



**WILLOW CREEK**  
2:42 GUIDEBOOK



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## Three Ways to Belong

Welcome! We're thrilled you're exploring what it means to be part of the 2:42 Community at Willow Creek Community Church. Below, you'll see the three primary ways people can choose to belong here. Joining the 2:42 Community is a significant step toward integrating into the life of the church. Explore the information in this guidebook to help you get to know Willow Creek as your potential church home.

### ATTEND SERVICES OR EVENTS

All people are welcome to attend Willow Creek and be part of our church and ministries—including weekend, midweek, and holiday services; classes; workshops; and special events. Willow Creek is a safe, loving place where everyone can explore a relationship with God, no matter where they are on their spiritual journey.

### JOIN THE 2:42 COMMUNITY

If Willow Creek is your home church and you can declare the following, then 2:42 Community is for you.

1. I am a follower of Jesus.
2. I have been baptized since becoming a Christian.
3. I have read and accept what Willow Creek believes (Statement of Faith, Five Gs, and Elders' Position Papers).
4. I agree not to be divisive.
5. I want to help build this church by using my gifts and resources for God.

### JOIN THE LEADERSHIP COMMUNITY

While many of Willow Creek's volunteer roles are open to anyone in the church, specific roles in each ministry require being part of the Leadership Community because volunteers who serve in these areas represent the church or provide spiritual guidance for others.

Those who are part of this community have read and signed the Willow Creek Leadership Covenant, completed a leadership interview, and declared the following:

1. I am part of the 2:42 Community.
2. I commit to leading a spiritually surrendered life.
3. I commit to displaying a Christlike attitude in every interaction.
4. I model a whole-life commitment to the church's beliefs, values, and strategies.
5. I commit to pursuing a life above reproach.
6. I commit to giving God my best as I serve and lead in my current role(s).

Read more about joining the Leadership Community on page 14.

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### ACTS 2:42-47

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*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

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## Overview of Willow Creek

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”*

Luke 19:10

Because Jesus came to seek and to save the lost,  
we feel compelled to do the same.

### THE MISSION

of Willow Creek Community Church is  
to turn irreligious people  
into fully devoted followers  
of Jesus Christ.

### THE VISION

of Willow Creek Community Church is  
to be a biblically functional community of  
believers so Christ’s redemptive purposes  
can be accomplished in the world.

## As we build Acts 2 churches locally and globally, here are our rally cries:

1. Help people far from God come to faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8).
2. Fight injustice, work for peace, and extend compassion to people in need (Acts 2:45; Isaiah 58:6-7, 9-10; Matthew 25:40; 1 John 3:17).
3. Live reconciled to one another in a radically inclusive, biblical community (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:16).
4. Strive to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:42; Matthew 28: 19-20; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-23).
5. Empower women and men to serve according to their gifts (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
6. Steward resources generously, wisely, and sacrificially (Acts 2:44-45; Luke 12:48; 2 Corinthians 9:11).
7. Gather regularly for biblical teaching, corporate worship, and prayer (Acts 2:42, 46; Ephesians 5:19; Ephesians 6:18-19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15; 1 Timothy 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).
8. Depend upon and courageously obey the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

## The Five Gs

While none of us can achieve perfection in this life, our desire is to make daily progress in the *pursuit of holiness*—progress that reflects principles and core values seen throughout Scripture. Willow Creek sums up these core values and principles in statements we call “The Five Gs.”

## GRACE

I have been saved by grace. I live by it and am committed to showing it to others. When I struggle in this area, I will dive deeper into my understanding of grace (Ephesians 2:8-9).

## GROWTH

I will continually pursue growth toward Christlikeness. When I struggle, I will seek every resource at my disposal to begin growing again (2 Peter 3:18).

## GROUP

I will pursue authentic community with other believers as modeled in the New Testament—especially the book of Acts, chapter 2. As I’m able, I will help others grow in their faith and welcome their help as I grow in mine. When I’m tempted to abandon living a life of community in relationship with others, I will ask for help from God and others to keep those relationships strong (Acts 2:46).

## GIFTS

I will identify the spiritual gifts God has entrusted to me and use them to help build His church. When I struggle to understand what my gifts are or how to use them, I will commit to learning more about them and to growing in my ability to put them into action (Romans 12:6-8).

## GOOD STEWARDSHIP

I will steward the resources God has given me in ways that align with the wisdom and guidelines found in Scripture. I will handle money in a way that frees me from financial bondage and allows me to be generous. I will give—or work toward giving—the full tithe for God’s work. (The tithe is described in Scripture as one tenth of one’s earnings.) When I struggle to be a good steward, I will examine how I use my resources and take steps toward becoming more faithful and sacrificial in giving back to God for His work (Philippians 4:11-19).

Pursuing “The Five Gs” means you are well on your way to becoming a fully devoted follower of Christ. These core values from Scripture are not just arbitrary rules; they provide direction that help every follower of Jesus live in a way that pleases God. They will help you grow into the best version of yourself—something God desires for every one of His children.

# The 2:42 Community

## RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES

Those who are part of the 2:42 Community at Willow Creek seek to follow Christ in every area of their lives. By joining the 2:42 Community, you affirm the following:

- 1. I am a follower of Jesus.** I acknowledge that my wrongdoings in this life create a barrier between me and our holy God—a chasm that no amount of effort on my part can bridge. Through Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, I receive forgiveness for my wrongdoings, accept God’s grace as the only way by which I can be reconciled with Him, choose to follow Christ with my life, and anticipate being united with God in heaven for eternity.
- 2. I have been baptized since becoming a Christian.** I have mirrored the example of Jesus in the New Testament by being baptized following my decision to become a Christian. My Baptism is not the means of my salvation but is an outward sign of Christ’s inner work in me—my redemption and His cleansing me from past and future wrongdoings. If I was baptized as an infant or child, my Baptism after making a decision to become a Christian fulfills the intent of my parents that I would someday follow Christ with my life. *For more information, read the Elders’ Statement on Baptism, page 60.*
- 3. I have read and accept what Willow Creek believes.** I have read the contents of this guidebook and understand the values, beliefs, and positions of Willow Creek, our Elders, and senior leadership as described in:
  - **Willow Creek’s Statement of Faith** (page 46).
  - **The Five Gs** of Grace, Growth, Groups, Gifts, and Good Stewardship (page 10). I have completed the Five G Bible study (page 18).
  - **Willow Creek’s theological teachings as found in the Elders’ Position Papers** (beginning on page 58).
- 4. I agree not to be divisive.** I accept the core beliefs of our church as being founded in and supported by the clearest passages of the Bible. I will avoid being dogmatic about matters on which Bible-based believers have held divergent views. In any areas where my opinions or views about doctrine, ministry decisions, or church direction differ from the Elders, senior leadership, or staff, I will be respectful rather than divisive in how I communicate. If I have a serious disagreement about something happening in the church, I

will go directly to the person involved, my section/small group leader, or my ministry leader, rather than talking about it with others.

**5. I want to help build this church by using my gifts and resources for God.** I understand that being part of a local church means using my spiritual gifts, talents, skills, and financial resources to help the church and its mission thrive. If I'm not clear on what gifts God has given me, I will seek to identify and understand them through Willow's "Discover Your Spiritual Gifts" class. I will find a volunteer role that maximizes my gifts, talents, skills, and areas of interest—both to benefit our church and community and to develop myself as a fully devoted follower of Christ. In addition, I recognize that everything I have comes from the loving hand of God. I will steward the resources He entrusts to me in a way that honors Him, giving with a joyful heart toward the mission and vision of my local church. I will move toward giving the full tithe to God's work, traditionally viewed in Scripture as 10 percent of my earnings.

## IF SOMETHING CHANGES

While anyone can belong at Willow Creek as an attender, being part of the 2:42 Community or the Leadership Community is not a once-and-for-all commitment. If you decide you can no longer abide by the descriptions of the 2:42 Community (page 11) or the Leadership Community (page 14), please notify your section/small group leader, ministry supervisor, or the church so we can update your belonging status. In addition, if you move to another church home (or out of the area altogether), please let Willow Creek leaders know about the change.

## PRIVILEGES

Belonging has its privileges. As part of the 2:42 Community:

- You have the right to influence key decisions of the church—most importantly through the selection and affirmation of Elder candidates, but also through your ministry involvement, development, and contributions in the area(s) where you volunteer.
- You're invited to attend all 2:42 gatherings and "family meetings," in which latest updates and future plans of the church are discussed.
- You have access to Willow Creek's facilities and staff members' time and assistance for weddings, funerals, benevolence needs, and personal development and support in your area of ministry.

Those who have taken the additional step of joining Willow Creek's Leadership Community are also eligible to serve in leadership positions within the church.

## CONCLUSION

Just as a reminder, God does not expect you to be a perfect Christian, living a struggle-free life—and we don't expect that either! But since every believer is called to be like Christ, we ask that as part of the 2:42 Community, you seek to demonstrate your commitment to love and follow Christ by living in His teachings, serving His church, and allowing Him to shape your character into His image.

# Leadership Covenant

Thank you for your interest in serving Christ and others at Willow Creek Community Church. We are both grateful and excited that you have a desire to further God's kingdom by investing your time, talents, and resources here.

The volunteer serving role you are pursuing is entrusted with influence and authority. By assuming this role, you are signing up to be a role model and representative of Jesus and Willow Creek Community Church. Your ministry participation comes with a level of accountability above and beyond that of the general congregation. People pay attention to church leaders. They watch our actions and listen to our words. In addition, people often define the qualities of God and the character of our church by our choices and behaviors as leaders, both in how we serve within the church and how we live outside of the church. We must understand the weight of responsibility this brings—and use wisdom and discernment as we navigate our personal and public lives (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

It is not Willow's expectation that its leaders be without fault. We all have areas of weakness, and sometimes we make mistakes. But in the spirit of honoring the influence and responsibility that comes with leadership in the local church, we ask that you read through the commitments below and the Scriptures that inspire them—and prayerfully reflect on the questions that follow. After reflection, please connect with the pastor or ministry leader in your area to discuss next steps.

## LEADERSHIP COVENANT STATEMENTS

As people who represent Christ and our church through our serving roles, we commit together to honor God and reflect Him in all areas by leading spiritually surrendered lives.

### 1. We are part of Willow Creek's 2:42 Community.

### 2. We commit to leading spiritually surrendered lives.

Anyone in an influential role at Willow Creek must be engaging with Scripture consistently, pursuing a conversational relationship with God through prayer, actively listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, practicing the spiritual disciplines that help grow and mature their faith, and must be a baptized believer of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:7-9, Galatians 5:22-23, Acts 2:38). One important component of a spiritually surrendered life is regular and consistent participation in the local church community and its gatherings—in our case, Willow Creek Community Church (Hebrews 10:25).

