designed the local church for both gospel and community by making it that group of regenerate people who are committed to express the gospel in community and experience community by the gospel.

Beyond, or one might say, beneath these three formative considerations, the undergirding theological value that supported the entire process for me, from the early stages of the project proposal all the way to its final evaluation, was the oft-repeated biblical mandate of persistent faithfulness. For example, it is the “good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21, 23) whom the master commends in Christ’s parable. Believers are encouraged never to “grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do



not give up” (Gal 6:9), and to “run with endurance the race that is set before us,” while focusing on Christ, so that we will “not grow weary or fainthearted” (Heb 12:1, 3).

This project gave me opportunity to discover whether I believed these passages of Scripture to be true. Giving up would have been very easy. That Christ did not allow me to do so is personally gratifying.

### **Personal Reflections**

The glowing optimism with which I entered the D.Min. program in June, 2005, seems at this date rather remote. The journey that was so delightful and encouraging during the academic phase grew less pleasant as I transitioned into the project portion of the degree. Obstacles and difficulties seemed to attend every stage: the death of my supervisor, three years of conflict and disputes within the church, a personal tragedy that led to my being granted a leave of absence, a change in the nature of the project, and finally my own health problems, all combined to make the process more arduous than anticipated, and thus render this personal retrospective a somewhat melancholy reflection.

Throughout the project’s development and implementation, old fears and uncertainties regarding my leadership resurfaced. As the time to implement the project approached, I began to revert to an unhealthy pattern of withholding information from people in fear that they might not like what I told them. I failed to give adequate publicity and explanation for the preaching series in no small measure because I feared that the current members would feel resentment toward the seminary for—as I thought they might suppose—imposing the messages upon them. The irony of this failing is that the members’ resentment was then directed toward me because they perceived I had a

hidden agenda in preaching the messages.

The writing of the New Members Class curriculum was perhaps the most personally fulfilling aspect of the entire project. The effort to systematize the meaning of membership in First Baptist Church rejuvenated my understanding of the pastorate. I became more aware of how crucial it is that the pastor constantly portray to his congregation the nature of the local church as a radical partnership of the regenerate. I grew more convinced of the importance of what I came to think of as relational discipleship: not just individual piety in the practice of personal spiritual disciplines, but rather a corporate approach to following Christ in which members actively partner with one another in the application of the gospel to their daily lives.

This renewed view of pastoral leadership relates to one of the apparent reasons for the relative and unexpected success of the New Members Class: it was taught by the pastor. I had initially considered having a co-teacher lead about half the sessions, but this idea was dropped during the curriculum development simply because I was unable to find and train a willing co-teacher. The class experience indicated, however, the importance of my teaching all or almost all of the sessions. Several class members remarked repeatedly throughout the course of the class how much they appreciated my taking the time to teach them this vital information. Their appreciative response further signifies for me the importance of my role in casting the vision for membership not only at certain specified seasons of the year, but as a continual feature of my leadership.

### **Conclusion**

From the beginning of the writing of the curriculum in late summer 2010 until the formal start of the project implementation on December 26, 2010, preparations for the

project required approximately three hundred hours. The bulk of this time was spent on the curriculum itself. Its sixty pages required an average of over three hours per page to compose and complete. The preparation for the sermon series took place simultaneously and required ten to fifteen additional hours per message to modify the content of the curriculum into a sermon-appropriate format.

During the course of the development and compilation of the curriculum, I began to sense that God was moving the focus of the class itself away from the kind of individualistic discipleship emphasis that was originally planned toward a more relationally-driven approach to the life of a disciple. The eventual title of the curriculum, “Life in the Body: Becoming and Being a Member of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado” reflected this change in emphasis by highlighting the fact that, for the individual Christian, life in Christ necessarily involves active relationships and participation in the life of the Body of Christ.

With all the data in view, both statistical and anecdotal, I can assert that the New Members Class was an unqualified success. There is no reason to believe that it would not succeed equally again and again. Plans to implement the class at least twice per year are currently being developed, and the next class should take place soon.

By contrast, the preaching series was as complete a disappointment as the New Members Class was a delight. If such a series were to be preached again, much more publicity would be needed, along with increased clarification of its purpose and objectives.

