



**CalvaryChurch**  
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**Constitution and By-Laws of  
Calvary Church of Valparaiso, Incorporated  
As Restated on November 1, 2022**

**Our Covenant**

We, the members of Calvary Church of Valparaiso, Indiana Incorporated (the “church”), covenant together to remain true to our confession of faith in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord and only hope for salvation, and in the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 10:23).

1. We will meet together to worship God, hear His word and encourage each other to remain true to our commitment to Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25).
2. We will serve God by using whatever gifts He has given us in order to build up and strengthen his church (Ephesians 4:12-16; 1 Corinthians 12).
3. We will give financially and support the ministry of the church in our efforts to glorify God in our community and around the world (2 Corinthians 9:6-9; Malachi 3:6-12).
4. We will honor and submit to our spiritual leaders because they watch over our souls, shepherd the body and are accountable to God for their work as spiritual overseers (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Timothy 5:17).
5. We will love each other by making every effort to live at peace with each other and to honor our Relational Commitments to each other; we will also respect the Christian liberty of our fellow members by refusing to judge one another concerning matters of individual conscience before God (Ephesians 4:1-3; Romans 14:10-12). Calvary Church’s Relational Commitments, attached as “Appendix A”, embody the interpersonal aspirations and expectations for our church body.
6. We will witness to those who do not know Jesus our Lord because we have been given a Great Commission that calls us to be concerned for the lost (Matthew 29:19-20; 1 Corinthians 9:19-22).
7. We will endeavor to restore with great compassion and mercy those who have sinned while excluding from our fellowship those who bring harm to the unity and purity of the community by refusing to honor our Relational Commitments (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).

8. With the help of God's Spirit, we will also make every effort to pursue lives that bring glory to God while avoiding those things that bring damage to His name and His church (Ephesians 5:3-7).

### **Our Confession**

We confess our unity with the Church global and the apostolic faith that has been believed and practiced since its founding. We believe:

1. The Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and the Divine and final authority for Christian faith and life. (Matthew 4:4; 5:17-18; John 16:12-15; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20; Revelations 22:18-19).

2. In one God, Creator of all things, infinitely perfect and eternally existing simultaneously in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Genesis 1:26; Matthew 28:19; John 14:26; 15:26).

3. Jesus Christ is true God and true man, having been conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He died on the cross, a sacrifice for our sins according to the Scriptures. Further, He arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, where at the right hand of the Majesty on High, he now is our High Priest and Advocate. (1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Corinthians 15:1-5; 1 Timothy 2:5).

4. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ and during this age, to convict men; regenerate the believing sinner; and indwell, guide instruct and empower the believer for godly service. (John 14:15-17, 26; 16:7-15; Ephesians 5:18).

5. Mankind was created in the image of God to fill the earth and make it a suitable place for the glory of God; that in His creative wisdom He made mankind to be male and female; and that His design for marriage is for a man to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife in covenant commitment to one another. Genesis 2:20-25; Matthew 19:3-9; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33).

6. The human race followed Satan, fell into sin and is therefore lost; and that only through regeneration by the Holy Spirit can salvation and spiritual life be obtained. (Psalm 14:2-3; Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-3; Titus 3:5).

7. The shed blood of Jesus Christ and His resurrection provide the only ground for justification and salvation for all who believe; and that only such as receive Jesus Christ by faith are born of the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God. (Romans 4:5; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 1:7; Ephesians 2:8-9; Colossians 1:20; Hebrews 9:22).

8. Baptism (defined, for purposes of this constitution, as willing baptism by immersion) and communion are to be observed by the Church during the present age. They are not,

however, to be regarded as a means as salvation. (Matthew 26: 26-28; Acts 2:42-46; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Acts 10:47; 1 Peter 3:21).

9. The true Church is composed of all such persons who through saving faith in Jesus Christ have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and are united together in the Body of Christ, all of which He is the head. Only those who are members of the true Church shall be eligible for membership in the local church. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18; Acts 2:44).

10. Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head of the Church and that every local church has the deference under Christ to decide and govern its own affairs. (Psalm 118:22; Ephesians 1:22; Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Colossians 1:18; Titus 1:5).

11. In the personal and imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ and that this “blessed hope” has a vital bearing on the personal life and service of the believer. (Philippians 4:5; Titus 2:3; 1 John 3:2).

12. In the bodily resurrection of the dead: the believer to everlasting blessedness and joy with the Lord and the unbeliever to everlasting conscious punishment. (Matt. 25:41-46; Acts 17:32; 1 Corinthians 15:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).

