



# Trinity Evangelical Church

## Membership Handbook Practices & Policies

March 2021

## **BY-LAWS OUR CONSTITUTION**

### **PREAMBLE**

We, the members of Trinity Evangelical Church, in order to promote the work of the Church in the Spirit of Christ and thus advance His kingdom, do hereby adopt this constitution.

### **ARTICLE I - NAME**

The name of this church shall be Trinity Evangelical Church, Inc.

### **ARTICLE II - AUTHORITY AND ORGANIZATION**

A. The written Word of God as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible shall be the authoritative standard for this church body. This church does not recognize the Apocrypha as authoritative.

B. As a non-profit corporation in the State of Indiana and recognized as a 501(c)(3) religious organization, this church:

1. May not financially benefit any of its officers (elders, trustees, and ministers) except for reasonable compensation for services rendered.
2. May not perform any other activities not permitted by a corporation exempt from Federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.
3. Is prepared to relinquish its 501(c)(3) status rather than compromise its mission, message, ministry, or faith.

### **ARTICLE III - GOVERNMENT**

A. The government of this church shall be defined as presbyterial, not congregational. Though input from the congregation is sought after and encouraged, final decisions will be made by the board of elders.

B. The governing body of this church shall be the Board of Elders. (Whenever the term "Elders" is used in this constitution, it is referring to the entire Board of Elders).

### **ARTICLE IV - ELDERS**

A. Responsibilities of Elders

1. The Elders shall direct the affairs of the church and oversee all departments, committees, and ministry teams. They shall seek to promote the health and growth of the church.
2. The Elders shall seek to fulfill their scriptural responsibilities, which include: a) training Christians for ministry; b) praying for the needs of members; c) directing the affairs of the church; d) teaching and/or preaching; e) setting a Christ-like

example; f) protecting the church from false teachings; g) correcting members caught in unrepentant sin; h) establishing policies; and i) shepherding the flock. See: Acts 11:27-30; 15:1-7; 16:4,5; 20:28-31; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1Thessalonians 5:12,13; Titus 1:9; Hebrews 5:12,13; James 5:14,15; 1Peter 5:2,3.

3. In order to fulfill their responsibilities faithfully, the Elders shall meet together regularly, at least once a month. Each elder must be notified and invited.

4. Each elder possesses equal authority among themselves and function together as a collective whole. There is no rank among the elders as their authority is found only in their plurality.

5. All elders are to be notified of meetings. A majority of the number of elders shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business at any meeting of the Board of Elders. Elders should make every effort to make decisions with unanimous agreement. If possible, disputable matters should be tabled until there is such agreement. If time does not permit this, then majority rules.

6. The Elders may delegate authority to other members of the church for the purpose of distributing responsibilities. The Elders, however, are ultimately responsible for all decisions made. For purposes of both efficiency and fulfilling the mandate of Ephesians 4:11-16, Elders shall make every effort to distribute various responsibilities to capable and qualified members (Acts 6:1-7)

## B. Selection of Elders

1. The number of Elders shall be determined by the need and availability of qualified men.

2. Criteria for determining the qualifications of elders are to be limited to those standards found in Scripture, especially in 1Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-10. (While it is the intention of this church to help nourish both men and women to fulfill their various ministries, it is our position that the appointment to the office of Elder is limited to men as directed in 1Timothy 2:12).

3. Nomination Process. The Elders shall decide the nomination process from the following options: a) They may form their own slate of nominations; or b) choose to solicit nominations from the congregation; or c) utilize a combination of both methods.

4. Evaluation Process. The Elders will make an initial evaluation of the nominees submitted, considering their qualifications and commitment to the church body. Qualified nominees shall then be interviewed by the Elders. If accepted, the nominee will then be asked to participate as a provisional, non-voting, elder for up to a twelve-month period. After the provisional period, the nominee and the

Elders will reassess the appointment of the nominee and a decision will be made on whether to present the individual to the congregation for affirmation. The Elders reserve the right to dismiss any nominee at any stage of the evaluation process.

5. Affirmation Process. Before an elder is officially appointed to serve, members of the congregation will be afforded an opportunity to affirm the appointment in writing. (See Article VI.B.)

#### C. Duration of Office

1. An elder shall occupy his office as long as he: a) maintains the scriptural requirements for this office; b) is a member of this church; and c) chooses to hold his position.

2. Currently serving elders shall be affirmed by the members annually. The Elders shall formally review any case in which an elder fails to receive substantial affirmation and shall consider whether his resignation would be appropriate.

3. An elder who fails to maintain scriptural requirements will be asked to resign. Involuntary removal must be obtained by unanimous consent of the other elders.

### **ARTICLE V - MINISTERS**

#### A. Responsibilities of the Minister(s)

1. The Senior Pastor shall serve as an elder and therefore must meet the requirements listed in Article IV.B.2, and be appointed per Article IV.B.5.

2. An associate, assistant, or youth minister may be appointed as an elder contingent upon the process outlined in Article V.B.

3. Job descriptions of senior, associate, assistant, and youth ministers will be determined by the Elders.

#### B. Selection of the Minister(s)

1. All pastors and ministers (senior, associate, assistant, youth) shall be appointed by the Elders.

2. The members of the congregation shall be afforded the opportunity to express their affirmation in writing before the Elders make a final decision to hire a Senior Pastor (see Article VI.3).

3. When a vacancy in the office of Senior Pastor occurs, the Elders shall determine the selection process.

4. Nothing in this constitution shall be construed to require the church to have a Senior Pastor.

5. Associate, assistant and/or youth ministers may be appointed and hired as necessary.

6. Pastors and Ministers shall be issued a contract specifying all relevant issues of employment, such as salary, length of contract, benefits, procedure and conditions of termination, job description, etc.

## **ARTICLE VI - CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS**

A. Congregational meetings will be held to provide open communication between the Board of Elders and the members of the Church. Congregational Meetings are held for the purpose of providing information, inviting input, and issuing calls-to-action as needed.

1. A "Regular Congregational Meeting" will be held once a year to: a) allow various committees and ministry teams to make reports; b) proceed with any matters that might require congregational affirmation; c) affirm elders; d) review last year's financial report; and e) review next year's budget.

2. "Special Congregational Meetings" may be called by the Elders when needed. Only those matters that require attention will be brought before the Church. Though a two-week notice is preferred, a minimum of one week (including two Sunday mornings) should be given to call a Special Congregational Meeting. The calling of any Special Congregational Meeting requires the members to be informed of: a) date and time of meeting; b) location of meeting; c) subject of meeting; and d) whether a Congregational Affirmation will be requested.

B. "Congregational Affirmation" is an expression that refers to that opportunity where members express their approval or disapproval in writing. It is designed to allow the Elders to consider the support or lack of support the congregation may have on any given issue and thus help them to make a wise decision (Acts 6:1-6). Congregational Affirmations are not votes and do not seal decisions. All final decisions are the responsibility of the Elders.

C. Congregational meetings shall be directed by the pastor or one of the elders.

## **ARTICLE VII - MEMBERSHIP**

A. Individuals interested in membership should contact the pastor. The process involves an initial interview, a probationary period, completing an application, and a final interview.

B. Privileges of Members. Only members of the church will be afforded the opportunities below. Additional qualifications may be required for some areas of service.

1. Participate in the process of nominating elders.
2. Offer written input on affirmations for pastors and elders.
3. Offer input and affirmation for all other matters brought before the church.
4. Serve as an elder or department head / ministry chairman.
5. Serve as a teacher of adults, youth, or children. However, older children whose parent(s) are members may teach younger children.
6. Serve as a member on any committee, ministry team, or department.
7. Serve as a youth group sponsor.
8. Participate in other areas of service: greeters, nursery workers, soundboard, ushers, music team, etc.

C. Responsibilities and Agreements of Members. By joining the church, a member clearly affirms each of the following about himself/herself:

1. I am a Christian. I understand that salvation is by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ and have therefore placed my trust in Him. I recognize His Lordship both universally and personally.
2. I have been baptized by water and have made a public confession of my faith.
3. I am at least 18 years old.
4. I agree, without reservation, with the church's Statement of Faith.
5. I will support the process of church government outlined in its constitution and by-laws.
6. I will abide by the policies and procedures contained in the *Member's Handbook* and *Introduction to Trinity Evangelical Church booklet*.
7. I will faithfully and generously support the church financially, in proportion to my income.
8. I will support the church with my conversations, refraining from gossip, slander, malicious talk, or anything that would damage fellow members and/or the ministry of the church.
9. I will attend Sunday services faithfully.

10. I will contribute my time, talents, gifts, and abilities to the ministry of this church.

11. I will support the pastor and the elders as leaders of this church body; I accept that they are over me in the Lord (1Thess 5:12) and that they are accountable to God for their oversight of the church and its members (Hebrews 13:17).

12. I will make every effort to attend congregational meetings and participate in calls-to-action that may be issued.

13. I will neither seek nor maintain membership in any lodge or secret society that demands (a) an oath of total allegiance and secrecy or (b) participation in rituals of a religious nature that are not distinctively and exclusively Christian.

14. I agree to receive instruction, counsel, and, if necessary, discipline should my words or actions become sinful, compromising my personal testimony or the testimony of this church.

15. In the event I decide to dissolve my relationship with this church, I will make such an intention clear to an elder and will provide a written explanation that can be made available to other members.

16. I understand that if I am involved in an unresolved church discipline process, my membership cannot be transferred in good standing.

