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CLC Values

Christ Centered Service

Humility in Service

Passion in Worship

Caring for the Body (Love)

Hunger for Righteousness

Boldness in Holy Living

Generosity in Giving

Biblical Centered Direction

_ Lost people matter to God and to us.

· Biblical teaching and preaching is our foundation for a transformed life.

Devotion to discipleship.

Holy Spirit Centered leadership

Prayer that seeks the Spirits wisdom

Anointed teaching

Empowered witnessing

Introduction

At CLC, we consider ourselves a family. I trust that you're reading this because you already feel a sense of family when you come to CLC, and your desire is to draw closer to the Head of our family, Jesus Christ. God says in His word, the Bible, that we are His children and are members of His family. We are called "God's household", "God's children", "God's sons and daughters", and "co-heirs" with Christ in His Kingdom. This makes each of us very special in the eyes of God – and makes each one of us brothers and sisters in the Lord! We have been called to be one big, united family!

Each of us is connected to the Body of Christ (the Church).

Hebrews 10:25 *"And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near."*

If you could imagine for a moment if one of your body parts were to be severed from your body and stuck in a glass jar with the lid closed tight. How long would it take for that body part to shrivel up and die? Our lives apart from being connected to a local church are much the same. It is so much easier to live out the Christian life when you have other like minded people to share the experience. Being able to share your life through fellowship with other believers is one of the things that keeps life flowing through the veins of a Christian. Everyone needs individuals who will encourage them, love them, pray with them, cry with them and laugh with them. Who better to do this than someone who is connected to the same body as you are – who understands what it's like to walk the Christian life and can share similar experiences and how Jesus helped them to overcome.

Not only is it recognized at CLC that you're a member of our family – you're a VITAL member of our family!

I Corinthians 12:14 tells us, *"in fact, the body is not one member but many."*

Each one of us has a vital role in the life of this body, and each role is important.

The Apostle Paul continues to write in **I Corinthians 12**, “ If the foot says, “I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,” that does not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear says, “I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,” would that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

¹⁸But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each *part just where he wants it*. ¹⁹*How strange a body would be if it had only one part!” (I Cor. 12:15-19)*

So, how is it that we find our place in the body? How do we find our *identity* at CLC?

Here at CLC, we believe it is our responsibility to help you find your identity in Christ – not just your personal identity in Christ – but also your identity in the body life of this community. Jesus has a plan for your life. We are here to equip, build you up to serve in the body of Christ.

The goal of this booklet is to introduce you to the experience of worshiping Jesus in your life on a daily basis. We serve Jesus every day through the things we believe, how we live our lives each day, as well as participating in the worship services and various small group opportunities that are available through the life of the church family. And that is exactly how we will proceed in this booklet. **First**, we will discuss what we believe at CLC. There are beliefs that hold as essential to what the Christian faith is about as well as other beliefs that may not be essential for salvation, but we believe are very important to our life and existence as a Church body. **Second**, we will look at the key elements that will help you grow in your personal, spiritual walk with Jesus. These will be practical things that you can do every day to be more in touch with Jesus and in line with His will for your life.

Finally, we will view the opportunity for officially becoming a Covenant Partner of CLC, and everything that applies. Being a member of a Church does not make you a Christian any more than working at McDonald’s makes you a hamburger. However, just as baptism (which will be discussed at greater length later) is a public, symbolic action of your decision to receive Christ, becoming a member of a church is a public, symbolic action of letting everyone know that you identify yourself and have committed yourself to a like minded community of believers.

At CLC, we desire that every individual experience community, life, and the celebration of Jesus to its fullest through praise & worship, community groups, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. Our mission and purpose for existing is to “Be an instrument of God’s grace by converting unbelievers to the Lord Jesus Christ and helping them become all that God intended them to be.” Our passion is for YOU to become all that God intended you to be. Are you ready to take a journey with us? Let’s explore the CLC Identity together!

What we believe –

The first step of learning to worship Jesus with us is knowing what we believe. In Jesus' high priestly prayer of **John 17:20-21**, *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and*

I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me." One of the signs to the entire world that the Church is sent by God is that the Church would "all be one". When the disciples gathered together in the Book of Acts, it says that they were in "one mind and one accord". When the Church gathers together with one purpose, one vision, and one unified front – there's no stopping it! However, this cannot be a cosmetic thing. We can't just say that we're one when we're not.

An example of this can be seen with the simple statement, "I believe in Jesus". But, which Jesus is being spoken of? Are we speaking of the Jesus of the Jehovah Witnesses who claim that Jesus is "a god" (little "g") and is actually Michael the Archangel? Perhaps we're speaking of the Jesus of Mormon faith who is Lucifer's brother and that we can all aspire to be as Jesus was and gain our own universe to be gods over. Or maybe, we're talking about the Jesus of the UPC (United Pentecostal Church) who recognizes Jesus as being the father AND the son AND the Holy Spirit, thus denying the Trinity. Or, there are some who have their own perception of who Jesus is and what He represents – but their basis of belief has no Biblical basis.

You see, every word has a definition – words are not without meaning or context. We can all agree in the name of Jesus. However, if your perception of who Jesus is isn't the same as mine, then we're not in agreement at all...and the unity that we claim to have is a sham.

The basis for which we come together as a body of believers is under the unifying belief in the essentials of the Christian Faith. You see, there are many, many beliefs throughout Christianity. There are also many, many denominations of Christians to suit just about every conceivable belief. If you have a certain belief in a certain area of the Faith, chances are there is a denomination that will fit you. However, the one thing that ALL of the denominations have in common with one another – and what this community church has in common with them is – we ALL believe together in the **essentials** of the faith.

There is a phrase commonly used in Christian circles that says, "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity". Basically, this means that there are beliefs that

define what a Christian is – if you're a born-again, Bible-believing Christian, you MUST believe that "this" is true. There are many other beliefs that are non-essential – whether you believe it is true or not, it does not make a difference on if you're a Christian or not. BUT, when dealing with essentials or non-essentials, we do it in love – we don't get into loud,

contentious arguments over beliefs. When was the last time an argument or fight led one of your friends or loved ones to Jesus?

Before we go into discussing what these essentials are, I want to discuss how we deal with the non-essentials as a community of believers here at CLC. CLC is a **community church**. We are not affiliated with any denomination. Because of that, we are quite diverse in our backgrounds and beliefs. People from all kinds of upbringing and experience are welcome here to fellowship in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. In a community church, we will teach the truth of God's word and where non-essentials are concerned, your beliefs are not to be judged or condemned. As long as we are in agreement on the beliefs that define us as Christians, we can fellowship in "one mind and one accord."

In the Constitution and By-Laws of CLC, we have listed the "Basic Beliefs" that bind us together as a community of believers. Of the beliefs that we will be discussing here, many of these will be referred to as "essential". The others (which will be clearly explained as non-essential) may not be essential, but are nonetheless useful for defining our identity, and are firmly believed.

1. The Scriptures, both the Old and the New Testaments, are inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man; the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct.

With everything that we believe as Christians, the Bible is the ONLY starting point. Without it, we would not have any direction whatsoever as to what God would expect of us, or as to the way of salvation. The Bible is everything we need to know for salvation and for how we are expected to live our lives on earth.

II Timothy 3:16-17 says, *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. "God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work."* We believe that God, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gave His Word to select men to write the Bible. There are over 40 writers throughout the 66 "books" of the Bible, who wrote in a span of over 1500 years. Yet, it is a seamless book – a book

with consistent thought patterns and without contradiction. It is the biggest selling book of all-time, but that alone does not make the Bible the Word of God.

It is the content within its pages, filled with words of encouragement for lost souls, words of exhortation to help those who need direction. It is inspirational, yet direct. The Bible is a red flag for all who dare

to walk in a path contrary to its clear light. Most importantly, the Bible gives the pathway for a lost and dying world suffering from the terminal illness of sin, to return to a relationship with the One True God.

If Jesus stood before you tonight – right now – and told you to do something, what would you do? Would you sit there and question Him? Would you debate why you have to do it? Of course not! You would not hesitate to follow if Jesus sat right down with you and gave you instruction or asked for something from you. Yet, we have the very words of God recorded right here in this Bible. What will we choose to do with them? If we believe that the Bible is our *authoritative rule of faith and conduct*, then we should not hesitate to follow its instructions.

2. *The One True God has revealed Himself as the eternally self-existent “I am”, the Creator of all things and the Redeemer of mankind. He has further revealed Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

We are a Trinitarian church. We believe that there is only one God, and that He has revealed himself in three distinct persons – Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Each person of the trinity is equally God, each has all the attributes of God, but each also has a different function in the grand scheme of eternity – all with the same purpose. We could spend weeks explaining all the different facets of the Trinity, all the attributes that are equally shared between each of the Godhead.

If you have any questions concerning the Trinity, we'd be happy to sit down with you and try to answer those. And, yes – the Trinity really is an essential belief. The Trinity is tied directly to how we perceive who God is, it becomes an essential.

3. *The scriptures declare the Deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and set Him forth as the eternal Son of God. They further declare:*

- a. His Virgin Birth.**
- b. His sinless life.**
- c. His miracles.**
- d. His substitutionary work on the cross.**
- e. His bodily resurrection from the dead.**
- f. His exaltation to the right hand of God.**
- g. His sending forth the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.**
- h. His promise to personally return and receive His Church to Himself.**

That is a lot. However, each one of these defines who Jesus is. That

makes this area a strong essential to cover. We will **briefly** look at scriptures for each of these truths.

The Deity and eternity of Jesus. We believe that Jesus has always existed – even before His birth through Mary on earth – and that as the Son of God; He is equally God with the Father and the Holy Spirit. **John 1:1-3** defines these parameters for us: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”* The Apostle John purposely opens his gospel with the same words as the first book of the Bible, Genesis... “In the beginning”. Verse 3 says that *nothing* was made without the Word (as you read further, you plainly see that “the Word” was Jesus Himself). Only that which could exist before the beginning to create everything could be God.

His Virgin Birth. We will refer to two different passages of the Bible to identify the truth of Mary’s virgin birth. The first was a prophecy given hundreds of years before Jesus was born.

Isaiah 7:14 *“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”* (Immanuel = God with us). The other verse contains the very words of Mary as she speaks to the angel in **Luke 1:34-35**, *“Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’”*

There is more to the virgin birth than a mere miraculous sign. The virgin birth is an essential to our Christian Faith because of the taint of sin, which is upon every man, woman and child that has ever lived. We will cover the Fall of Man in our next section, but it serves well to note here that if Jesus was born just like every other human on earth – from the seed of a sinful man – then there would not have been the seed of God within Him, and thus would've had the same taint of the sinful nature as us. In fact, without the virgin birth, several of the key essentials of the Faith would no longer have a foundation to stand upon as you will see.

His sinless life. Hebrews 4:15 *“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”* The perfect righteousness of Jesus is all that the Christian has to stand upon. The Bible tells the truth, *“all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.”*

There is no one who has not fallen into sin. Yet, Jesus never did.

Here, we need to speak of what is called, “justification”. We serve a perfect, holy and righteous God who has never sinned and never failed. We serve a God who cannot accept unrighteous living. God created us – we are His creation. Thus, it is only fair that the Creator is the One who is permitted to set the rules for what is right/wrong for His creation. Since all of us have broken God's law, we are guilty before him. We have a death sentence set upon us as the Bible says, *“The wages of sin is death.”* We will get more into detail on this when we look at the Fall of Man – but for this part, it is essential to note that our own righteousness is not sufficient for salvation. But because Jesus never sinned, and because He chose to die a sinner's death on our behalf, God has accepted His righteousness as being sufficient for our salvation.

As long as our faith is fixed upon the work of Jesus – His sinless life and His death on the cross, we are accepted as righteous in the eyes of God – despite our sin.

His miracles. His miracles are written of throughout the gospels. There are dozens of instances that attest to the sovereign power of the Son of God. From causing blind eyes to see, healing the sick, causing paralytics to walk again to raising the dead, causing a storm to cease, turning water into wine and feeding 5000 with five loaves of bread and 2 fish – the miracles attest to who Jesus is. In fact, Jesus says Himself in **John 14:11** *“Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.”* Jesus says to just look at His life and the things He has done. If you won't simply take His word for who He is, you can look at His miraculous life for revelation as to who He is and why He came.

His substitutionary work on the cross. As we have discussed, we have all sinned and have broken relationship with God as a result. There is an eternal death sentence upon our heads. However, **Romans 5:6-8** tells us, *“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. ⁷Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. ⁸ But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”* Jesus died the death for sin that we could have had to die for. He gives to us the righteousness that we could not have achieved for ourselves, so that we could receive an eternal life that we could not otherwise attain.

His bodily resurrection from the dead. I think Paul said it best in

I Corinthians 15:16-19 *“And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. ¹⁷And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. ¹⁸In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! ¹⁹And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”* “The resurrection is living proof all the claims that Jesus made while He was on the earth are true. It is the proof that Jesus truly is the Son of God and has power over sin, death and the grave. It is the proof that there is life after death and eternity awaits us.

His exaltation to the right hand of God. **Hebrews 1:3** says that after He purged out sins, He *“sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on High.”* Again, in **I Peter 3:22** it says that He has *“gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”* Jesus sits in the seat of God’s favor (His right hand). While in heaven, scripture says that Jesus *“intercedes on our behalf”* and that He will act as our Advocate when we stand before God in heaven. It is truly a comfort to know that Jesus is always there interceding on my behalf and prepared to defend me as one of His own!

His sending forth of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 1:8 gives us some of Jesus’ final words before He ascended to heaven. Those final words were a promise to all who believe; *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* Jesus did not leave us as orphans on this earth to try to figure out this Christian life on our own. All who have received Jesus as Lord and Savior have received the Holy Spirit to live inside of them. Jesus tells that He sends the Holy Spirit to us to give us power to live the Christian life, to testify of Jesus throughout the world, to guide us to all truth

concerning Jesus, and to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment so that all may come to Jesus.

His promise to return and receive His Church unto Himself.

Acts 1:11 speaks of a messenger sent to the disciples of Jesus immediately after He ascended into heaven saying, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”* The beginning of all eternity will begin when Jesus returns to earth to receive His people. This is the blessed promise and hope for all who know Jesus as Lord and are eagerly awaiting His return.

4. Man was created in the image and after the likeness of God and was therefore sinless. However, man by voluntary transgression incurred physical and spiritual death.

God created Adam and Eve as sinless beings. The very presence of God dwelt with them in their midst in the Garden of Eden. Adam had dominion over the entire earth – over all the living creatures on the earth and over the land. God only asked one thing of Adam – only one rule was set before him – DO NOT eat from the tree of good and evil. I’m sure you know the rest of the story... As a result, spiritual death came immediately to mankind and physical death came into existence. All of us as descendants of Adam suffered spiritual death as well, because **Romans 3:23** *“All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”*. **Romans 5** discusses the uniqueness of this belief. Because Adam was the representative of all mankind when He was in the Garden, his sin against God was communicated to us like a hereditary disease, infecting every man that was ever born. This is why it was so important that the Son of God come into the world – not from the sinful seed of a sinful man – but by the overshadowing of God Most High. Jesus did not have the taint of the sin nature, nor did He commit a sin Himself. Thus, His righteousness is perfect and pure – and acceptable in the eyes of God.

5. *But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. if we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. I John 1:7-9*

a. Salvation is received through repentance of sin and faith in

the complete atoning work of Jesus Christ.

b. *The inward evidence of salvation is the direct witness of the*

Holy Spirit. The outward evidence is a life of righteousness

and true holiness.

Repentance is defined as “changing the mind” – when it comes to sin, it is not just a matter of stopping the wrong things that you do...it’s “changing your mind” about those wrong things. If I became a Christian and chose to stop doing the things that I did before I was a Christian, but still thought in the back of my mind that those things “weren’t that bad”, I may be changing my behavior – but I would not be repenting.

When I repent of the things I have done that are wrong, I have realized that those things hurt God – I begin to see sin the way that God sees it – then I choose not to do those things because I want to please God...now I am living a life of True Repentance.

6. The Ordinances of the Church are Baptism in water and Holy

Communion. Matthew 28:19, Luke 22:17-20

a. *Baptism in water is commanded in Scripture. All who*

repent and believe on Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are

to be baptized.

b. *The Lord’s Supper, consisting of bread and the fruit of the*

vine, is the symbol expressing our sharing the divine

nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a memorial of His

suffering and death; a prophecy of His second coming;

and is enjoined on all believers “till he comes.”

We will be taking these in greater detail when we discuss how each of us is included in the Worship Celebration. However, it would be good to note here that we do not believe that baptism or communion, in and of themselves, have any kind of salvation power attached to them. They are symbolic of works that have already been completed by Christ on your behalf.

7. All believers are baptized in the Holy Spirit according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teachings of Scripture. With it comes the endowment of power for life and service including the bestowing of the gifts and their uses in the work of the ministry.

I Corinthians 12-14 gives a very clear teaching of what the gifts of the Spirit are and their uses. We could spend weeks discussing Spiritual Gifts. It is good to note here that we do believe in the activity of the Holy Spirit and that spiritual gifts are still active in the Church today – provided that they are done “decently and in order”. We also recognize that not all believers may be endowed or demonstrate all the spiritual gifts available. I would challenge you to study this area of scripture for yourself, pray and draw your own conclusions as to where you may fit in this area. It is also important to note that we believe that ALL believers receive the Holy Spirit upon salvation.

8. Sanctification is the act of separation unto God. It is realized in the believer by recognizing his identification with Christ in His death and resurrection, and by faith reckoning daily upon the fact of that union, and by offering every faculty continually to God.

Sanctification can be said to be the process by which we are perfected to be like Christ, Although we may desire to be perfect right now, as long as we continue to dwell in these imperfect earthly bodies, we will not be perfect. We will still make mistakes, and we will still sin. Although “nobody’s perfect”, this is not a justification for continued sinning. With the Holy Spirit in us convicting us of sin as we commit it, we learn to submit to the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit. **II Timothy 2:21**

We also learn through the study of His Living Word, the Bible. The Bible not only sets forth the way of salvation, but also the moral standard of conduct for the life of a Christian. This has become increasingly difficult to teach and to get believers to grab hold of because we are completely inundated by today's culture. Because we believe that there is one God and we are His creation, we do not set the standard for how we live. We do not dictate to God how we will live our lives. God sets the standard for His created beings, and those standards are set forth in the Bible. Our understanding and application of those standards or laws is our path towards the holy living that God desires. It is also the threshold of the blessings of God in our lives. This process will be gloriously completed when we are transformed and brought into the presence of God in the resurrection.

9. The Church is the Body of Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit. Each believer, born of the Spirit, is an integral part of the Body of Christ and therefore of the Church. Romans 12:1-8

Have you ever heard anyone say, "Jesus loves you and has a plan for your life"? It may sound cliché, but it's really true. God has placed inside each individual a purpose of what He wants you to do with your life. Finding your place within a community of believers such as CLC is a big part of realizing that vision. A major purpose of who we are and what we are to do with our lives is incorporated within the body of a Church family. Jesus left the Church on the earth to be his witness to the world of who He is.

Each one of us has a place to participate within His plan to attest to His saving power and grace. Thus, each one of us has a place in which He has chosen for us to participate, in this great mission. The only question that remains unanswered is, what is YOUR part going to be? We are here specifically to help you realize your identity – to find your role in God's plan. We are so glad that you are choosing CLC to be an integral part of what God has for your life. In a little while, you'll have an opportunity to publicly seal that commitment by becoming a Covenant Member of CLC. Becoming a Church Member may not be an essential thing for salvation, but it is a vital part of truly becoming everything that God intended you to be as a believer.

10. Healing for the whole person is spiritual and physical integral part of the Gospel and is provided for in the atonement.

James 5:14-15 ¹⁴“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.” **I Peter 2:24** We believe in divine healing – whether it be directly through the work of God in a miracle or through the hand of a physician. We do not dictate how God chooses to heal, but we believe that God does do healing according to His will and good purpose.

11. The resurrection of the dead in Christ and their translation together with those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord is the imminent and blessed hope of the Church.

In our discussion about the beliefs of Jesus, we covered Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Without His resurrection, our faith is futile and our own resurrection would not be possible. Funerals would become the saddest moments of our lives because we’d no longer have the hope of ever seeing our loved ones again. But, because Jesus rose from the dead, we have the hope of our salvation – the redemption of our souls.

We also believe the passage of **I Thessalonians 4:16-17**, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” We believe in the imminent hope of Jesus returning to receive us unto Himself and to

spend all eternity with Him. We subsequently see the Rapture of the Church as the next great event in prophetic history. It may not be an essential to believe WHEN Jesus returns, but it is an essential (and the hope of all in Christ) to believe that Jesus IS coming back.

12. There will be a final judgement when whosoever is not found written in the Book of Life will be consigned to everlasting punishment.

Yes, there is a heaven and there is a hell. There will be a day that we all will stand before God and will have to answer for how we lived and what we did with Christ while we were here. Those who trusted in Christ in this life will have all eternity in His presence. All those who did not will have eternal punishment in hell and the Lake of Fire. God tells us in His word that he desires that “none should perish but that all shall come to repentance”. It then

becomes the responsibility of the Church and of its individual members to pass along the message of the gospel so that as many as God desires shall come unto repentance. **II Peter 3:9**

This is not the most popular subject to be spoken about. However, it is the most important subject to discuss. Your belief in the reality of heaven and hell, and where your family, friends, loved ones and even strangers will spend life after death should have a major impact upon your mind and heart. Jesus said that, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes unto the Father but by me."* Jesus is the only way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

John 14:6

Imagine yourself finding the cure for a disease that is plaguing the world. You have the serum, and all someone has to do is inject it into their system and their lives would be spared. BUT, you decide that it would be better if you kept this life changing information to yourself, and people continue to die...

Could you do that? Are you capable of letting millions of people continue to die because you won't give away the only solution for their illness? Well...that is exactly what we're doing when we're not sharing the love of Jesus Christ with people who don't know Him. Heaven is a wonderful reality, and Hell is a horrible, yet equal reality. **Matthew 16:18**

Your Part in the Worship -

These are the beliefs that CLC holds to – this is how we identify

ourselves in Christ. Although these are the beliefs that we hold dear and that define ourselves as believers, we need to present these beliefs in a way that will be practical. Truth is a wonderful thing, and truth is true whether you believe it or not. However, if you want an individual to *accept truth* (which is what a Church is supposed to be designed to do), then we need to pray and encourage receiving the truth of Christ.

There are certain things that we do in our Worship Services to honor God and to promote Jesus Christ as Lord. Your participation in these worship services is a vital role in the life of

our community – not merely as one who fills a pew – but as someone who actively participates in each facet of the Worship Service.

a. Praise and Worship

Psalms 100:4 *“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.”* As we come together for a Worship service, our main desire should be to experience His Presence and to “hear God speak” through His Word. God says that the way into His Presence is to offer Him “thanksgiving and praise”. We do this at the beginning of the Worship service by offering God praise through the singing of songs. These are words that have been artfully written to help us express ourselves to God for worship.

b. Prayer Partners

Once into His presence, we take the opportunity to bring our needs before the throne of God. We have Prayer Partners who are trained and prepare to pray with you as you bring your requests before the Lord. **Matthew 18:20**

c. The Word of God

No worship service is complete without a relevant message brought from the Word of God. Each topic discussed may have a contemporary theme, but make no mistake – God is speaking through the words of the message. However, the Worship Service is not the only time the Word of God is taught at CLC. We have a number of studies in small group settings that can take you deeper into God’s Word. Such as: **Men’s Bible Studies, Women’s Bible Studies, Youth & Children’s Services, Home Group Studies** and other study opportunities to assist you in your personal growth.

d. The Ordinances of the Church

Two very special opportunities to worship God are offered to every believer in Jesus Christ – the opportunities to be baptized and to partake in communion (The Lord’s Supper).

Romans 6:4 *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”*

Colossians 2:12 also says that we are *“buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”* **Baptism** becomes our public confession of who we have become through the saving work of Jesus in our life. As we go down into the water, it symbolizes our death to sin. As we are brought out of the water, it symbolizes the newness of life that we have in Christ Jesus.

As we have stated previously, baptism cannot be concluded of as an essential for salvation for two reasons. First, there are examples of those such as the Thief on the Cross in Luke who did not have opportunity to be baptized, yet died and went to be with the Lord “in paradise”. Second, to say that baptism is required for salvation would be to say that you had to “do something” on your part to be saved. **Ephesians 2:8-9** *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* The only “work” that had to be done for your salvation was the work that Jesus did on your behalf on the cross. Even the faith that you receive to believe doesn’t come directly from you – it is a gift from God. It is simply a matter of the will as to whether or not you receive God’s free gift. As stated, baptism is not a requirement, but it is a command of God to be baptized, and it is highly odd for someone who claims to love God to totally ignore such a clear-cut command from Him.

Matthew 26:26-29 *“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take eat; this is my body.” Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom”.*

We take Holy Communion together as a church to remember what Jesus has done – the brokenness of His body through the beating and death that He went through for us, and the blood that He shed that washes away our sin. Once again, one does not gain salvation from eating the bread and drinking the cup of Christ – but only by trusting what Jesus did on your behalf that is symbolized in The Lord’s Supper.

Your Personal Relationship to Jesus –

Now that we have concluded our look at CLC's Identity with Christ through what we believe and how we worship, we need to look at your personal identity with Christ.

If you remember the section that we discussed concerning "sanctification", then you remember that sanctification is a process – it's a time of growth and maturity that occurs in every believer. It doesn't bring us to perfection in this lifetime, but it does bring us closer to being "like Jesus". So the questions that may enter your mind could be "What does God expect of me?" or "What do I do with my life now that I am a follower of Jesus?" God desires that we would grow to maturity in our Christian life so that we may better serve God and others.

Ephesians 4:11-13 *"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of God".*

CLC as a church and as a ministry staff has a responsibility to you - to train you, to guide and direct you in the ways of the Lord and help give you the tools that you need for ministry. **BUT** it is the **body of believers** that are responsible for taking advantage of the opportunities given them for spiritual growth. You've heard the expression "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink" – well, you can lead a Christian to a church, but you can't make him grow!

Personal spiritual growth and maturity can only be accomplished as you put the time, energy and prayer into it. You can also sit and listen to all the greatest teaching and preaching that any church has to offer, but if you're not willing to apply it to your life, it will not

do much good. **James 1:22** *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*

Studying the Word of God

The first thing that comes to mind when I am asking you to study the Bible is, “Why do I need to study the Bible?” What authority does the Bible have to tell me how I should live my life? The Authority and Inspiration of the Word of God is absolutely essential to the Christian Faith.

Without the Bible, there is no Christian Faith. There needs to be an objective (provable, unchanging) standard for what the Christian Life is all about, otherwise we are merely following another man’s opinions – which are subjective (opinion, subject to change). We proclaim that the Bible is that objective standard for truth – in fact, we do not merely proclaim that the Bible “contains” the Word of God – it IS the Word of God! That is a standard worth following! There are a few things that I should say concerning the Authority of the Bible:

a. The Bible is inspired of God.

The Bible is one book, yet it is actually 66 separate books written by no less than 40 writers, and written during a time period spreading out over 1500 years. Yet, from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible reads flawlessly without a single proven contradiction. How can this be?

Well, the writers of scripture themselves make the claim – it is not them alone who wrote the scriptures, but God wrote the scripture through them by the utterance of the Holy Spirit. As I said before, the Bible does not merely “contain” the Word of God – it IS the Word of God! I will let the Bible speak for itself on this subject;

I Corinthians 2:13 *“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.”* Also, **II Timothy 3:16-17** *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* God used the Holy Spirit to speak through the authors of the Bible so that they would write the Word of God as opposed to the word of man.

b. The Bible is our absolute standard for Christian faith and practice.

If the Bible is true, and if the Bible is inspired of God, then the Bible must be considered our absolute, unchanging standard for Christian faith and practice. Men’s

opinions have often taken the place of the truth of the Bible, and have led many astray through their subjective opinions. However, the Bible stands unchanged and is the standard for our beliefs. We need to learn to let the Bible dictate to us what is the truth instead of us reading **into** what the Bible says. One of the keys of Bible interpretation is "Scripture interprets Scripture". It is so easy to take our opinions and wrong thinking processes to the Word of God. When we do this, we open ourselves up to wrong interpretations of the Bible because we are reading it through the eyes of our presuppositions. However, if we will respect the Bible for the objective authority that it is, we will find that the reading of God's Word will mold and shape us into the likeness of Christ.

So, how do we read the Bible? How do we permit the Word of God to get into our hearts and produce action in our life?

1. Hear it

Romans 10:17 *"Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ."* Hearing the Word of God spoken through godly pastors and teachers is a wonderful way to begin understanding the Bible. Each of us came to an understanding of salvation through Jesus Christ by hearing someone else who understood God's Word – thus we believed the message and received our salvation. Now, we continue to come together for church services, Bible studies, Home Groups and the like for the purpose of gaining a broader understanding of the Bible. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God rightfully taught.

2. Read it

Revelation 1:3 *"Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it."* Although this passage is specifically written as a blessing for reading the Book of Revelation, this passage is truth for the reading of ALL scripture – Blessed is the one who reads and takes to heart what the Scriptures say! I would recommend beginning with the Gospel of John, and then proceed through the rest of the New Testament. Proverbs and Psalms are also areas of scripture that you should begin reading immediately as they will help you grow quickly in God's wisdom and in worship. There are reading plans that will assist you to read through the Bible in one year and other reading plans that can take you faster or slower, based

on your desire to read and your comprehension.

3. Study it

Acts 17:11 *“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”* If you read the entire Bible in one day but could not understand it, it is of no benefit to you. Learn to take notes on what you are learning through God’s Word and then study your notes as well.

4. Memorize it

Psalms 119:9 & 11 *“How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word...I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”* Memorizing scripture is one of the keys that we have to living the Christian life and to defeating Satan. In the book of Matthew, Jesus fasted for 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness. After 40 days, Satan came and tempted Him. Do you know what Jesus did to defeat Satan? He quoted scripture to win over the arguments that the devil had. If Jesus used the Word of God to defeat the enemy, how much more can we do the same thing if we will take the time to apply God’s Word to our hearts to make it ready for use at any time?

5. Meditate on it

Psalms 1:2,3 *“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”* Meditation can be said to be the process by which the Bible goes from the head to the heart. As you begin to think about the Word of God after reading it, think about what the meaning of the scripture is – and when you do that, think about what the writer was trying to say to those who he was originally speaking. THEN, think about how it directly applies to you. What moral lesson can be learned and applied? What instruction is given to follow? What promise is made by God for you to trust? What did you just learn about the nature of God?

Applying all 5 of these principles can take as little as 10-15 minutes a day. The key to letting the Word of God have an impact on your life though is **making a commitment to get into God’s Word every day!** Even in small doses, God’s Word can have a big, immediate impact upon your life. Take the time to Hear, Read, Study, Memorize & Meditate on God’s Word – the Bible.

Living a Life of Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13 *“This, then is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’*

This is commonly known as The Lord’s Prayer. Many of you, even before you became Christians, probably have heard or even memorized this prayer. However, this is not merely a prayer that is to be recited – this is an **outline** for prayer that can be followed. Jesus was teaching His disciples a pattern by which to pray to be more effective in their prayer. I want to teach you today about this outline for prayer so that you can begin to apply it to your own prayer life.

1. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name – There are two keys here that give us some understanding about prayer.

a. Our Father – Jesus says these words, and they must’ve sounded totally foreign to the Jews He was speaking. The Jews revered God in such a way that they would not even speak the Name of God in Hebrew (pronounced Yah-weh). However, Jesus brings this into relational terms. “Our” Father means that we are approaching the same Father in heaven that Jesus is approaching when He speaks – and that we have the right as sons and daughters to approach God as a young child would his/her father. This opens the door for a special relationship that can be developed between you and your heavenly Father – an intimate relationship that can be developed through prayer.

b. Hallowed – Hallowed means to give reverence, honor or respect. Thus, instead of rushing into what **we** want in prayer, we should open our time of prayer with giving God praise. Simply, in your own words, tell God how much you love Him and appreciate Him for who He is and what He has done for you. As you get to know God through His Word, you can also add to those praises the attributes of God – praising Him for His holiness, righteousness, justice, love, truthfulness, etc. You can speak, you can sing – you can offer your praise in any way that will express honestly how wonderful God is.

2. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

This is acknowledging that God is in control, and that you are praying for God to line up your desires with His kingdom. Not your

will, but God's will to be done in your life, the life of your family and friends, in the life of the church, your country, the world.

Now, acknowledging that God is in control and praying for God's will to be done in every situation. One of the biggest parts of prayer – especially in this particular area of praying for God's will – is learning to submit to God. When you humbly acknowledge that you do not have any control over your life and your situations and that you need God to intervene, you are beginning to live out “your kingdom come, your will be done.”

3. Give us this day our daily bread.

Remember – Jesus begins this entire segment saying, “*This then is how you should pray...*” Some people, in an attempt of self-humility have made statements that they will not pray for themselves, but they pray for others. Others pray ONLY for what they need, and do not pray for others. Both of these extremes are inconsistent with the prayer life that Jesus calls us.

A strong part of a good prayer life is getting your will lined up with the will of God – and God's will is that we love others as we love ourselves. Thus, praying for others so that God's will is worked in their lives is an essential part of prayer. However, so is praying for your own needs.

God promises to meet our needs “according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus”. God also promises to meet our needs as we obey Him and make Him the top priority in our life – **Matthew 6:33** “*But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*” This is a promise from the mouth of Jesus to you as a believer in Jesus – if you will put God first in your life and seek His will and live righteously, you will not cease to have God meet the NEEDS in your life.

4. And forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors.

We are asking God to forgive us what we owe him. What exactly is it that we owe God? We are in debt to God because we serve a righteous and holy God who cannot permit any unrighteousness in His sight.

We know that we are to ask God to forgive us of our sins on a daily basis. Sin cuts us off from our relationship with Him, and to maintain strong communication with God, it is a good thing to

keep short accounts with Him. However, there is another part of this that is less discussed - “as we also **have forgiven** our debtors.” So, who

owes us? Those who have sinned against us. Notice that the phrase assumes that we have already forgiven the debts. Two passages of scripture clearly show us how God feels about us forgiving others. **Matthew 6:14** *“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* The other verses are in **Matthew 18:23-35**. It is a parable that Jesus tells about a king who forgives a great debt to a man who could not pay it back. The man who was forgiven the debt then finds a man who owed him a small amount of money – but like him – could not pay the debt. The man who had his debt forgiven threw the other man in jail to pay his debt. When the King hears about it, he calls the servant in who he forgave the debt and throws him into “the outer darkness” because the servant did not forgive in the same way that the King forgave him.

It is assumed that we will forgive others what they have done to us because God has forgiven everything that we have ever done against Him and has given us eternal life.

5. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Asking God to keep us from temptation is an acknowledgement that we need God’s help in areas of temptation – that we are incapable of handling temptation on our own. **I Corinthians 10:13** *“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”* This is yet another promise from God that goes along with one of the facets of The Lord’s Prayer.

- a. First of all, you are not the only person that goes through temptation –** thus, you can share your struggles with another person in the Lord (preferably of the same sex) so that you can pray together and help give you good counsel to overcome.
- b. God promises that you won’t be tempted beyond what you can bear.** Whenever I teach this, I remind believers that the same God who says this promise also says, *“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.”* Thus, in Christ’s strength, you can overcome any temptation.
- c. God promises a way of escape.** However, the escape is so that you may find the strength to “stand up under” the temptation.

James 1 says, *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.”* Perseverance is the patient ability to stand under a test or trial and not waver in your faith. There are many scriptures in the Bible to bear out that perseverance is one of – if not THE – most important thing that God wants to develop within you. A person who perseveres is someone who is mature and strong in their faith, who does not waver under temptation or trial.

As you develop habits to get to know God through His Word and prayer, you can begin to have faith-filled experiences with God as you begin to develop a maturity in your faith – a maturity that knows who God is from a personal perspective. You will have your own testimony of how God has moved in your life, what He has taught you and shown you. And as you mature, you will see the needs of others and be able to share Jesus with them so that their lives may be changed as well.

Membership -

“Membership in this Church shall consist of such persons who have confessed Jesus Christ to be their personal Lord and Savior; have been baptized as a believer in water in the name of the Father, Son, and of the Holy Spirit; and have complied with the following”:

Process:

1. Demonstrate a desire to unite with this congregation.
2. Attend membership class, read and sign a Statement of Agreement with this Constitution, a Statement of Faith, and a Church Covenant.
3. Willingly submit to Christ as the Head of the Church, to the leadership of this Church, and to the other members of this fellowship.

Privilege:

All members have the privilege to participate in the ministries of the Church.

Expectations:

Weekly Worship: Participate in the weekly worship services on a regular basis

Group Participation: Join the family life of the Church in a congregational and/or small group context.

Specific Ministry:

Exercise one's spiritual gift(s) in specific areas of ministry.

Church Involvement: Support the variety of ministries of the Church through prayer and service.

Consistent Giving: Contribute financially to the Church in a consistent, generous manner.

Personal Evangelism/World Outreach: Share one's faith personally while supporting others who proclaim the gospel around the world.

Willing Accountability: Respond positively to the leadership of the Board of Elders in matters of Church policy and discipline.

Personal Growth: Assume the responsibility for one's spiritual nourishment through personal and corporate Bible study and prayer.

Discipline:

The desire of Christian Life Center is to edify and exhort our membership to a consistent Christian lifestyle. In the event Church discipline is necessary, the steps as outlined in **Matthew 18:15-17** will be pursued with the following understanding:

1. The goal of Church discipline is always to restore our brother/ sister.
2. The spirit of Church discipline is to be one of gentleness, but with authority.
3. The object of Church discipline is to maintain a pure and godly testimony to the world.

Termination of Membership:

Church membership may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

1. Leaving the Church.
2. Disqualification by the Board of Elders for
 - a. Failure to meet the criteria set forth in Article V, section 1 (Process) and/or expectations of Article V, section 3.
 - b. Failure to properly respond to Church discipline.
3. Continued lack of interest and attendance at the services of the Church, when such conditions continue for one year.
4. Departure from the faith by advocating, teaching or distributing literature contrary to the Church's Statement of Faith.
5. Continuance in sinful practices without repentance.
6. The member's life and conduct is not in accordance with the membership covenant in such a way that the member hinders the ministry of the Church in the community.
7. Death of the member.

Such action of dismissal shall be made in harmony with the steps outlined in **Matthew 18:15-17**; removal from Church membership may take place upon the decision of the Board of Elders.

Transferability of Membership:

Membership in Christian Life Center of Merced is not transferable to any other person or entity. We are a Non-Denominational Church, thus there is no other church in which your membership could be transferred to.

AFFIRMATION OF PARTNERSHIP for

CHRISTIAN LIFE CENTER

Name _____

Address _____

City Zip Code _____

Home Phone _____ **Cell** _____

Email

The Covenant by which Christian Life Center exists, and which every Covenant Partner accepts is as follows:

· We acknowledge Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Savior.

- *We accept that the Bible is verbally inspired as our rule of faith and practice.*
- *We recognize the privilege and duty of uniting ourselves in Christian fellowship.*
- *We participate in Christian Ordinances.*
- *We participate in the public worship of Jesus Christ and the advancement of His church on earth.*

By signing this Affirmation of Partnership, I state that:

- *I am a Christian*
- *I am in agreement with the Constitution/By-Laws of Christian Life Center and Statement of Faith*
- *I have attended a CLC Values Class*
- *I want to be a Covenant Partner of Christian Life Center*

In agreement with all that I have learned about Christian Life Center, I now request to become a Covenant Partner.

Signature

Print

Date