## **Our Constitution and Bylaws**

### **Article I. The Name of the Church**

The legal name of this organization shall be Calvary Church of Valparaiso, Indiana Incorporated.

### **Article II. The Association of the Church**

The church is a nondenominational evangelical faith community that welcomes fellowship, partnership, and association with other churches for the purpose of common mission and service.

### **Article III. The Purpose of the Church**

The ultimate purpose of the church is to bring glory to the God of all creation, to enjoy Him now and forever, and to help as many as possible do the same.

### **Article IV. The Mission and Practices of the Church**

**Section 4.01 Mission.** Our mission is to spread the gospel to every person, to baptize them in the name of the Triune God as a visible sign of their salvation, and to teach them to be disciples of Christ living out the commands of Scripture by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Section 4.02. Practices.** In order to guide us in the accomplishment of our mission, we have adopted the following practices:

- (a) We will witness to our neighbors near and far, endeavoring to win as many as possible to Christ through gospel proclamation, and baptize those who have confessed their faith in Him as a visible sign of invisible grace.
- (b) We will gather for worship, bringing glory to the God who has created and redeemed us through singing, preaching, giving and observing Communion, the Feast of our Salvation.
- (c) We will faithfully teach the Word of God in order to help God's people know and live out the whole counsel of God.
- (d) We will foster a community of believers who walk together in love and mutually encourage each other in their faith.
- (e) We will equip God's people to work in the church and the world so that the community of faith will be healthy and strong while the gospel goes out into all the world.

**Section 4.03. Social Concern.** Along with the proclamation of the gospel, we also have a responsibility to serve humanity by ministering to the poor, hurting, oppressed and needy in our community and world. The church cannot faithfully preach the gospel in a manner that is pleasing to God without humbly serving the needs of suffering humanity.

## **Article V. The Membership and Discipline of the Church**

### **Section 5.01. Membership and Voting.**

- (a) Membership on this church shall be granted to all who confess their faith in Jesus Christ and affirm the Calvary Church Confession and Covenant set forth above. Members also agree to affirm Calvary's Relational Commitments as set forth in Appendix A. The Elder Team will oversee the membership process.
- (b) There are two classes of membership in this church: voting members and non-voting members. Any person 18 years or older who has been received into membership is considered a voting member of the church. Any person under 18 years of age who has been received into membership shall be considered a nonvoting member of the church and shall not have the right to vote on any matter until they reach the age of 18.
- (c) Membership voting rights include the right to nominate candidates for the position of Lay Elder, amending the church constitution and any other matter that the Elder Team brings before the congregation for a vote.

(d) Persons who disregard the church Covenant may be removed from membership upon recommendation of the Elder Team. A membership audit will be conducted by the Elder Team on at least an annual basis.

### **Section 5.02. Church Discipline**

(a) The Elder Team will appoint and oversee the work of the Restoration Council. The Elder Team will act as the final authority on matters of church discipline and restoration.

(b) Church discipline will be guided by Scripture, particularly the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18:15-20 and of his Apostles in 1 Corinthians 5:1-2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

(c) The primary aim of all discipline is love for God and each other. Discipline protects God's reputation and preserves the peace and purity of the church.

(d) Only those persons who refuse to repent or recognize the authority of the church after efforts have been made to restore them will be excluded from membership.

(e) The Restoration Council will not entertain frivolous or uncorroborated accusations. Only matters deemed significant to the peace, unity and purity of the Christian community will be considered appropriate for discipline.

## **Article VI. The Officers and Ministers of the Church**

### **Section 6.01. The Elder Team**

(a) The church will be led by a community of godly, competent leaders, referred to in Scripture as elders, and collectively as the Elder Team. The Elder Team will function as the primary governing board of the church with the conviction that they serve under the leadership of Jesus Christ, the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18). Selection of elders should be consistent with the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

(b) The Elder Team will provide oversight as to all matter related to the doctrine, discipline, finances and direction of the church.

(c) The Elder Team shall endeavor to function as a unified leader community corporately discerning the will of God for the church. The Elder Team shall strive for fully vetted consensus while recognizing the unique gifts and perspectives of each member (Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 12; Acts 15).

(d) The Elder Team will be comprised of both “Lay Elders” and “Pastor Elders”. Lay Elders shall be qualified laypersons that are members of the church and meet the qualifications for elders found in Scripture. Pastor Elders are members of the church’s pastoral staff who are employed full-time or part-time by the church.