For all that God has done in me and in First Baptist Church through this project, its development and implementation, I offer him praise. For all that he will do

through future use of the New Members Class curriculum and the lessons he has taught me in the process, I give him glory in anticipation of his gracious willingness to use a weak instrument like me to bring honor to his name in the gospel through Jesus Christ.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE MEMBERSHIP COVENANT OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

The following document was written and revised by the First Baptist Church Council from August, 2006 to September, 2007. It was approved as the official membership covenant of the church on October 28, 2007. This Covenant is read aloud in Sunday morning worship at First Baptist Church twice a year.

#### **Membership Covenant**

As a member of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado, I commit myself to God and to the other members to keep the following covenants of Christian discipleship:

I will protect the unity of His Church . . .

- ♦ By acting in love toward other Christians
  - ♦ By refusing to gossip or spread rumors
  - ♦ By supporting and praying for the staff and leaders of First Baptist Church
- So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding. – Romans 14:19*

*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus – Romans 15:5*

*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. – Ephesians 4:29*

*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*

I will encourage the health of His Church . . .

- ♦ By regularly praying for the spiritual wellbeing of First Baptist Church as well as other churches
  - ♦ By sincerely inviting my unchurched friends and acquaintances to attend First Baptist with me
  - ♦ By warmly welcoming guests who attend First Baptist Church
- Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you. – 2 Thessalonians 3:1*

*And the master said to the servant, “Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.” – Luke 14:23*

*Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. – Romans 15:7 (NIV)*

I will serve in the ministries of His Church . . .

- ♦ By using my spiritual gifts and natural talents in the life and ministries of First Baptist Church
- ♦ By allowing my pastor and the other leaders of First Baptist Church to equip me for ministry
- ♦ By choosing to serve and help meet the needs of the other members, as well as those who don't know Christ

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace. – 1 Peter 4:10*

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup>not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. <sup>5</sup>In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. – Philippians 2:3-5 (NIV)*

*And He personally gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ. – Ephesians 4:11-12 (JR)*

I will support the testimony of His Church . . .

- ♦ By dependably attending the worship and study meetings of First Baptist Church
- ♦ By earnestly seeking to live a godly life in home, work and community
- ♦ By faithfully giving of my finances and time to First Baptist Church

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another . . . – Hebrews 10:25a (JR)*

*Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . . – Philippians 1:27a (JR)*

*“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.” – Malachi 3:10*

## APPENDIX 2

### EXCERPTS FROM THE PUBLICITY PAMPHLET INTRODUCING COMMUNITY GROUPS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

#### **Ten Reasons You Should Be In a Community Group**

10. Being with other Christians in vital, Gospel-centered relationships is not optional. It's not something you do to be a stronger Christian, it's what you're commanded to do because you're a Christian. It's for EVERY Christian, not just a select few.
9. If you're a member of FBC, you have covenant obligations to the other members. (See the membership covenant for details.) CGs are places where you can joyfully fulfill those covenant obligations to your brothers and sisters in Christ!
8. The church is the family of God, not just an organization. Families are where folks get included and welcomed, as Scripture says: "God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:6). CGs are designed to be functional families in Christ, sharing Gospel life together. In CGs, we learn to make the Gospel the center of all our relationships, with each other, and with the unchurched.
7. CGs are a way to live out the New Testament pattern for the church, as we see in Acts chapters 2 through 5: they met in a large group on Sundays for worship and teaching, and on weekdays in homes for Gospel-centered relationships and to learn to apply the Gospel in their lives. Sitting in a big room with other Christians on Sunday morning is only part of it.
6. CGs are where we can live out the Gospel with each other as we listen to, learn with, pray for, and love one another. 2 Corinthians 5 says that we have been given a ministry of Gospel reconciliation, and CGs are where we can learn to live out this reconciling ministry.
5. CGs are a biblically-defined way of learning to obey the 57 "one another" commands given to us in the New Testament, such as these. John 13:34-35—A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. 1 Corinthians 12:25—God's purpose was that the body should not be divided, but rather that all of its parts should feel the same concern for one another.
4. CGs are where you can reflect on and learn to apply God's Word in community

with others who are seeking to apply it just like you. It helps to share with others who are trying to grow in their obedience to the Word of God. “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17).

