

# What We Do

## Refuge Essentials



## Objectives

1. Identify the markers of a local church
2. Understand the structure of leadership at Refuge
3. Articulate how we are incorporated into God's mission

## Church or church

When we speak of “the church,” we generally speak of two “churches”: the universal Church (note the big ‘C’) and the local church (note the small ‘c’). While they are intertwined, they represent different ways of viewing God’s people.

The universal Church consists of all believers in history and across the globe. In essence, the Church includes all people who have trusted in Jesus’ saving work and have experienced God’s redemption and reconciliation. The Church is the bride of Christ who will one day enjoy partaking in the wedding supper of the Lamb when our Lord returns.

Yet the universal Church consists of many smaller, local churches where faithful brothers and sisters gather together to encourage, exhort, care for, and love one another as a practical outworking of God’s transforming work in their lives. While the totality of the Church is known to God alone, we engage in the visible church trusting that God is at work in the lives of those around us. To this end, God calls us to be active and committed to a local church so we can experience the benefits of deep, God-focused community and engage in his mission to spread the gospel to the far corners of the earth.

These smaller, local, and visible churches are called to exemplify certain markers that designate them as part of God’s people: the true preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of discipline.

## The True Preaching of the Word

All of the values we hold at Refuge hang on our first value: truth. Without truth, we cannot know who God is and what he has done in the world because we need him to reveal these things to us. Since the time of the apostles, local churches have taken the opportunity to meet together and proclaim God’s truth as it was revealed to them through the apostles’ teaching and the Bible.

This proclamation of the gospel through the preaching of God’s Word is of central importance to our worship gatherings. On Sundays when we gather, we structure our time together with a central focus on the preaching of God’s Word. Our goal is to push all who gather with us toward the true, honest, strong, reliable, inherent, hope giving Word of our living, triune God. The other two marks of the church flow from this first mark.

## The Right Administration of the Sacraments

The term sacraments can be an odd word depending on the background that people have. When we use the term sacraments at Refuge, we refer to the two, ordained means of visible participation in Christ's death and resurrection: Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is the public proclamation of trust and acceptance of the gospel. In Baptism, believers declare that they are sinful and unable to save themselves from God's wrath apart from Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. When we receive the sacrament of Baptism at the beginning of our relationship with God, we are identifying with Jesus' death and resurrection through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As a continuing means of grace after our Baptism, we partake weekly in the Lord's Supper. While it goes by different names – Communion or the Eucharist – Refuge, like other gospel believing churches, affirms that we experience the ever-needed grace of God through Communion. In this sacrament, we see a visible picture of Jesus' death through the breaking of the bread (his body) and the pouring of the wine (his blood). As we partake we are spiritually nourished by his sacrifice and proclaim his death until he returns.

As local churches continue to administer the sacraments, they are also called to continuously lead believers back to repentance of sin and faith in Jesus.

## The Faithful Exercise of Discipline

Church discipline sounds outmoded and unneeded to most people. Yet, when done rightly, church discipline is one of the most loving acts that a local church can undertake toward members of the congregation.

Discipline comes from the same root as the word disciple, and this is no coincidence. At the core of the Church's proclamation of the gospel is the desire to see people become disciples of Jesus. Hence, any discipline that occurs within local churches should be geared toward helping Christians pursue a life of love and holiness toward our Triune God.

At Refuge, we see various means of church discipline that occur. In the context of Gospel Communities, we hope that people live in open, honest relationships with one another so that, when sin is apparent, members can speak truth to one another and exhort one another toward Godliness.