## **Section 6.02. The Elders**

(a) **Composition.** The Elder Team shall be composed of twelve members: eight (8) Lay Elders and four (4) Pastor Elders. Lay Elders are members of the church that are not employed by the church. Pastor Elders are members of the church who are employed either part or full-time by the church. The Elder Team shall determine the designation of a person being a Staff Pastor.

(b) **Lay Elder Nomination.** Lay Elders will be nominated by the church membership, examined and recommended by the Elder Team Nomination Committee, and confirmed by a vote of the Elder Team. The Elder Team shall have a written policy setting forth the process for nomination, examination and appointment of Lay Elders.

(c) **Staff Elder Nomination.** The Lay Elders shall determine which Staff Pastors shall serve as Staff Elders. In appointing Staff Elders to the Elder Team, the Lay Elders shall consider the following factors: organizational authority, job description, spiritual maturity, giftedness, and the perceived overall value the Staff Pastor brings to the Elder Team. There shall be no set terms for Staff Elders as the Lay Elders shall annually determine which Staff Pastors shall serve on the Elder Team at the beginning of each calendar year. Staff Pastor vacancies on the Elder Team will be filled by a vote of the Lay Elders.

(d) **Nomination Committee.** The Elder Team shall appoint a five-member Nomination Committee each year consisting of two Lay Elders, one Pastor Elder and two members of the congregation who are not currently serving on the Elder Team. At least one of the members from the congregation must be female. The Nomination Committee shall receive nominations for Lay Elders from the congregation, consider the nominations, and recommend Lay Elders to the Elder Team after examination. Each nomination slate shall include at least three members for consideration by the Elder Team. The Elder Board shall appoint any unexpired Lay Elder vacancies in the Elder Team from members nominated by the Nomination Committee.

(e) **Lay Elder Terms.** Lay elders shall serve an initial term of four years. A lay Elder may serve an additional consecutive four-year term if invited to do so by a vote of the Lay Elders (for a total consecutive term of eight years). A Lay Elder must be off the Elder Team for at least one year to be considered to serve any additional terms. Lay Elders will serve staggered four-year terms to achieve a healthy balance of continuity and change.

(f) ***Elder Chairman.*** The Elders shall appoint a person with strong leadership ability to serve as the Chairman of the Elder Team. This Elder Chairman shall preside over the functioning of the Elder Team and shall prepare the agendas for Elder Team meetings.

(g) ***Quorum.*** Sixty-six percent (66%) of the total number of Elders then serving on the Elder Team shall constitute a quorum to transact church business. The act of a majority of Elders present when there is a quorum shall constitute official Elder Team action (except as specifically stated otherwise herein). Elders may not vote by proxy, but may participate by other electronic means as set forth below.

(h) ***Meetings.*** The Elder Team shall meet at least monthly, in order to pray, discuss church matters and take official action. The Elder Team may meet more often than monthly at its discretion. All meetings will be held at such a time and place as the Elder Team determines.

(i) ***Special meetings.*** Special meetings of the Elder Team may be called by or at the request of the Elder Chairman, or a majority of the Elder Team.

(j) ***Executive Session.*** The Elder Team may meet in executive session of only Lay Elder members of the Elder Team to discuss and decide issues of Staff Pastor employment, compensation and benefits, or for any other purpose deemed appropriate for executive session by the Elder Chairman or a majority of the Lay Elders.

(k) ***Participation.*** All Elders are expected to be physically present in person to participate in all meetings of the Elder Team. However, if this is not possible, Elders may participate in and act at any meeting of the Elder Team by means of a conference telephone or other similar communications equipment enabling all persons participating in the meeting to communicate with one another. Participation in such meeting shall constitute attendance and presence in person at the meeting of the Elder or Elders so participating.

(l) ***Consents to Action.*** The authority of the Elder Team may be exercised without a meeting if a consent in writing, setting forth the action so taken, is signed by all of the Elders entitled to vote with respect to the subject matter thereof. The action so taken shall be effective when all Elders have approved the consent unless the consent specifies a different effective date.

**Section 6.03. Staff Pastors.** Pastors will serve under the leadership and oversight of the Elder Board who will determine their responsibilities and authority. The Elder Team shall approve all pastors confirming clear job descriptions and accountability for each. The Elder Team shall ensure that the congregation is apprised of the organizational structure of the church and the areas of responsibility and oversight of all pastors. All pastors must be approved by a seventy-five percent supermajority (75%) of the Lay

Elders after careful examination and prayer. Staff Pastors may be removed from their position upon a majority vote of the Lay Elders.