3. CGs are a continual reminder that being a Christian really does mean being a functioning part of the Body of Christ. Salvation means being saved into a beautiful, wonderful, sometimes messy thing called the church. You are not called to live the Christian life alone. If you are saved, you are called into relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Really!
2. Community Groups are an ideal place for the caring ministries of the church to happen. It’s natural for CG participants to extend all kinds of caring to one another, from hospital visitation to meals ministries, and every other kind of support and care. As you grow together with your brothers and sisters in Gospel-centered relationships, caring automatically happens.
1. You will be blessed in ways you can’t even imagine. The benefits of being in Gospel-centered relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ are limitless. Your life can be changed by participating in a CG.

Listen to what one participant in one of the first CGs said: “The third time our group met, I had this ‘Ah-ha!’ moment about following Christ in a particular area of my life. I’m really being changed. I never would have had this discovery on my own. Hearing others in the group grapple with the Word of God is what opened up the truth to me in a completely new way.”

### **Community Groups Frequently Asked Questions**

How do Community Groups differ from home Bible studies?

Most home Bible studies focus on a particular topic or Bible book. They’re extremely practical and helpful for people who want to study that topic or book, so often times, the study itself is the “main event” – and while Gospel life may happen in home Bible studies, it’s not the focus of the group. CGs exist to provide a delivery system for living Gospel life together. They use prayer, fellowship, Scripture reflection, life application service, and care as tools for encouraging Gospel application in every CG member.

Are Community Groups just like Sunday School classes?

Nope! CGs are more informal and discussion-oriented. They can also be a blend of folks from all ages and stages of maturity, rather than being age or stage oriented–this helps to remind us that we are part of the family of God!

Who should join a Community Group? Can I invite my friends?

CGs are so fantastic that we think everyone connected to FBC should be active in one. And because of the informal nature of CGs, they’re a great place to invite your unchurched and unsaved friends.



I'm a very busy person. Isn't this going to be just one more thing for me to do?

Well, if it is, we're doing it wrong! For Christians, living out the Gospel in our daily lives is supposed to be a top priority. CGs aren't just another "program" to be tacked on to our already busy schedules. They're a way for us to minister and be ministered to—a time of refreshing, joy-filled, genuine Gospel relationship. Yes, it does take some time, but talk to anyone who is in a CG, and they will tell you it's worth it!

What if I can't join a group right away?

No problem. After the first few meetings, each group will be open to new people throughout the annual CG cycle, which generally coincides with the school year, so you can join an existing group anytime. (Some CGs *may* choose to meet during the summer.) Also, new CGs will start from time to time, and they'll be well-publicized, so you'll have ample opportunity to get in a CG.

What goes on in a Community Group meeting?

A sample schedule for a CG meeting is included as the last page in this pamphlet.

How do I join a Community Group?

Easy. Every Sunday after both services, there will be a Community Group table with information about a group near you or one that fits your schedule. Groups will meet during the week, so you can pick an evening, a location, and a time that works well for you; and then that CG leader will contact you with details in time for you to visit the same week.

What if there are no groups that work for my schedule?

We're always on the lookout for more opportunities to launch new CGs, so if you're stymied by the schedule, call the church office and let us know when you are available. We'll try to get you plugged in as soon as possible.

What are the expectations for participants in Community Groups?

We expect you to be blessed, and grow in your faith by leaps and bounds! We also ask that folks pick a group and stick with it. Of course, since we're all humans, less-than-perfect situations are bound to crop up now and then, but CG is the perfect place to work through those situations. Beyond the basic schedule that all of the groups will follow, each group has a lot of flexibility to make its own "rules," assign ministry and care jobs, set time limits, and work out all the other details of Gospel life together.

What if this booklet hasn't answered my questions?

You have more questions? Great! Here's how you can get those burning questions answered. You can talk to Pastor John or Richard Jackman. You can chat with one of the folks in a CG. Or you can email your questions to [fbcggroups@gmail.com](mailto:fbcggroups@gmail.com). But maybe the best way to get your questions answered is . . . to join a Community Group!