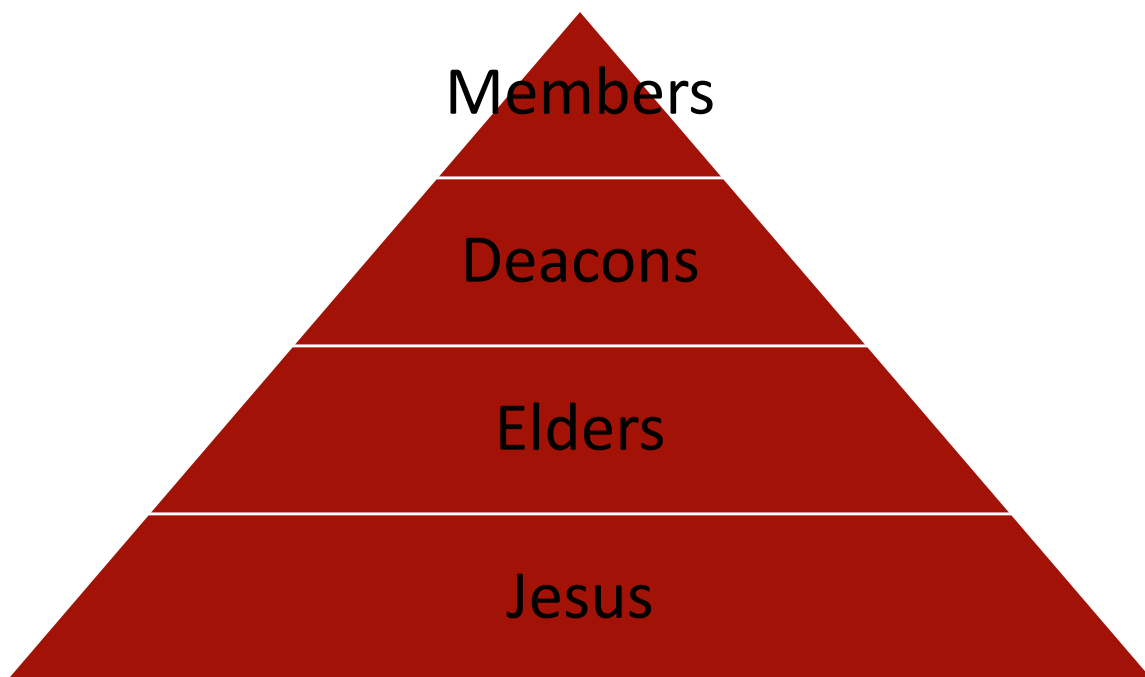
If sin continues to grow without repentance, the elders will attempt to guide wayward members back to repentance and faith through various means. This aspect of discipline occurs for the good of the member and the protection of

the rest of the flock. The elders take the exercise of church discipline seriously as one of their many responsibilities in leading and guiding the church at Refuge.

### Church Government

Different local churches exhibit different forms of church governance (polity). The most common forms of church governance are Congregational, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Elder-led polity. At Refuge, we exercise Elder-led governance.

In Elder-led polity, there are four groups with varying roles within the local church: Jesus himself, the elders, the deacons, and the members.



- Jesus is the chief shepherd of the local church. He plants churches by the will of the Father, leads churches through the illumination of the Spirit, heads the church as its ultimate pastor, and builds the church through his blood and resurrection. All authority in the local church (and universal Church) resides with Christ.
- Elders are the under-shepherds that Jesus puts in place to teach the Word, pray for the congregation, care for the members, live exemplary lives, encourage sound doctrine, and exercise church discipline. If the elders are rightly exercising their calling, all members within the church should feel the freedom to utilize their gifts for the building of God's kingdom. Refuge has one set of elders (often referred to as pastors),

with a simple distinction that some are staff elders (paid elders) and some are lay elders (non-paid elders). All elders share in the same pastoral duties. The distinction is a function of time, energy, and focus rather than authority.

- Deacons are leaders within the church who assist the elders in carrying out ministry within the church. Deacons fulfill certain functions at Refuge such as leading the children's ministry or managing the church finances.
- Members at Refuge are those people who have entered into covenant with one another as the local body to believe, trust, and hope in the gospel together. As members, they join in God's mission of redemption in St. Charles and around the world by proclaiming the gospel and living out transformed lives. All elders and deacons at Refuge are, first and foremost, covenanting members with the rest of the body.

