

A Note from Our Pastor



Dear friend,

On behalf of the congregation of the Angel Fire Baptist Church, welcome to our Membership Matters class!

It's my hope that over the four sessions, we will be able to introduce you to our church and to what the Bible says about the responsibility every Christian has to bring glory to God through their life with

other Christians in a local church. This commitment to a local church—what we call membership—is the focus of this class. And, as the title of the class suggests, membership matters.

As you get to know us as a church, I trust that you will begin to see some of the opportunities and challenges that our setting and our history have brought to us. We cannot be sure what life in the future will bring for us as a church any more than we know what tomorrow will bring for us as individuals. We are nonetheless delighted at the spiritual growth God is cultivating here and are thankful that He continues to bring committed believers into our fold. It is a blessing to serve God in the mission field of AFBC with these brothers and sisters of all ages, backgrounds, occupations, and stages of life.

Whether it is Angel Fire Baptist, or someplace else, my prayer is that God would show you where to commit yourself to His people in His service.

In Christ,

Jerred Unruh | Lead Pastor

Our Membership Process

Step 1: Class

Session 1

- Overview & Purpose.....4
- Who We Are & What We Believe.....8

Session 2

- Why Membership Matters.....28

Session 3

- History & Distinctives.....33
- Leadership & Structure.....36

Session 4

- Life Together.....38

Membership Covenant.....39

Appendix

- A - Getting Connected.....40
- B - Worshipping God Together through Song.....44
- C - What is Congregationalism?.....46

Step 2: Conversation

Schedule a membership interview with one or more of the elder(s). They will make a recommendation to the Elder Board for membership/baptism.

Step 3: Congregation

Received into membership by affirmation of the congregation, based on your statement of like faith & practice, upon believer’s baptism, and or transfer letter.

Session 1: Overview & Purpose

WHY A MEMBERSHIP MATTERS COURSE?

Ephesians 2:19-22 – *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

THE FOLLOWING ARE THREE REASONS THAT HELP TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION:

1. To help establish or strengthen your foundational understanding of church membership.

A foundation stands under or undergirds that which is built upon it. No serious architect or builder would dream of trying to build a house without carefully laying its foundation first. A Christian’s foundation is even more important. Proper understanding and application of key biblical truths will enable you to build a healthy and fruitful life for our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Timothy 4:16; Titus 2:1; Jude 3).

2. To help unify us as a local church.

Jesus stressed the importance of walking together in unity and commonness of purpose when he said, “And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand” (Mark 3:25). This course helps lay the foundation by which members of this local body may seek that unity by which the world will believe that the Father sent the Son (cf. Jn.17:21). True biblical unity finds its foundation in truth.

Acts 4:32 – “Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul.”

Philippians 2:2 – *“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.”*

Amos 3:3 – *“Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet?”*

3. To help prepare you for membership at Angel Fire Baptist Church.

All people who have been genuinely born again are members of the universal Church. The Scripture most frequently, however, speaks of Christians as members of a local church. Scripture is full of exhortations and commands to be practically joined together with other believers. No one can rightly say, “I don’t need other Christians,” or “I’m only a member of the universal Church.” We believe that God has a local church for every believer where they can both be equipped and serve. The challenge for each believer is to find that church and take his/her place there.

Acts 2:46-47 – *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

1 Corinthians 12:18,27 – *“But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose...Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”*

BECOMING A MEMBER OF ANGEL FIRE BAPTIST CHURCH

THERE ARE 3 STEPS IN THE MEMBERSHIP PROCESS: COURSE, CONVERSATION, AND CONGREGATION

1. COURSE

This Membership Matters course was designed to help you discern God's will concerning your place at AFBC, as well as provide you with a scriptural basis upon which to make a covenant to membership. Therefore, completion of the course is necessary for you to become a member.

Attendance

Since the issues being dealt with and the subjects being taught are of such a critical nature with the respect to the purpose and values of Angel Fire Baptist Church, we ask that those interested in church membership personally attend each of the sessions offered. We are aware of the tremendous challenge this may be for some; so if your schedule makes this requirement impossible, then please contact the church to visit with us about possible options. There is no reason to worry about unnecessarily rushing the membership process, so if you miss a class for some reason we just ask that you make it up at another time.

Assignments

We also ask that you write down questions and read through the handouts, so that we can have better discussions.

2. CONVERSATION

Once you have completed the Membership Matters class, you will be contacted by a pastor to set up a time to have a conversation. The purpose of the conversation is to give you opportunity to ask any questions that you may have, share concerns, and allow us to hear you share (verbally) your personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ. During this conversation, we will also have the opportunity to talk about baptism.

3. CONGREGATION

According to Article IV, Section 3B of the Constitution of Angel Fire Baptist Church all those seeking membership (full or seasonal) who profess personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, give evidence of new birth (a changed heart), give a satisfactory testimony before the church members, and willingly agrees to our Statement of Faith and our Church Covenant may be received into membership by means of believer's baptism by immersion, upon the affirmation of the Elders and the church members.

Session 1: Who We Are & What We Believe

WHY IS DOCTRINE IMPORTANT?

The first and most important consideration when choosing a church is its doctrinal beliefs. We must be personally convinced that a church's beliefs are biblical. That is why doctrine is such a high priority. What an individual believes determines how that person lives their life. Despite popular notions that theology has nothing to do with daily Christian living, we hold tenaciously to the belief that our understanding of God is the most practical element of our daily walk with Him.

OUR PURPOSE: WHY WE EXIST

We exist to proclaim Christ, preach His gospel, and join Him in making disciples, for this we labor. This statement may be understood in three categories of relationships: our relationship to other Christians, our relationship to God, and our relationship to the world.

Thus, when we speak of "ministry" at Angel Fire Baptist, we think in terms of relationships, rather than simply tasks. These relationships also give us a sense of the direction in which we're to reach. **"Proclaiming Christ"** means in-reach into the lives of other believers as we seek to live in covenant community carrying out the "one another" commands of Scripture. **"Preaching His gospel"** involves the worship of our Triune God, an up-reach motion of God's people as we seek to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. **"Joining Him in making disciples"** involves an outreach motion as we seek to obey Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20).