**Section 6.04. Other Staff and Personnel.** Non-pastoral staff members, whether part time, full time, will be selected or removed by the Staff Pastor who is responsible to oversee the non-pastoral staff member, or the Elder Team as it assigns responsibility.

**Section 6.05. Ministerial Credentials.**

(a) Licensing. Persons who are given the title of Pastor, or whose primary job description requires them to be engaged in ministerial work, will be considered a licensed minister of the church and granted appropriate ministerial credentials. The church may also serve as a licensing body for members of the congregation who do not serve as paid staff members.

(b). Ordination. Ordination, while typically obtained from a governing body representing a denomination or the Church, may be granted by this church to Pastors within the requisite ministerial training and experience after a thorough examination by a council convened from such a purpose.

**Section 6.06. Baptism Requirement.** Baptism, as defined in paragraph 8 of our Covenants, herein, is required for any person to serve at Calvary Church as an elder, pastor, officer, or member of Calvary Church's Leadership Team.

**Article VII. The Worship of the Church**

**Section 7.01. Gatherings.** The church will gather together for worship on the first day of the week in celebration of the resurrection of our Lord, the number and times of services being fixed by the Elder Team. Additional gatherings for worship may be held under the direction of the Elder Team.

**Section 7.02. Traditions.** Worship gatherings will include the ancient traditions of reading and preaching Scripture, singing songs with all kinds of instruments, offering prayers to the Lord, receiving communion, collecting offerings for the ministry of the church, and greeting one another. Worship gatherings will be rooted in the Scriptures and orthodox traditions while making every effort to be relevant to the contemporary culture. Communion will be celebrated regularly, at a frequency determined by the Elder Team.

**Article VIII. Congregational Meetings.**

**Section 8.01.** Congregational meetings of the church will be held annually, and additionally as needed, at the discretion of the Elder Team. The Elder Team is responsible to communicate regularly and effectively with the membership of the church in order to keep them well-informed on matters related to the finances, health and direction of the church. At least two weeks notice must be given to the members prior to



any congregational meeting and promoted in such a way as to reasonably communicate such notice to the membership. A congregational vote may be achieved through any reasonable means as long as the means are clearly communicated in advance to the members. Consent voting where only votes against a measure shall be an approved means of obtaining a congregational vote.

**Article IX. Amendments.**

Amendments to this Constitution and Bylaws may be proposed by the Elder Team and approved by a majority voted of all the members in good standing. Approval of amendments may be obtained by a special meeting of the membership, individual consent, informed consent voting, or any other reasonable method approved by the Elder Team.

## Appendix A

### **Relational Commitments: Gospel Centered Community at Calvary Church**

#### **Introduction**

The following Relational Commitments are designed to help the members of Calvary Church relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships. These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, protecting children from abuse, counseling and confidentiality, and mutual accountability.

These Commitments are intended to help us build a strong community of faith. By gospel-centered *community*, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we worship and enjoy God, grow in our understanding of His love for us, and seek to tell others about the salvation and peace they too can find through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

We know that true gospel-centered community isn't easy to achieve and sustain. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries; but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:1–2 warns, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have...”

That certainly describes us! At times, no matter how hard we try to build and preserve a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash and lead us to sin. That's where these Commitments come in. Here you will find key principles from God's Word that serve as the relational guidelines for Calvary Church. These Commitments are designed to accomplish several important purposes:

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion, and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church community.
- They provide a clear track for us to run on when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, and protect our children from abuse.
- They define and limit the spiritual authority of church leaders and thereby pursue the fair treatment of all members.<sup>2</sup>
- Finally, they reduce our church's exposure to legal liability by clearly describing our relational practices and by affirming our mutual commitment to resolve conflict biblically.

As you read our Relational Commitments, we encourage you to study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. We want you to be confident that these Commitments are based solidly on the Word of God. If your study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach our leaders, who will be happy to talk with you about these principles.<sup>3</sup>

We encourage you to expressly embrace these Commitments and formally join Calvary Church by going through the Starting Point membership class, acknowledging your faith in Christ, and by signing the Membership Commitments on the Calvary Church membership application. If you are not yet prepared to become a member, we hope you and your family will continue to attend our worship services and participate in Calvary ministries, and seek assistance from our leaders. Because these Commitments apply to Christians in general and not just to Calvary members, if you continue relating to us in any of these ways, we will assume that you have consented to these Commitments, even if you have not yet formally joined the church.

Calvary Church Board of Elders

These Relational Commitments are adapted from *The Peacemaker Church*. Used by permission of Peacemaker® Ministries ([www.PeacemakerChurch.net](http://www.PeacemakerChurch.net)).  
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Become a Member of Calvary Church

## **COMMITMENT TO PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION**

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9).*

Calvary Church is committed to building a culture of peace that reflects God's peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness, and broken relationships are not appropriate for the

people whom God has reconciled to Himself through the sacrifice of His only Son (John 13:34-35; Ephesians 4:29-32; Colossians 3:12-14).

Therefore, we look to the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit for guidance on how we can respond to conflict in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile relationships, and preserve our witness for Christ. As God gives us His wisdom and grace, we are committed to actively teaching and encouraging one another to live out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

### **Personal Peacemaking**

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words, and actions (1 Corinthians 10:31).
- We will try to get the “log” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matthew 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Proverbs 19:11).
- We will seek to refrain from all gossip, backbiting, and slander (Ephesians 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we intend to talk to them, not about them.
- We will endeavor to make charitable judgments toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Corinthians 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Proverbs 12:18; Ephesians 4:29; Galatians 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Psalm 141:5; Proverbs 15:32).
- As we seek to resolve differences with others, we will look out for their concerns and interests as well as our own (Philippians 2:3-4).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as He has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).

Those seeking to resolve their differences biblically may benefit from the assistance of the Restoration Council when personal efforts at peacemaking are not progressing or have failed.

### **Assisted Peacemaking**

- When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the mediation of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matthew 18:16;

Philippians 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.

- When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matthew 18:17-20).<sup>4</sup>
- When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Corinthians 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matthew 5:23-24; Romans 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in the *Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline* section of this document.
- If we have a legal dispute with or within our church and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will make every effort to resolve our differences through biblical mediation or arbitration before we resort to other processes.<sup>5</sup>

Above all, we pray that our ministry of peacemaking will bring praise to our Lord Jesus Christ and that through the peacemaking process, lives would be changed forever by the gospel.

### **COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES**

*So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate (Matthew 19:6).*

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Ephesians 5:22-33; Revelation 19:7). Therefore, He established marriage to be a lifelong, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matthew 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ, and others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices but have since experienced the repentance and forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. We want all to know they are

welcome at Calvary Church—single, married, and divorced. Marital status will not hinder anyone from being involved in any of Calvary’s ministries.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we will devote a significant portion of our preaching and teaching ministry to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide serious premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are well prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in our Life Groups ministry where they can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Hebrews 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and we expect wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Ephesians 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to providing counsel and support to couples who face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to escape issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness, and ongoing discipleship.

We recognize, however, that there are times when God permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. We believe divorce is permissible when the other spouse has been sexually involved with a person outside the marriage (Matthew 5:31-32), or when an unbelieving spouse abandons a marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-16).

Even though divorce is *permissible* in these situations, it is not required. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Psalm 103:8-12; Isaiah 55:7). When divorce becomes an option, an offended spouse can imitate God’s love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Ephesians 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Colossians 3:12-14; Galatians 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is in danger of ending. Therefore, if a member of Calvary Church is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our pastors, elders, or Restoration Council and cooperate with them as they promote repentance and reconciliation; pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate; and determine whether biblical grounds exist for divorce. There are situations in which church leaders will suggest a couple physically, and perhaps legally, separate for a time while restoration is being pursued. During this time, leaders will look for marks for genuine repentance.

Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce should consider themselves married until the day a civil court issues a divorce decree. Thus they should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We are always interested in helping divorced people restore their previous marriage if that is possible and appropriate. We will support a decision to pursue a second marriage to a different person only when we have determined that it is biblically valid and that every reasonable effort has been made to seek and grant forgiveness of the sins that contributed to a previous divorce.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace, and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God also graciously extends His love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done all they can to rebuild broken relationships.

### **COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN**

*The prudent see danger and take refuge (Proverbs 27:12).*

Children are a blessing from God, and He calls the church to support parents in their responsibility to train children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Therefore, the church should be a place of safety and blessing for children, where they can grow, play, form friendships, and learn to experience and share the love of Christ.

Since sin affects every person and organization in the world, it is possible that children could be harmed even during church activities. We cannot guarantee that such things will never happen at Calvary Church, but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children from foreseeable harm. The commitment includes, but is not limited to, the following steps:

- Parents and guardians are required to check young children (birth through 5<sup>th</sup> grade) into and out of activities at Calvary Church through our check-in system.
- Before being allowed to work regularly with children, potential volunteers are required to complete an application, participate in an interview with a staff member, be a church member or an active participant in the life of the church for at least 12 weeks, and submit to screening through reference and background checks.
- Volunteers in Children's Ministries are trained to serve in their respective positions and given training to implement Calvary's Emergency Response Plan to ensure the safety of children.
- Volunteers will be provided training on classroom discipline policies, which include restrictions on corporal punishment or any form of inappropriate physical touch.
- Volunteers will be provided training on restroom guidelines. Facilities are developed to prevent situations where 1 adult would need to accommodate a child in a restroom with a closed door.

- In order to provide the best care for our children, every effort is made to maintain appropriate leader-to-child ratios for safety and for adequate learning environments.
- Every effort will be made to ensure a minimum of 2 adults (or 1 adult and 1 teen) are present at all times when children are being cared for during our programs or activities.

If a child is harmed in our church, we will take immediate steps to inform the parents, to accept responsibility for our role in the situation, and to hold offending workers fully responsible for their actions. We will also evaluate our practices and procedures, considering changes that might reduce the likelihood of such harm to children in the future.

On the rare occasion that a child is believed to be in danger outside of the church due to abuse or neglect, we are obligated to follow God’s command to protect those that are unable to protect themselves (Proverbs 31:8). Secondly, we are obligated by Indiana state law to report suspected abuse or neglect to the authorities so that appropriate law enforcement experts can investigate.

### **COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING**

*I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Romans 15:14).*

All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on their lives and relationships. Whenever believers are unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through personal efforts, God calls them to seek assistance from other believers, and when needed from church leaders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (see Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, Calvary Church encourages and enjoins its members to seek counsel from and confess sins to each other and to church leaders. We have a process in place to meet the counseling requests of those in our congregation.

We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life, and our counseling is based on scriptural principles (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Unless they specifically state otherwise, none of those who counsel in this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists. We want people to get the care they need. When appropriate, we will refer to a trusted mental health care provider or organization.

God calls our leaders to set an example for us “in speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity”(1 Timothy 4:12). Therefore, we expect them to treat counselees with every respect and courtesy, and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety or impurity during counseling (Ephesians 5:3). We also expect counselees to promptly report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.



To prevent our leaders from being placed in situations that might compromise their pastoral commitments, we, the members and attenders of Calvary Church, agree that we will not try to compel them to testify in any legal proceeding or otherwise divulge any confidential information they receive through pastoral counseling or ministry (Proverbs 11:13, 25:9).

There are occasions when our leaders may not have sufficient time to meet with every person who asks for counseling. At such times, we will give first priority to people who have formally joined the church (Galatians 6:10). To serve those who attend the church but have not become members, we will first meet with them to determine the best course of action, which may include referring them to another source of godly counsel.

### **COMMITMENT TO CONFIDENTIALITY**

A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret (Proverbs 11:13).

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matthew 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip (Proverbs 26:20), invites confession (Proverbs 11:13), and thus encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of the local church, all Calvary Church members and attenders are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our leaders will carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when our leaders believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

- when a leader is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other leaders in our church or, if the person attends another church, from the leaders of that church (Proverbs 11:14);
- when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Proverbs 24:11-12);
- when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20); or,
- when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Romans 13:1).

### **COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY, RESTORATION, AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).*

**Like all of our Relational Commitments, the principles and practices described below apply to all members of Calvary Church.**

### **A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God’s Love**

God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom, and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Ephesians 3:10-11). He loves His church so much that He sent His Son to die for her (Ephesians 5:25). His purpose for His church is to present her as a gift to His Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the “bride” of Christ (Revelation 19:7). For this reason, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Ephesians 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Philippians 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God’s mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Hebrews 10:24-25).

We sometimes refer to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as “discipline.” The Bible does not present church discipline as being negative, legalistic, or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God Himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. “The Lord disciplines the one he loves” (Hebrews 12:6). “Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach from your law” (Psalm 94:12). “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline” (Revelation 3:19).

God’s discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as “formative discipline,” involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship, and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions, God’s discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, He corrects us. One way He does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called “corrective” or “restorative” discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

*What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matthew 18:12-13).*

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful, or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matthew 18:15; Galatians 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Corinthians 5:6-7), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Peter 2:12).

### **B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal, and Informal**

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:7; cf. Galatians 5:23). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God's Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently" (Galatians 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior, or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Proverbs 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "But if they will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matthew 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, church leader, pastor, or elder. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

### **C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Church**

If a member persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matthew 18:17). The process begins with informing specific church leaders who are equipped to assist in reconciliation and restoration; however, in cases in which the entire church is affected the entire church may be informed that discipline is necessary. It is at this point that the peacemaking process becomes a formal restoration/discipline process. The leadership has approved and adopted the following procedures:

- 1) A member may contact a pastor or the Elder over Restoration stating that he/she has an unresolved offense with another individual and would like to petition the church for assistance. The request should state the name of the individual with whom the dispute is shared, a very brief explanation of the nature of the offense, and the names of the persons who have assisted in resolution/reconciliation efforts. (NOTE: Members must follow the biblical steps of resolution/reconciliation before requesting the church's intervention. To do otherwise goes against the pattern laid out by Christ in Matthew 18, Matthew 5:23-25, and Galatians 6:1. In fact, efforts to involve the Senior

Pastor or any elder at the outset of a conflict may be viewed by the Restoration Council or the Elder Board as an effort to influence the outcome of the process.)

- 2) Because each situation is different, the Restoration Council (RC) may take one or more of the following steps:
  - a) The RC may talk to any or all of the persons involved for clarification on the nature of the offense.
  - b) The RC may talk to the accused and request a written statement from him/her in response to the written explanation submitted by the petitioning member.
  - c) The RC may determine that the persons involved need to make additional efforts to resolve the conflict and urge them to do so.
  - d) The RC may appoint additional “peacemakers” from the leadership to sit down with one or all individuals involved. They will issue a written recommendation that, if approved by the Elder Board, should be respected by all parties.
  - e) The RC may involve other leaders, especially if discipline or reproof may be necessary; and in some cases the Elder over Restoration may inform the full Elder Board of pending action by the RC, especially when an individual is non-cooperative in the process.
  - f) The RC may request that the individuals pursue biblical counseling.
  - g) In rare cases, the Elder over Restoration may issue a “summary judgment” to one or both parties that the offense has not risen to the level of discipline and that the matter will not be heard by the leadership.
  - h) The RC may request that individuals involved remove themselves from leadership or ministry positions during the restoration process.
- 3) Because of the seriousness of unresolved conflict and the potential damage it may cause, any member refusing to cooperate with the Elder over Restoration, persons appointed by him, or the pastors, if their involvement is requested, may be notified of further measures to encourage restoration.
- 4) It is important to note that *accusation* is not equated with *guilt*. When members accuse other members of an offense, they do not possess the authority to declare guilt. This responsibility lies with those who have been given the authority to “watch over the church.” (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5)
- 5) Persons sometimes leave the church community before they have properly resolved conflict and choose to speak ill of leaders who did not side with them in conflict situations. In that situation, the Elder over Restoration is authorized to draft a written statement of the facts that may be shared, upon elder board approval, with the entire church community. Since the member has, in effect, made disagreement known to others by leaving, the leadership may choose to disclose any details necessary in order to provide accurate information to the rest of the community, or a portion of the community, with the goal of preserving peace and unity. As outlined in these Relational Commitments, members under discipline may choose to resign from membership while under

formal church discipline, however, a request for resignation of church membership is valid only when put in writing, and it will be noted as a “withdrawal of membership while under discipline.”

If the straying member does not begin to move towards discernible marks of repentance (2 Corinthians 7:9-11) in response to private appeals from our leaders, leaders may choose to communicate with those in the church who are in the member’s sphere of influence and can provide prayer support. (Prior to sending said communication and if the leaders determine it is necessary, they will pursue legal counsel concerning the appropriateness of the communication.) This may include people who might be harmed or affected by that member’s behavior. This communication step may include close friends, a small group, a ministry the individual serves within, or the entire congregation, if our elders deem it to be wise and appropriate (Matthew 18:17, 1 Timothy 5:20).<sup>6</sup> The goal in increasing communication to spheres of influence in the church is always to increase the potential to stir a straying member towards repentance. The Restoration Council carefully manages the process in accordance with the Restoration Guide and with the oversight of the elders.

If, after a reasonable period of time, the member still refuses to change, then our elders may formally remove him or her from membership and normal fellowship. They also may discern that it is necessary to inform those in the sphere of influence, or the entire church body<sup>7</sup> of their decision and advise those persons to treat the individual as an unbeliever. We will encourage those individuals to look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him/her, remind him/her of God’s holiness and mercy, call him/her towards grace and towards repentance, and to put his/her faith in Christ (Matthew 18:17; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20). Again, the heart and goal behind removing a member from the church is never punitive. This measure is taken to protect the church (1 Corinthians 5:6-7) and to encourage the individual toward repentance and restoration.