APPENDIX 3

THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

**A Survey of Understandings of Church Membership**

The survey in which you are about to participate is designed to determine how clearly members and prospective members of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado, understand church membership. The survey will be conducted *only with those age 18 and older*. This research is being conducted by Pastor John Roberts for purposes of completing his Doctor of Ministry project; namely, to develop and implement a new member class at FBC. In this research, you will respond to a series of twenty simple statements based on the curriculum of the FBC membership class. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time*. By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

To complete this survey, simply circle one of the numbers on the scale below each statement, to indicate your agreement or disagreement with each statement. Try not to over-think your responses.

1. In today's culture, being a member of a local church is out of date.  
Definitely disagree      Somewhat disagree      Unsure or undecided      Somewhat agree      Definitely agree  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5
2. I know Scripture verses that teach assurance of salvation.  
Definitely disagree      Somewhat disagree      Unsure or undecided      Somewhat agree      Definitely agree  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5
3. Genuine Christians can lose their salvation.  
Definitely disagree      Somewhat disagree      Unsure or undecided      Somewhat agree      Definitely agree  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5
4. I understand how to lead others to faith in Christ.  
Definitely disagree      Somewhat disagree      Unsure or undecided      Somewhat agree      Definitely agree  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5
5. Jesus Christ has done everything God requires to save people.  
Definitely disagree      Somewhat disagree      Unsure or undecided      Somewhat agree      Definitely agree  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5
6. It's okay for the members of a church to come up with their own beliefs.  
Definitely disagree      Somewhat disagree      Unsure or undecided      Somewhat agree      Definitely agree  
1.....2.....3.....4.....5

7. True church unity is based on unity in beliefs.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
8. The Bible contains no teaching about church membership.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
9. Churches described in the New Testament had no guidelines about who could be a church member.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
10. A clear understanding of church membership helps protect the unity of the church.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
11. I know how to have a quiet time with Christ every day.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
12. Christians can't grow spiritually without regular time alone with God.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
13. Reading the Bible is as important as maintaining a healthy diet.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
14. I understand what Community Groups in FBC, Sterling, are about.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
15. Being in a Community Group is vital for the spiritual growth of the members of FBC, Sterling.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
16. Christians don't need to be accountable to each other.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
17. I know how my gifts and talents can be used in the ministries of FBC, Sterling.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |
18. Church members should protect the unity of the church.
- |                     |                   |                     |                |                  |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Definitely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Unsure or undecided | Somewhat agree | Definitely agree |
| 1.....              | 2.....            | 3.....              | 4.....         | 5.....           |

19. There is really no such thing as an inactive church member.

Definitely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Unsure or undecided	Somewhat agree	Definitely agree
1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5

20. Becoming and/or being a member of FBC, Sterling, is important to me.

Definitely disagree	Somewhat disagree	Unsure or undecided	Somewhat agree	Definitely agree
1.....	2.....	3.....	4.....	5

Thank you for your thoughtfulness, time and effort in completing this survey. God  
bless you for your participation! Pastor John Roberts

APPENDIX 4

THE NEW MEMBERS CLASS CURRICLUM  
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Becoming and Being a Member of First Baptist Church,  
Sterling, Colorado  
A study for new and prospective members**

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by Pastor John Roberts

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Scripture quotations marked JR are Pastor John's own translations from the original languages.

## APPENDIX 5

### THE NEW MEMBERS CLASS CURRICULUM SESSION 3

#### **Life in the Body:**

#### **Becoming and Being a Member of First Baptist Church, Sterling, Colorado Session 3 What Does Church Membership Mean? Partners in Gospel Life**

**Goal:** The goal of this session is that participants will understand and agree that being a member of a local church is a relational covenant entirely based on Biblical principles, so that they willingly and joyously enter into covenant with the other members of First Baptist Church, Sterling.

**Key statement:** Church membership is committed partnership in gospel life.

**Key verse:** *1 Corinthians 12:27 – Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

#### **A definition of biblical church membership**

In his excellent book, *Membership Matters*, Dr. Chuck Lawless defines biblical church membership: “Membership is a public pledge to find our role in the body, work alongside other members, and hold each other accountable to faithful Christian living.”\* In other words, a commitment to be a member of a local church is entering into an earnest relational partnership. As Dr. Lawless’ definition points out, it involves several specific and ongoing acts of dedication.