Our goal is that the various ministries of Angel Fire Baptist would do just that: reach out in every direction and every relationship. It is our prayer that the Lord Jesus Christ would find us faithfully and actively loving Him, serving one another, and reaching out to the lost world with His Gospel as we anxiously await His return.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Creation

The beginning of the Bible is the beginning of everything.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning...

Everyone has a creation story, and so does the Creator. This is where the Bible's story about Jesus Christ begins.

Creation teaches us about God.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. (See also: Ex. 3:14; Ps. 115:3; Isa. 6:1-5; Acts 17:24-25; Ps. 36:9; Ro. 11:35-36; 1 Jn. 1:5; Ro. 1:19-21; Ps. 19:1)

God is...

1. Holy. That is, He exists eternally; He is self-sufficient; He is the creator of everything; He is separate from His creation; He is happy in himself; He is sovereign in all knowledge, power, and wisdom; everything He made, including us, is utterly dependent upon Him for its existence and life.
2. Righteous. That is, He is just and pure; God issues the punishment of death for those who disobey His Word.
3. Good. God is the standard and source of everything good and beautiful. He is also benevolent; He loves doing good by His creation, especially us. He placed us in paradise and met all of our needs.

Creation teaches us about ourselves.

Genesis 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (See also: Gen. 1:26-31; Gen. 2:15-25)

We are the most glorious part of God's creation: we were made last; we were made very good; we get the most ink in the creation account. But most significantly, we were created in the image of God.

We are created in the image of God...

1. To enjoy a special relationship to God. God spoke to humans. God was present in a special way with humans.
2. To trust and keep God's Word. Unlike the animals, humans are given commands, moral obligations, and the calling to trust in God's very Word.
3. To rule over God's creation. Humans are uniquely called to have dominion over the earth. God gave it all to humankind to enjoy and to rule as His representatives.

We are created in the image of God, male and female.

1. Men and women are equal in dignity but distinct in our roles. This distinction is beautiful.
2. Marriage is a gift from God for the flourishing of His people. See Appendix 1: "Statement on Marriage and Sexuality Policy," for a statement on Angel Fire Baptist Church's scriptural understanding of this topic.
3. In these ways, we were specially fashioned to mirror God's glory in God's world. We're little "glory reflectors." God's nature is displayed in what He has made, and we're the crown of God's glorious creation.

Fall

What's wrong with us?

Everyone knows there's something wrong with us; ours is not the world of Genesis 1-2. Most people seem to have an answer for what has gone wrong. Different cultures have different widely accepted explanations. But the Bible says it all started with Adam.

Genesis 3:1-6 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the

garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.”⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Gen. 4:7; Js. 1:13-17; Eph. 4:22)

Remember Adam’s three responsibilities? As God’s image bearer, he was to enjoy a special relationship with God, keep God’s Word, and rule God’s world. Unfortunately, Adam didn’t do a very good job at this. What we see here in Adam’s failure is a picture of how sin works.

Adam failed...

1. To trust God’s goodness. Adam believed instead that God was stingy (v1-3). Whenever we disobey God, at heart we are saying, “God, I believe you are withholding something good from me.”
2. To keep God’s Word. Adam believed instead that he would not die (v4-5). Whenever we disobey God, we are saying, “God, I don’t trust you. I’d prefer to believe some other voice. You said this would lead to death, but I believe the opposite is true.”
3. To rule over God’s creation. Adam submitted instead to the created serpent. Whenever we disobey God, we are saying, “God, I’d rather submit myself to the creation.”

At Angel Fire Baptist Church, we believe a proper view of God is foundational to a proper view of ourselves. Where you find a church that doesn’t make much of sin, you find a church that doesn’t make much of God.

Adam’s sin had immediate consequences.

Genesis 3:8-13 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”¹⁰ And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.”¹¹ He said, “Who told you that you were

naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”
¹² The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (See also: Ro. 8:20-23)

Adam’s problem is the human problem. We’re alienated from God, guilty of sin, and stand in judgement (v8, 23-24). We’re also in trouble within ourselves. We’ve brought on shame and moral corruption (v9-10). We’re also in trouble with each other. By sin, we’ve brought on estrangement and enmity (v11-12). And we’re in trouble with pretty much everything else. Because of God’s curse, marriage is complicated, having kids is painful, work is exhausting, and all of creation groans (v16-19).

If we are honest with ourselves, we know that all of this is true of us.

Adam’s sin had long-term consequences.

Read this next passage, listen for the consequences of Adam’s disobedience.

Romans 5:12-19 ...just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given...¹⁵ many died through one man’s trespass... ¹⁶ the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation... ¹⁷ because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man...¹⁸ one trespass led to condemnation for all men... ¹⁹ by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners... (See also: Eph. 2:1-3; Ro. 3:10-18; Eph. 4:17-19)

Eve ate first, but the Bible pins death on Adam, the head of the human race.

Because of Adam’s sin, we are born polluted by sin. Though none of us are as bad as we could be thanks to God’s restraining grace, every part of us is nonetheless corrupt, bent, and perverted. Our minds are employed in service to our heart’s corrupt desires. We are capable of anything we ever read about in history or see on the news. We sin because we are sinners, which means we have an inherent disposition to think, love, and do that which is against God.

Because of Adam's sin, we are born guilty as sinners. As those who are in Adam, we are condemned with him because of his sin, even as we are born sinners because of his sin.

When Adam took the fruit, he thought he was taking life, but he brought death to himself, his family, and the whole race. He saw a delicious even if forbidden fruit, but in that fruit was death.

Sin is essentially trading on the glory of God, but it has a myriad of facets.

Romans 1:21-25 For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (See also: Ro. 3:10-18; 3:23; 6:16-17, 23; Isa. 64:6; Jer. 2:13; 3:1; 1 Jn. 3:4; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 4:17-19; Eph. 2:1-3)

Sin is cosmic high treason. God's glorious power and divine nature are plain to us, but we suppress the truth about God, and we devalue his glory, preferring what God has made to God himself.

The Bible's portrait of sin is multifaceted. As sinners, we are rebels, failures, debtors, voluntary slaves, filthy, spiritually senseless, whores, lawless/deviant, blind, corrupt, children of wrath, and dead.

So, sin is utterly bad. But let's be clear on just how bad it is for us. Not only does it lie to us about what it can deliver. Sin lies to us about what it deserves.

The penalty for sin is God's eternal wrath in hell.

Jesus spoke frequently and clearly about hell. But what is it and why is it such a big deal? Well, it's infinitely worse than death. Listen to Jesus put death in perspective.

Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (See also: Mt. 13:36-43; Ro. 6:23a; Rev. 21:8; Mt. 25:41, 46; 1 Thes. 1:9; Isa. 59:2; Rev. 14:10; Lk. 16:19-31; Ro. 9:22)

God is the one who can kill, and throw both body and soul in Hell. Punishments should fit crimes. This is a crime of infinite offense. Hell is an unfortunate subject because sin is an unfortunate reality. But in the same way that it is right and just and good to speak of jail for the thief, or death for the murderer, it is right to speak of hell for sinners.

Hell is...

1. Fair. It is just because God is just, and we aren't.
2. Long. It is eternal because our offense is against an eternal God.
3. Painful. It is torment because God is angry at our sin. And the devil and his minions will not be doing the tormenting. They will be among the tormented.
4. Lonely. It is separation from God because God is holy.

This may not seem right to us, but that should come as no surprise if the Bible's description of our sin problem is true. Hell seems out of place to modern ears because we have traded on the glory of God. At Angel Fire Baptist Church, this is not a light matter, but a serious matter. We believe that this is what we deserve, and that many are going there.

In other words, we have a big problem.

How can God remain pure and accept the polluted, or remain just and accept the guilty? This is the tension that the rest of the Bible's story is written to resolve.

God is glorified in the display of His justice in the punishment of sinners; but it is also true that this is not God's favorite thing to do. Thankfully, the story doesn't end in Genesis 3.

Christ's Redemption

There is bad news in Genesis 3. But there is also good news!

Genesis 3:15 “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”

God promised that a son of Eve would crush the head of the serpent. God is a God of great justice, but He is also a God of great grace. The rest of the Bible's story is an unfolding of this wonderful promise.

The Old Testament prepares us to see and receive the promised Savior.

Luke 24:25-27 “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. (See also: 1 Pet. 1:10-12; Ps. 110:1; Ex. 12:27; Is. 7:14; Is. 9:6-7)

Adam...

1. Discounted God's presence. The Savior will restore it.
2. Rejected God's Word. The Savior will keep and reveal it. Adam exchanged the truth about God for a lie. Instead of submitting to God's Word, he assumed the position and authority of God. He wanted to “be like God.”
3. Abdicated his responsibility to rule. The Savior will rule from an eternal throne. He submitted to the creation instead of the Creator.

The Old Testament prepares us through...

1. Inadequate sons.
2. Promise patterns. Shadows in the form of events, people, and institutions.
3. Explicit promises.

Yet there is a tension in the Old Testament story: The Savior would come as the LORD himself, but He would also suffer for the sins of His people.

Jesus was the promised Savior.

Galatians 4:4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman... (See also: Jn. 1:1-2; Heb. 9:24-28; Jn. 11:25; Heb. 2:14-17; Acts 2:24; Jn. 8:58; 1 Pet. 3:18)

Jesus...

1. Offered an effective sacrifice for sin. Christ is our Great High Priest. We need someone to take our punishment. The Exodus and the sacrificial system look forward to God's provision of a perfect Lamb.
2. Was the Word of God made flesh.
3. Was God's king who defeated death. Christ is our victorious King.

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament's tension: He was "God with us," and He suffered for the sins of His people.

The heart of Jesus' saving work is His death.

How did Jesus accomplish salvation? How did He solve the problem of our sin and God's justice?

John 1:29 [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (See also: Jn. 10:11; Mt. 20:17-19; Lk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Eph. 1:7)

Dying was the main thing Jesus lived to do. This is clear from Jesus' introduction. John the Baptist introduced Him as God's Lamb. It's clear from what Jesus said. Jesus spoke often about the way He would die. It's clear from Jesus' life story. His death and resurrection are the climax of each of the four gospel accounts. The Apostles' also repeated references to Jesus' blood.

What exactly happened on the cross? What was the meaning of Jesus' death? What is the big deal about Jesus' blood? This is the big question that we must answer in coming to Christianity. We will not know Christ or salvation if we do not understand what He was doing on the cross. Was He dying as an example of love? Was He dying to defeat death and the devil? Yes. But what is at the heart of His death?

The heart of Jesus' death is substitution.

Isaiah 53:3-6 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. ⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (See also: Lk. 22:19-20; Phil. 2:8; Col. 2:13-14; 1 Pet. 3:18; Heb. 2:14-17; Col. 1:20)

This is exactly what the Old Testament says we need, and this is exactly what the Old Testament says the promised Savior would do. Jesus spoke about the meaning of His death on the night of His arrest, when He said, “this is my body, given for you.” Jesus’ death was the climax of His obedience for us. To God, Jesus is our righteousness. That is, He obeyed in our place. Jesus’s death was also the climax of His suffering for us. Under God’s wrath, Jesus was our propitiation (appeasement). That is, suffered under God’s wrath in our place.

Jesus’ death accomplished our reconciliation. We are at peace with God through Christ. Jesus’ death also accomplished our justification. God declares us righteous on account of Christ.

The Roman Catholic view of justification can be stated this way: God will not declare righteous what is not, at least, in part actually righteous. We believe that our righteousness is entirely from outside of us.

Christ’s substitution is at the heart of the whole New Testament.

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (See also: Ro. 5:6-19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22; Ro. 6:23; Ro. 3:21-26; 1 Cor. 1:18, 20-21, 30-31)

In Adam we deserve sin, death, judgment, and condemnation. In Christ we get righteousness, life, grace, and justification.

To personalize this: Christ took our sin and gave us His righteousness. Christ took our death and gives us His life. Christ took our judgment and

gave us God's grace. Christ took our condemnation and gave us justification.

