

East White Oak Bible Church
**RELATIONAL
COMMITMENTS**



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RELATIONAL COMMITMENTS

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The following text was added to the EWO membership manual which is used in all of our membership classes.

It is a statement on how members in the body of Christ ought to relate to one another, how leadership ought to counsel and relate to members and how members ought to relate to leaders. As you can see it covers a number of significant relational dimensions relative to the Lord's church.

In the interest of authentic discipleship and becoming a church fulfilling God's call in our times, it has been put in this booklet form so that each member of the EWO body can have a copy.

We encourage all to read it and to follow it! We think you will find that it is based soundly on scripture and expresses the highest ideals for relationships in the body of Christ. Our thanks to a couple of sources, which are mentioned below, that we relied on in putting this together.

Adapted from a document published by Bethlehem Baptist Church, accessed at www.hopeingod.org/resources/images/107247.pdf.

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INTRODUCTION

A document on church relationships published by Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis outlines a parable of two boys, John and Luke, who lost their mother at a young age.

When they were in their teens, their father was reported to have died when his plane crashed into the ocean. The boys had no other relatives, so two neighboring families took them in.

The Friendly family did all they could to make John feel welcome in their home. They gave him his own bedroom, provided his meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. Not wanting him to feel any pressure, they did not explain to him any of the family rules. Instead they hoped that he would notice how their other children behaved and decide on his own to act the same way.

Not knowing exactly what was expected of him, John frequently disappointed the family by violating unspoken rules. Feeling judged and unconnected to the family, he became increasingly independent. He did whatever he wanted to do. When Mr. Friendly finally tried to talk with him about this behavior, John said, “I’m not your son, so you have no right to tell me how to live my life. I like having a bedroom and meals whenever I decide to be here, but I’ll still do whatever seems right to me.”

Tensions continued to build, and finally Mr. Friendly asked John to leave. Fortunately for John, there was another Friendly family in town, and they were happy to take him in. But there the cycle started all over again.

John’s brother had an entirely different experience. Luke was taken in by the Loving family. They wanted him to feel welcome, so they gave him a room, provided meals, and encouraged him to join in family activities. But they also wanted to avoid misunderstandings and conflict. So shortly after Luke arrived, Mr. Loving explained the family rules to Luke, so he

would know how to get along with the rest of the family. He said, “Even though you are not my son, I will be glad to look out for you the best I can. But as long as you are in my home, I also will expect you to behave as my other children do.”

Like any normal teenager, Luke sometimes broke the rules. When he did, Mr. Loving sat down with him, pointed out what he’d done wrong, and held him accountable to the same standards he had established for his other children. Luke sometimes resented this discipline, but he eventually realized it was always done in love, and it kept him out of a lot of trouble. After a few months, Mr. Loving approached Luke and said, “Since you are living here like part of the family, we would like to make it official. If you feel this is where you’d like to stay, we’d like to adopt you and make you our son.”

Luke gladly accepted and formally committed himself to the family. In doing so, he changed from being an orphan who merely resided in the home to being a son who willingly accepted and enjoyed all of the same responsibilities and privileges of his new brothers and sisters.

Suppose that John and Luke’s father is rescued from an island two years later. When he is reunited with his sons and hears what has happened to them, which family will he thank the most? The Friendly family, who were kind enough to give John a place to live, but could not bring themselves to give him any boundaries? Or the Loving family, who welcomed Luke in, held him accountable to the same rules as the rest of the family, and invited him to be a son? The answer is obvious. And there is a real Father who one day will evaluate the way we care for the people who come into our church family. Therefore, we are glad to welcome people and give them a place to worship, grow and serve. But being “friendly” is not good enough. We want to be loving, as God defines loving (Heb. 12:5-6; 10:24). Therefore, we will encourage and expect everyone who attends our church to live out the biblical principles that are summarized in these commitments.

And when people have lived like part of our family for a while, we will encourage them to “make it official.” Living like an orphan, with its illusion of independence and self-determination, may seem appealing to some. But it cannot compare to the security, privileges, and sense of belonging that come from joining a biblical church and living as truly committed brothers and sisters in the family of God.

RELATIONAL COMMITMENTS IN THE CHURCH

The following relational commitments are designed to help the people who are members of our 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 community, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we worship God, grow in our understanding of His love for us, and seek to tell others about the salvation they, too, can find through faith in Jesus Christ.

We know that true community isn't easy to achieve. 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. At times, no matter how hard we try to build a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. That's where these commitments come in. They pull together key principles from God's Word and serve as our relational guidelines.

These commitments 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.
- 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 insure that all members are treated properly.

As you read these 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.

We encourage you to expressly embrace these commitments and formally join our church by going through our membership class, acknowledging your faith in Christ, and signing the Church Covenant.

COMMITMENT TO PEACEFUL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CHURCH

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; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 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 trust God and seek His help in living out the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation:

Personal Relationships

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).

- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we will talk to them, not about them.
- We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will seek reconciliation without delay (Matt. 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 (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others’ interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).

Assistance in Troubled Relationships

- 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 (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 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 (Matt. 18:17-20).
- 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 Cor. 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 (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).

COMMITMENT TO PRESERVING MARRIAGES

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ’s loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, he established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 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 have found repentance and forgiveness in coming to Christ and sought reconciliation where possible. Others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others, even after professing faith in Christ, may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since repented and received the forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus and

sought reconciliation where possible. We want all of you to know that you are welcome in our church.

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 premarital counseling to help couples enter into marriage advisedly, and be well-prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in our frequent marriage building ministries. We expect Christian husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and Christian wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to helping individuals and couples receive biblical counsel and support when they face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness and ongoing discipleship.

Biblical Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage

Christians today are not entirely of one mind on the question of legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage. For example, some of us see the scripture forbidding remarriage after divorce as long as both spouses are living, no matter what the circumstances of the divorce were.

Others believe that the scripture permits divorce under the limited circumstances of unrepentant adultery or abandonment which would allow an aggrieved spouse to remarry in the Lord. Others see an even broader permission for divorce and remarriage, since Christians are “under grace.”

For a thorough discussion of this biblical issue, please see our EWO church document “A Pastoral letter on Divorce and Remarriage.”

Biblical Guidelines for Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage

In view of the Bible’s teaching, EWO members will abide by the following guidelines:

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15).

2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.

3. Divorce may be permitted and reserved for only the most appalling circumstances, when for example a spouse harms his or her spouse and/or family through such things as repeated, unrepentant adultery, long term abandonment, illegal behavior in the home, or putting a spouse in danger of life or liberty (it shall not be limited to these examples since there are certainly other extreme and appalling possibilities). The main point being that such a spouse is in a situation in which separation or the legal protection of divorce seems necessary and appropriate. A church member contemplating divorce should certainly counsel with the elders of the church before taking ANY steps forward into the legal system.

Divorce is certainly not permissible for normal marital problems that are common to all humanity. Even in extreme circumstances we do not believe that divorce must be the last word. Even after terrible harm and hurt, reconciliation can happen, as when the people of God return to the Lord after periods of waywardness (Hosea 2:14-23).

We want to emphasize that the phrase “divorce may be permitted” holds out the possibility that closer examination may reveal that the “wronged” partner engaged in a wrong behavior that helped to drive the other away, so that a change is called for at home rather than divorce. And we want to stress that forgiveness and reconciliation between sinning spouses is preferable to separation or divorce in all cases.

4. The remarriage of a divorced spouse may be viewed as severing the former marriage so that the unmarried spouse whose behavior did not justify being divorced, may be free to remarry a believer. It is of course important that he or she confess all known sin in the divorce, and make significant progress in overcoming any destructive behaviors and attitudes.

We urge every member who contemplates remarriage to struggle in prayer and study with all the relevant Scriptures, with the sole aim of glorifying God through full obedience to his word. Such a decision cannot be made from the position of the subjective viewpoint of personal “happiness” a state of mind which is frequently fleeting and highly influenced by emotions and personal wishes. Rather the glory of God and the authority of His Word must be kept in view.

5. The amount of time that has passed and the change in standing from unbeliever to believer does not alter the application of the guidelines for divorce and remarriage (God’s plan for marriage is for all his human creation, not just his redeemed people).

Even though divorce is permissible under some egregious and appalling circumstances described above, we want to stress that it is not required. It is not the best testimony to the covenant-keeping love of Christ and his church. God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7).

When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God’s love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 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 (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is threatened with dissolution. Therefore, when a member of EWO is considering divorce, he or she is expected to bring the situation to our elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the sepa-

ration, and as they endeavor to promote repentance and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate. Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce, but are still legally married, should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married. Moreover, it must be remembered that according to 1 Cor. 7:10-11, permission to divorce does not grant an automatic permission to remarry.

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 a previous spouse is deceased or remarried, only when “it is in the Lord” and only when the relational difficulties and “baggage” of the first marriage have been thoroughly examined and overcome.

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 what the scripture requires to rebuild broken relationships.

COMMITMENT TO PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN

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

EWO but we are committed to taking every reasonable precaution to protect our children and youth from foreseeable harm.

If a child or youth 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 regularly review our policies, practices and procedures, to consider changes that might further reduce the possibility of such harm to children in the future.

COMMITMENT TO BIBLICAL COUNSELING AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Our counseling at EWO relies on Biblical teachings and principles applied with “all wisdom” through the Holy Spirit to each situation we counsel. We are committed to asking the question, “What does Scripture say regarding this matter?” and to counseling in the light of the response to this question.

We believe that Christ has equipped His body, the church, to provide wisdom, knowledge and instruction to one another (Rom. 15:14) in order for each member to live a godly and holy life, pleasing God in all ways. Christ has also equipped His church with spiritually mature leaders who are able to shepherd, lead, teach, and counsel others (Heb. 5:11-14) in the church.

In order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the role of pastors and leaders in the church that provide “spiritual counsel” these clarifications should be kept in mind.

1. God calls the leaders in His church to set an example in “speech, in life, in love, and in faith and purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). If any leader should not live up to this standard in any counseling situation, the counselee needs to report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.

2. Confidentiality is an important factor in establishing a relationship to receive spiritual counsel. The leader providing spiritual counsel will keep confidentiality except in the following situations:

- When the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);
- When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20);
- When leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1). Providing spiritual counsel requires a relationship between the leader and the counselee. Occasionally there may arise a misunderstanding between the counselor and the counselee. We ask our members to handle these misunderstandings in a Biblical way by seeking out another church leader and privately seeking mediation.

Our desire is to provide “wise, spiritual, godly counsel” to each person in our church. By sharing these guidelines, we hope the “Biblical counseling” offered at EWO will help many become “mature in Christ”.

COMMITMENT TO ACCOUNTABILITY AND CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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 (Eph. 3:10-11). He loves His church so much that he sent His Son to die for her (Eph. 5:25). His ultimate 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

19:7). For this reason the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 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; Phil. 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; Heb. 10:24-25).

We sometimes refer to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents 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 those he loves" (Heb. 12:6).

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.

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 (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Pet. 2:12).

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

Similarly, in the church, we need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in His Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The elders and leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Private Discipline

Discipline should always begin 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, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are com-

mitted to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 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 (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of the church leadership.

C. Public Discipline

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” (Matt. 18:17a). By this time, this should involve informing one or more church elders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our elders may approach the member privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The member will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the member recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our elders may accelerate the entire disciplinary process and move promptly to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our elders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including, but not limited to, private and public admonition, stated expectations, etc. If the straying member does not repent in response to private appeals from our elders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).

If, after a reasonable period of time, the member still refuses to change, then our elders may bring the situation before the congregation, with the recommendation that the member be removed

from membership and normal fellowship. If the congregation supports that recommendation, we will treat the member as an unbeliever. This means that we will no longer treat the member as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the member, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him or her, remind him or her of God’s holiness and mercy, and call him or her to repent and put his or her faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 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 agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability while discipline is pending against us. We agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not stop the process of discipline until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 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, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the member 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 member 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 Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If a member repents, and our elders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God’s forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

We hasten to add that mere confession and sorrow do not constitute biblical repentance. One has to look at actions, not just words

in evaluating repentance. There are many biblical examples of those who confessed wrong doing but did not mend their ways. Repentance stems from a self loathing which manifests itself in desperation to make things right with God and others. And it is evidenced by a passionate, self motivated, enthusiastic, persistent embrace of doing whatever it takes to make things right.

Those who have been disciplined by another church will not be allowed to become members at EWO until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our elders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we will hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "God disciplines us for our good, 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" (Heb. 12:10-11).

WE INVITE YOU TO BECOME A MEMBER OF OUR CHURCH

Becoming a member of a church can be a life-changing decision. The preaching, teaching, fellowship, opportunities to use your gifts, and mutual accountability that you experience in a church can dramatically change your relationship with the Lord and with the people he places in your life. Attending our membership class will not obligate you to become a member of our church.

If attending the membership class convinces you that joining our church will help you grow in your ability to love and serve God, we would be delighted to have you become a member of our body. By joining our church, you will demonstrate in a concrete way your desire to unite with us to advance Christ's mission in the world. Membership also will allow you to enjoy the privilege of participating and voting in congregational meetings, where we seek to discern and plan how to follow God's vision for our church. Membership allows you to formally place yourself under the spiritual care of our pastors and Elders who are dedicated to your spiritual growth and well being. Membership will also provide the security and comfort of joining with others committed to the relational commitments contained in this booklet.

Please feel free to meet with our pastors or elders, who would be happy to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about membership.