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Genesis 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church’s ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we should agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we should willingly waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we should agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not stop God’s process of discipline in your life, and our desire for your repentance and restoration to God and His church, as described in these Commitments (Matthew 18:12-14; Galatians 6:1; Hebrews 13:17).

If a member leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our elders learn that he or she is attending another church, depending on the nature of the sin and whether it could be deemed harmful to the other church leaders or community, they may choose to inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the individual to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the individual find freedom from his or her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members (see Matthew 18:12-14; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).<sup>8</sup>

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If a member repents, and our Restoration Council or elders are able to discern his or her sincerity, then we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God’s forgiveness by working with the individual to restore them to fellowship within the body (see Matthew 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Colossians 3:12-14).

People who have been excluded from another church will not be allowed to become members of Calvary Church until they have demonstrated marks of repentance and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled to those who have been hurt or offended. In some cases, our elders may determine that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate and membership at Calvary will proceed normally.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: “They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:10-11).

## **BECOME A MEMBER OF CALVARY CHURCH**

We believe that God wants every Christian to be a member of a local church.<sup>9</sup> Becoming a member of a church can be a life-changing decision. The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use one’s gifts, and mutual accountability that we experience in a church can dramatically change our relationship with the Lord and with the people He places in our lives. Therefore, we want potential members to take time to get to know our church, learn how we are fulfilling God’s command to build His kingdom, and see how we love and relate to one another in daily life.

If you believe that Calvary Church might be a place where you can worship and engage in gospel-centered community, we invite you to attend our membership class, Starting Point. During that class you can learn more about our church’s doctrines and vision for ministry, and about the privileges and responsibilities of formal membership. Attending Starting Point will not obligate you to become a member.

If attending the Starting Point membership class convinces you that Calvary Church is a place that you can worship and engage in gospel-centered community, we would be delighted to have you become a member of our body.

## **FOOTNOTES**

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the words “we” and “us” refer to both the members and leaders of Calvary Church.
2. When we use the term “leader” in these Commitments, we are referring to the pastors and elders of our church.

3. Embracing these Relational Commitments does not imply that you affirm each and every explanatory comment, biblical interpretation, or resource mentioned in this document, but rather that you agree to support and follow the specific action steps set forth in sections entitled “Commitment to ....” If your conscience prevents you from affirming a particular concept or commitment in this document, you may request a special waiver of that provision at the time of your membership one-on-one.
4. See [peacemaker.net/project/slippery-slope](http://peacemaker.net/project/slippery-slope) for information on biblical mediation and arbitration.
5. Nothing in this section (Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation) requires individuals to relinquish any legal rights. It simply affirms that each of us is committed to obeying God’s teaching in passages like Matthew 18:16, Ephesians 4:1-3, Romans 12:18, and 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 and will make every biblically appropriate effort to resolve our differences within the body of Christ before resorting to any other processes, including civil litigation.
6. For example, it is not uncommon for a person to attend a church, develop relationships of trust, persuade people to give him money to invest, and then fail to return the money as promised. When such sinful men are discovered, they may leave the church, but continue to prey on members who have not heard about their schemes. If our leaders found such a man in our church, they would call him to repent and confess his wrongs. If he refused, they would bring him under formal discipline, and also warn the congregation not to trust him with their money.
7. If our leaders inform our entire congregation about a disciplinary situation, they have discretion whether to divulge the member’s name. This decision usually will depend on a variety of factors, such as how widely known the situation already is, whether there might be people in the congregation who could persuade the member to repent, or whether the congregation needs to be on guard against potential harm he or she might cause (see previous footnote). Even if our leaders decide it is not necessary to identify a member specifically, they may still inform the congregation of the general situation and the disciplinary steps they have followed. This general information can help warn people who may be flirting with secret sin that they too may face discipline if they do not turn back to God.
8. For example, if we confronted a man in our church for seducing young women, or for acting inappropriately around little children, or for sowing gossip and division, and he left and started attending another church, we would consider it our duty to urge the leaders of that church to counsel with him and to protect their people from his harmful behavior.
9. For more on the importance of church membership, see Joshua Harris’ book, *Stop Dating the Church: Fall in Love with the Body of Christ*; the third chapter of

Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines Within the Church: Participating Fully in the Body of Christ*; and John's Piper sermon "How Important Is Church Membership?" available online at [desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/how-important-is-church-membership](http://desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/how-important-is-church-membership).