Jesus Christ is the only way to God.

Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (See also: Ro. 10:1, 13-15)

Christ is the exclusive way to God because no other way solves the problem of sin. There is no saving hope in other religions, no matter much they may apparently have in common in terms of how we should live. Christianity is concerned chiefly with saving us from sin. Christianity is the only religion that can acknowledge the evil in each of us for what it is while at the same time assuring us of God's favor. Every other religion has to either minimize our problem of sin, or God's justice.

Jesus' work is applied by grace and through faith.

Ephesians 2:1-10 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ... ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. ... ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Salvation is a gift of grace, not a payment. We are saved exclusively through Christ, which means that all the credit belongs to God. Salvation is received by faith, not earned. We are saved exclusively through Christ, and never apart from explicit faith in Christ.

Exactly why would God do this? Because God loves us, and He loves His glory.

Ephesians 1:3-14 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ... In love ⁵ He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, ⁶ to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In Him we have

redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸ which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ... ¹¹ In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, ¹² so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of His glory. ¹³ In Him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of His glory. (See also: Ro. 3:20-26; Jn. 3:16; Isa. 43:25; Isa. 48:9-11)

God's love is not conditioned on our loveliness but is grounded in His own eternal nature.

God's glory shines most brightly in the display of His grace toward His enemies. His justice is glorified in judgment. But His righteousness and His mercy are glorified in salvation. This was hinted at in Ephesians 2:9. God saves us by grace so that we will boast, not in ourselves, but in him.

God's love and grace shine through...

1. Adoption. God makes His enemies His children.
2. Redemption. God owns us twice.
3. Forgiveness. God covers our sins by the blood of Christ.
4. Our inheritance. God gives us what we don't deserve for eternity.

This salvation is a work of our Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Salvation is from the Father, through the Son, and by the Spirit. And these "spiritual blessings" are what it means to be "saved." This is what is so wonderful about salvation, about being a Christian.

New Creation

Eternity is the secret longing of every human heart.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has put eternity into man's heart...

The Bible says that we are wired for happiness and that our happiness is found in God. Every other happiness is as fleeting as the thing we're trusting in.

Eternal life is knowing Jesus Christ.

John 17:1-3 "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."
(See also: Isa. 55:1; Luke 23:43; John 14:2-3; Rev. 22:17)

Eternal life...

1. Begins when we first meet Christ.
2. Gets better when we meet Christ face to face.
3. Gets even better in Christ's new creation.

The new creation is the culmination of God's salvation plan in Christ.

2 Peter 3:13 But according to His promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (See also: Ro. 8:18 and Jn. 14:2-3)

This is the ultimate horizon of the Old and New Testament. Jesus inaugurated the beginning of the new creation through His resurrection. The new creation is seen now through the church, an outpost of that future age. The new creation is completed at Christ's return. Yes, when we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. So, there is a certain experience for believers immediately following death. But there is a final state yet to come.

Revelation 21-22 is a symbolically rich picture of this future age.

The new creation is...

1. A new place. It's physical.
2. With a new people. This is a complete people.
3. With a new experience of God's presence.
4. With a new purity. That is, there is no sin or death, and the devil is no more. Jesus will have done away with it upon His return.

In the new creation, Christ will be exalted, and His glory will fill the earth.

Jesus Christ will be worshiped by redeemed people of every tribe, and tongue, and nation.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

As a summarization of our Confession of Faith, we believe in:

1. The Trinity – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. The full deity and humanity of Christ.
3. The spiritual lostness of the human race.
4. The substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection of Christ.
5. Salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.
6. The physical return of Christ.
7. The authority and inerrancy of Scripture.

WHAT WE TEACH

The Triune God

We teach there is one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in His love and in His holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, He perfectly, exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about His eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore His fallen creation, to the praise of His glorious grace. The three persons in the Godhead share an incomparable and eternal unity, diversity and equality. They are the same in substance and equal in power and glory.

Revelation (General and Special)

We teach that God has graciously disclosed His existence and power in the created order and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of His Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by His Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human

words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of His saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of His will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

Mankind

We teach that God created human beings, male and female, in His own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and His church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified

men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

The Fall

We teach that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

The Gospel

We teach that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is Christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if His death and resurrection are not central (the message is: "Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised"). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

The Redemption of Christ

We teach that, moved by love and in obedience to His Father, the eternal Son became human: The Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed His heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God's sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross He canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By His resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by His Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all His people; by His ascension He has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

The Justification of Sinners

We teach that Christ, by His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By His sacrifice, He bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By His perfect obedience He satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and His obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the

justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

We teach that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to His people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by His powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in Him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive His sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

Baptism and Lord's Supper

We teach that when people receive God's gift of salvation, they are to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as a sign of having been cleansed from sin. It is a covenant with the church to walk in the way of Christ through the power of the Spirit. We teach that believers should regularly observe the Lord's Supper, as instituted by Jesus Christ and that it points to Christ, whose body was broken for us and whose blood was shed to assure salvation for believers and to establish the new covenant. In the Lord's Supper, the church identifies with the life of Christ given for the redemption of humanity and proclaims the Lord's death until He comes. The Lord's Supper expresses the fellowship and unity of all believers with Christ in remembrance, celebration, and praise which strengthens believers.

The Restoration of All Things

We teach the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels, when He will exercise His role as final Judge, and His kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of Him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged, and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and His people will be enthralled by the immediacy of His ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of His glorious grace.

Session 2: Why Membership Matters

WE BELIEVE THAT MEMBERSHIP MATTERS DEEPLY TO THE LIFE AND HEALTH OF THE CHURCH. SO WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN A CHURCH?

What is a Christian?

A Christian is someone who, first and foremost, has been forgiven of his or her sin and been reconciled to God the Father through Jesus Christ. This happens when a person responds to the hearing of the Gospel proclaimed by repenting of their sins and puts their faith in the perfect life, substitutionary death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Secondly, a Christian is someone who, by virtue of his reconciliation with God, has been reconciled to God's people. Jesus said it best when He said, *"all the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind AND love your neighbor as yourself"* (see Matt. 22:34-40).

Ephesians 2:14-22– *"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility...."*

(v.19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit."

Paul has explained in the first half of Eph. 2 the awesome salvation that comes through Christ and we just read the second half where Paul has described what this means for the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. We heard phrases like – "fellow citizens" and "members of God's

household” and we are “joined together” there are other ways the Bible uses to describe the church: family, a fellowship, a body and a bride, a people, a temple.

In short, when God called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9), he also called you into “fellowship” with the whole family (1 Cor. 5:2). Mark Dever writes, “It’s impossible to answer the question *what is a Christian?* Without ending up in a conversation about the church; at least, in the Bible it is.”

What is the Church?

So, let me ask you - What makes a church a church?

If a group of people meet together to discuss spiritual things does that make them a church? What if they do so in a church building as opposed to a coffee shop or a home? What if in addition to discussion, they sing and pray together? What if they add Bible reading to their group time?

Therefore the distinguishing marks of a church

- Preaching of the Word (not false teaching, but pure teaching based on content not the form of the sermon)
- Correctly administering/observing of the ordinances: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Baptism, according to Scripture, is fundamentally a physical sign of a spiritual reality. Another way to say it is an outward sign of an inward reality. It is the initial symbolic act of obedience in our new life of discipleship to Christ and even more specific it symbolizes our death and burial with Christ, identifying us as members of the community called the people of God – the church. Baptism, then, is the ordinance that guards the front door of the local church. It ensures, as far as externally possible, that those who become members of our church really are members of the New Covenant. This is why we require believers baptism to join fellowship at Angel Fire Baptist Church.

The Lord’s Supper, according to Scripture, is the continuing symbolic act of unity and fellowship in Christ that identifies us as those who are continuing members of the church in good standing. By eating the broken bread and

drinking the poured juice we are reminded of Christ's sinless life and atoning death on our behalf. We are commanded to observe the Lord's Supper repeatedly throughout our Christian lives as a sign of continuing in fellowship with Christ.

There seems to be background in the Old Testament for this ceremony. In the OT sacrificial meals continually pointed to the fact that sins were not yet paid for, because the sacrifices in them were repeated year after year, and because they looked forward to the Messiah who was to come and take away sin once and for all. The Lord's Supper, however, reminds us that Jesus' payment for our sins has already been accomplished, so we now eat in the Lord's presence with great rejoicing.

According to Cor. 11:17-34 the Lord's Supper is several things wrapped into one:

- Opportunity to express the unity of the church
- A fellowship of God's people
- A symbolic remembrance of Christ's sinless life and atoning death on our behalf
- A proclamation of Christ's death, resurrection, and return.
- A built in opportunity for self-examination

Therefore, communion guards the back door of the church.

Joining a Local Church

When a person becomes a Christian and they become a member of the universal church (i.e. Matt 16:18; bulk of Ephesians-all Christians everywhere throughout history) he or she joins a local church (i.e. most NT references - those people who meet down the street from you to hear the Word preached and to practice baptism and the Lord's Supper) because it's the expression of what Christ has made him – a member of the body of Christ.

Joining a local church, like this gathering at Angel Fire Baptist Church, means:

Commitment

Scripture instructs us to assemble regularly so that we can regularly rejoice in our common hope and regularly spur one another on to love and good deeds. (Heb. 10:23-25)

Church membership is not simply a record, it is not a sentimental feeling, it is not an expression of loyalty or disloyalty, it should be the reflection of a living commitment or it is worthless.

Taking Responsibility

Meaningful church membership occurs when believers commit to one another and grasp hold of each other in responsibility. By identifying ourselves with a particular local church we are saying to the pastors and other members that we commit to them in gathering, giving, prayer, and service. We are telling them to expect certain things from us and to hold us accountable if we don't follow through.

This obligation is spelled out in Scripture with all the one another passages:

The “one anothers” of the New Testament clearly cannot be carried out without some sense of membership within a local body of believers (e.g. “members one of another” – Rom. 12:5; “love one another with brotherly affection” – Rom. 12:10; “outdo one another in showing honor” – Rom. 12:10; “live in harmony with one another” – Rom. 15:5; “welcome one another” – Rom. 15:7; “instruct one another” – Rom. 15:14; “greet one another” – Rom. 16:3-6, 16; “serve one another” – Gal. 5:13; “bear one another’s burdens” – Gal. 6:2; “bearing with one another in love” – Eph. 4:2; “submitting to one another” – Eph. 5:21; “encourage one another” – 1 Thessalonians 5:11).

The New Testament concept of church discipline presupposes some sense of mutual covenant community with a local church (e.g. 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 Cor. 2:6).

Why Join?

Church membership is a crucial topic for understanding what Christ is calling you to as His disciple. Joining a church will not save you anymore than your good works, your education, your culture, your friendships, your financial contributions, or your baptism will save you.

Here are 5 good reasons to join a church:

To Assure Ourselves

In joining the church we put ourselves in a position where we ask our brothers and sisters to hold us accountable to live according to what we speak with our mouths. We ask the brothers and sisters around us to encourage us, sometimes by reminding us of a way that we have seen God work in our lives and other times by challenging us when we may be moving away from obeying Him. In joining a church we are grasping hands:

To Evangelize the World

To Expose False Gospels

To Edify the Church

To Glorify God

Session 4: History & Distinctives

Our History

Angel Fire Baptist Church began out of a desire to see an intentionally God-centered, theologically-grounded, missions-minded Southern Baptist church planted in Moreno Valley.

With land and support given by First Baptist Dallas, in May of 1989 with a small core group Angel Fire Baptist Church was born, with Danny Masters as the first pastor.

From our beginnings to the present, the Lord has brought us through many transitions and some challenges. We have welcomed many into our fellowship both part-time and full-time members and we've blessed many as they have moved away. We have rejoiced together in triumphs and grieved together in trials. Through all of this, the Lord has preserved His mission through us and promoted the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. By His grace we remain faithful as a family to proclaim Christ, preach His gospel, and join Him in making disciples.

Our Distinctives

We are EVANGELICAL.

That means that we take our stand with those that believe in what are called “the fundamentals” of the Christian faith:

- We believe in the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as infallible, inerrant, and final authority for belief and behavior; God's revelation of himself to humanity.
- We believe in the Trinity...Father, Son and Holy Spirit...One God.
- We believe in the complete humanity and the complete deity of Jesus Christ.
- We believe in the utter sinfulness of all humanity.
- We believe in the virgin conception of Christ and his incarnation of the eternal Son of God.
- We believe in Christ's substitutionary atonement as the only way of salvation.
- We believe in the bodily resurrection and return of Christ.
- We believe in salvation by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone.
- We believe in the eternal damnation of the lost and the eternal glorification of the saved.

We are BAPTIST.

This is expressed in three specific ways:

1. We affirm the South Baptist confessional statement contained in The Baptist Faith & Message (2000);
2. We give financially to the BCNM, the Cooperative Program & International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.
3. Our understanding of the ordinances of the church are baptistic in nature and expressed in the following:

(a) Baptism does not save us, but evidences our union with the Lord in his death, burial and resurrection. Therefore, we practice believer's baptism by immersion as the means by which such union is best pictured. Christian baptism, in the name of the triune God, is the visual representation with water of the believer's identification with Christ spiritually.

(b) The Lord's Supper is celebrated by the believing community of Angel Fire Baptist on the first Sunday of each month. It is a time in which we recognize our bonds within the covenant community of believers who have been brought into fellowship with God and his people solely by the sacrificial work of Christ. We believe that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ for commemoration of his death. In its observance, we declare Christ's death until he comes again (cf., 1 Cor. 11:26). We do not affirm either of these ordinance as being salvific in nature.

We are EVANGELISTIC.

This means we take seriously the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."* We are mission-minded. Without compromising the sovereignty of God, we affirm the responsibility of each person to repent and believe on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We further affirm our responsibility to extend the message of the Gospel as a call to salvation to everyone who hears its message.

Expository PREACHING.

The preaching submits the shape, emphasis, and tone of the sermon to the shape, emphasis, and tone of a biblical text.

Gender ROLES.

A Complementarian view teaches that God created men and women as equals in value, yet distinct in their gender-defined roles; both within the church and within the home.

Reading Assignment: *Please read through the Baptist Faith & Message (2000) and the doctrinal statements from session 1.*

What questions do you have?

Session 4: LEADERSHIP and STRUCTURE

Congregational Rule

The congregation, as a church, has the authority to speak for the church regarding the what and the who of the gospel; both what the gospel is, and who is rightly confessing it. These are the keys to the Kingdom. (Matt. 16 & 18)

Angel Fire Baptist is an autonomous, denominationally affiliated church.

That we're autonomous simply means that we are independent and self-governing. We are not accountable to an authority structure or governing body beyond our church. Denominationally, we have sought the partnership for church planting, local evangelism, and intentional disciple-making from the Southern Baptist Convention.

To be a “congregationally ruled” church, believing that Scripture gives final authority in matters of doctrine and membership to the congregation.

Elder-Led

Where you have a church in the Bible, you have elders, or pastors. Elders have a specific role—to lead the church in its exercise of the authority Jesus has given. Elders don't hold the keys; the church does. But elders lead the church as it uses them.

Angel Fire Baptist Church is also “elder-led” because we believe that Scripture calls for a plurality of men (called elders or pastors) to teach, shepherd, lead, and protect the church according to the Bible.

Angel Fire Baptist Church's elders lead as a plurality.

Leadership by a plurality of elders:

1. Is biblical; the term “elders” is always used in the plural in the New Testament.
2. Is practically wise; our men rarely vote but work to reach consensus.
3. Draws on the diversity of the men's gifts.
4. Provides for mutual accountability.
5. Does not require a “first among equals.”
6. Includes paid and non-paid men.

Angel Fire Baptist Church's Elders lead in several ways.

1. Pray and study.
2. Teach and preach.
3. Protect from harm.
4. Care for the sick.
5. Provide an example.

SERVANT EXECUTED

Elders don't lead alone.

Angel Fire Baptist has Staff and Deacons who act as servants by executing ministry in specific areas within the church.

MEMBER ENGAGED

Angel Fire Baptist is a church that is led by the Elders, its ministries are executed by the staff, deacons and volunteers, and the work of the church's ministry is carried out by each member.

When we gather on Sundays, we are participating in the life of our church. We are called to be doing the work of the ministry, both during worship and the rest of the week.

Engagement Through: Corporate Worship, Smaller Groups, Member-to-Member, Evangelism

What ways are you interested in serving the local church?

Session 4: Life Together

When God united us with Christ, he also united us with all other believers in his body. In this session we will look at the context in which these relationships are practically worked out in the body or to put it another way our life together as a church.

The Church As Community

The church is not primarily an organization or structure; it is primarily people...people who have been born again and are being built together by God to help fulfill his purposes and bring glory to his name. But how do these believers relate with one another? The New Testament tells us in Acts 2:42-47 what this first church was like:

“⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. ⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. ⁴⁶ 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, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

Those are all things that we want to see here at Angel Fire Baptist. And by God’s grace we are growing in these themes. Specifically, the four things in this passage that support this love for God’s word, for each other, and for the lost:

1. These Christians gathered together regularly—meeting together in the temple courts.
2. They lived life together—meeting together in their homes and sharing with each other.
3. They enjoyed and supported the leadership God gave them—in this case, the apostles.
4. They spent time together in prayer.

Membership Covenant

HOW DO WE COMMIT TO LIVING TOGETHER?

Having been led as we believe by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God and this assembly most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge and holiness; to promote its health and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, doctrines, and discipline; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, and the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We encourage members to maintain family and private devotions; to consistently educate our children in the Christian way of life; to seek the salvation of our relatives and acquaintances; to conduct our affairs in a Christian manner; to be just and honest in our dealings, faithful in our responsibilities, and exemplary in our conduct; to oppose in the Spirit of Christ every form of greed, selfishness, and vice; and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the teachings of our Savior to secure it without delay.

