



REDEEMING GRACE CHURCH OF LAKEWOOD

Redeeming Grace Church of Lakewood Membership Packet

The purpose of this packet is to make potential members aware of who we are and what we believe. To accomplish this, we discuss the role of membership, doctrine, our church covenant, and “our nuts and bolts.” We are told in Ephesians 3 that it is through the church that “the manifold wisdom of God” is made known. Therefore, Redeeming Grace Church exists to promote the glory of God as we live in Him, with each other, and in the world. Our desire is that we preserve the purity and unity of local church membership, so that our testimony to the world makes the gospel visible.

I. What is Church Membership?

Church Membership is a recognized relationship between a church and a Christian. It is based upon a shared belief in the gospel, experienced by a shared love for one another, and intended to pursue a shared joy and holiness in Christ.

II. Why Church Membership?

From their beginning, local Christian churches were congregations of specific, identifiable people. For example, Paul writes 1 Thessalonians “to the church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thess 1:1) and 1 Corinthians “to the church of God in Corinth” (1 Cor 1:2). It is clear that our New Testament letters were written to specific churches, each in a specific location, rather than to individual Christians within the general population of the city. This in no way discredits their usefulness to the *universal* church (the whole body of believers throughout the world; Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22), but these letters first landed in the hands of a *local* church (a body of believers who gather together on the Lord’s Day, originally in homes, in order to worship the triune God through preaching the gospel and administering the sacraments; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:5). The local church, therefore, is the gathering of Christians to publicly worship and enjoy the living Savior Jesus Christ.

Scripture refers to the church many times as the “body of Christ” (e.g. 1 Cor 12:27). It even continues this metaphor by calling each individual Christian a “*member*” or in our language a “body part” of the body of Christ. In other words, the church, Christ’s body, is made up of eyes, ears, feet, hands, etc. The point is not for you to discern which “member” you are, but to realize that you are, in fact, a member! So this is partly why we use the word *member* to describe a Christian’s covenantal commitment to a local church. Like members of a physical body, placed exactly where God desires them to be for the purpose of physical health and unity, so it is with God’s spiritual body. You have been placed exactly where the sovereign God desires you to be, for the purpose of spiritual health and unity.

“God has so composed the body...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12:24,25).

Membership is partnership. It is a commitment to one another. But it is more than that. It is a bending or bowing of the whole person around other Christians in love. It is placing your discipleship to Christ under others, and they under you, loving one another with the affection of Christ. It is acknowledging that God has arranged you to be in membership with other Christians not only in the universal church, but first and primarily in the *local* church. Local church membership is the physical reality of your spiritual membership in the universal church. No Christian will deny the truth that we need to care, encourage, and admonish one another, and those duties are most healthfully lived out in the context of membership.

Perhaps an illustration would be helpful. When a man and a woman decide to marry, they plan a wedding ceremony. The purpose of the ceremony is to publicly *display* and *celebrate* their covenant of love, allegiance, and submission to one another. Rings are shared, signatures are taken, and vows are promised. To what end? To physically and tangibly convey the meaning of covenantal love in marriage. Typically it is not enough just to say “I love you”, but also to publicly say at some point, “I do.” Local church membership is very

similar. It is not enough for Christians to say "I love you" to the church, but also to say publicly one day to a local church, "I do." *"I do in fact give my whole self to this group of people, loving and cherishing them, trusting them, laying down my life for them, serving them, and helping them along their journey to Heaven."* This is a church membership vow. It physically shows the meaning of covenant love in church membership, declaring to all present your love, allegiance, and submission to one another. Largely, the significance of Christians saying "I do" to one another in membership has been lost. But why have we lost it? Why are we hesitant to publicly affirm our love for each other, when in fact, in private we affirm it all the time? Do the Scriptures speak of a place where our love for one another is to be expressed? Yes! The local church (1 Cor 12)! And membership informs the Christian *who* to publicly love and submit to. As such, a first step in expressing *spiritual* care for one another is to *physically* sign and agree with the Member Packet, promising to the best of our ability that we will carry out the duties of a healthy church member. Again, this is how we know who to shepherd, who to pray for, who to love *specifically*, who we are to teach and admonish faithfully, and who we are to enjoy God with. Joining a church is saying "I do" to a group of people who seek your spiritual well-being and protect you from hazards along your Christian walk. Joining a church is walking down the aisle, celebrating the sovereign love that binds a band of believers together, and asking God's Spirit to empower us to live in harmony with one another.