***Reflect:** How are you actively pursuing God in this season? In what areas in your life is God calling you to greater levels of obedience or surrender?*

### 3. We commit to displaying Christlike attitudes in every interaction.

Followers of Jesus are identifiable by the love and grace they show to others. Our love for others must be the most prevalent attribute that people see and experience when they encounter us. For everyone in an influential role at Willow Creek, relationships with family and friends should be honoring and should model the attributes of love (1 Corinthians 13, Philippians 2). With Christ as our example, we are servant leaders who navigate conflict in a biblical way (Matthew 18). We move the work of God's kingdom forward through humility, collaboration, and service.

***Reflect:** Assess the health of your relationships. In what situations do you need to approach people with a more loving, Christlike attitude? Is there someone with whom you need to reconcile or resolve a conflict?*

### 4. We model a whole-life commitment to the church's beliefs, values, and strategy.

As leaders of Willow Creek, we commit to the values of the church, and we pledge to respect the authority of church leadership—from both men and women. As people of influence, we refuse to stir up dissension and disharmony within the community. While there is room for respectful disagreement and dialogue, we choose unity over personal preference. We consistently pray for our church and its leadership—that we may live out God's Acts 2 vision for the local church.

***Reflect:** How do you model unity within the church while still retaining your personal opinions and views? Have you read the church's values, and do you commit to modeling them in your life?*

### 5. We commit to pursuing lives above reproach.

While none of us are perfect or blameless, we actively pursue holiness and purity before Christ, and we regularly confess our wrongdoings to Him, allowing Him to transform our areas of brokenness. If you find yourself engaged in patterns of pride, greed, hatred, lust, irresponsible debt, unwholesome language, or other destructive patterns of wrongdoing, please talk with your pastor, section leader, or ministry leader, and ask him/her to walk alongside you in your journey toward overcoming these areas of brokenness. People watch how leaders in the church act and treat others. We must understand the weight of responsibility this entails, and use wisdom and discernment as we navigate our personal and public lives (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

***Reflect:** When you consider your life in light of the teachings of Scripture, is there any ongoing pattern of wrongdoing or brokenness that hasn't been confessed or surrendered? Have you welcomed accountability from healthy, trusted leaders and peers? If not, what is your plan to do so?*



**6. We commit to giving God our best as we serve and lead in our current roles.**

God has gifted each of us with unique gifts and abilities (1 Corinthians 12). We believe that each of us should serve according to our gifts in order to best help build the local church. We also believe that every one of us can get better in using our gifts through development, training, and coaching.

***Reflect:** How are you using your gifts and abilities to build God's kingdom in and through the local church? Does your current serving role utilize these gifts and abilities?*

By signing below, I commit to Willow Creek's Leadership Covenant statements. If my actions or circumstances change such that the specifics of this covenant are no longer true, I commit to sharing this with my Willow Creek ministry leader to receive care and direction.

Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Ministry Area: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix A

# BIBLE STUDY | The Five Gs

We invite you to engage in this study to explore the scriptural principles behind the Five Gs.

A FARMER HAS NO POWER to make his crop grow. He can prepare the field, sow the seed, fertilize the soil, and protect the plants from parasites, but he cannot create the biological processes that bring a full yield.

Our journey with God is similar. We cannot save ourselves spiritually through our own efforts. Nor can we transform our character by simply trying harder. We can prepare the “soil” for a harvest in our souls, but God is the one who does the actual saving. He creates a clean heart within us. (When the Psalmist wrote, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” he used the same Hebrew word for “create” that is used in Genesis 1:1 to describe God creating the heavens and earth.)

Once powerlessness is accepted, a Christ follower can—and must—engage in spiritual practices that will cultivate the harvest only God can produce. Writing to believers, the apostle Paul said, “You are God’s field” (1 Corinthians 3:9). God is the supreme overseer of the farm, and we are His tenant farmers, actively engaged in making His fields ready. The produce we desire to see grown is that of Christlike character.

A church is also God’s field. In order to contribute to its spiritual well-being, we must understand the characteristics of a healthy, thriving church. Likewise, we must be on guard against apathy and spiritual disease in order to fend it off.

The Five Gs help paint the picture of a healthy church. If each individual member grows, expressing those traits and values consistently, the church as a whole will grow healthily as well. The following Bible study is a tool for assessing and guiding our personal and churchwide health. Through this study, you will learn what Willow Creek aspires to be as a church—and what God aspires for each of us individually.

## Grace

### The foundation of our lives with God

“GRACE” MEANS “A FAVOR WE DIDN’T EARN.” It’s the bedrock of our Christian experience and saturates every aspect of who we are. It means every relationship we have and situation we encounter is an opportunity to experience grace—or share it.

### Our Need for Grace

Some people think they are good enough for God to accept them just as they are. Use the space below to summarize what these verses say about this line of thinking:

Romans 3:10–18, 23  
(See also Isaiah 59:2 and 64:6)

Once we understand and accept that we have fallen short of the standards set by our holy God, the next step is determining what to do about our shortcomings. Perhaps we react by becoming “religious.” We try to stop doing wrong things to earn God’s approval. That will settle things, right? Read Ephesians 2:8–9 and Titus 3:4–7, then write a letter to yourself explaining why you can’t and don’t have to earn God’s acceptance.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Scripture often uses the concept of debt forgiveness to help us understand the concept of grace. When we forgive a monetary debt, the loss becomes ours, not the debtor’s. What do these verses say about how that concept applies to our relationships with God?

1 Peter 2:24

Hebrews 10:10–14

## Our Response to God

Once we're in the place of being honest about our need for God's help and forgiveness, what's the next step according to these verses?

John 1:11-12

Acts 16:30-31

Romans 10:9

Galatians 2:16

Briefly describe the time when you finally gave up trying to obtain God's favor through your own accomplishments and instead rested in Christ's work on the cross for you. If you haven't done that yet—or are unsure whether or not you have—note this below.

## The Inward Signs of Grace Received

According to these verses, who deserves our gratitude for the grace and forgiveness we've received?

Colossians 3:15-16

In light of these verses, take a moment to provide a reflective assessment of your own level of gratitude. What does your assessment reveal about your understanding of God's grace?

Read Luke 15:11-32. Do you see yourself as that lost son or daughter who is forgiven solely by the Father's grace? If not, why not?

The older son resented his brother and wanted credit for his good behavior—a sure sign he was living with a sense of entitlement rather than grace. As people of grace, how should we view those who have made mistakes, have not yet turned home to the Father, or who stand in judgment over others?

Reflect on your current level of concern for those far from God. What does your compassion-meter reveal about how close you are to reflecting your heavenly Father's heart for His lost children?

## The Outward Signs of Grace Received

In the following verses, how did new believers demonstrate their responses to what God had done for them?

Acts 2:37-38, 41

Acts 8:36-38

Acts 16:14-15

Many of us were baptized as infants or small children, sometimes out of tradition, but often by parents who had a desire for us to embrace faith as we grew. The New Testament teaches we should believe first, then be baptized (see Acts 18:8). Why do you think Scripture teaches that Baptism follows belief?

Another outward sign of grace is sharing it with others. What does the Bible say about our role in telling others about what God has done in our lives (“sharing the gospel”)?

Matthew 16:15

Matthew 28:19-20

Romans 10:13-15

Matthew 9:37-38

1 Peter 3:15

Colossians 4:2-6

Since Scripture encourages us to share our faith with others, how might you do that with the people you know?

### The Elders’ Statement on Grace

*Christ followers understand and have individually received Christ’s saving grace. They have abandoned all attempts to earn God’s favor through accomplishments of their own and find security only through Christ’s sacrificial death on their behalf.*

*In obedience to Christ’s command, they have undergone water Baptism as believers, giving outward witness to the inner cleansing and renewal experienced in Him.*

## Growth

### Progressing as a Christian

GOD DESIGNED ALL LIVING THINGS to grow—and He wants us to partner with Him in the growing process. We plant, water, and fertilize, and God makes trees bud and crops flourish. We parent, and He guides our children into adulthood. We coach or teach, and He enables students and athletes to become more skillful.

That growth partnership is true in the spiritual world, too. God designed each of us to mature into fully devoted followers of Christ. When we trust Him to do His part, which He always does, and faithfully do our part, we can count on the spiritual growth He will bring.

But there’s a tension. Although God is faithful in His part to help us grow (the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit), we consistently fall short on our part. We resist things that would help us grow, fail to trust the Spirit’s help, and sometimes do things that actively keep us from growing. This tension will be with us all our lives. But when we commit to the growth process through our partnership with Him, we can deepen our lifelong response to His grace and earnestly express His grace to others. That’s what spiritual growth is all about.

### The Inward Signs of Growth

If we are intimately connected to Christ, what “fruit” will our lives bear?

Galatians 5:22

Rate yourself in each of the nine fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. Which one would you like to focus on developing as you take your next spiritual step?

According to this passage, how would you describe someone not intimately connected to Christ?

Galatians 5:19-21

Read the following passages and note the role of compassion in a transformed heart. Summarize what you discover.

Galatians 2:10

Luke 14:13-14

James 1:27

Describe how your heart is growing (or has become stagnant) in compassion for those who are poor, marginalized, or in need. What has helped you grow? What has hindered you? What help do you need moving forward?

We welcome people from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and sexual backgrounds. We strive to create a culture in which every person feels a sense of belonging. We accept each other's differences as we fully participate in building a unified church. Does anything prevent you from being fully engaged in that effort? If so, what can you do to move beyond it?

## Tools for Growth

In John 15:4-5, Jesus talks about growing as one of His followers. Summarize what He says.

Growing as a Christ follower takes intentionality. The following tools can help you grow and remain intimately connected to Christ.

## The Bible

Nothing catalyzes intimacy with Christ and growth in character quite like reading, reflecting, and responding to the Bible. What do the following verses teach about the importance of Scripture in the life of a growing Christian?

Psalms 1:2-3

Hebrews 4:12

Psalms 119:9-24

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. According to verse 16, who is the true author of the Bible? What are the different ways you can equip yourself with the Word of God (verse 17)?

How would you put in your own words the warning to Christ followers found in James 1:22-25?

What tempts you to be a hearer—but not a doer—of God's Word?

## Prayer, Solitude, and Worship

What do Luke 5:16 and 6:12-13 tell us about Jesus' prayer life and solitude with God the Father? What can we learn from His example?

List the various types of prayer you see in these verses:

1 John 1:9

James 5:13

1 Timothy 2:1

Philippians 4:6

According to these passages, what are the benefits of Christians gathering together? How do weekend services and other church activities help you experience these benefits?

Acts 2:42-47

Hebrews 10:24-25

Hebrews 12:28-29

1 Timothy 4:13-16

## The Purpose of Spiritual Practices

The tools we use to grow spiritually (such as Bible reading, prayer, silence, solitude, enjoying the beauty of creation, and worship) are often referred to as “spiritual practices.” Religiously self-righteous leaders of Jesus’ day thought engaging in these practices would impress God—even if their hearts weren’t right (Mark 7:3-4). It didn’t (Matthew 23:13-36). The purpose of spiritual practices is to help us experience God’s grace—not earn His favor.

Ephesians 3:16-19 describes Paul’s vision for spiritual maturity. How would you put it in your own words?

## When Sin Deadens Our Spiritual Growth

What do these verses teach us about our life and conduct?

1 John 2:4-6

1 Peter 1:14-16

If salvation means total forgiveness, why does it matter if we continue to sin once we have become Christians (Romans 6:1-4)?

According to Romans 1:21, what heart condition leads to a sinful lifestyle?

These passages tell us things fully devoted followers of Christ should avoid. Which do you struggle with?

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Galatians 5:19-21

1 Timothy 1:9-11

2 Timothy 3:1-5

Titus 2:1-14

What do these verses teach us about growing in Christ and aligning our actions with God's plans?

Luke 11:28

John 14:23-24

Acts 7:39

Romans 6:16-17

1 John 2:4-6

### The Elders' Statement on Growth

*Christ followers know the grace of God that saved them is only the beginning of His work in them. They gratefully respond by actively pursuing a lifelong process of spiritual growth in Christ and seek to become conformed to His image. To this end, they consistently nurture their spiritual development through prayer, worship, and Bible study.*

*They regard the Bible as the final authority in all areas of their lives and desire to be wholly obedient to it. Christ followers honestly confront areas of personal sin and engage the Holy Spirit's power in seeking to turn from sin.*

*Christ followers also desire to extend the grace they've received to others through personal evangelism and participation in the collective ministry of the church in their community, their country, and around the world.*

## Group

### Relationships that optimize life change

THOSE WHO ATTEND WILLOW gain the opportunity to get to know God at deeper levels and to see one another as we truly are: children of the Most High God who are loved completely and forgiven freely. Every event, experience, and relationship helps us understand those things more fully.

For example, when gifted teachers teach from God's Word, it changes how we think because we get a glimpse into the goodness and holiness of God. When we gather for corporate worship, we celebrate and enjoy a dimension of God's beauty that inspires us. When we meet in small groups, another group member can remind us of what we sometimes forget: God loves us beyond measure, is working in us, and will carry us to heaven one day to be with Him. These are moments that remind us we are breaking free from sin and becoming more like Him.

### The Community of Christians

Early believers knew Christ never intended for them to live alone. What do the following verses teach us about their relationships with one another?

Acts 2:44-47

Acts 4:32-35

Read what the writer of Hebrews had to say about community life in Hebrews 10:24-25. Rephrase this passage in your own words.

### The Few in the Midst of Many

According to 1 Corinthians 16:19, Christians met in large groups and in \_\_\_\_\_.

What are the advantages of each?

Examine the Scripture passages below. Why is it impossible to fulfill these teachings without having close relationships with other Christ followers?

Galatians 6:1-3

Proverbs 27:17

Colossians 3:16

## Christlike Attitudes in Relationships

All believers are followers in one way or another. How does the Bible describe a good follower?

1 Corinthians 16:15-16

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Hebrews 13:17

Sometimes quarrels occur between individuals within the church. What does 2 Timothy 2:23-24 teach about this topic?

Describe the process for conflict resolution that Jesus talks about in Matthew 18:15-17.

What issues do the following verses have in common: Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:12-13; Titus 3:10; James 4:1-3; and Jude 1:9?

Reflect on the passages below. Why do you think God is so passionate about division and factions not being part of our church?

John 13:34-35

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Philippians 2:3-8

### The Elders' Statement on Group

*A Christ follower honors God's call to participate in community in order to grow in Christlikeness, to express and receive love, and to carry out the ministry of the church.*

*For this reason, Christ followers give priority to attending the corporate gatherings of the church for the purpose of worship, teaching, and participation in the sacrament of Communion, and are connected relationally to a small group of believers for the purpose of mutual encouragement, support, and accountability.*

#### **Christ followers also:**

- Pursue Christ-honoring relationships at home, within the church, and in the marketplace, and are committed to pursuing the biblical pattern of reconciliation when conflict arises.
- Support the leadership of the church and are biblically submissive to it.
- Affirm and uphold the fundamental truths of Scripture (as summarized in our Statement of Faith), and refrain from promoting other doctrines in ways that cause dissension.



# Gifts

## God-Given Abilities Used for the Common Good

IF GOD GAVE EVERYONE IN A CHURCH every spiritual gift, what would that look like?

“What a tremendous ministry!” you may think. “No shortage of volunteers. If the pastor is sick one week, no problem! Everyone has the gift of teaching, so anyone can fill in. Every small group has a leader; every ministry vacancy has a number of potential directors to choose from. In addition, there are no financial problems because everyone has the gift of giving and gives way beyond the tithe!”

Maybe. But think a little harder. There would be constant frustration because no one could fully use their gifts—and developing them through practice would be almost nonexistent. More importantly, we wouldn’t need or appreciate each other.

God’s plan for the church looks better than this. He gave everyone different gifts and abilities so we’d excel at different things and therefore need each other.

## The Privilege of Serving

Read Matthew 9:36–38. Imagine Jesus visiting one of Willow Creek’s weekend services, and afterward, you sit together in the lobby and watch the thousands of people head directly for the doors. He sighs, then repeats what you just read. How do you think He’d feel?

In 1 Timothy 1:12, the apostle Paul tells us his attitude toward working in God’s service. How would you explain what he says?

## Different Parts, One Body

In 1 Corinthians 12:14–26, the apostle Paul compares the church to a human body: Christ is the head, and all of us are different members. In three or four sentences, summarize the key ideas he brings out.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:4–7, what is the reason God gave everyone different skills and abilities?

## Every Person is a Difference Maker

What did Jesus mean by “bearing fruit” in John 15:8, 16–17?

What’s the connection between bearing fruit and evidence we are His disciples?

What does the need to bear fruit say about being involved at Willow?

The following isn’t a biblical story, but it’s worth some thought:

*A group of 15 people were carrying a log on their shoulders. One man tripped and fell, but the others kept going. As the man sat on the ground and watched them, he thought, “No need for me to help. They’re doing fine without me.”*

Now for a twist: You’re leading the team carrying the log. How would you convince the man who quit that he’s wrong?

What encouragement does 1 Corinthians 15:58 give to those willing to “keep carrying the log?” How might this motivate you when you want to “sit this one out” and watch others serve?

## Discovering Our Gifts

If you aren't clear on what spiritual gifts you have, we want to help you discover them. Go to [willowcreek.org/workshops](http://willowcreek.org/workshops) and find the next "Discover Your Spiritual Gifts" class to learn more.

If you know your gifts, what's keeping you from employing them at Willow?

## Our Attitudes as We Use Our Gifts

In the following passage, Jesus does something for the disciples that illustrates the attitude we should have when we serve. What is it?

John 13:3-17

Would others describe you as a towel-over-your-arm kind of Christ follower? Why or why not?

### The Elders' Statement on Gifts

*Christ followers recognize the church is composed of interdependent individuals, each uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of building up the body and furthering the ministry of the church.*

*They therefore seek to discover, develop, and deploy those God-given gifts—and to find a place of service within the church with the support and affirmation of the body.*

## Good Stewardship

### The Reasonable Response to Our Gracious God

"Mine."

IT'S ONE OF THE FIRST WORDS we learn as children. In one sense, knowing the difference between "mine" and "yours" is a natural and necessary phase of childhood development. It helps us become self-aware and establish appropriate boundaries.

The downside is that "mine" can quickly morph into an attitude of selfishness. There's no area where that shows up faster than in our attitudes about money. So it shouldn't surprise us that Jesus and New Testament writers talk a lot about the concept of money and possessions. They know our tendency is to forget that "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1).

Despite our tendencies, God is still incredibly gracious. Even though He knows we will mismanage what He has given us—and it's all His—He still shares it with us. All He asks is that we be gracious and sacrificial with it.

That's what Jesus did. He gave up everything in heaven to graciously and sacrificially accomplish our redemption. When we follow His lead, He promises we will store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in or steal (Matthew 6:20). When we get there, no one will grasp for more or try to selfishly clutch their "toys." No one will ever say "mine" again. We'll freely enjoy what our good stewardship here has imitated—it's all His, and He freely gives it to us (Romans 8:32).

## A Biblical Basis for Giving

What percentage of our income is the biblical model for giving?

Genesis 14:18-20

Leviticus 27:30-32

Proverbs 3:9-10

Malachi 3:8-10

## Stewardship of Our Resources

What's the moral of the story Jesus shares in Luke 16:10-13?

What does this passage teach about how we should view our possessions?

## Savings and Debt

According to Proverbs 6:6-11, why is the ant a good model of money management?

In the same passage, what do we avoid when we work hard and save?

What does Proverbs 28:20 teach us about get-rich-quick schemes?

We live in an age of credit and consumer debt. What does God's timeless wisdom say about that?

Proverbs 21:25-26

Proverbs 22:26-27

Proverbs 22:7

## Attitudes about Money and Giving

According to these passages, how should we think about money and giving?

1 Timothy 6:8-10, 17-19

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

2 Corinthians 8:9, 12

Luke 6:38

Matthew 6:3-4

2 Corinthians 9:6-9. What challenge is presented in this passage? What promise?

## How We Should Give

**GENEROUSLY:** We know Christ has given us everything and owns all we have.

**PROPORTIONALLY:** We give the highest percentage of our income possible, recognizing the tithe (10 percent) as the long-established benchmark in Scripture. We look forward to giving more as we prosper.

**REGULARLY:** As resources flow in, we offer our "firstfruits" back to God, honoring Him first—before fulfilling our other financial obligations.

**LOCALLY:** Willow is our spiritual home, and we support it with our tithes and offerings because God uses the church to bless us, those in our community, and our brothers and sisters around the world.

**COMPASSIONATELY:** As we're able, we give beyond our normal levels of giving to support special initiatives for those in need.

CHEERFULLY: Knowing God sees our heart, we don't give begrudgingly. We give as a willful, joyful act of worship to honor God and serve others.

HUMBLY: We don't call attention to ourselves when we give—and we don't give to gain favor or influence over others.

EXPECTANTLY: We're confident in God's provision and look forward to how He will use our gifts. We know He is pleased when we give generously and sacrificially. We look forward to seeing how He will faithfully provide for our physical needs when we have been faithful in honoring Him with the firstfruits of our income.

## Good-Stewardship Commitments

1. I believe all I have has come my way through the loving hand of God.
2. I will live joyfully within God's current provision for my life (Philippians 4:12-13).
3. I will honor God by giving the first tenth of my earnings to him (Proverbs 3:9-10).
4. I will save a portion of my earnings for emergencies, above-and-beyond giving, and my retirement (Proverbs 6:6-8).
5. I will live each day with an open ear toward God and respond eagerly to any direction He gives me regarding my resources.

## Appendix B

### The Elders' Statement on Good Stewardship

*Christ followers realize they were bought with the price of Christ's blood, and everything they are and have belongs to Him. In light of this, they desire to be responsible caretakers of the material resources God has entrusted to them. They recognize the tithe (10 percent of one's earnings) as the historic standard of giving in the Bible. Moreover, in response to Christ's abundant giving, they increasingly submit their resources to His lordship and display a spirit of generosity and cheerfulness in supporting the work of the church.*

# Church Governance and the Role of Elders

## How is Willow Creek Governed?

*“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*

Ephesians 4:15-16

The head of Willow Creek Community Church—indeed, of any local body of believers—is Jesus Christ. Therefore, we seek to reflect His priorities in what we do and how we do it. We never make decisions that knowingly contradict any of Jesus’ teaching. In addition, through the Holy Spirit’s guidance, we endeavor to discern God’s vision and direction for the church. Whenever we implement a plan, we keep one eye on our effectiveness and the other on the next step God leads us to take.

## Multifaceted Leadership and Policy Governance

Willow Creek’s organizational structure, known as “policy governance,” optimizes Elder and staff leadership. The Elders are spiritually mature men and women who use their wisdom, discernment, and shepherding gifts to evaluate Willow Creek’s teaching and ensure major decisions and strategic initiatives stay on a true, biblical course. The Elders are our final decision-making authority.

The Elders entrust the implementation of that direction to staff and ministry leaders. Under the leadership of the senior pastor, our staff members use the best hours of their days to maximize their gifts and talents, making practical decisions on how to execute the Elders’ direction. Ministry directors also offer input on decisions that affect the entire church. Senior staff leadership is accountable to the Elders for carrying out the Elder board’s direction.

Our governance allows us to center on policies, not personalities, and is superintended by our commitment to three fundamental ideas:

1. Our policies make clear the biblical parameters that guide the Elders’ vision for Willow Creek.

2. Our governance transcends any individual Elder and can be passed on—an added to—by future members of the Elder board.
3. Our governance provides protection to the church for the long haul and sets us up well to follow God’s lead into the future.

## The Role of Elders

*“For this reason I left you in Crete that you would set in order what remains and appoint Elders in every city as I directed you.”*

Titus 1:5, NASB

*“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”*

Acts 20:28, NASB

New Testament passages like these make it clear the church is to be led by a plurality of godly leaders under the oversight and direction of Elders. In addition to the responsibilities already mentioned, Elders are to pray for the sick, guard the church against harmful influences, and confront those who contradict biblical truth or who continue in a pattern of sinful behavior—thereby negating Satan’s influence in the church so the truth of Christ remains credible to the congregation and the community (1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9; James 5:14).

## Biblical Qualifications for Elders

Elder qualifications are summarized in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Above reproach	<i>Elders must lead by example and demonstrate a lifestyle free of patterns of sin.</i>
Faithful spouse	<i>Elders, if married, must be devoted spouses.</i>
Temperate	<i>Elders must be self-controlled, enslaved to nothing, and free from excesses.</i>
Prudent	<i>Elders must be sober, sensible, wise, balanced in judgment, and not given to quick, superficial decisions based on immature thinking.</i>

Respectable	<i>Elders must demonstrate a well-ordered life and honorable behavior.</i>
Hospitable	<i>Elders must be unselfish with their personal resources. They must be willing to share blessings with others.</i>
Able to teach	<i>Elders must be able to communicate truth and sound doctrine in a non-argumentative way.</i>
Not addicted to wine	<i>Elders must be free from addictions and willing to limit their liberty for the sake of others.</i>
Not pugnacious or quick-tempered	<i>Elders must be gentle, patient, and able to exercise self-control in difficult situations.</i>
Uncontentious	<i>Elders must not be given to quarreling or selfish argumentation.</i>
Free from love of money	<i>Elders must not be stingy, greedy, out for sordid gain, or preoccupied with amassing material things.</i>
Manage their household	<i>Elders must have a well-ordered household and a healthy family life.</i>
Not a new believer	<i>Elders must not be new believers. They must have been Christians long enough to demonstrate the reality of their conversion and depth of their spirituality.</i>
Good reputation	<i>Elders must be well respected by unbelievers and those outside the church, as well as free from hypocrisy.</i>
Not self-willed	<i>Elders must not be stubborn, prone to forcing opinions on others, or abusive of authority. They must model servant leadership.</i>

Loving what is good	<i>Elders must desire the will of God in every decision.</i>
Just	<i>Elders must desire to be fair and impartial. Their judgments must be based on biblical principles.</i>
Devout	<i>Elders must be devoted Christ followers, seeking to be conformed to His image. They must be committed to prayer, worship, the study of Scripture, and the guarding of their own spiritual walk.</i>
Holding fast to the faithful word	<i>Elders must be stable in the faith, obedient to the Word of God, and continually seeking to be controlled by the Holy Spirit.</i>

## Selection and Term of Elders

There is evidence in the Bible that Elders in first-century churches were appointed by founders of those churches. Therefore, it seems reasonable a church's existing spiritual leadership should be involved in the selection of new Elders. Beyond this, there are no guidelines for the selection process. Thus, individual churches are free to develop processes that best serve their needs (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

At Willow, each Elder serves a minimum four-year commitment. They are eligible for renomination one year after the conclusion of each four-year term. There is no limit to the number of terms an Elder may serve.

## Elder Selection Process

Each year, current Elders determine the number of positions, if any, to be filled in the upcoming year. If openings are available, they initiate this process:

1. An Elder Selection Committee is appointed to the selection of new Elder candidates.
2. Those who are part of the 2:42 Community of Willow Creek Community Church nominate godly men and women as candidates by submitting their names to the Elder Selection Committee.
3. The committee reviews the nomination list and presents appropriate candidates to the Elders.
4. The Elders select final candidates and present their names to the 2:42 Community of Willow Creek Community Church for a 30-day period of review and comment.

5. At the end of the period, the new Elders begin their terms in June, as those concluding their four-year terms rotate off the Elder board

The selection process takes three to four months. In the event a mid-term vacancy or special need occurs, the Elders may select a replacement from previous nominees or initiate a selection process.

## The Church's Responsibility to Elders

God desires Elders to sacrificially keep watch over the church, mindful that they will give an account to Him for how they have led. He teaches Christ followers that our role is to submit lovingly to our Elders so their work among us can be joyful (Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

## The Role of the Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor is an Elder and the chief executive officer of Willow Creek Community Church. He or she oversees all business and ministry operations of the church, subject to the authority of the Elders. Like any other Christ follower, the Senior Pastor should minister primarily within his or her areas of spiritual giftedness. In our context, this includes teaching God's Word and providing the church with strategic leadership and vision to carry out the directives of the Elders.

The Senior Pastor is called to help move believers toward Christlikeness through insightful, accurate, applicable, and relevant presentations of biblical truth, equipping us to be "ministers" (Ephesians 4:11-12). He or she must lead by word and example.

The Senior Pastor is not responsible to minister consistently in areas unrelated to his or her core responsibilities and giftedness. As shepherds of the church, the Elders should appoint leaders gifted in those areas to assist the Senior Pastor and thus maximize the church's effectiveness.

Teaching within the body is not limited to the Senior Pastor. The New Testament emphasizes the need for teaching Elders and/or the utilization of other men and women who are gifted teachers.

## Willow Creek Staff Members

Consistent with New Testament principles of leadership, staff members are paid co-ministers. They must evidence:

- A love for the Lord and a growing spiritual walk.
- A commitment to the vision and values of the church and its leadership.
- Gifts, abilities, or credentials that qualify them for their area of ministry.

## Serving in Unity

Willow Creek runs smoothly because of the humble, servant-like spirit of our Elders and staff. Regardless of their roles, staff members and Elders alike understand we are all submitted to Jesus Christ. Our leaders do not lord their authority or influence over the church. They sacrificially serve us to build God's kingdom, considering others more important than themselves (Philippians 2:3). This spirit of cooperation and appreciation is one of the remarkable features of Willow Creek and is one of God's greatest blessings to us. It is a fragile gift, and we trust everyone who belongs to our staff, leadership, and 2:42 Community to value and protect it.



# What We Believe

## Our Statement of Faith

*“Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, He has both the Father and the Son.”*

2 John 1:9, NASB

The Willow Creek Statement of Faith summarizes our beliefs as a church. Our theology is not innovative—anyone familiar with historic Christian doctrine will find these statements fall in the center of evangelical theology (“evangelical” means theology derived from the evangel, or the gospel; in other words, it is biblical theology rather than speculative theology or theology rooted in tradition).

We avoid being dogmatic about matters on which Bible-based believers have held divergent views. We want our core beliefs to be centered in Christ and His message as found in and supported by the clearest passages of the Bible. More obscure doctrine or teachings with less support are left for individuals to sort out on their own. We take no official position in these areas.

In the following pages, we’ve added a few explanatory comments to clarify and help apply these vital doctrines. As you read these statements, you will see they are rich with spiritual truth. Do not try to hurry through these pages. Read them slowly and thoughtfully. Ask yourself throughout, “What difference does this truth make in my life? If I didn’t know or believe this, would it matter?”

### The Bible

THE SOLE BASIS OF OUR BELIEF IS THE BIBLE, composed of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. We believe the Bible in its entirety originated with God and was given through the instrumentality of chosen men. Therefore, the Bible speaks with the authority of God and reflects the backgrounds, styles, and vocabularies of its human authors. We hold that the Bible is infallible and inerrant in the original manuscripts. They are the unique, full, and final authority on all matters of faith and practice, and there are no other writings similarly inspired by God.

### COMMENTS

*Human reason is a powerful tool, but it can be distorted by our finite and often self-centered perspective. Reason alone cannot figure out the meaning to life and cannot comprehend who God is beyond the simple awareness that He exists. If we are to have a relationship with God, we*

*cannot overcome our limitations to reach Him; He must break through and get to us. The Bible is the written summary of His attempts to do that.*

*But the Bible isn’t just a record of His word. The Bible itself is the Word of God in written form. It is revelation—truth expressed not by means of humans groping in the dark for the right way to say it, but truth given by God himself as He “carried people along” in their writing. Their message was and is His message.*

*Because God cannot lie, this written Word is completely reliable, so we must let it judge us instead of us judging it. Though other books, both modern and ancient, may contain helpful spiritual truth, no other writings are “God-breathed” in the way the Bible is. Truth is mixed with error everywhere except in the Bible. That is why we base our beliefs on its teaching and submit all our thoughts and plans to its scrutiny.*

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- We endeavor to regularly read and study the Bible, privately and publicly, to understand and apply its message.
- We reject claims that any human or ecclesiastical intermediary is necessary for us to know and relate to God. We have His Word, and we are each individually responsible to learn what it says.
- All aspects of our lives and conduct must be submitted to what the Bible teaches. We must obey what we discover God has commanded.
- Messages given by Willow Creek teachers must provide teaching supported by Bible.
- We do not accept doctrines—no matter what is claimed as their source—if they do not square with what the Bible says; supposed “modern prophets,” “new revelation,” or any message—even if apparently given miraculously—must be tested against the Bible.

### God

WE BELIEVE THERE IS ONE TRUE, HOLY GOD, eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of whom possesses all the attributes of deity and the characteristics of personality. In the beginning and out of nothing, God created the world and all the things therein, thus manifesting the glory of His power, wisdom, and goodness. By His sovereign power, He continues to sustain His creation. By His providence, He is operating throughout history to fulfill His redemptive purposes.



## COMMENTS

*The Bible begins with the phrase, “In the beginning, God...” God has always existed; His nature and being are eternal. We also learn about God from His revelation to us that three distinct “persons” are called God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Because the Bible clearly teaches there is only one God (not three gods), we understand these three persons fully share the one and only divine nature. We use the term “Trinity” as a label for the teaching that God has a singular nature but a plural personality.*

*This creative God desired to share the “community” that has always existed within Him, so He made a universe that would reflect His attributes. All He created is dependent upon Him—He made it out of nothing, keeps it together, can reshape it, and is Master over it. God crowned His creation with man and woman, fashioned in His personal image, with whom He could have a relationship, and who could relate to each other. They would reflect His nature by exhibiting unity in the presence of diversity, love in the midst of differences, and ruling while remaining submissive—all at the same time.*

*God has been involved in the affairs of His creation from the very beginning and continues to play an active role in relating to humankind, specifically in rescuing us from our rejection of His love and His legitimate right to be glorified as our Creator.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Knowing God is our highest priority. Substituting any activity or allowing any passion to become stronger is idolatry.
- We treat creation as something wonderful God has made. We neither abuse it nor worship it; we seek to cultivate all God has shared with us so it can be used to further His purposes, treating it as a stewardship from Him, which must be preserved without becoming more important than the people He made to enjoy it.
- We cannot agree with any teacher or religious group that rejects God’s revelation of himself as Trinity (as is common among most “cult” groups).
- We can count on God to be active throughout our lifetimes. He will bring us good things, and He will turn evil things into some good; He works in our lives so we develop a vital relationship with Him based on deep trust that supersedes all other loyalties.

## Salvation

THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF GOD’S REVELATION in the Bible is to call all people into fellowship with Him. Originally created to have fellowship with God, we as humans defied God, choosing to go our independent

way—and thus alienating ourselves from Him. Humankind has suffered the corruption of our human nature, rendering us unable to please God. The fall took place at the beginning of human history, and all individuals since have suffered these consequences and are thus in need of the saving grace of God.

The salvation of humankind is, then, wholly a work of God’s free grace—not the result, in whole or in part, of human works or goodness—and must be personally appropriated by repentance and faith. When God has begun a saving work in the heart of any person, He gives assurance in His Word that He will continue performing it until the day of its full consummation.

## COMMENTS

*The common myth that humankind is basically good is not supported by the Bible. We were originally created good, but the first man and woman rebuffed God’s rightful place in their lives, so we are all now infected with the disease called “sin” and are spiritually separated from God. This condition is without remedy through any human effort. If God had left us to ourselves, all of us would continue in disobedience and rejection of Him.*

*The good news is He has provided a way out of our dilemma through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which paid the penalty for our sins. Those who personally appropriate the forgiveness God offers will be restored to a right relationship with Him. This new life is a gift; it cannot be earned by our activities nor revoked by our failures—what God begins, He finishes. We live with the undeserved promise that the change He has begun in His followers is only the beginning of a total transformation that culminates when we are taken into His very presence to live forever.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- Our message to those exploring faith contains the call to turn from fruitless attempts to earn God’s favor and cast themselves, without reservation, on the perfect and reliable provision of God in Christ.
- We rest secure in the knowledge that the Christian life we live is a “thank you” to God for the salvation He has fully provided. We neither think that our obedience enhances our salvation (as if we could add something to the death of Christ) nor do we treat His grace in a cavalier way (as an excuse to live sinfully).
- Knowing we all are sinful, we never naively assume we are immune to temptation or evil; though confident of being rescued from the penalty of sin, we prudently conduct our lives mindful of sin’s ongoing potential to misdirect us.

## Jesus Christ

JESUS CHRIST IS THE ETERNAL SECOND PERSON OF THE TRINITY who was united forever with a true human nature by a miraculous conception and virgin birth. He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father and voluntarily atoned for the sins of all by dying on the cross as our substitute, thus satisfying divine justice and accomplishing salvation for all who trust in Him alone. He rose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He lived and died. He ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of the Father, where He, the only Mediator between God and man, continually intercedes for His own. He shall come again to earth, personally and visibly, to consummate history and the eternal plan of God.

### COMMENTS

*Jesus is both fully God and fully man. He is unlike any person who has or ever will live. He is not part divine, part human; He is fully both. All of God dwelt in Him, and His humanity was complete. His birth evidences His humanity in that He was born from a human mother, yet His divinity is established by virtue of the fact that His mother was a virgin who conceived miraculously. In His humanity, He experienced every human limitation except sin; He was like us in every way except that He never disobeyed His heavenly Father. In His divinity, He is coequal with His Father and the Holy Spirit throughout all eternity. His death did not end His existence, but after He paid for our sin on the cross, He arose from the dead on the third day. His resurrection not only shows His complete provision for sin's effects, it also serves as a prototype of our future resurrection when our bodies will be remade in the same way to live in eternity (Philippians 3:20–21).*

*Jesus continues to possess both full humanity (though glorified) and full divinity. He is the ongoing Mediator between us and the Father, ever mindful of our needs, always concerned for our well-being. His final words on earth included the promise to return to earth visibly and bodily for the purpose of consummating history.*

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- We are Christians (not “Godians”) because our message is about Christ—His work, His divinity, and our need to follow Him. Any message that does not center on Christ, including His full humanity and divinity, and His forgiveness for all sin, is not the gospel.
- Because our salvation was secured by a perfect sacrifice of a perfect person, we live knowing we are totally and unconditionally forgiven from sin now, rather than hoping we will be forgiven at some future point. We are secure in the grace of God through Christ.

- Knowing Jesus will return some day, we hold the things of this world loosely, counting on the new heavens and new earth (2 Peter 3:13) to be our permanent home.

## The Christian Life and the Holy Spirit

THE ESSENTIAL ACCOMPANIMENT of a genuine saving relationship with Jesus Christ is a life of holiness and obedience, attained by believers as they submit to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. He was sent into the world by the Father and the Son to apply to humankind the saving work of Christ. He enlightens the minds of sinners, awakens in them a recognition of their need of a Savior, and regenerates them. At the point of salvation, He permanently indwells every believer to become the source of assurance, strength, and wisdom, and uniquely endows each believer with gifts for the building up of the body of Christ—the church. The Holy Spirit guides believers in understanding and applying the Bible. His power and control are appropriated by faith, making it possible for the believer to lead a life of Christlike character and to bear spiritual fruit to the glory of the Father.

### COMMENTS

*The Holy Spirit is God, not just a force. The Bible describes Him with personal pronouns and reveals He has personal attributes. He works “behind the scenes” to prepare people to hear the gospel, and then applies the merits of Christ to them at the point of regeneration. Jesus promised the Spirit’s presence to all His followers, assuring us He would actually indwell us in a permanent union. His ministry in us includes: helping us understand the Bible, making us aware of things we do that don’t please God, assuring us we are God’s children, empowering us for witness, gifting us to uniquely serve others in the church, helping our prayer life by interceding for us, and producing in us the kind of character that makes us credible, persuasive representatives of Jesus Christ.*

### PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- As saved people, we are continually striving to be more like the One who saved us; we are not content just to be forgiven; we want to exemplify Christlike behavior in every area of life. We will never give up the fight to resist sin and to be more like Him in word and deed.
- The Christian life is more than just “being good.” We need the Holy Spirit to bear His fruit in us; therefore, our daily lives must be yielded to the Spirit in a moment-by-moment surrender. Otherwise, our self-improvement efforts will be useless.
- When we share Christ with others, the message we present is effectual, not because of our superior reasoning or irresistible presentation, but because the Spirit is at work through us and in

the heart of the person we're talking to; therefore, we depend ultimately on His invisible activity through our limited understanding of what will reach the person.

- Because the Spirit is resident in us, we listen for His promptings, anticipating that He wants to direct us and will do so if we are open to Him.

## Human Destiny

DEATH SEALS THE ETERNAL DESTINY of each person. For all humankind, there will be a resurrection of the body into the spiritual world and a judgment that will determine the fate of each individual. Unbelievers will be separated from God into condemnation. God's judgment will reveal His justice in consigning them to perpetuate in eternal retribution their own rejection of God. Believers will be received into eternal communion with God and will be rewarded for works done in this life.

## COMMENTS

*There are no "second chances" after we die. Our relationship with God for eternity is set by how we respond to Him in this life. God has not only saved our souls, but—as He did for Jesus—God is also going to resurrect our bodies in a form that will be suited to the environment of the eternal life we will inherit. The only hope for spending eternity with God will be to claim the merits of Christ. Any attempt to hold out one's good deeds as sufficient for God's approval will result in the discovery that those behaviors weren't enough, and that one's misconduct was far more serious than anticipated (now that it has been brought into the searing light of a holy God).*

*Because we are made in God's image and have the mark of His handiwork upon us, He does not destroy us after we die. He is the God of the living, "for all live to him," said Jesus (Luke 20:38 ESV). Rather, He fixes our eternal condition based on our life preferences: heaven and hell are simply the fulfillment of our spiritual aspirations as manifested in this life. If we welcomed His presence and cooperated with Him in our earthly life, He is pleased to continue that relationship for all eternity. If, on the other hand, we looked for ways to avoid Him in this life and sought to live in behavior He condemned, He will allow us to continue unbothered by His presence and holiness forever. Hell is God's provision for those who have longed for Him to stop interfering with their plans and who wish He would leave them alone. Those whose highest delight in life was God will be able to enjoy forever the One who gave them pleasure on earth.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- We reject the teaching of reincarnation. We must make good choices with the one life we have and urge others not to count on some later incarnation to work out their problems.
- Knowing our eternity is infinitely longer and more significant than our 70 or so years on earth, we order our lives here so they take into account this eternal perspective; we choose our activities and priorities based on God's pleasure, recognizing that His approval supersedes every other consideration.
- Although we know good works can't earn heaven, we believe our obedience pleases God, and we will be rewarded based on the teachings of the Bible; we serve Him diligently, not only because it brings Him glory, but also because He has assured us the future age will make all earthly difficulties fade by comparison.
- The message of the gospel brings life to those who would perish eternally without Christ; we therefore seek to present His saving message publicly and privately as often as we can (being sensitive to our listeners' needs as well as communicating naturally through our own evangelistic style).
- As we relate to people throughout life, we see them as the eternal beings they are and accord them due respect; we have never met an *average* person—everyone matters to God and deserves to be treated lovingly.

## The Church

THE COROLLARY OF UNION with Jesus Christ is that all believers become members of His body, the Church. There is one true Church universal, comprised of all those who acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The Bible commands believers to gather together to devote themselves to worship, prayer, the teaching of the Word, the observance of Baptism and Communion (the sacramental ordinances established by Jesus Christ), fellowship, service to the body through the development and use of talents and spiritual gifts, and outreach to the world.

Wherever God's people meet regularly in obedience to this command, this is the local expression of the Church. Under the watch-care of Elders and other supportive leaders, its members are to work together in love and unity, intent on the one ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ.

## COMMENTS

*The Church is first-and-foremost an organism, not an organization. It is the living body of Christ, made up of all people everywhere who are His followers. It is not defined by the limits of any particular denomination*

or location, but includes all true believers. The local expression of this body is found wherever His children gather in His name. While the Bible describes some of the activities of a church, it is Christ in our midst—not anything we do—that makes us His Church.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

- Non-Christians can be members of an organization, but making us members of the Church is something Christ himself does; Willow Creek’s system for belonging recognizes this invisible work of Christ as distinct from the flexible, human-controlled systems of belonging in a local church.
- We are an interdenominational church, emphasizing that all true believers are one with Christ and each other, regardless of denominational background. Every gathering of believers is a gathering of the Church; every small group is in fact the Church meeting together in its smallest unit.
- Small-group leaders function as shepherds of their “flock,” and ultimately, the Elders can provide spiritual oversight through those leaders for the entire church.
- All believers must have opportunities to learn about and develop their spiritual gifts; we structure our ministries to implement this value so everyone can participate in some aspect of the church based on their areas of passion and giftedness.
- Disunity hurts the body of Christ and His cause. We guard our unity and diligently seek to honestly confront and work through differences in God-honoring ways that both respect the individual (made in God’s image) and preserve our oneness in Christ.

## Faith and Practice

THE BIBLE IS THE FINAL AUTHORITY in all matters of faith and practice. Willow Creek recognizes it cannot bind the consciences of individuals who are part of the 2:42 Community in areas where the Bible is silent. Rather, each believer is to be led in those areas by the Holy Spirit, to whom he or she alone is ultimately responsible.

## COMMENTS

*Truth is found in the Bible, but truth is not found ONLY in the Bible. The Bible is all-sufficient for our spiritual lives, but many other beneficial things can be learned through other means. We embrace whatever wisdom we can learn from whatever legitimate source, always passing it through the discerning grid of God’s unerring Word. What the Bible teaches, we embrace. If a non-Scriptural source contradicts the Bible, we can be certain it does not embody God’s truth—and we affirm what the Bible teaches. Beyond that, no person, organization, or writings have authority to dictate our beliefs.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- No person ever has the right to dictate the beliefs of another person; we submit to God’s authority through His Word, which stands over and judges all of us, including our leaders.
- We do not take stands on controversial issues about which the Bible is silent; individuals are left to their own consciences before God rather than depending on the church to tell them what to think or do.

## Conclusion

We believe the Statement of Faith to be an accurate summary of what the Bible teaches. Those who are part of the 2:42 Community shall refrain from advocating doctrines that are not included in the Statement of Faith in such a way as to cause dissension.

## COMMENTS

*We believe that what we have communicated in this Statement of Faith is not teaching of our own design, but an accurate reflection of the Bible’s main themes, true for all people at all times in every place. This final statement simply asks that everyone in our fellowship agree that, even if they have differing opinions, there be no divisiveness.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

- We are free to express our opinions among our brothers and sisters, but we don’t want to ever harm the church by gathering a following around ourselves (or an interpretation of a controversial issue) to create a splinter group or cause disunity in the church.
- We value the well-being of Christ’s body above our desire for self-expression; though no authority has a right to police our thoughts, we agree not to speak with unwarranted conviction when our opinions pertain to non-biblical matters or when our views differ from this Statement of Faith.

## Appendix C



# Elders' Position Papers

Throughout more than 40 years of ministry, Willow Creek's Elders have sifted through several challenging areas of doctrine and practice. When they study these issues and come to conclusions, they produce "position papers" that summarize their learning and wisdom about an issue.

This appendix contains those written statements. These papers do not necessarily represent the most core issues of our faith; and they are in no way exhaustive about how we as Christians are to think and live in the 21st century. This is a body of interpretations and "case-law" wisdom that flow out of the unique experience of this church. They are a response to issues raised by staff members in the course of doing ministry, from those who are part of the 2:42 Community wanting clarification, or from other churches or organizations requesting our position on an issue.

Because the Elders are charged with the doctrinal and pastoral watchcare of the church, they study, pray, and share wisdom so the church can benefit from thoughtful, carefully worded responses that give biblically sound guidance. Many hard issues face our growing Christian community, and we are grateful for the Elders' diligence in guiding us as we seek God's direction. They are a great example of how believers can apply the timeless truths and principles in the Bible to modern issues that need to be addressed.

## Statement on Women and Men in Community

WE BELIEVE THE BIBLE teaches God created men and women to equally bear His image (Genesis 1:27). God's intention was for them to share oneness and community (Genesis 2:23-24), even as the Godhead experiences oneness within the Trinity. Each had a direct relationship with God and they shared jointly the responsibilities of rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Genesis 1:26-28). However, human oneness was shattered by the fall. The struggle for power and the desire to "rule over" another is part of the result of human sin. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

However, God has acted in Christ to redeem the human race, and to offer to all people the opportunity to be part of His Church. It is God's intention for His children to experience the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23). This means that old divisions and hierarchies between genders and races are not to be tolerated in the church, where all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

## Biblical Basis and Guidelines

In the formation of the church at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on women and men alike, as had been predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:18). In the New Testament, women as well as men exercise prophetic and priestly functions (Acts 2: 17-18, 1 Corinthians 11:4-5, 1 Peter 2:9-10). Further, the Spirit bestows gifts on all members of His Church sovereignly, without giving anyone preferential treatment based on gender (Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:7, 11). Every believer is to offer her or his gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ (Romans 12:4-8, 1 Peter 4:10-11). To prevent believers from exercising their spiritual gifts is to quench the work of the Spirit.

## In the Church

In all attempts to understand and put into practice appropriate relationships between genders in the body of Christ, our sole authority is the will of God as expressed in Scripture. A few isolated scriptural texts appear to restrict the full ministry freedom of women. The interpretation of those passages must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their specific contexts. We believe that, when the Bible is interpreted comprehensively, it teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry. Spiritual gifts are not gender-based, but God-assigned. All gifts are possible for anyone, regardless of gender.

## In the Home

It appears that the consistent weight of the Genesis narratives of creation and the fall is on the mutuality and communal nature of the relationship between male and female that existed as they were first created. The disruption of this mutuality is expressed as the result of sin and not as God's original purpose for the human race.

Because of Christ's redemption, we can work toward restoration of relationships between women and men. Roles within relationships are not predetermined by gender, but are defined by the individuals themselves in the relationship, based on factors such as gifts, talents, expertise, and experience. We believe that in Christ, marital relationships are grounded in reciprocal servanthood, mutual submission, and sacrificial love.

## Conclusion & Response

Mutual acceptance between men and women—and teamwork on the basis of full equality—are foundational to the biblical understanding of community as we practice it as Willow Creek.

Therefore, in our attempts to live together as a biblically functioning community, we are committed to the following values:

- To be intentional about developing and empowering both women and men, and girls and boys, for all aspects of ministry based on giftedness and character without regard to gender, and stressing each one's giftedness and calling.
- To pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between genders that led New Testament writers to describe them in terms of family: "brothers and sisters."
- To pursue and encourage marital relationships of reciprocal servanthood, mutual submission, and sacrificial love.
- To use sensitivity in language that reflects the honor and value God desires for maleness and femaleness and to encourage the use of translations of Scripture that accurately portray God's will that His Church be an inclusive community (TNIV, NRSV, etc.).
- To be intentional where appropriate in overcoming sexist elements of our culture and to offer encouragement to women in areas where their giftedness has been traditionally discouraged.
- To teach and model these values to our community, to the church, and the world at large.

For further study and more complete discussion of the key biblical passages pertaining to this issue, we recommend:

Bilezikian, Gilbert, *Beyond Sex Roles* (Baker Academic, 2006).  
 Barton, Ruth, *Becoming a Woman of Strength* (Shaw Books, 2000).  
 Hull, Gretchen, *Equal to Serve* (Baker Book House, 1998).  
 Keener, Craig, *Paul, Women, and Wives* (Baker Academic, 1992).  
 Ogden, Greg, *The New Reformation* (Zondervan, 1991).  
 Spencer, Aida, *Beyond the Curse* (Baker Academic, 1989).

## Statement on Baptism

WHEN PEOPLE CONSIDER THE TOPIC OF BAPTISM, they often ask one of two questions. The first is a very basic one: What is the spiritual significance of Baptism? The second has to do with traditions from the past, specifically pre-conversion Baptism. The issue in that case is: Why be baptized as an adult believer if I was baptized as a baby?

While recognizing other churches have the right to practice infant Baptism if it conforms to their theologies, Willow Creek Community Church understands the Bible teaches that only professing believers qualify for Baptism.

Scriptural teaching on Baptism may be summarized as follows:

- Baptism is an act of obedience to the command of Christ, fulfilled by individuals who have subjected themselves to His sovereignty.

- Baptism symbolizes the spiritual cleansing through divine forgiveness and newness of life experienced by believers by virtue of their identification with Christ in His death and resurrection.
- Baptism provides an opportunity for believers to make a formal profession of their faith before the church.

Although the old-covenant practice of infant circumcision is sometimes used as a rationale for infant Baptism, the biblical definitions of the functions of circumcision and of Baptism show that those two institutions fulfilled different purposes in their respective covenants. The equation is never made in the Bible between the circumcision of male infants in the old covenant and the Baptism of Christ-following believers—much less of infants—in the new covenant through Jesus Christ.

However, Willow Creek Community Church encourages Christian parents to present their child for a ceremony of dedication, whereby God's blessing is formally invoked upon the child, and the parents publicly commit themselves to raising the child in accordance with the teachings of the Bible.

The Elders require that children be in grade six or older to be baptized.

Willow Creek Community Church offers the options of Baptism through both sprinkling and immersion, on the basis of a sacramental view of the ordinances, whereby their value lies in the symbolism they convey and in the faith of the participants, rather than the nature or amount of the elements used (bread and wine for Communion, and water for Baptism).

## Scripture Passages Concerning Baptism

At Willow Creek, the Bible is the source of our beliefs, including our views on Baptism. A few key passages can help us see what purpose Baptism plays in the life of a believer.

In Matthew 28:19 (NASB), Jesus commands His followers, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Baptism is the means by which disciples of Christ are identified. And because Christ commanded it, Christ followers willingly submit to it.

In passages such as Acts 2:41, 8:12, and 10:47-48, it is evident the act of Baptism came after an individual's decision to trust Christ for salvation. It was an outward sign of something that had occurred in the person's life (usually quite recently). No one would dream of being baptized unless they had made a decision to identify with Christ. And no one else could make that decision for them. The New Testament records the Baptisms of adults who were believers, but never of infants. Baptism can't give a person anything, spiritually speaking. It can only signify something that has already happened.

In Romans 6:1-11, the apostle Paul explains how the immersion mode of Baptism identifies the believer with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going under water pictures Christ's death. Coming out of the water illustrates His resurrection. While the immersion mode of Baptism best illustrates the work of Christ, this passage does not mandate how much water should be used. The value of the sacrament of Baptism is in the life and heart of the believer, not in the amount of water used. Because of this, Willow Creek affirms both sprinkling and immersion as acceptable methods of Baptism.

## The Wedding Illustration

One way to grasp the meaning of Baptism—and what it doesn't mean—is to imagine a wedding. The bride and groom stand side by side in the front of the church. They take turns promising “till death do us part.” This bride and groom don't look any different on the outside, but in just a few moments they will be married—united for life by invisible cords. In order to signify that unseen union, the bride and groom exchange rings. These bands of gold tell the world they are now married. A permanent change has happened to them.

Now imagine an unmarried couple is watching. They decide they want to be married too. So they give each other rings right there where they sit. No commitments, no vows made, just the symbols of union exchanged. As they walk out of church, their hands, like those of the bride and groom, bear the accepted token of lifetime love. But only the couple that has made the commitment to each other is really married.

The point is obvious. Symbol is not substance. Marriage depends on a commitment, not on bands of gold. The same is true of becoming a Christian. What may outwardly identify you as a believer does not make you one. The wedding rings do not marry the couple. They are fitting symbols, but without the reality of commitment, a ring—like Baptism—is void of meaning. Therefore, you must choose Christ, and you must choose Baptism, in order for the sacrament to have the meaning intended by the Bible.

Of course, you do not have to be baptized to have Christ any more than you must exchange rings to be pronounced man and wife. But if the inner commitment to trust Christ alone for salvation has been made, then the outward symbol of Baptism should be as valued and as visible as the gold ring on a newlywed's finger.

## Infant Baptism

If the purpose of Baptism is to identify a new believer in Jesus Christ publicly, the question may be asked, “Why are so many people baptized as babies?”

In the Bible, we find parents bringing their children to Jesus. He held them, prayed for them, and told His disciples to welcome them. But

He did not baptize them, and He did not tell anyone else to baptize them. Baptism is appropriate only for those who have made a personal decision to trust Christ alone for their salvation. If you were baptized as a child, it was no doubt the intent of your parents that you would one day be a follower of Christ. Your Baptism as an adult can be viewed as the fulfillment of your parents' wishes. It in no way repudiates the Baptism you received as a child.

## Statement on Stewardship and Giving

CULTURE TODAY bombards us with the notion that more stuff and more money lead to happiness and fulfillment. The latest and greatest promises to bring status, value, and joy. But the Bible teaches a countercultural way of life. In fact, more than 2,400 verses in the Bible teach something about money and contain a wealth of financial wisdom. We're simply stewards of all God has given us, which frees us to accept God's grace and protects us from the dangers of money and the lure of more possessions.

What is stewardship? Stewardship is living each day recognizing that everything on earth and all that we have belongs to God. We carefully manage the time, talents, and resources He has put in our care with the understanding that it has been given to us to further His kingdom. This includes carefully managing our household budgets and choosing a lifestyle that allows us to give freely, save for the future, avoid debt, and meet our financial obligations. This will provide us with a joyful sense of freedom from possessions.

## Biblical Basis and Guidelines

*“Then He said to them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions’”* (Luke 12:15).

*“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money”* (Matthew 6:24).

*“For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6:10).

*“Unless you are faithful in small matters, you won't be faithful in large ones. If you cheat even a little, you won't be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven?”* (Luke 16:10-11).

*“... And the borrower is slave to the lender”* (Proverbs 22:7).



The heart of the matter when it comes to Christian giving is this: Give with joy.

Our value and identity do not come from the accumulation of things but from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We give out of a place of gratitude for all that Christ has done for us. Giving should be a joyful experience, not based on obligation, but a cheerful and generous response to a loving God. God doesn't need our money—He has the power to accomplish whatever He wants on His own. But He realizes love of money and possessions can have significant power over us. He provides giving as the mechanism we can use to maintain control over money so that it doesn't control us. In the Old Testament, the standard was the tithe. God's people were required to contribute at least one tenth of their income to God's work. When considering the New Testament, examples of giving in the Bible range from 10% to 100%, thus the practice of tithing is a minimum guideline for Christian giving. God entrusts us to discern the portion necessary to provide for one's family with reasonable safeguards for the future versus the portion to give to further God's work through His Church.

*“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).*

*“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).*

*“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).*

*“In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus Himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35).*

## Conclusion

As we strive to fully honor God with our time, talents, and resources, we should look diligently for opportunities to give and be open for God's promptings. We should never be complacent, but be thankful, prayerful, and cognizant of the fact that how we steward our resources is a key indicator of the condition of our hearts and our spiritual health.

*“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need” (Acts 4:32-35).*

# Summary Statement on Biblical Standards for Marriage, Singleness, and Sexual Practice

NOTE: The Elders' extended “Statement on Biblical Standards for Marriage, Singleness, and Sexual Practice” is available at [willowcreek.org/values](http://willowcreek.org/values).

In this statement, we outline our church's position on a number of important topics related to marriage and sexuality. However, this discussion is not just about divorce or premarital sex or gay marriage—although we do address those controversial issues. It is rather first and foremost an exposition on the wonder and beauty of our sexuality and God's design for its full expression within a marriage. It's about celebrating and affirming the differences among us and encouraging each individual to honor God with his or her sexuality within the parameters and boundaries for purity that He has established. In a culture that tells us that seeking pleasure is the highest virtue, it's about putting sexuality in its proper perspective, not as an essential element of happiness or fulfillment, but as a wonderful privilege and responsibility that should never be abused or dishonored. And, it is about the very countercultural idea that followers of Jesus submit willingly to God's direction with regard to their sexual expression, aspiring to be faithful and obedient to Him even when doing so requires sacrifice. We believe that this document accurately reflects biblical teaching on this sensitive topic, and we resolutely stand with Jesus and His loving call to purity.

## Biblical Basis and Guidelines

As in all matters, we consider Scripture to be the basis of our beliefs related to marriage and sexuality, and we see throughout the Old and New Testaments that God uses marriage and sexual imagery to illustrate the intimacy He wants us to experience with Him (Ezekiel 16:8; Hosea 2:14-20; 1 Corinthians 6:17; Romans 7:1-6; Ephesians 5:21-33). We also see that God does not view either marriage or singleness as an inherently favored status—both have advantages and disadvantages. Moreover, both sexual expression and celibacy can help us in our pursuit of spiritual intimacy and holiness, depending on the person and the circumstances (1 Corinthians 7:32-35). In addition, we see that God has clearly defined the situations within which sexual activity is consistent with His design and purposes. Specifically, God reserves sexual intimacy for marriage, which according to Scripture is an interdependent, exclusive, and lifelong commitment between a man and a woman who are likeminded in love and faith. In every other relational circumstance or stage of life, God's call is to remain celibate. Behavior that is incompatible with God's design for sexual intimacy does not lead to the truest and best life for any human being. We are quick to add

that although many have succumbed to the lure of various sexual sins, God's grace is assuredly and freely offered to anyone wishing to claim it. Despite the pain or shame we may feel, God's redemptive power is always stronger than the destructive force of our human recklessness.

We recognize that the church has not always stewarded well the balance of biblical truth with loving grace and acceptance in areas relating to sexuality. Sadly, it has been far too common in the Christian church to place undue emphasis on scriptural definitions of sinful behaviors and lose sight of the outrageous love, forgiveness, and inclusiveness that Jesus brought for all the children of God. This has caused undue judgment, exclusion, and shame for people struggling to follow God's design for sexuality. As followers of Jesus, we challenge ourselves to uphold God's biblical standards with a spirit soaked in grace and an awareness of the confusion and brokenness that is rampant in our fallen world.

At Willow, our hearts break for people challenged by and struggling with God's call to purity. None of us are without sin, and we all struggle to live lives that measure up to God's standards. No matter your struggle, we honor your journey and welcome you to join us at Willow so that together we can seek to follow Christ. It is our intention to boldly speak the truth of God on these matters while extending a radically loving hand of grace and inclusion to each and every individual as an infinitely valuable person created in the image of God so that those seeking to find Christ will not be hindered, and those seeking to grow in Christlikeness will be spurred on.

Based on our interpretation of Scripture and much prayerful consideration, we hold the following beliefs, which are further explained and elaborated upon below:

WE BELIEVE all people are made in God's image, have turned away from Him, and are all offered unconditional love and acceptance through Jesus Christ.

WE BELIEVE we are called as children of God to holiness and the pursuit of intimacy and communion with God the Father through the work of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

WE BELIEVE sex within God's design is always a mirror of His oneness involving the whole person, uniting a man and woman into "one flesh."

WE BELIEVE God's design for marriage beautifully reflects His holy character and the interdependent community—the "oneness"—that eternally exists within the Trinity.

WE BELIEVE for those who marry, sexual expression is a gift from God given to them—and only them—to solidify and enhance their covenant relationship.

WE BELIEVE marriage is a lifelong, exclusive, and interdependent relationship between a man and woman in which both, sometimes as individuals and sometimes as partners, participate in God's redemptive purposes in this world.

WE BELIEVE at some point in our lives—and for others, all our lives—singleness is God's design, and those eras are a gift from Him, allowing focused participation in His work in our lives and His redemptive purposes in this world.

WE BELIEVE violations of the marriage covenant and sexual expression outside its bounds stand in contrast to the love-infused kingdom of God that Jesus came to bring and are prohibited by the Bible.

WE BELIEVE God's grace, forgiveness, and capacity to redeem is far greater than any human shortcomings, and as His followers, we love and embrace each and every person as a treasured child of God—while relating His truth with the same love and grace we have each received so undeservedly.

## Statement on Avoiding Business Conflicts

Mutual trust and respect are essential to both interpersonal fellowship and in business transactions, but the church is often not the appropriate environment for these two types of relationships to intersect. Should Willow Creek attendees in communities or sections do business together? Business relationships may exist within the church as long as conflicts of interest between business dealings and the purposes of Willow Creek are avoided. No Willow Creek attenders, especially those in leadership positions, should use church resources or assets to further their own businesses.

### Biblical Basis and Guidelines

Jesus' cleansing of the temple as recorded in Matthew 21:12-16; Mark 11:15-18, and John 2:13-6 include references to other biblical passages (Isaiah 56:7, Jeremiah 7:11, and John 2:16), which establish the church as "a house of prayer" for worship and spiritual service, not a place for making financial gain.

Simply put, unless approached by an attender, staff members and church leaders should not solicit anyone in the church to sell, market or promote business products or services. By avoiding this practice, we can keep our message clear and unequivocal that the church's mission is to develop fully devoted followers of Christ. Examples may include:

- Passing out business cards or flyers on Willow Creek property or at any Willow Creek-sponsored event.

- Using Willow Creek phone, email, or mailing address lists for business purposes.
- Using employment or leadership affiliation with Willow Creek to influence a business relationship.
- Using church equipment or supplies) such as the telephone, stationery, copier, or postage) for outside sales.

If a Willow Creek attender requests a business service from another attender, this will be considered an exception to these guidelines provided the business dealing is based on a mutual agreement by both parties and the business relationship between them is completely independent of their Willow Creek affiliation and does not utilize any church resources.

## Special Guidelines for Church Leadership

Scripture consistently calls leaders to the highest standards of ethical conduct and reminds them to soberly consider their influences as examples in the body. Everyone in a leadership position at Willow Creek needs to be careful and diligent when dealing with people. Examples may include:

- Using the utmost integrity to protect both their own and Willow Creek’s reputation.
- Avoiding inappropriate use of leadership influence for business purposes by setting clear boundaries between business dealings and his or her Willow Creek leadership role.
- Wherever necessary to avoid confusion, disclosing to all persons solicited outside the church that the business engagement or opportunity is separate and distinct from his or her Willow Creek leadership responsibilities.
- Educating and promoting adherence to these guidelines with all persons under his or her direct influence and actively discouraging any solicitation activities within the church.

## Conclusion

Willow Creek must remain a safe and welcoming community for spiritual seekers to explore the claims of Christ and for believers to grow without the potential distraction of business dealings at church. Elders acknowledge the possibility of God-honoring business dealings; however, the ultimate concern is to protect the bride of Christ, the purity of her witness, and the spirit of peace and unity that should properly prevail at Willow Creek Community Church.

## Summary Statement on Prayer

NOTE: The Elders’ extended “Statement on Theology of Prayer, Disease, and Supernatural Healing in the Ministry of the Local Church” is available at [willowcreek.org/values](http://willowcreek.org/values).

Prayer is intimate communication with our Heavenly Father. It enables believers to live out a fruitful and closely connected relationship with Jesus (John 15:5–8). We believe God’s power is reflected in the lives of people who pray.

During His life on earth, Jesus’ days were filled with leading, teaching, serving, and healing His followers. He rarely had time to Himself; crowds followed Jesus everywhere. Yet, He made time in prayer with His Heavenly Father a priority. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place where he prayed” (Mark 1:35).

### ***We believe God meets with us in a special way through prayer.***

Through prayer, we speak to God directly anytime, anywhere, for any reason. We are confident that when we approach Him, He welcomes us and we receive His mercy and grace. Through prayer, we participate in His work in the world—both seen and unseen (Hebrews 4:16).

### ***We are called to pray privately as well as in group settings.***

We encourage individual times of solitude in prayer (Matthew 6:6–7) and provide opportunities for corporate prayer. We encourage prayer at every small group or corporate gathering. All Willow Creek campuses have a prayer room where people can spend time alone with God, pray for others, or receive prayer. One-on-one prayer with trained prayer pastors is available at all campuses, including anointing with oil when requested (James 5:14).

We believe in the spiritual gift of intercession. Willow Creek prayer teams support the body by praying for requests submitted by individuals and ministries. In addition, Willow’s Elders regularly and intentionally gather prayer requests from Willow’s staff and ministries—and pray for those needs. While all believers are called to pray, God calls specific members of the body to pray on behalf of others in response to His prompting. These members have the gift of intercession (Romans 8:26, John 17:9–26, 1 Timothy 2:1–4).

In addition to praying, sometimes intercessors bless people they pray for through encouragement and exhortation that can be very comforting and revealing. If such encouragement is shared (along with the prayers), the intercessor is to offer these words with humility and no claim of divine authority.

People receiving encouragement from an intercessor should receive their words as sincere blessings from a flawed human being, not as God's final authority. God is not offended by our need for confirmation of encouragement from any source. He encourages us not to be easily swayed as we seek His guidance (Acts 17:11, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 1 John 4:1).

***We believe in and pray for physical, spiritual, and emotional healing.***

Jesus showed that there was no power—spiritual, physical, demonic, or natural—that was not subject to Him. The vast majority of processes associated with growth, health, and healing by God's design are gradual. With this in mind, we are encouraged to keep praying, although immediate results may not be seen. We also believe God will, at times, graciously intervene and perform miracles. A lack of instant transformation does not represent a failure of faith or submission to our fallen nature or failure on God's part to be gracious.

***We believe faith has an impact on answered prayer.***

Believing and trusting in God's goodness, power, and love is critical to a vibrant prayer life. Christians can be confident God hears and answers prayers. We partner with God as we pray. It is God who powerfully acts and we who humbly request His action (Matthew 21:21-22). Yet, it is God who does the work, not our faith. "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission" (Hebrews 5:7). Small faith in a big God is enough; even faith the size of a "mustard seed" accesses His power (Luke 17:5-6).

***We believe some current prayer philosophies are not biblical.***

At Willow Creek, we do not endorse or promote certain beliefs about prayer that are accepted in some faith circles. These philosophies include:

- Health, wealth, and prosperity beliefs that Christians are guaranteed physical and emotional healing, material possessions, and financial wealth on earth because of their position as God's children or as a result of the proper exercise of faith.
- Prayer to anyone other than God (the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit)—the belief in praying to saints or other religious individuals as a way to get help or influence God.
- Word of Faith Movement—the belief that God is obligated to answer our prayers because we have faith and claim biblical promises, or that "faith" itself has some mystical power.
- Internal worship—the belief we are little gods and carry His full authority because we have the Holy Spirit's presence.

- Philosophies that create strata and layers of hierarchy—the belief that some intercessors and prophets are more spiritual than others and carry biblical prophet status to be followed.

These theories can lead to abuses, harmful judgments of people who are sick, a lack of compassion, an unhealthy reliance on certain individuals and their words or authority, or despair at a lack of results these teachings offer. "Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teaching..." (Hebrews 13:9).

***We believe spiritual warfare is real.***

Spiritual forces work to prevent the growth and development of the Church and Christ's followers (Ephesians 6:10-18). Scripture calls us to "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith..." (1 Peter 5:8-9a). There is mystery to spiritual warfare. While the Bible gives guidance, it does not offer prescriptive formulas espoused by false teachers. We are confident in God's supreme authority. There are times God is ready and willing to work but minimal conditions have not yet been met. For example, James says, "You do not have because you do not ask God" (James 4:2).

James also writes we may not receive something because our motives are wrong (James 4:3-4). We don't look for these "blockages" as if they are hiding or can be found only through some elaborate spiritual process. We know God wants them dealt with and anticipate His making them obvious, if they are not already. For people weighed down in spiritual defeat, we are to pray that God brings His love, truth, strength, and hope into their situations. We are to remind people for whom we pray of biblical truths and promises. When Jesus was confronted with evil, He modeled and responded with the truth of God's Word (Matthew 4:1-11).

***We believe prayer will carry us into the future God has for us.***

Our best days of ministry are still ahead. We are not interested in just maintaining God's current work at Willow Creek. We want to live vibrant, relevant, teachable, and power-filled lives with God. We seek to follow God daily and faithfully. We believe prayer is foundational as we move into the future. Our understanding about prayer is always adaptable as the Spirit informs and leads. We strive to be fearless without being foolish, risk-takers without being reckless, and careful biblical interpreters without wearing theological blinders. We long for God to receive glory and honor for what He has done—and will do—through prayer.

**To view expanded and additional Elder's Position Papers, including statements on Protection of Minors and Vulnerable Adults, Discipline, and Reconciliation, visit [willowcreek.org/values](http://willowcreek.org/values).**

## Join the 2:42 Community

To join the 2:42 Community of Willow Creek, complete the form below (one per person), or fill it out online at [willowcreek.org/242](http://willowcreek.org/242).

<i>Last Name</i>			
<i>First Name</i>			
<i>M.I. (optional)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> Mr.	<input type="checkbox"/> Mrs.	<input type="checkbox"/> Ms. <input type="checkbox"/> Dr.
<i>Address</i>			
<i>City</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Zip</i>	
<i>Primary Phone Number</i>	(      )		
<input type="checkbox"/> Cell	<input type="checkbox"/> Home	<input type="checkbox"/> Work	
<i>Secondary Phone Number</i>	(      )		
<input type="checkbox"/> Cell	<input type="checkbox"/> Home	<input type="checkbox"/> Work	
<i>Email</i>			
<i>Date of Birth (mm/dd/yyyy)</i>			
<i>Marital Status</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Married (List first/last name of spouse)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Single	<input type="checkbox"/> Separated	<input type="checkbox"/> Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/> Widowed
<i>Date I began to follow Christ:</i>			
<i>Date I began attending Willow Creek:</i>			
<i>I attend this Willow Creek congregation:</i>			
<input type="checkbox"/> Casa de Luz	<input type="checkbox"/> Huntley		
<input type="checkbox"/> Chicago	<input type="checkbox"/> North Shore		
<input type="checkbox"/> Crystal Lake	<input type="checkbox"/> South Lake		
<input type="checkbox"/> South Barrington	<input type="checkbox"/> Wheaton (DuPage)		

(Continue on following page.)

Which weekend service time do you normally attend?

Are you involved in Group Life at Willow? (Check all that apply.)

Yes, Section \_\_\_\_\_  Yes, Small Groups  No

I have been baptized as a believer:

Yes  No  Soon

Date:

Church:

I agree to allow the church to store and use the information provided above for ministry purposes only.

**I affirm the following statements:**

1. I am a follower of Jesus.
2. I have been baptized since becoming a Christian.
3. I understand and accept what Willow Creek believes, (Statement of Faith, the Five Gs, and Elders' Position Papers).
4. I agree not to be divisive.
5. I want to help build this church by using my gifts and resources for God.

Signature:

Print Name:

Date:

Please give this completed form to your section/small group leader, ministry supervisor, or a Guest Experience host.

**Office Use Only (Please Print)**

Confirmed by:

Role and Ministry:

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[willowcreek.org](http://willowcreek.org)