First, being a member of a local church “is a public pledge.” It is not something done in secret or in private – it is you taking a public stand to covenant with the other members of FBC, Sterling, in a determined partnership.

Second, being a member or partner of FBC, Sterling means you are committed to finding and fulfilling your role in this local church body. Other words for role include function, responsibility, job, task and part. Finding and fulfilling your role in FBC, Sterling, therefore means you are willing to discover and do what God has called you to do, as you partner with others in the church to fulfill the mission and vision of God for FBC, Sterling.

Third, being a member or partner of FBC, Sterling, means you are committed to working alongside other members. This involves teamwork, which requires that you submit your own ideas and plans to the overall mission and vision of the church. In other words, you cooperate with the other members in fulfilling the big picture for FBC.

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\* Charles E. Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New members classes and Assimilation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 74.

A fourth element of biblical church membership, as Dr. Lawless points out, is holding one another accountable. Relationships in the body of Christ are meant to build one another up in Christ-like character, and encourage each other in the sometimes difficult process of sanctification. To experience this kind of accountability, you have to develop close relationships, in which a depth of trust is established that allows you to hear the truth as we speak it to one another in love. We encourage all the members of FBC, Sterling, to get involved in one of our Community Groups, which are designed to cultivate these kinds of relationships.

The final element in Dr. Lawless' definition is the ultimate goal of the membership commitment: faithful Christian living. Being a member or partner of FBC, Sterling, means you and all the other members lovingly expect each other to be faithful to Christ and obedient to the gospel. The commitment to be a member is a way of saying to the other members, "I want you to expect me to follow Christ; and I will expect you to follow Christ, too."

### **Biblical evidence for church membership**

The New Testament doctrine of the church can be understood only in the context of genuine membership. There is, however, no command in Scripture, "Thou shalt be a church member." Nevertheless, several passages describe aspects of life in the early church that make sense only if local churches actually kept lists of people who were mutually committed to one another and the local church. The following is a partial list of the New Testament evidences for genuine membership in the infant church.

1. The churches kept numbered lists of those who identified with them (Acts 1:15; 2:41-47; 4:4; 6:7).
2. People understood participation in the local church to be based upon "joining" the church, literally "cleaving to" (Acts 5:12-13).
3. Church leaders maintained and supervised special lists of persons who received special ministry (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 5:9-11).
4. Christians understood the church as a body, and themselves individually as members of it (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12, 18-27).
5. Christians called themselves "members" and "partners" of each other (Ephesians 4:25; Romans 12:5; Revelation 1:7; 1 Corinthians 12:27).
6. Church leaders maintained identified lists of people who were eligible to vote and establish a majority (2 Corinthians 2:6; Acts 1:15-26).
7. Churches followed an established process for disciplining and/or dismissing members (Galatians 6:1-6; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5).
8. Churches had specific qualifications and guidelines for two different kinds of leaders, called deacons and elders (Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Hebrews 13:17).
9. Church leaders were paid, at least in some churches (1 Timothy 5:17-19; 1 Corinthians 9:9-14).

The conclusion, based upon the biblical evidence, is this: though Scripture contains no explicit command for Christians to be church members, there is ample testimony that even in the earliest days of its existence, perhaps within weeks after Christ's ascension, the church developed guidelines for including some people as members and excluding others from membership.

## **Biblical guidelines for church membership**

As we have seen, the early church had clear guidelines for who could be a member and who could not. Our church constitution follows these same guidelines for church membership here at FBC, Sterling. We lovingly hold out the following biblical expectations for the members of FBC, Sterling:

1. to give credible evidence that they are truly born again (including baptism by immersion after personal confession of Christ as Lord and Savior);
2. to willingly commit themselves to develop gospel-centered relationships in covenant with other members of FBC, Sterling as described in the Membership Covenant, which we will study more fully in Session #6;
3. to be in substantial agreement with FBC's Statement of Faith, "The New Hampshire Confession," which was reviewed in Session #2;
4. to affirm FBC's mission and vision as implemented by its leaders;
5. to dedicate their gifts and talents to ministry in and through FBC; and
6. to actively pursue biblical sanctification in their personal lives.

For now, let's take a more detailed look at guideline #1, which, of course, is the most important one.

To be a member of FBC, Sterling, you need to give credible evidence that you are truly born again. This evidence must include an initial public testimony of your salvation through the means of baptism by immersion. We believe that Scripture is clear: if you have been born again, you should be baptized by immersion at your first opportunity.

If you have not been baptized by immersion since you were born again, we will expect you to be baptized as soon as possible. Please speak with our pastor about baptism.

The next section details the biblical teaching on the importance of being baptized by immersion after you are born again. It is taken from the Bible study on baptism we require every baptismal candidate to complete.

## **The method and meaning of baptism**

The biblical method of baptism

A. Baptism is, by definition, immersion in water.

1. What the word "baptism" means: immersion

Our word "baptism" comes from the Greek word *BAPTISMOS*, used in the original language of the New Testament. *BAPTISMOS* means "immersion" or "the act of dipping into." It does not mean sprinkling or pouring.

2. What the early church did: immersed

(See Matthew 3:6,16; Mark 1:10; Acts 8:36-39 and Romans 6:3-4.)

When the method of baptism is described in the New Testament, those being baptized "go down into the water" (Acts 8:38), and then "come up out of the water" (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10). This picture agrees with Paul's teaching on baptism as a burial (Romans 6:3-4).

B. Baptism is a public act, not a private one.

1. What Jesus expected: public confession (See Matthew 10:32-33.)

During His ministry, Jesus called people to follow Him openly, and expected an open, public response.

2. What the early church did: baptized publicly (See Acts 2:38-42; Acts 8:27-39; Acts 9:10-19; Acts 16:13-15, 5-34; Acts 19:1-7.)



Baptisms in the New Testament typically took place in a group setting, not in private.

C. Baptism is for believers only.

1. What Jesus commanded: baptize only believers

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus commands the Church to do four things: a) go into the world; b) make disciples; c) baptize them; and d) teach them to obey His command.

2. What the early church did: baptized only believers (See Acts 2:38-42; Acts 8:27-39; Acts 9:10-19; Acts 16:13-15, 5-34; Acts 19:1-7.)

All the baptisms recorded in the New Testament took place *after* those being baptized received Christ. There is not a single example of baptizing the unbelieving children of disciples. The text sometimes used to support infant baptism (Acts 16:25-34) actually affirms believers baptism: in this account, every family member was baptized (v. 33) because every family member believed (v. 34).

The biblical meaning of baptism

A. Baptism is a statement. When the church baptizes someone, both the church and that person are saying something very clearly.

1. Baptism is a statement of the church's obedience.

The church must obey our Lord Jesus. We baptize only those who have become disciples of Jesus, because that's what Jesus commanded us to do (Matthew 28:18-20).

2. Baptism is a statement of a believer's commitment to do God's will. (See Matthew 3:1-17; Mark 1:4-11; Luke 3:1-22.)

Jesus came to John at the Jordan River and was baptized by him "for repentance" (Matthew 3:11). The basic meaning of repent is "to change directions." In this sense of the word, Jesus did repent at His baptism: that is, He changed the direction of His life. Before His baptism, He was a carpenter. After His baptism, He began His public ministry. Just like the others John baptized, by being baptized Jesus made a public commitment to do the will of His Father: He turned from His former way of life and started the ministry He had come to do. We expect every saved person to make a similar commitment to do God's will, and to express this commitment in baptism, just like Jesus did.

B. Baptism is a symbol. When the church baptizes someone, that person is showing that a real change has happened in his or her life.

1. Baptism is a symbol of the believer's new life.

We receive eternal life from Jesus by being born again (John 3:3-8). Baptism is a picture of the death of the former life, as the disciple is "buried" in the water; and of the new life, as the disciple is then "resurrected" out of the water. In Romans 6:1-11, Paul uses this image in his teaching on the importance of baptism.

2. Baptism is a symbol of the washing away of sins.

We are forgiven of our sins by the blood of Christ, and we are cleansed from sin by the work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-5). Baptism, as a kind of physical "bath," symbolizes the Holy Spirit's inner washing away of our sins.