Inherent in the conversation regarding church membership is the issue of church discipline. In other words, one cannot talk about opening the "front door" of the church without talking about the "back door." Many texts in the New Testament point to the practice of church discipline, but the most well known comes from Matthew's gospel. Jesus says,

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Mat 18:15-18)

What does this all mean? In short, Jesus means for churches (not just elders) to play the judicial function in fighting against the sin in our lives. When faced with people who claim to represent Jesus with their lips but who live contrary to that claim, churches must carefully weigh the evidence and render judgment. Most church discipline is what we call "*formative church discipline*", that is the positive, private discipline between one member and another. It is the stake that stabilizes and directs the tree as it grows, braces on the teeth, the extra set of wheels on the bicycle. In other words, discipline is not only a negative matter, it's the positive discipleship that occurs daily in the life of a church. Along with "*formative church discipline*", is "*corrective church discipline*." This is usually what we all think about when we hear the words "church discipline." It corrects something that has gone wrong in the body so that more serious injury is avoided. In the context of Matthew 18 (following on the parable of the sheep-seeking Shepherd), it is clear that God's goal in church discipline is *restoration* (see also Gal 6:1). Rebuke, admonition, and excommunication are all examples of corrective discipline. They correct the more serious errors that members make in doctrine and lifestyle. Hopefully, this type of discipline also remains private and between a couple of members, but that depends upon the repentance of the guilty member. Neglecting corrective discipline can be deadly for a church.

Undergoing the surgical knife is never enjoyable, but it is often life-saving. The prospect of corrective church discipline, especially when public, is never pleasant. But unrepentant sin and those who continually cherish false doctrine are cancerous to the body and must be addressed proactively if the body is to enjoy health and engage in productive work. Therefore, personal accountability and open relationships can go a long way toward preventing such public discipline.

So before we move on, please consider what it means to join a church. Fundamentally, to join a church is to publicly identify yourself with a group that is committed to loving God and loving one another. It is acknowledging that you cannot live the Christian life alone and therefore need other Christians to partner with you. Finally, it is about the church being God's heavenly embassy on earth, living as citizens of heaven and emitting the light of the gospel to a dark world. It is not only saying "I love you," but also saying "I do."

III. What We Believe

God

We believe in the one true God, the source and sustainer of all life, who eternally exists in three persons as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. He is the maker, sustainer, and sovereign ruler of all things, having decreed all things from eternity past to be subject to His perfect will and pleasure.

Genesis 1:1; Genesis 2:7; Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 47:2,8; Jeremiah 10:10; Daniel 4:35; Matthew 28:18,19; 2 Corinthians 13:13,14; Ephesians 1:11; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 4:11.

Scripture

We believe God has revealed Himself to all mankind in the things that have been made. Beginning with creation and culminating in Jesus Christ, God has also revealed Himself in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments which alone are divinely inspired, inerrant, and infallible. The Bible is the supreme authority in matters of faith and conduct.

Psalm 19:1-11; John 17:17; Romans 1:19,20; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 3:15,16; Hebrews 1:1,2.

Jesus Christ

We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, and in His virgin birth, His sinless human life, His divine miracles, His vicarious and propitiatory death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His present mediation in heaven, and His future personal return in power and glory. We believe in His passive and active obedience, that is, His substitutionary death and His righteous, sinless life both secure salvation, having canceled the record of debt that stood against sinners with its legal demands. We believe that Christ alone, in His person and work, is the means of reconciling sinners to God.

Isaiah 53:4-6; Luke 1:26-35; John 1:1,14; John 11:38-44; Acts 1:9,10; Acts 4:12; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Colossians 1:15; Colossians 2:14; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Hebrews 1:1-3; Hebrews 7:25-27.