We moreover agree that when we move from this church we will as soon as possible unite with some other New Testament church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

Appendix A:

Getting Connected at Angel Fire Baptist Church

One of the singular joys and significant challenges of joining a new local church is figuring out how to feel connected to the congregation. Most of us don't want to just have our names on a members list; we want to belong, to be a part, to feel that we contribute. That's what we hope to help you with in this short article, to help you understand better how to get connected to the congregation of Angel Fire Baptist Church.

Love as the Visible Mark of a Christian

We hope that your connections to Angel Fire Baptist Church looks as much as possible like the kind of love that we see described among God's people in the Bible. There we read of Christians loving people who are very different than themselves and inconveniencing themselves primarily because they have a shared love for Christ (I Thessalonians 2:7-9). There we read about the kind of connection that comes from sharing our lives together, helping one another and spending time together with the deliberate aim of encouraging one another in the faith (I Thessalonians 2:7-9).

Our hope is that you will connect to Angel Fire Baptist Church through the kind of visible love that the Apostle John describes as normal among believers (1 John 3:23).

Jesus himself talked about how the joy of deliberate, mutual love would mark those whom he has known and saved. In the fifteenth chapter of John's gospel, Jesus says –

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:9-12)

Getting Connected at Angel Fire Baptist Church (Continued)

And later in his first letter, the Apostle John reminds his readers of Christ's teaching, saying –

“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.” (1 John 3:16-20)

One thing is certainly clear from these passages – Christians are visibly marked as those who love Christ based in large part on the way that they love one another. Yes, it is wonderful for us to serve in many more institutional ways, and personal repentance and an individual faith in Christ are a must if we are to see God, but how does that internal reality then show itself? Scripture says it shows itself perhaps most clearly by our love for specific other Christians – the other members of our local church, mainly. That's how Scripture says “we know that we belong to the truth.” And that is the joy we want for members of Angel Fire Baptist Church.

Some Practical Ideas of How to Love Others

But we also realize that this kind of unstructured approach can seem really daunting to many people. It's so much easier to just sign up for something. We get that. So let me suggest a few ways that you can begin to build these kinds of encouraging relationships at Angel Fire Baptist Church.

Stay around after services

One very simple first step is to just stay around after the conclusion of our morning service. We hope to encourage members to stay around and talk, to speak to visitors and to people they don't know, and to make initial connections with other members, too. Certainly this can be awkward at times. However, please make an effort to talk to others you don't know.

Join a Sunday school class

Another helpful step may be to join an Angel Fire Baptist Church Sunday school class. We be glad to talk with you about a class that might work well for you. A Sunday morning class is a welcoming first-step to help you continue on to broader and deeper relationships within the congregation. We all have to start somewhere and many people find these classes an encouraging and manageable starting point.

Offer and accept hospitality

Throughout the bible one of the things that regularly marks God's people is their love for others, or hospitality. Admittedly some folks may feel awkward about being the one to invite people over, or out, when you are new. But we should try to build a culture at Angel Fire Baptist Church where hospitality is normal. So we hope that members will reach out to new members, but we also hope that new members will step up and invite longer-term members and other new members over for a meal or out for an activity from the very early days of their membership. Living these kinds of open lives together is a big part of how we create and sustain the hospitable culture of a gospel community.

Initiate or accept a discipling relationship

Almost certainly the best way to connect at Angel Fire Baptist Church is to initiate or accept an offer to establish an intentional discipling relationship. One of the clearest ways that the love we read about earlier in John 15, is made visible when we intentionally set out to do one another spiritual good in discipling relationships. It's fun to have friendships based on shared interests or hobbies or experiences. But it is wonderfully glorifying to God to have friendships based most fundamentally on a desire to encourage one another in the hope of the gospel. The kind of relationships where we intentionally set out to study Scripture, or to read a good Christian book, or to talk about this week's sermon all with the aim of encouraging one another to hope and trust more in God. As a new member of the church you don't need to sign up for anything or get anyone's permission to approach another member (of your gender, please) to establish a discipling relationship. But if you want some help you can always contact the pastoral staff to get a little help figuring out how to get started.

A wonderful display of God's glory

Whatever route you take, we want to encourage you to look for ways, in keeping with your personality, to establish meaningful relationships with other members of Angel Fire Baptist Church. Certainly you can talk with various committees about ways to eventually volunteer and serve, but don't make that the first thing you do. First, look for ways to just get to know other members of Angel Fire Baptist Church and to let them get to know you. Take the first few months of your membership to spend your energy on some of the ideas suggested. We feel strongly about this because we value each member of our congregation simply as a brother or sister in Christ, not just for the ways they can serve.

But, you know, you will serve us best by doing what we've talked about in this article . . . by building the relationships that give and receive encouragement. That's fundamental to what it means for us to be the body of Christ in this local church. And that's how the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples, by the way we love one another (John 13:35). We look forward to the part God may have for you to play in bringing that glorious reality into an even sharper view at Angel Fire Baptist Church.

Appendix B:

Worshipping God Together through Song

One of the greatest privileges we have as a congregation is to praise God together in song. Music is a powerful vehicle for glorifying God and encouraging one another; therefore, it is our desire is to approach worship through song with intentionality. The following five considerations give a substantive reflection of the deliberate thought and care that shape our use of music in the services of Angel Fire Baptist Church.

We strive to be GOD-CENTERED.

We understand that God's glory is His highest purpose in all things. We seek to make God central in our minds' attention and our hearts' affections. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God." God created music as a medium that stirs great emotion in the human heart. Our goal is to harness this power responsibly by using music to highlight and celebrate biblical truth. We recognize that music can make people feel certain emotions regardless of the lyrics' message, so we strive to pick songs with profound biblical content and to avoid over-emotionalizing our music. The emotion in worship should be a response to the truth of who God is and what he has done.

We strive to cultivate rich CONGREGATIONAL singing.

When John views God's throne room in Revelation 5-7, the whole gathered congregation joins their voices together to praise the Lamb. Our goal is for singing to be a participatory experience, not an observational experience, whereby a song leader, musical ensemble, soloist, etc. is given prominence over the congregation's collective voice. Paul tells the Ephesians to address "one another

in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19), which reminds us that although our worship through song is primarily God-centered, it also has a secondary purpose of encouraging one another.