Conclusion: If you have received Jesus, but have not been baptized since then, we encourage you to take this step of obedience in your walk with Him!

### **Credible evidence that you are truly born again**

Beyond baptism, what does “credible evidence that you are truly born again” mean? It means that you should be able to describe in simple terms that you are reasonably certain you have been born again, as we looked at in Session #1. How did you answer the questions at the end of that session? Let’s review:

1. Have you become convinced that God, Who created you and infinitely longs for a relationship with you, is infinitely holy?
2. Are you convinced that you are a sinner, separated from God?
3. Do you acknowledge that only Jesus Christ can solve the sin problem?
4. Have you admitted to God you’re a sinner who needs a Savior?
5. Do you trust Jesus to be your only Savior?
6. Have you committed your life to Him?
7. Most importantly, is your confidence in Christ and in His Word, that He has done all God required to save you?

In addition to your own testimony about what God has done for you to “cause you to be born again” (1 Peter 1:3), credible evidence that you are born again would include changes that others see in you, ways that you live your life differently because you are a Christian. What has changed or is changing in you as a result of Christ’s living in you? What attitudes and behaviors are different? What difference does Christ make in your daily life?

As Dr. Lawless’ definition of church membership points out, one of the most basic aspects of church membership is being committed to the kind of gospel-centered relationships with other members in which you are encouraged to continually grow in the kinds of attitudes, actions and words that prove you are truly born again. Sessions #4 and #5 in this class are aimed at encouraging this growth, both in your own personal life and in the development of gospel-centered relationships with other members.

### **Membership is a covenant relationship.**

As we saw in Session #2, our doctrinal statement, the New Hampshire Confession, defines a church as a group of born again people who are “associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.” In its most basic sense, the word “covenant” simply means a solemn promise by two or more parties to engage in certain attitudes and actions, and to avoid other actions and attitudes.

In Session #6, we will study the specific elements of the Membership Covenant of FBC, Sterling. If you decide to become a member of FBC, Sterling, we will ask you to sign this Membership Covenant in front of the church during a Sunday morning worship service. For now, please take time to read the Membership Covenant, and jot down any questions you may have.

Note that the Membership Covenant is one that could be called both unilateral and unconditional. In other words, these are promises that each member personally makes to God and to the other members, regardless of whether the other members are keeping their promises or not.

## APPENDIX 6

### THE PREACHING SERIES: SERMON OUTLINES 1 AND 3

#### Sermon Series

#### “Partners in Christ’s Body at First Baptist Church”

Introduction to the series: For the next several weeks, we’re going to be focusing on the term “partners.” We are partners in the Body of Christ. Membership in this church means partnership with each other. We will discover how the Word of God calls us to live with one another in committed accountability to the glorious partnership we have been brought into when we were born again in Christ.

#### Preaching Series Sermon Outline for Message #1 “Partners in Certain Salvation”

1 John 5:11-13

Introduction: The foundation of the partnership we enjoy in the church is salvation. If I am saved and you are saved, then we are partners in salvation. And, God’s Word tells us we can be sure. Assurance of salvation is, in fact, the re-birthright and privilege of every regenerate person. It is possible to be sure. Every Christian, however, sometimes struggles with doubts. I want to show all of you that are born again how you can overcome these doubts and be sure.

Keys to maintaining genuine assurance:

1. Conquer doubt with gospel truth.

“I write these things to you . . . so that you will know”

John 8:32

Don’t ask, “Do I FEEL saved?”

Ask instead, “What does God’s Word say about how you get saved?” Repeatedly review the gospel: what has God DONE in Christ?

The gospel is gloriously freeing.

Because, as John Piper reminds us, the gospel is good NEWS, not good ADVICE.

Good NEWS leads to joy, freedom and celebration.

Good ADVICE means duty, burden and pressure.

Assurance means you, knowing again, “Yes, I AM admitting I’m a sinner who needs a Savior (not just that I DID admit that once); Yes, I AM believing Jesus did everything necessary to save me; and Yes, I AM committing my life into Christ’s hands. I DID and I still am.”