17. I have reviewed the statement below about Christian mediation (E.) and agree to be governed by its provisions rather than pursue litigation in civil courts.

#### D. Termination of membership.

1. Any member who fails to meet their membership obligations (Article VII C) will be encouraged to reexamine their commitment to the church. If there is an unwillingness to meet said obligations, the membership status will be terminated.

2. This church does not maintain an inactive membership role. Any member who becomes inactive for 3 months will have their membership status terminated.

3. In the event that the procedure of church discipline, as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 and other Scriptures, fails to result in repentance of sin, a member will be subject to expulsion. (See teaching on church discipline, available separately).

4. Any member who geographically relocates permanently and is therefore unable to maintain regular attendance will no longer be considered a member of this church.

## E. Mediation

1. Members of the church agree to submit any legal dispute with the church for mediation before a mutually agreed-upon mediator, or if none can be agreed upon, one selected by Peacemaker Ministries. Lawsuits between believers, or threats of lawsuits between believers, are a matter of grave concern for the church, are contrary to biblical and church teaching, and mediation is an effort to resolve disputes in a biblical fashion (1 Cor. 6: 1-7).

2. Mediation will be governed by the Rules of Procedure for Christian Conciliation of the Institute for Christian Conciliation (ICC Rules), unless modified as stipulated by the parties. In particular, subject to the more detailed provisions of the ICC Rules, mediator(s) will attempt to assist us in reaching a voluntary settlement of any disputes through mediation.

3. The confidentiality of the mediation process will be protected, and these matters will not be discussed with people who do not have a necessary interest in them. If settlement can be agreed upon, the conciliators may, at their discretion, issue an advisory opinion.

4. Neither the opinion, nor any communications exchanged in the mediation process, will be admissible for any purpose in any subsequent legal proceeding.

## **ARTICLE VIII - AMENDMENTS**

This constitution may be amended by the Board of Elders, after having utilized the Congregational Affirmation process as defined in Article VII.C.

## **ARTICLE IX – OFFICERS OF THE INCORPORATION**

Current principals of Trinity Evangelical Church, Inc., shall consist of at least a President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Officers are to be members of the church, appointed and removed by the Elders. Officers shall serve as legal representatives of the church, authorized to sign legal documents on behalf of Trinity Evangelical Church, Inc., as directed by the Elders.

## **ARTICLE X - CREDENTIALS**

As an autonomous ecclesiastical body, Trinity Evangelical Church issues ordination and licensing credentials for its ministerial staff upon employment.

### A. Ordained Ministers.

1. Requirements: Ordination is granted to the full time Senior Pastor.

2. Duties: To solemnize marriage according to the laws of Indiana; to officiate at funerals; to administer water baptism; to administer the Lord's Supper; to perform other duties consistent with the Christian ministry.



B. Licensed Ministers.

1. Requirements: Licensing is granted to all non-ordained full-time and part-time ministers.
2. Duties: To perform duties assigned by the Elders, which may include: officiating at funerals; administering water baptism and the Lord's Supper; and performing other duties consistent with the Christian ministry.

**ARTICLE XI – POLICIES**

The Elders shall form policies and procedures for the operation of the church. These are to be stated in a Member's Handbook and will be updated by the Elders as needed.

**ARTICLE XII – DISSOLUTION**

Any action to dissolve Trinity Evangelical Church must be approved by each member of the board of elders and affirmed by the current members (see Article VI.B.). Should said action be taken, the church's assets shall be distributed to a 501(c)(3) organization(s) determined by the elders and trustees serving at the time of the dissolution.

*Revised December 2020*

## **FINANCES**

### **MANAGING OUR INTERNAL CONTROLS**

#### **1. Job Descriptions**

- A. Primary Expense Treasurer – reconciles checkbook, pays withholding taxes; oversees the payment of expenses and QuickBooks Online.
- B. Secondary Expense Treasurer - pays weekly expenses and bills; enters data in QuickBooks Online
- C. Donation Treasurer – corrects contribution records when necessary, issues tax receipts; oversees offering counters
- D. Expense Verifier – an elder or representative of the elders who reviews expenses, requisitions, and reimbursements.
- E. Offering Counters – serve on a rotation to count the Sunday offerings and record contributions

#### **2. Procedures for the paying and reporting of expenses:**

- A. All reimbursements must be processed with a requisition form. The requisition form must be filled out completely and properly.
- B. Heads of departments must sign the requisition form.
- C. Either of the Expense Treasurers shall issue payments accordingly. He may challenge any expense he suspects is not properly approved. He may withhold payment until he resolves his questions and/or concerns with the payee, the department head, or an elder.
- D. The Expense Treasurers have no authority to approve or deny requests for payments.
- E. After payments are made, requisitions and attached receipts are then submitted to the Expense Verifier. He shall look over each requisition and “sign off” on them, making sure that everything is properly filled out and that the payment was properly approved. He shall take any concerns or questions to either the payee or to the elders.
- F. After the Expense Verifier is satisfied that the bills and requisitions are appropriate, he shall give them to the church secretary to be filed under their designated department numbers, according to the year they were paid. No receipt shall ever be discarded or destroyed.

### 3. Proper procedures for counting and recording offerings:

- A. Offerings are to be counted by two people in a private and secure location, preferably in the kitchen or one of the church offices. Relatives are not to serve as counters together.
- B. Anyone serving on the finance committee or as one of the treasurers should not be involved in the weekly counting of the offering.
- C. The counters record contributions in the donation software. The contribution report generated by the software is saved on Google Drive for a specified amount of time.
- D. The monies collected from the offering shall be deposited in **the** church's checking account in a timely manner.
- E. The Donation Treasurer shall issue end-of-year receipts to all donors whose contributions are \$100 or more.
- F. Under no circumstances shall funds be taken from the offering and distributed. All expenses shall be administered through the church's checking account.

### 4. The elders are responsible for the annual budget, which is to be shared with the congregation at the annual business meeting.

## USE OF FACILITIES

The church's facilities are provided through God's benevolence and by the sacrificial generosity of church members. TEC desires that its facilities be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ, for outreach opportunities, and to bring God glory. Therefore, the church cannot allow its facilities to be used for activities or beliefs that are contrary to its faith and convictions. Our "restricted use" policy ensures that the church will not inadvertently cooperate in practices it finds objectionable.

Church members, their immediate families, and organized groups that are part of the ministry, organization, or sponsored activities of the church are eligible to submit a request for use of the facility (a form is provided for this purpose). All requests must be approved by the senior pastor and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Denials may be contested by appealing to the board of elders.

## **FUNDRAISING**

It is the general policy that the *church treasury* is the source for needed funds. However, certain programs within the children's or youth ministries may be appropriate for some types of fundraising. In these cases, the activity to raise the funds is seen as a benefit as much as, if not more than, the actual funds raised. Therefore, each fundraising activity must be considered by the elders on a case-by-case basis. The following guidelines will be used to help determine approval.

1. Funds raised are to be used for educational or mission projects and not recreational or self-serving purposes. The project must have a ministry focus. Examples: A winter ski trip would not be approved; meeting the expenses of attending Summit Ministries would be approved.
2. We prefer the fundraiser offer an actual service (labor involved) rather than merely reselling goods. Car washes would be approved. Selling home-baked items would be approved. However, selling magazine subscriptions, boxed candy, or published cookbooks would generally be discouraged.
3. People are not to be approached on a one-to-one basis to buy or contribute. Items to be sold may be displayed on a table, or announced to the church body from the pulpit and/or newsletter. Under no circumstances should individuals be pressured to participate.

## **WORSHIP GUIDELINES**

1. Songs must be doctrinally correct. If an expression may seem confusing or unfamiliar then the worship leader should offer clarification.
2. Worship is our subjective response to God's objective truths. Our time of praise and singing should be seen as a part of our on-going attempts to disciple and train the believers.
3. Songs that speak about God's truths are better than songs that merely speak about our feelings, actions, or our own acts of praise. However, subjective songs should not be totally prohibited (note some of the Psalms), but we should be conscious of placing them appropriately with the more didactic type songs.
4. Songs that ask God to sanctify us (or similar requests) that are sung from the perspective of a prayer also have value, especially if the song contains strong content about God's character.
5. When all else is equal, songs that are sung from the corporate perspective ("We") are better than individual perspective ("I").

6. Interaction between the song leaders with the congregation should be encouraged (pointing out significant truths in certain verses, explaining difficult expressions, etc.). Again, the song service should be seen as an opportunity to teach and exhort the congregation with sound truths.

## **A PASTOR OR ELDER WHO YIELDS TO SEXUAL SIN**

Sexual sin shall consist of fornication, adultery, incest, bestiality, homosexual behavior, transvestic behavior, prostitution, pedophilia, exposure, voyeurism, cohabitation, or viewing pornography. Pornography shall consist of that material (audio, video, print) that is designed to provoke sexual lust. It may consist of, but is not necessarily limited to, the following: A) viewing soft or hard porn magazines and/or videos; B) accessing sex websites; D) calling sex hotlines; E) reading “adult” books or other erotic literature.

Any pastor or elder who yields to sexual sin shall be terminated immediately. The congregation will be informed of the reason for the termination. If the pastor or elder is remorseful and repentant, the termination shall proceed nevertheless. However, the congregation will be made aware of his repentance and no further action will be taken. The termination of office is not to be regarded as punishment, but for failing to maintain biblical qualifications. A man’s leadership is only as good as the trust and respect the congregation gives him. While he may be forgiven for his sin, he has demonstrated a character flaw that disqualifies him from office.

If the pastor or elder is not repentant, and persists in the sin, even after his employment or office is terminated, he will be subject to church discipline for the purpose of repentance and restoration.

## **SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND YOUTH SPONSORS**

Requirements for those involved in instructing others include: 1) Membership at TEC; 2) signing *Evangelical Affirmations* and *Supervisory Policies*; 3) being involved in a home group or participating in book assignments; 4) demonstrating regular attendance on Sunday mornings; and 5) meeting standards for a church servant (“deacon[ness]”) in 1 Tim. 3:8-13.

## **YOUTH WORKER’S SUPERVISORY POLICIES**

The following policies apply to all workers, volunteers and staff, who may be involved in serving children under 18 years old. This includes, but is not limited to: nursery workers, Sunday School teachers, youth group helpers and sponsors, and chaperones. The term “**children**” refers to anyone under 18 years old, including infants. The term “**youth worker**” refers to adults (volunteer or paid staff) who work with children.

## **1. Qualifications**

Anyone with a criminal history of abusing or molesting children will not be qualified to serve as a youth worker. All youth workers must be members of the church, in good standing. References must be provided by two church members.

## **2. Adequate Supervision**

Any program involving children should always include adequate supervisory personnel. As a general rule, two adults should be present during any church function involving children. See below for Sunday School exceptions. Under no circumstances should one male adult ever be alone with one female child unless they are blood relatives or a legal guardian.

## **3. Sunday School**

Security cameras are installed in each classroom and are scheduled to record Sunday School sessions. It is not uncommon for a class to have only one adult teacher; this is permissible under the following conditions: 1) Neither the window in the classroom door nor the security camera are obstructed; 2) There must be at least two children in the classroom; 3) The door must be kept ajar if the teacher is male and all students are female; 4) All ceiling lights must be on while the room is occupied. In a Sunday School setting, a male teacher shall never be alone with one child, whether male or female, unless the adult is a blood relative or legal guardian.

## **4. Parental Permission**

The church encourages all youth workers to avoid situations in which an adult is alone with a child. However, there may be some situations where it is permitted. Examples would include a youth sponsor taking a teen out for a Coke in a public place, or an adult providing transportation for a child. In such situations, the following requirements must be met: 1) The child must be the same sex as the adult; 2) Permission from the child's parent must first be obtained.

## **5. Report Suspicious Behavior**

Any suspicious behavior between an adult and a child should be reported to the pastor or one of the elders. If the safety of a child appears to be at risk, intervene immediately and investigate the situation.

## **6. Application**

All youth workers must fill out and sign the *Youth Worker's Screening Form*, obtain 2 references, and be approved by the eldership to serve in this capacity.

## **POLICY ON CARRYING FIREARMS ON CHURCH PROPERTY**

The following policy shall govern the possession and carrying of firearms on premises owned by Trinity Evangelical Church ("TEC") and at any official events, services, or functions of TEC. "Leadership of TEC" shall hereafter mean any pastor or elder of TEC.

**Firearms other than handguns:** Except in cases where the Leadership of TEC specifies otherwise, TEC does not allow the possession of any firearm that is not a handgun on its premises or at its official events, services, or functions unless said firearm is unloaded and secured in a locked vehicle.

**Handguns:** TEC does allow the possession and carrying of handguns on its premises and at its official events, services, or functions, but only in strict conformity with the following conditions:

1. Handguns may only be possessed or carried by individuals:
  - a. Who are at least 18 years of age, and
  - b. Who are legally able to own a handgun, and
  - c. Who have a valid license to carry a handgun issued by the state of Indiana or by another state whose license to carry a handgun is recognized as valid by the state of Indiana.
2. Handguns may only be possessed or carried in a concealed manner. "Open carry" is not permitted.
3. Any handgun must remain holstered on the body of the person possessing it or secured in a bag or case kept in the immediate custody of the person possessing it. No bag or case containing a handgun shall be left unattended by the person possessing the handgun in the bag or case.
4. No handgun shall be left unattended in a vehicle on the premises of TEC unless the handgun is stored out of sight and the vehicle is locked.
5. No handgun shall be brandished or displayed for any purpose except in a situation necessitating its use to lawfully defend self or others in accordance with all relevant sections of I.C. § 35-41-3-2.
6. Any person possessing a handgun shall cooperate with all lawful instructions of the Leadership of TEC or of any person TEC has designated a member of its security team.

Any person found to be in violation of this policy will be asked, in the sole discretion of TEC, either to comply with this policy or to immediately leave the premises of TEC or the official event, service, or function of TEC.

**Reservation of Authority:** The Leadership of TEC reserves the right to disallow possession of handguns on any premises owned by TEC or at any official event, service, or function of TEC by any individual or generally, if TEC, in its sole discretion, believes it necessary for the safety of TEC employees, contractors, members, visitors, or the public.

**Compliance with other Authority:** If any provision of this Policy conflicts with any federal or state law, rule, or regulation governing the possession of firearms or any rule of a facility being used by TEC, that provision shall be superseded by the relevant law, rule, or regulation, and all other provisions shall remain in force.

## **BAPTISM**

Baptism is one of two ordinances for the church specifically commanded by Christ (Matt 28:19). Trinity Evangelical Church observes believer's baptism, formally known as credobaptism. We hold that baptism is for those who have made a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. As an act of post-conversion obedience, baptism functions as a public testimony of the individual's salvation and his formal initiation into the faith. We believe this to be the model of baptism as it is described in the New Testament, in accounts such as the following:

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. **Acts 2:41**;

But when they believed Philip as he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. **Acts 8:12**;

One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. **Acts 16:14-15**.

Because our requirement is a "credible profession of faith," we do not set an automatic age level for baptism. Faith in a Biblical sense involves knowledge, assent, and trust—basic knowledge of Christian belief, assent to its truth, and a "whole-life" trust demonstrated by actions. This cannot be assessed by an age requirement; it can only be determined through personal interaction. Our practice is for the interested candidate to approach the senior pastor with his or her desire for baptism. The senior pastor will arrange an interview with the candidate to explore his or her understanding and commitment to the truths of the faith. The pastor will either confirm the candidate's readiness or recommend a delay.



Over the centuries there have been a number of ways baptism has been implemented in various churches. Our practice is total immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, believing this to be the model of baptism seen in the early church for the following reasons: (1) The New Testament word for baptism (baptizō) generally refers to dipping or dunking an object; (2) Accounts in the New Testament seem to imply immersion (Mark 1:5, Mark 1:10, John 3:23, Acts 8:36, 38-39); and (3) The main symbolism of baptism—the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ and our union with Him (Romans 6: 3-4 and Colossians 2:11-12)—is best pictured by total immersion rather than the alternatives of sprinkling or pouring.

Baptism, as an ordinance of God, is not something to be treated lightly. Yet because we live in a fallen world with a divided church, many denominations of which use different modes in baptism, we must deal realistically with people who have previously been baptized in a church with a different understanding of the rite. While we must always insist that a baptism must have been performed in the name of the Triune God to be valid, other situations allow for some grace depending on the individual's understanding of his or her past baptism, its meaning and impact on his or her life, and whether he or she has remained in the faith. The issue of whether to re-baptize or not is best worked out on an individual basis with the senior pastor or elders.

## **WOMEN TEACHING ADULTS**

Over the years, there has been no small measure of controversy over the role of women in ministry. Some churches allow women to serve in any capacity, while others restrict women from roles that would involve any teaching or exercising authority over adult males within the body. The discussion centers primarily around the interpretation of two New Testament passages: I Timothy 2:11-15 and I Corinthians 14:33-35.

In an attempt to understand the Biblical material on this matter – so as to establish a policy for our church – the elders spent a number of months in 2003 studying the matter. In 2020 they revisited the subject again, taking into consideration developments in recent scholarship. What follows is a brief summary of these two discussions.

At the starting point, we recognize that biblically, there is no ontological difference between men and women. Before God, both share equally in the same responsibility in creation and the same inheritance in redemption. There is nothing inherent in a woman's nature that would disqualify her from teaching children, women, or adult males.

The question then, is not of value, but of role. The major passage in the discussion is found in I Timothy 2:12:

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.*

Different groups have disagreed over what is being forbidden in this verse. Is all teaching by a woman prohibited? Others hold that Paul is only saying that women may not teach men; teaching other women and children is fine. Still others conclude that women must not teach in a congregation when men are in the audience. Finally, there are those who believe that what is being denied is women serving in the role of an elder, who both teaches and has authority in the church.

When we compare scripture with scripture, several points stand out. First, all teaching cannot be in mind here. Many passages either support or compliment women teaching others in various capacities. Women teaching other women (Titus 2:4), women teaching children (Prov1:8), and even women instructing men in private settings (Acts 18:24-28).

In addition, certain activities in corporate worship are instructional by nature. In Colossians 3:16, Paul says that our songs should instruct:

*Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs . . .*

Elsewhere in I Corinthians 11 Paul permits women to participate in public prayer and “prophesies” (with head covered), which he later defines in I Corinthians 14 as instructional.

No one seems to be suggesting that women may not participate in singing worship songs, or praying and prophesying if men are present in the congregation, even though these activities constitute at least some measure of teaching. Instead, from these examples, it would seem that what is being withheld here is not every type of instruction but a *specific* type—namely, the teaching authority in the church. This is consistent with the context of the passage:

- The text moves from this passage into a discussion on the qualification of elders.
- The Greek word used here for “teaching” is one that, in the pastoral epistles, almost always refers to the authoritative teaching that is to be faithfully preserved by the elders. Paul says that an elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”
- The verb “to teach” is a present infinitive, implying an ongoing activity or practice. This seems to correspond with the regular ongoing authoritative teaching of the church, not an occasional address to the church.
- If the phrase “to teach or have authority over” is matched with any church role it would seem to be the activities of an elder.

There is another position that claims this passage is addressing a specific cultural situation present at the time Paul was writing to Timothy. Therefore, it was written to restrict the false women teachers of Ephesians from promulgating a false doctrine and is not meant to be a restriction for all times. According to them, Paul later changed his position and wrote in Galatians 3:28,

*There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

We have neither the time nor space to address all the pertinent issues of this view, but some brief observations are in order:

1. There is no evidence from 1<sup>st</sup> century Ephesus that supports any of the proposed scenarios put forth by people who hold this position. The scenarios are ad-hoc creations to support the desired conclusion.
2. Paul puts as his reasoning the order of creation (vs 13-14), not the current situation. If anything denotes permanence, it is an appeal to the way things were in the beginning.
3. Galatians 3:28 is talking about our equal standing before God. This does not mean all differences are obliterated. There are still males and females, and God can specify differences in roles between them. There are still Jews and Gentiles, and Paul even talks about differences in blessings in Romans 9, delineating the special role of Israel. His point in Galatians 3:28 is that none of these differences makes us more pleasing to God. None of these earn merit.
4. If false teaching were the problem, why not address that instead of restricting all women?

For these and other reasons, we find this particular argument a case of special pleading and without merit.

Though man and woman are equal in ontological standing before God, they are not identical or interchangeable as to what God expects of them relative to their creative sexual giftedness. The 1Timothy passage speaks to their simultaneous unity and diversity.

A case can be made that the prohibitions in 2:11 should not be understood as just restrictive in nature, but also regarded as a positive affirmation that women were to be given the opportunity to learn during the church's gathering. In a society that did not typically afford women the same opportunities to learn as men, Paul's instruction was therefore quite progressive. By his words, "to learn in quietness," Paul envisions an orderly atmosphere where everyone's learning potential can be encouraged and enhanced. However, women are not to exercise ecclesiastical and doctrinal authority over the church, something that is reserved for elders/pastors.

This leaves a final question: What about I Corinthians 14:33-35? It is a particularly difficult passage to interpret. However, it is clear that it cannot be talking about all speech because Paul has just endorsed women praying and prophesying in public in chapter 11. A number of Bible scholars believe that since in this immediate context Paul is talking about participating in the evaluation of prophecy, women are being restricted from that activity—not speech in general. It seems to be the best of the possible understandings of this verse.

The question is, "May a woman teach adults, including men and women, in a formal church setting?" It is our conclusion that the distinction lies not between men and women, but between elders and non-elders. Anyone who teaches in the local church, does so *under the elders*. The elders are ultimately responsible for all teaching (choosing teachers, setting curriculum, correcting errors, etc.). All teachers, both men and women, share the same opportunities and responsibilities under the elders. In light of the points above: 1) women may not serve as elders, but 2) should not be disqualified from all teaching simply because they are women.

Finally, *to teach with authority in the church* – a role reserved for pastors/elders – would include, but not necessarily be limited to: 1) setting and describing the practice of church policy; 2) exercising church discipline; 3) explicit teaching of doctrine; 4) establishing a position by introducing a new interpretation of Scripture, especially one that may disrupt church unity; and 5) providing the continued and regular instruction for the church assembly. Teachers who do not serve in the role of an elder should avoid these matters unless they are working alongside the eldership with specific permission.

## WHAT ABOUT TITHING?

Tithing (contributing ten percent of one's income to the church) has enjoyed a long tradition. The practice is clearly taught in the Old Testament but is barely mentioned in the New. Jesus alludes to it in passing (Matt. 23:23), and the author of Hebrews refers to it only to illustrate a point about Melchizedek and Levi. There is, therefore, some debate on whether tithing is biblically mandated for Christians. Without taking time to exhaust the argument here, Trinity Evangelical Church believes that it isn't. However, the Scriptures are clear about believers supporting the work and missions of the local church, and we would like to see tithing serve as a starting point when members are considering their financial commitments.

The New Testament teaches that we are to give eagerly and cheerfully, suggesting enthusiasm for the ministry we support. It also teaches that we are to give proportionally to our income, indicating that we all should put our oars in the water and sacrifice equally. Since we all benefit from the various expenses of the church, it follows that we should all share in bearing the costs. In 2 Corinthians 8-10, Paul appeals to these principles of enthusiasm, equality, and proportionate giving when encouraging the believers at Corinth to be generous.

Though we do not appeal to a biblical command, we do nonetheless humbly ask our members to give ten percent of their gross income to support the expenses of the church and its outreach projects. The request is one made of everyone equally, and is based on the assumption that all who are members believe in this church, and believe in it enough to support it.

Please consider the following:

1. We strive to be careful with the funds entrusted to us. It is our purpose to be conservative with the utilities, supplies, decorations, salaries, capital improvements, etc. Each fall the elders and finance committee spend a significant amount of time working through the details of the next year's budget, anticipating expenses from all the different utilities, supplies, salaries, departments, ministries, missions and so forth.
2. Our church books are open for all members to examine (except records on the contributions of individual donors). No question will go unanswered.
3. Trinity Evangelical Church financially supports outside ministries and missions.
4. Gifts made to Trinity Evangelical Church are tax deductible.

## **STATEMENT ON SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE**

We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God in His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death. We are therefore called to defend, protect, and value all human life. (Ps. 139.)

## **STATEMENT ON SEXUALITY**

We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary sexes together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

## **STATEMENT ON MARRIAGE**

We believe the term “marriage” has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen. 2:18-25). We believe that marriage between one man and one woman, for life, uniquely reflects Christ’s relationship with His Church (Eph. 5:21-33). We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4). We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, cohabitation, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, or use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matt. 15:18-20; 1 Cor. 6:9-10).

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:9-11).

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of our church.

## **CHURCH MEMBERSHIP PRIVILEGES / RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **Privileges**

**Church members will be afforded the opportunities to:**

1. Participate in the process of nominating elders as described in the constitution.
2. Offer written input on affirmations for pastors and elders.
3. Offer input and affirmations for all other matters brought before the church.

**Providing that additional qualifications are met, members may:**

4. Serve as an elder, department head, ministry chairman, and youth group sponsor.
5. Serve as a teacher of adults, youth, and children.
6. Serve as a member on any committee, ministry team, and department.
7. Serve on the worship team or participate in other areas of service: greeters, nursery workers, running soundboard, etc.

### **Responsibilities**

See Article VII in our Constitution and By-laws above.

## **PASTOR'S POLICY ON WEDDINGS**

### **Supplemental**

I am often asked to officiate at weddings. Many times, I am unable to accommodate these requests because of certain policies I have established. For the sake of brevity, my purpose here is to simply outline these without full explanations. As always, I would be happy to discuss my reasons in person with anyone interested.

1. I will only officiate weddings for believers. To involve the pomp and circumstance of a church setting – complete with a Minister of the Gospel and the invoking of God's blessings – for non-Christians who have, by their lives and convictions rejected both the church and the Gospel, is a brazen contradiction.
2. Both the bride and the groom should be in agreement on which church will serve as their church home. Because the pastor of that church is over them in the Lord (1Thess 5:12), it is fitting that he be the one solemnizing their vows. Therefore, I will only officiate weddings for members of TEC. In light of this, TEC members are discouraged from asking other clergy to perform their weddings.
3. If either party was previously divorced, then it will become essential to determine whether the divorce was biblically justified. This may require interviewing those who have firsthand information of the situation, including family members and a former pastor. It is my position that the Bible allows divorce for matters other than adultery (this was addressed in a teaching given on December 9, 2007, available on our website).
4. I reserve the right to refuse participation in any wedding I believe to be unbiblical or unwise.
5. Sexual purity before marriage is expected, and I may withdraw or postpone participation if this is compromised. Couples are expected to have guidelines in place to ensure purity during their courtship.
6. Those seeking marriage must undergo premarital counseling that I provide.
7. It is my intent to honor the wishes of the bride and groom and incorporate their ideas into the wedding ceremony. However, I have a planned order of service that I work from which couples are asked to respect. Special music, readings, and testimonies must be in good taste, honor God, and uphold the tradition of marriage.
8. I do not recognize homosexual relationships as valid for marriage. Nor do I perform civil unions.

-- *W Brane*

**AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE**  
**trinity-evangelical-church.org**

Statements of Faith for Members

- Apostles' Creed
- Nicene Creed
- Evangelical Statement of Faith

Statements of Faith for Elders and Teachers

- Evangelical Affirmations
- Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy
- Nashville Statement on Sexuality
- A Reforming Catholic Confession
- Athanasian Creed

Written Articles

- Church Discipline and Restoration
- The Lord's Supper

Applications

- Membership
- Baptism
- Volunteer
- Working with Children

Introduction to Trinity Evangelical Church booklet

- A Brief History of our Church
- The Meaning of Evangelical
- Philosophy of Ministry
- Philosophy of Worship
- Sanctity of Marriage
- Standing for Life in a Culture of Death
- Interceding for Persecuted Christians
- Honoring the Truth while Maintaining a Spirit of Unity
- Youth Group
- Membership