Humanity

We believe God created the heavens and the earth. Mankind is God's pinnacle act of creation, having been created in His own image. We believe Adam and Eve to be our first parents. When deceived by the serpent, they sinned against God and alienated humanity from the Creator and creation. We believe sin to be an offense against God, exchanging the glory of the immortal God for the glory of mortal man. We believe that Adam's sin was imputed to all mankind. In light of God's holiness, we believe that man's sinfulness renders every person incapable of coming to God on his or her own apart from the effectual work of God.

Genesis 1,2; Psalm 8:3-8; Isaiah 59:1,2; Romans 1:21-23; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12; Romans 8:7,8; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:21-22.

Salvation

Despite the wickedness of man, we believe God lovingly saves all people who repent of their sin and put their faith in Jesus Christ. By His obedient life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection, Jesus Christ delivers, adopts, forgives, justifies, purifies, and sanctifies sinners for salvation. We believe that faith alone is the instrument by which the ungodly are justified and forgiven. We believe the Holy Spirit regenerates and indwells the people of God forever, enabling them to live holy and transformed lives in this world.

Mark 1:15; John 3:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 16:30-31; Romans 6:1-11; Romans 8:9-10; Ephesians 2:8-10; 1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:9; 1 John 5:1.

Church

We believe the church is the covenant people of God shown through both the Old and New Testaments and extending into the New Heavens and New Earth. We believe the church is set apart from the world by confession of the gospel and dramatization of the gospel in the form of baptism and the Lord's Supper. We believe the local church gathers regularly for worship as displayed through the ordinances, prayer, song, fellowship, and preaching. We believe its members are called to lives of personal holiness, discipleship, and gospel witness, having been empowered by the Holy Spirit. We believe the church's mission is the Great Commission, given to her by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Matthew 5:16; Matthew 16:18; Matthew 28:19; Luke 9:23-26; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Hebrews 10:19-25; 1 Peter 1:15; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:11.

Last Things

We believe the Lord Jesus Christ will return triumphantly at the end of this age to destroy all evil powers, resurrect all humanity, consign all who have rejected Him to eternal punishment, and unite all who have received Him to reign forever with God in glory.

Matthew 24:29-31; Matthew 25:31-46; John 1:12; John 5:25-29; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Revelation 5:9-10; Revelation 19:11; Revelation 21:8.

Signature _____

Date _____

IV. Our Church Covenant

Having, as we trust, been brought by Divine Grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give up ourselves to Him, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We will pursue God alone as our highest joy, counting everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord.

We will walk together in brotherly love, exercising an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonishing and entreating one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and each other.

We will seek to set our minds on things above, where Christ is, putting to death the deeds of the body and bringing to life the fruit of the Spirit.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

We will seek to owe no one anything, except to love each other, becoming perfectly one, so that the world may know that the Father loves us even as He loves the Son.

We will desire the word of God to dwell in us richly, treasuring His promises and obeying His commands.

We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.

We will work together to further a faithful evangelical ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible unite with another church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Signature _____

Date _____

V. Our Nuts and Bolts

This section is designed to explain the “Nuts and Bolts” of our church life. Please remember, what follows are some of the practical details for *our* local assembly. We certainly do not think all churches should adopt our ways of fleshing out ministry. Instead, our “Nuts and Bolts” are tailored for Redeeming Grace Church specifically. That is not to say that our methods come out of thin air either; rather we hope to show in fact that our methods rest on timeless biblical principles. For this reason, this section may be the most helpful section to you as a potential member of this church. We know what it is like to be in your shoes. You want to know how all this works! You likely want to know: “If I give myself to this church, how will this church shepherd my soul, my family, and my life?” We cannot cover everything here, but what follows is a quick glance at RGC church life. We begin with our leadership and close with the role of the congregation.

First, our leadership consists of both elders and deacons. These leaders should be explicitly qualified, possess a keen sense of accountability, be reputable with outsiders, exercise authority, and edify the church. While all these characteristics should be present in both elders and deacons, they will be expressed differently given the nature of the offices. We begin with the ministry of a deacon.