2. Check for evidence of Christ in you.

“Whoever HAS the Son has life . . .”

When you trust Christ and commit your life to Him, He comes to live IN you, You

can then say, “I HAVE the Son of God living in me.”

Paul talks about this amazing reality that the Son of God takes up residence in His people, and describes it this way in Colossians 1:27 – “the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

2 Corinthians 13:5 encourages us to check for evidence of our salvation

Some evidences of Christ in you.

You grow to cherish God’s will as Christ did.

John 5:30

John 6:38

Now if He Who cherished the Father’s will lives IN you, you will grow to cherish God’s will also.

You develop a hatred of your own sin.

It’s easy to hate OTHER people’s sin. That almost comes naturally. But Christ hates YOUR sin (it’s why He died!), and if He lives in you, you will develop a hatred of your sin too.

You love God.

Grateful love is the only rational response to the gospel! And grateful love is demonstrated by obedience to Christ’s commands, as He said in John 14:15.

3. Focus on God’s character and promises.

“ . . . believe in the NAME of the Son of God . . . ”

His name, Jesus, reveals His nature: He is the Lord Who saves.

In the final analysis, assurance of salvation is all about the reality that God in Christ Jesus is faithful.

Hebrews 10:23, says, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He Who promised is faithful.”

HOW can you hold fast your confession? Because HE is faithful! Focus on His faithfulness and be certain of your salvation!

### Preaching Series Sermon Outline for Message #3

#### “Partners in Gospel Life”

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Introduction: In today’s church culture, a term and concept that seems to have been forgotten is “biblical church membership.” I want to prove to you today that Scripture teaches us clearly that God expects His family members to be committed to a local church in covenant partnership.

There are over two dozen texts in the New Testament which demonstrate that the early church had real membership.

There are also over five dozen “one-another” instructions and commands. All of these make sense ONLY when people are covenant partners

As an operating definition of biblical church membership, we will take what Dr. Chuck Lawless says on page 74 of his excellent book *Membership Matters*.

Biblical church membership is a public commitment to . . .

1. Find and fill your role in a local church

“PARTners” means you and I each have a PART to do

1 Cor. 12:14-16

These verses teach that we're not all the same, which means we have different ministries to do. I'll encourage you to do yours. You encourage me to do mine. Let's encourage one another to do what God calls us to do.

Biblical church membership is a public commitment to . . .

2. Work with one another in loving cooperation  
"Partners" means co-operating with each other.

1 Cor. 12:20-22

These verses teach that we need one another, so we have to learn how to love and work together.

Biblical church membership is a public commitment to . . .

3. Hold one another accountable to gospel life  
"Partners" means accountability to one another

1 Cor. 12:25-26

These verses mean that caring for each other is at the heart of accountability

What word is at the center of the word accountability? Count. I can COUNT on you. You can COUNT on me. Together, we COUNT ON God.

When we count on each other, we acknowledge the covenant we're in.

When we count on each other, we develop gospel-centered relationships.

Look around you. There is not one person in this room that God does not love. Does the way you relate to these people line up with them? Are you committed to the other people in this room as an expression of your commitment to God? If anything needs to change in your heart about anybody else connected to this church, would you take a moment right now to bring that to God?

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A DISCIPLESHIP-ORIENTED NEW MEMBERS CLASS FOR FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH STERLING, COLORADO

John Eugene Roberts, D.Min.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011  
Supervisor: Dr. Paul H. Chitwood

This project explores the development of a discipleship-oriented New Members Class at First Baptist Church in Sterling, Colorado, and explains how this class was implemented. Chapter 1 relates the situation at First Baptist Church and details the need for the New Members Class.

Chapter 2 gives the biblical support for the New Members Class. Specifically, this chapter expounds five biblical texts and outlines their implication for the class.

Chapter 3 examines best practices for assimilating new members. An overview of the impact of new members classes on membership assimilation is included, along with implications for the New Members Class at First Baptist Church.

Chapter 4 describes the implementation of the class and preaching series. Samples of the class curriculum, preaching series outlines, and survey instrument are included in the appendices.

Chapter 5 renders an evaluation of the class and the preaching series. Suggestions for further development and implementation are included.

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