We strive to BLEND historical and contemporary songs of worship.

In our services, our aim is to incorporate the doctrinally rich songs of the past with the substantive songs of the present. We seek to sing edifying hymns from long ago and also God-centered songs of worship from the contemporary Church. In doing so, we can appreciate the witness of our brothers and sisters from past centuries who have persevered in the faith and also realize that God

is still manifesting Himself to His people today (Matt. 13:52). This blend of musical style is an opportunity for the individual to sacrifice personal preferences for the sake of the whole congregation.

We strive to REFLECT the full spectrum of the Christian experience in our music.

Our goal is to sing music that captures the whole array of the Christian life – from the sorrow we have over our sin to the joy of our redemption in Christ, and from the happy expectancy of heaven to the pain of trials and persecution. We see this variety of expression conveyed wonderfully throughout the Psalms. We pray the selection of music will be helpful companions during times of suffering as well as times of great joy.

We strive to be CONTINUALLY GROWING.

We seek to be continually growing in our knowledge of God and in our worship of Him. We acknowledge we have not yet arrived and that knowledge is partial at best (1 Cor. 13:9; James 1:5). To be in need of growth in understanding is a humbling claim. In James 4:6 we read that humility is the only posture of the human heart which God blesses. Only on the day we stand before his great throne, free from all the affects of sin, will we worship God perfectly, even as he has loved us perfectly. (Ps. 40:3; 98:1; 149:1). Until that day we strive to encourage each other to continually grow in the faith, including our worship.

Appendix C:

What is Congregationalism?

At Angel Fire Baptist Church we are congregational in our governance. This means...that our congregation (its members) as a whole is the final court of appeal in matters.

However, we also have leadership roles (i.e. council, deacons, trustees, etc.) that we have recognized and affirmed to lead us.

So, the question is...what does it mean for a congregational church to submit to its leaders?

The Bible teaches that leaders are responsible to teach the Word, set a godly example for the flock, and oversee the affairs of the church (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Pet. 5:3; 1 Tim. 5:17). And Scripture therefore calls all Christians to “submit” to the leaders of our churches (Heb. 13:17).

And at the same time, Scripture teaches that the congregation as a whole has final authority in matters of discipline (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5) and doctrine (Gal. 1).

Do you see the dilemma? If the Bible gave church authority exclusively in the leaders, the idea of submission would be simple: the leaders would make the decisions, and the congregation would submit to those decisions. But what does it mean for a congregation to submit to its leaders when the congregation itself holds final authority?

Instead of considering this question in the abstract, let’s do it in an actual setting that a church may encounter.

Consider a case of a church entering into a building project and going into debt. We would argue that, even in a congregational church, there must be leaders to guide the process otherwise we wouldn’t go anywhere. We cannot move without leaders. Therefore, it makes sense for the leaders to be the primary group who work behind the scenes to address details and issues in the project.

But, still the congregation maintains final authority. The decision to go into a building project and raise the budget must finally be theirs. The leaders cannot simply “announce” that they have hired a contractor and so-and-so. They must bring to the congregation for a final decision.

Now, the real tricky question is this: How much does the congregation need to know in order to legitimately exercise their authority?

On the one hand, it would not be reasonable or edifying to the congregation to call meeting after meeting to talk details about the carpet color, and doing so may unnecessarily hold up the project. On the other hand, the congregation needs to know enough to make an informed decision and exercise their responsibility with integrity.

Imagine you're at a congregational meeting and the leaders recommend that the congregation enter into a building project to update the sanctuary. The leaders use those exact words and explain that they've been praying and working with contractors to get bids and architects for plans and have found the most reasonable and best option for us. So they're recommending that the church act to enter into a building project.

Now it's over to you and the other church members. How do you respond? What does it mean to submit to your leaders when you, along with the other members of your church, are called upon to make a decision in this matter?

A full answer might differ from case to case, but here's a crucial part of it: TRUST.

An un-submissive member won't be satisfied with the seemingly sparse details the leaders have provided. Instead, he will demand a full account—details of specific costs, transcripts of the leaders conversations—or else he won't go along with it. He'll insist on having all the facts, so that he can make an independent judgment. He'll want to hear opposing arguments in the interest of “fairness.” He won't take the leaders word for anything. He doesn't trust the leaders, and he will cloak that mistrust in the language of “responsibility,” or “transparency,” or “rights.”

But that kind of attitude makes church leaders—and many of the church's other responsibilities—virtually impossible. It leads to the kind of committee-of-the-whole congregationalism, which understandably gives

congregationalism a bad name. It paralyzes the church's leaders by giving them a title and responsibility but then hanging them out to dry when they most need a church's trust.

A submissive church member, on the other hand, won't set himself up as an independent review committee for every decision the leaders make. Instead, he'll recognize that leaders have been recognized in order to lead, and that in order to lead, they need to be trusted.

So a godly church member will be inclined to take the leaders at their word. She'll be inclined to trust their assessment of vision, direction, ministry, etc. He'll trust that they have faithfully followed the biblical principles and already done the hard work of visiting with members and different committees before the recommendation comes. He'll trust that the leaders have good reasons for moving the direction they did.

That doesn't mean he'll never under any circumstances dissent or voice disagreement; for example, there may be times when a church member knows something crucial that the leaders have somehow missed. Nor does it mean he'll never ask questions.

It does mean that he has a willing disposition to follow the leaders despite not knowing all the details. He will be obedient to God's command in Hebrew 13:7 by trusting them.

In order for a congregation to exercise its responsibility in such matters, the leaders must give them enough information to act wisely. But in order for them to exercise that responsibility in a submissive manner, a congregation needs to trust its leaders.

What if you don't trust the elders to act responsibly? Perhaps you should be at a different church. Not all leaders are trustworthy! This gives us some weightiness to whom we choose to lead us.

But if you're the type of person who would have trouble trusting the elders at any real, not-hypothetical church, the problem just might be with you. There might be more pride in your heart than you realize.

We who are called to submit to our leaders should be willing to follow them without having all the answers—just like we follow the Lord who appointed them.