Based on the account in Acts 6, where the first deacons were set aside, three aspects of a deacon’s ministry should be noted. *First, deacons care for the physical needs of the saints.* Some of the Christians “were being neglected in the daily distribution” (v.1). Thus, the deacons were identified and called out to serve the body. In this example, deacons picked up the ministry where the apostles needed assistance and cared for the physical well-being of other Christians. But note especially their second function. The physical neglect was causing spiritual disunity in the body (v.1). *Deacons therefore must strive for the unity of the body.* One group of Christians was complaining against another group and this arrested the apostles’ attention. In response, the apostles wanted to prevent a fracture in the church and so they appointed deacons to head off disunity and factionalism. In other words, the deacons act as the shock absorbers for the body. At a third level, *deacons support the ministry of other leaders.* In Acts 6, not only did those deacons help the widows and the body as a whole, but they also helped support other leaders (in this case the apostles) whose main obligations were elsewhere. Deacons therefore are fundamentally encouragers and supporters to the ministry of the elders.

Here at RGC, deacons are encouraged to fulfill these three areas of ministry. Like most titles in the Bible, theirs says it all. The word *deacon* literally means *servant* – not only a servant to God, but also a servant to the saints. Our deacons concern themselves with administration, maintenance, and the care of church members with physical needs, all to promote the unity of the church. As a church member, we want you to know that you are not alone in this journey and our deacons are one way we try to communicate that truth. This office, therefore, brings refreshment to Christians who live in a world of inexhaustible demands. Here at RGC, we want our deacons to promote serving and blessing the body in ways that reflect the “one another” directives of the New Testament (e.g. “love one another”, “bear with one another”, etc.)

Regarding elders, the essence of the elder’s office is found in teaching, ensuring the Word of God is well understood. Both elders and deacons must be *qualified* (I Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), a distinction that essentially entails walking in godliness and manifesting a life style that is above reproach (I Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). He should lead with carefulness, remembering

that the church is not his, but purchased by the blood of Christ. In addition to his character, anyone serving as an elder should have a better-than-average grasp of the basics of the gospel as well as the great truths of Scripture. An elder must also be able to soundly refute false teachings and be able to distinguish his own congregation from others (e.g., baptism for Baptists). Elders should be recognized by the church as gifts from God for the good of the church (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17).

Functionally, the first significant aspect of our elders is that they are on a team. As a church, we believe that the Bible prescribes maintaining a *plurality of elders*. James, Peter, Paul, and Luke all referred to the office of elder in the church, and each of them presumed a plurality of elders for each congregation (Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-5; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:28). Therefore, the direct evidence in the New Testament indicates that the common and even expected practice was to have multiple elders in each local congregation.

A second aspect of the office of elder are his *duties*. For our purposes we will use the categories of *knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting*. These four functions address the Christian's most basic needs and capture the biblical data as to how elders should lead. We also ask our elders to fulfill these responsibilities under the categories of *macro-shepherding and micro-shepherding*. Paul's moving farewell to the Ephesian elders captures these two categories in succinct fashion. He reminded them that he "did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you *publicly* and from *house to house*" (Acts 20:20). Paul's ministry was not merely in the public sphere but in the privacy of people's homes. It was both corporate and personal. This balance must be maintained for effective shepherding, and it can be represented by the distinction between macro-shepherding and micro-shepherding. In light of this evidence, each church member will have a "*shepherding elder*", a man who has promised to God and to his church that he will faithfully carry out the duties of an elder. The reason we have adopted this practice is to ensure, to the best of our ability, that each member is being personally cared for. Shepherds are to know and take of the sheep while the sheep are to know and appreciate those who watch over them. Thus, the shepherds lovingly care for the sheep and the sheep lovingly submit to their leadership (Heb 13:17).

In this last section, we turn our attention to the role of the congregation. To put it simply, the responsibilities and duties of members of a Christian church are simply the responsibilities and duties of Christians. These duties, however, can be divided into duties toward their leaders and duties toward other members.