Together these groups within the local church continue to love, exhort, teach, admonish, serve, and care for one another while pursuing our great, triune God.

### Qualifications for Leading

We believe that God has called all believers to serve and minister in the local church. While the elders desire for all members of Refuge to serve according to the gifts God has given them, some areas of leadership, especially areas of teaching, may be closed to members who hold settled convictions contrary to the beliefs that Refuge holds. These "firm-handed" issues can include aspects of God's creative works, the nature of God's sovereignty in relation to humankind's responsibility, or the biblical sexual ethic. The desire is not to make "second class" members, but to faithfully protect the members and regular attenders at Refuge from teaching that disagrees with the biblical witness.

### The Communal Disciplines

In being part of the local church, we are called to love and care for one another. This includes building deep, lasting relationships and being open, honest, and vulnerable with one another. Our society tends to push us toward individualism and isolationism, but the call to the Christian life is one of mutual dependence and community with believers in the local church.

To pursue this call of the Christian life together, we corporately practice the communal disciplines. The six disciplines we practice are predicated on Jesus' call to "love one another." These disciplines are:

- Greet One Another – Honestly caring for one another and seeking to invite honesty and openness in relationships.
- Encourage One Another – Helping others see and understand their worth and value as an image bearer of God.
- Live in Harmony with One Another – Seeking the unity of the local church and working to understand and love others.
- Bear with One Another – Welcoming the confession of sin, bearing the hurts and sorrows of others, and bringing the hope of God in all situations.
- Serve One Another – Regularly seeking to help others in their needs and sacrificially working for the good of others.
- Teach and Instruct One Another – Giving and receiving instruction to encourage others in their knowledge and pursuit of God.

The elders regularly call all members at Refuge to practice the communal disciplines to encourage, support, and sustain the life of local covenant community.

### Church Membership

At Refuge, we hold covenanting, church membership in high regard. While there is not an explicit command in scripture for church membership, we believe that being part of a covenanting Christian community is essential for the on-going maturity of believers.

Members of Refuge receive the benefits of close fellowship with one another, the opportunity for leadership within the church, and the best of the elders' time, effort, attention, and care.

To become a member at Refuge, people are asked to attend the Refuge Essentials class, sit down with the elders for a membership interview, and agree to the Membership Covenant.

The Membership Covenant can be found in Appendix A and the ancillary Consent to Shepherd document can be found in Appendix B.

### The Personal Practice of Worship

At Refuge, we encourage everyone to worship God continuously in their lives. Personal worship takes many different forms, but each expression of worship

toward God is fundamentally rooted in awe of his past and present actions and a deep, intimate relationship with him.

To continuously worship God, we must understand his revealed truth. Therefore, worship must start with the Bible. It is there that we read and understand God's mighty works that evoke our worship. But simply reading of these works is not enough for us to be drawn into worship. We are also called into the personal, spiritual discipline of meditation.

In meditation, we take a passage or truth about God and spend time in solitude and silence reflecting on it. As we do, the Holy Spirit works in us to understand the depths of God's love, mercy, grace, provision, care, guidance, and discipline so that we are drawn into worship of him and greater affection for him.

As part of God's people, we need to consistently be engaging in the disciplines of study, prayer, meditation, and fasting. These disciplines help us grow in our worship of God by growing in our knowledge of his truth, communing with him in confession and thanksgiving, contemplating our great need for redemption and his inexhaustible love toward us in the gospel, and understanding our daily need for him to satisfy our wants and needs. Through this we grow in our worship of and love for our triune God.

### The Corporate Practice of Worship

Personal worship is only part of our calling as worshipful beings. We were created for community and called into community by our God. Therefore, we benefit from consistent corporate worship with the local body of Christ primarily through Sunday morning worship gatherings.

When we gather together as Refuge on a Sunday morning, we gather with the express purpose of worshipping God in community. Our entire time is shaped by our desire to remember the mighty acts of God, primarily God's saving work through Jesus Christ, and stirring our affections for him.

The order of our time of worship is structured to tell God's great story that is found in the Bible: creation, rebellion, redemption, and restoration. The music selection, the responsive readings, the time of offering, the preaching of God's Word, and the partaking of the communion meal all point to this story. Each element draws us, as a people, to worship God and reflect on our new relationship with him.

It is essential that we meet together for corporate worship. It is through the continuous worship and teaching of the corporate body that we grow in our relationship with Jesus and are drawn into deep worship of our triune God.

### God and His Mission

The grand narrative found in the Bible – Creation, Rebellion, Redemption, and Restoration – centers around God himself. God created. His creation rebelled against him. He wrought redemption through his own life, death, and resurrection. He will restore all things to their proper aim and purpose. In this great story, God is the central figure. Therefore, when we speak of the Church’s mission, we refer to God calling us into his mission and allowing us to participate in it.

When God created all things, he created them with a specific purpose in mind. The goal of his creation was to worship him, glorify him, and enjoy him forever. The first line of the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” Yet, in our rebellion against him, we decided to worship ourselves instead of our creator who deserves all glory.

To restore creation to its God-glorifying role, the eternal Son, the second person of our triune God, assumed humanity. While on earth, he worked toward God’s ultimate mission of restoring creation to its role of worshipping God and loving him. He did this through restoring sight to the blind, casting out demons, healing lepers, and pushing back the effects of the fall. He did these mighty acts of love and compassion while preaching of the redemption that he would accomplish on the cross and through the resurrection, a redemption that would restore the relationship between God and his people.

This redemption and restoration is the grand sum of God’s mission. Through his constant action in our world, God is working toward the day when he will, once and for all, set all things right.

As part of the Church, we recognize that this life is not about *our* mission, but *God’s*. Our sorrow and joy, tears and laughter, work and leisure, needs and bounty, are all tied up into God’s mission to redeem and restore his creation.

### Tangible Missions at Refuge

At Refuge, we seek to engage the world with both the Good News of God’s redemption and tangible acts of love. Both are part of our God’s call to us to participate in his mission.



Locally, we serve St. Charles and the surrounding community as a church body through a ministry organization called Serve St. Charles. Serve has multiple events throughout the year, including food drives, clothing drives, and the yearly Christmas store for low income families.

Our Gospel Community Groups have multiple mission projects that they engage in. Some help at local thrift stores that are focused on helping low-income families. Others serve joyfully by doing yardwork in the community where they are located.

As we are engaged in these tangible acts of ministry to the surrounding community, we seek to share God's great love by telling others of the hope we have in Jesus. Our actions and words are always tied together to bring God's mission of redemption forth in St. Charles and the surrounding community.

Refuge also seeks to partner in God's mission nationally and internationally by planting and supporting Gospel-preaching churches. We partner with a number of Acts 29 churches to help new or struggling churches as they seek to spread the Good News of our triune God's redemption in their communities.

Globally, Refuge partners with a number of organizations to spread God's gospel and care for the needs of the global community. For example, we support the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary in Beirut, Lebanon, as they train pastors and ministers to reach out to the Arab world.



## Appendix A – Membership Covenant

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another..."

-Hebrews 10:19-25

### Purpose

When a person becomes a Christian by believing in Jesus and repenting from their sins they are brought into a new relationship with God. When this happens, we are made sons and daughters of the Most High – we are adopted into the family of God.

All of God's children are called to love God and obey his commands. We walk with him for a lifetime as we grow in our knowledge of who he is and as we live out his transforming power with the help of the Holy Spirit. We do not do this alone, God gives us a family and a home where we can grow in our faith, receive encouragement and correction, practice loving and serving others, and worship together. This family is called the Church and every believer is commanded by Scripture to participate in one of Her local expressions.

This covenant is Refuge's way of formally recognizing these commitments to one another and clarifying our understanding of what these commitments should look like. This covenant is not a promise that the elders or the membership will never fail you in these commitments, nor are you promising to keep these commitments perfectly. Rather, it is an affirmation that we are in agreement concerning:

- Core Christian doctrines
- The calling on all believers to be active participants within the lives of God's people
- Our intentions regarding how we will strive to love and serve the members of Refuge

With the help of the Holy Spirit, the ELDERS commit to the following:

1. We covenant to lovingly care for you and seek your growth in Christ (Heb. 13:17; I Thess. 5:12)
2. We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from the Scriptures (Gal. 6:6; I Tim. 5:17-18), and that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27-38)
3. We covenant to help you in times of need (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; James 2:14-17)
4. We covenant that elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in the Scriptures (I Tim. 3:1-13; 5:17-33; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4)
5. We covenant to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14)

6. We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31)
7. We covenant to exercise church discipline and guidance with humility and care (Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5; Gal 6:1)
8. We covenant to help you become equipped to serve Christ (Eph. 4:11-13)
9. We covenant to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study the Scriptures and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-5)
10. We covenant to set an example in fulfilling the duties of membership (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17)
11. We covenant to provide counsel and care to all who call Refuge home, but to make the care of our members a priority when we are limited by resources, time, or capacity

I willingly enter into MEMBERSHIP at Refuge and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, commit to the following:

1. I am a Christian who has been saved from my sins by the grace of Jesus Christ.
2. I have been, or am willing to be, baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in obedience to the Scriptures and as a testimony of my identification with Christ and His body.
3. I will submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final standard of belief and practice.
4. I will submit to the leadership and authority of the elders, trusting that they labor for my good. As flawed men, I understand they will often err and I will bring my questions and concerns in a gracious and peaceable way.
5. I will continue growing in my relationship with God through: regular times in the Scriptures, regular times of personal and corporate prayer, and regular fellowship with believers.
6. I will work to cultivate meaningful spiritual relationships with the people of Refuge for our mutual encouragement and care. I will also reject any actions or motives that could disrupt the unity of this people, such as: non-attendance, gossip, division, slander.
7. I will attempt to faithfully and sacrificially steward the resources God has given me - including my time (serving), talents (skills and abilities), and treasures (finances).
8. I have read and understand Refuge's "Core Beliefs" as outlined in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. I affirm my own personal belief in these doctrines and recognize that I will be removed from membership if I ever come to hold a *settled conviction* against any of these doctrines.
9. I have read and understand Refuge's vision and values as outlined in the Refuge Essentials binder and agree to support the mission of Refuge.

10. I am aware of Refuge's church discipline practices as outlined in the Consent to Shepherd and agree to abide by the beliefs and practices outlined there. I understand that this document is a helpful guide but each situation requires much wisdom and care as discipline is specifically implemented.
11. I will not function in leadership or as a member in another church family as long as I am a member at Refuge.

## Appendix B – Consent to Shepherd

### The Purpose of Church Discipline? Pursuing Faith and Repentance in Love

The elders of Refuge take the role of shepherd seriously. With Jesus as our Chief-Shepherd, God has given pastors to the church as imperfect - yet Spirit-filled - under-shepherds. Godly leaders are a gift to the church for her guidance, encouragement, protection, growth, and care (Eph. 4:11-13). One of the ways the elders are called to provide this care is through the practice of church discipline (Matt. 18:18-20, Heb. 13:17).

Martin Luther said “All of the Christian life is repentance.” Church discipline is a restorative process designed to help a Christian who cannot or will not repent return to Jesus as their only hope and true identity (Gal. 6:1). *Repentance* is the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s people to move their desires away from rebellion and wickedness and toward worship and righteousness. Repentance looks at both the heart and actions, but it only looks at actions in so far as they are the battlefield where the issues of the heart come to light. This means that many sinful actions will never warrant formal discipline since the believer is actively fighting for faith within the context of an honest community. This also means that many “harmless” sins can become occasions for formal church discipline if they provide a window into a heart that is determined to be hard, rebellious, and resistant to calls for repentance. The entire discipline process is aimed at answering the question: *Is there evidence of repentance? However imperfectly, are they fighting for faith in Jesus?* If so, the process ends. They will still need ongoing encouragement, support, and teaching. But the crisis has passed, the prodigal son has come home!

### Kinds of Discipline: Formative vs. Corrective; Informal vs. Formal

The Holy Spirit is the only one who can produce repentance in the human heart. The elders cannot do it. Following a process cannot do it. This means that any discipline should be carried out with hope and constant prayer. The Scriptures give clear commands regarding how ongoing unrepentance or gross sin should be handled (Matt. 18, 1 Cor. 5, 1 Tim. 5:20) . Church discipline does not replace the Holy Spirit, but when done in faith and love it is where He has promised He will intervene for the good of His people.

The bible teaches that church discipline can be both **formative** (teaching, encouraging, etc.) and **corrective** (rebuking, admonishing, etc.). The goal of church discipline is never to be solely *punitive* toward the disciplined individual, but rather it is aimed at the *restoration* of the believer by returning them from the path of death to the path of life (2 Thess. 3:15). The goal of all church discipline is three-fold:

- the spiritual health of the individual being disciplined
- the preservation of the doctrinal purity of the church
- the preservation of the unity of the church

*Formative discipline* is almost always informal and is constantly happening all around us. It entails the everyday encouragements, gentle reminders, and course corrections needed to continue in a life of faith and repentance. Examples of formative discipline could include:

- conversations in gospel community groups
- spiritual conversations with other members
- listening to sermons
- bible studies with other believers

*Corrective discipline* becomes necessary when the minor course corrections of formative discipline become ineffective in the life of a believer. Corrective discipline can begin informally but can become formal if repentance is not reached after a length of time. Some examples of informal corrective discipline could include:

- One on one discipleship or accountability with a member of Refuge
- Bringing your sin to your GC for ongoing encouragement and prayer
- Receiving counsel from a Refuge member, leader, or Christian counselor

The goal at each step is for the believer to turn from sin and renew their trust in Jesus. When the informal avenues of discipline do not lead to repentance, it becomes necessary to pursue *formal corrective discipline*. This may include some or all of the following:

- Meeting with the elders of Refuge to discuss the sin and condition of your heart
- Agreeing to see a Christian counselor upon the recommendation of the elders
- Agreeing to enter into an intensive mentoring/discipleship relationship with a mature member
- Agreeing to provide regular (monthly) status updates regarding your struggle with sin

### “Tell it to the church”: Why and How

When even these measures fail to produce repentance (Matt. 18:15-16), it may become necessary to *publicly take the issue before the covenant members* of Refuge (Matt. 18:17). This painful step requires great wisdom and care on the part of the elders. In the majority of cases this step is reserved for cases where the individual has been encouraged toward repentance over a number of formal and informal meetings, spanning a number of weeks or months. If, after repeated attempts to “win the brother back” the elders determine that the individual is **continuing in persistent, unrepentant sin** the eldership of Refuge, at their discretion, will inform the membership of the situation. This may include making certain private details public if the eldership deems this information helpful and necessary in understanding the scope of sin or the actions required from the membership of Refuge. Any person consenting to membership at Refuge Church is acknowledging that they have no expectation of *complete* confidentiality. The elders take confidentiality very seriously and will never abuse confidences, however in

some church discipline cases it may become necessary to make private information public with great care and discretion (Matt:18:15-20).

Notifying the membership of an instance of church discipline could take the form of:

- An email to all current members
- An announcement at a regularly scheduled, or specially called members meeting

The notification would consist of:

- Stating the name of the individual under discipline
- A general description of the sin and the situation leading to discipline
- A general explanation of the steps leading up to the public notification of members
- A notice from the elders announcing the intention to remove the individual from membership in the next 30 days if they continue in unrepentance
- A recommendation from the elders regarding how the membership is encouraged to interact with the individual under discipline (pursue, encourage, plead, avoid, etc.)

In the event that an individual is brought publicly before the church and refuses to repent, they will be removed from membership after 30 days unless otherwise specified. Then, depending on the nature of the situation they may either be permitted to continue attending Refuge as an unbeliever or in some cases may be completely banned from attending Refuge.

The goal of all church discipline is always for the repentance and restoration of the individual. This process should be filled with deep hope and earnest prayer. Church discipline is done *in love*, and even when the individual must be removed from membership they are still loved and the desire is still for their restoration.

### Atypical Cases

The steps outlined above reflect the general course of action outlined in Scripture. However, some cases require more immediate action.

### Gross Sin

In cases where gross sin has been committed, it may be necessary to bring some details of the situation to the church immediately. Examples of these kinds of situations could include:

- When a leader publicly sins in a way that is damaging to the church or the name of Jesus
- Heinous sins that imply extreme premeditation, deceit, or spiritual numbness
- Sins that present a real and immediate risk to the safety of Refuge members



In these cases it may be necessary to withhold the “benefit of the doubt” and to take action quickly to protect the spiritual and physical safety of the church and its membership. Even in these cases the person being disciplined is not to be ostracized, but loved.

### **Division**

Jesus tells us that the onlooking world will know we are Christians by our love for one another. This means that our greatest witness to God’s goodness and glory is our unity. If the elders determine that a member is intentionally attacking this unity by building alliances or causing factions it may be necessary, for the good of the body, to remove that person immediately (Titus 3:10). In this case, the elders will continue to work with the individual, but will need to monitor their interactions with other members.

### **False Teaching**

False teaching is the most damaging thing a person can do to a body of believers. Wrong understanding is part of the normal Christian life and God has given us the tools to combat it - regular teaching/preaching, humble reflection, and prayer. However, false teaching implies an *intentional attack* against the very pillars of our faith with a *desire to entice others into error*. If it becomes evident that a member is involved in false teaching the elders will act quickly to correct the error publicly, warn the membership about the individual and their teaching, and remove the individual from membership.

### **Retraction of Membership**

It is not uncommon for someone under church discipline to bristle at having their sin exposed. They will often feel “called to another church” or will drop out of church completely. It is the conviction of the elders that leadership’s role in church discipline has not ended at this point. Rather, these actions prove that the member is indeed running from accountability to God and community and needs to be pursued (Gen. 3:8-10).

Therefore, an individual may not terminate their membership while involved in a church discipline process. Should the member become unresponsive during the discipline process, the elders, at their discretion and after a reasonable amount of time and at least 2 attempts to make contact with the individual, will take the matter before the church. If the member chooses to attend another church during a disciplinary process, or after being removed from membership, the eldership will make the circumstances of the disciplinary process known to the leadership of the other church.

If during the discipline process the individual determines that they are not a Christian, the elders will cease the discipline process, which is reserved for Christians, and will make known to the membership that during the course of church discipline the individual chose to withdraw their Christian confession and will be removed from membership.

### **Restoration: Our Prayer and His Promise**

It is difficult to expose sin, die to ourselves, follow Christ, and entrust ourselves to a larger community. While extremely difficult at times, church discipline is intended to be healing and

restorative. God has given the Church the tools of discipline and correction as a means of working his grace into the lives of his people. God disciplines those he loves and commands that his Church do the same. This gives us hope that this difficult process can actually work! Believers who are stuck in sin will actually turn back! God will not abandon his own - and correction is one of the ways he has promised his presence with us. This means that at every step of the way the people of God are called to love, weep, and pray for our unrepentant brothers and sisters with full confidence that He who began a good work in them will be faithful to complete it.