The particular duties members have toward the leaders involve clear recognition, heartfelt trust, obedience, submission, and sincere carefulness (Heb 13:17; I Tim 5:17). It also should be recognized, however, that the local congregation is responsible for ensuring a qualified elder teaches them the Word of God (Gal 1:8; 2 Tim 4:3; Jude 3,4). Thus, the congregation delegates to the elders the responsibilities of teaching and leading the church. Those duties are only revoked when it is clear the elders are acting in a manner contrary to Scripture. Here at RGC, when the time comes to put forward a man for eldership, the current elders will nominate a qualified man to carry out his duties. After a period of several weeks (for the purpose of prayer and consideration), the elders will ask the congregation to affirm the nomination. The reason for this is that we believe the congregation has a responsibility to ensure that biblical truth is taught from God's Word (Gal 1:6-9).

When it comes to the responsibilities church members have toward one another they can be summarized as “walking in the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). Christians are obliged to love one another (John 13:34,35; Rom 12:9,10). Love then obligates the members of the church to avoid sin: malice, gossip, bitterness, and pride must be resisted (Col 3:8). Church members are also called to seek peace and unity within their congregation (Rom 12:16), clothing themselves in the armor of God (Eph 6) so that they may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Thus, Christians stand firm together, contending for the gospel (Phil 1:27) and maintaining the unity of the body (Prov 17:14). We are also called to actively sympathize with one another (Rom 12:15), edify one another (Eph 2:21-22), pray for one another (Jam 5:16), and watch over one another, holding each other accountable (Rom 15:14).

Inherent in the above description is our commitment to “*every member ministry*”, or what has been traditionally called “*priesthood of every believer*.” The basic idea behind these terms comes from the Old Testament, which describes how the Israelite priests ministered to the nation at large. But when we come to the New Testament, we are told that every member is a priest, ministering to one another in order to proclaim the excellencies of Christ (1 Pet 2:9). The goal of the elders is to equip the members of the church in such a way that the above characteristics flourish in the heart of each individual member. This creates not only individual growth but also corporate growth, as believers share their lives together and see God’s Spirit transform them. This type of growth cannot happen from a distance. It requires a Christian to reach out and ask others for help in their Christian walk. Scripture uses metaphors such as “stones” in a house (1 Pet 2:5) and “joints” in a body (Eph 4:16) to demonstrate just how close and necessary each member is to one another. Therefore, at RGC we stress the importance of discipleship, training, relationships, and faithfulness rather than programs and infrastructure. A certain degree of programs is necessary and helpful, but we want each member to strive for fellowship even if a program is not in place. We want the church to be full of life, active with one another and creating relationships that are mutually encouraging and helping people grow spiritually. What we are talking about is the “spirit” or the “culture” of the church. At RGC, we want to be full of spiritually dynamic friendship in which older Christians are helping to teach and guide younger Christians in the Word; where peers get together regularly for prayer and discipleship; where Christians are reading nourishing Christian books together, constantly growing and being conformed into the image of Christ. Ministries will be put in place in order to meet these desired goals, but we want the focus to be on people rather than programs.

We realize some of the matters covered in this packet may seem new, confusing, and perhaps even a bit intimidating or demanding. Hopefully, however, they breed encouragement and excitement as well! Scripture portrays church life as both uplifting and challenging. The reason for this is because we are not yet what we want to be, either with ourselves or with others, and so we call upon one another for help, encouragement, love, and perseverance.

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:21-21)

Soli Deo Gloria!

VI. Recommended Reading

1. *The Trellis and the Vine*, by Tony Payne and Colin Marshall
2. *Knowing God*, by J.I. Packer
3. *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, by Mark Dever
4. *Desiring God*, by John Piper
5. *The Life of God and the Soul of the Church*, by Thabiti Anyabwile
6. *Putting Amazing Back into Grace*, by Michael Horton
7. *What is a Healthy Church Member?*, by Thabiti Anyabwile
8. *Counterfeit Gods*, by Tim Keller
9. *The Deliberate Church*, by Mark Dever and Paul Alexander
10. *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, by Paul David Tripp
11. *What is the Mission of the Church?*, by Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert