

STONE PARTNERSHIP | WHAT WE BELIEVE

(Also known as our Bylaws as a church)

Welcome! This *What We Believe* packet briefly sets out the vision and values of Stone Church in 5 main parts. We believe that church attendance is good, but church partnership is better. At Stone Church, we describe membership as a partnership as we seek to partner together around our vision! *What We Believe* provides the essentials that anyone exploring joining Stone Church needs to know. We'd love you to join us on our adventure of faith as we enjoy Jesus as a family here in our corner of the world! *What We Believe* does not include our doctrinal statement which can be found on the About page of our website.

PART 1 | THE BIG PICTURE **3 MISSION DEFINING CONVICTIONS**

Jesus, family, and Auburn are the words we use to sum up the mission and purpose of Stone Church. They are much more than words though – they are burning convictions about what Jesus has called us into. Our vision as a church is **to see more and more people in auburn meet Jesus and be added to his family!**

Jesus | Jesus said, "I am the LIGHT of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life (John 8)." At the center of Stone Church is Jesus. Jesus promised salvation to all who would call upon him as the resurrected Savior of the world! By believing in Jesus as the one who suffered for your sin and rose from the grave to give you a new life, you are now secure in God's family forever!

Family | Through Christ, we become adopted into God the Father's family and are now brothers and sisters in Christ. This breaks through all dividing walls or stereotypes. Our differences no longer define us. We are members of the same family and united by a deeper meaning than anything else on earth.

Auburn | Jesus told the Apostle Paul, "there are many in this city who are my people (Acts 18:10)." We believe the same for our city! We want more and more people to come to the full knowledge of who their creator and Savior is. We are for Auburn! We also have a passion for **mission** beyond Auburn, into the South Sound and beyond. Church planting through the Advance family of churches is our primary focus for this. We also help fund an orphanage in Tijuana called La Hermosa which helps care for and disciple young boys and girls.

PART 2 | EXPECTATIONS OF PARTNERSHIP

To identify as a partner (or member) of a local church is a significant thing that carries both privileges and responsibilities. You can expect to be blessed as you choose to identify as part of this family! At Stone Church we understand church partnership to be one of the ways we work out discipleship as we demonstrate our commitment to the body and bride of Christ. As those who are committed, there are particular expectations.

Believer's Baptism | We love baptisms! We believe that the biblical basis for baptism is that it is only for those who have already responded in **faith to Jesus**. If you would like to become a partner at Stone Church, you must first have received salvation in and through Jesus Christ! Baptism does not save us, but it is a powerful sign and declaration of our saving faith in Jesus. Because believer's baptism is so crucial it is something we desire for all those committing to

partnership. Sometimes this can be an issue for those who have been baptized as infants and want to become a partner of Stone. If this is you, we would love to chat with you about it!

Commitment | Partnership at Stone is practically committing to and “leaning into” 4 things:

1. **SUNDAYS** – Help advance the gospel at Stone on Sundays by joining a Serve Team and coming ready for what God’s going to do amongst us!
2. **DISCIPLESHIP** – Lean into being discipled in relationship. The primary avenue for this is joining a Family Night (mid-week group), where we build one another up as a loving family.
3. **GIVE** – Give regularly and sacrificially so the church can grow in health and number. *“Each one must give as he has decided in his heart ... for God loves a cheerful giver.” We give joyfully!*
4. **UNITY** – Strive for unity with one another, the overall vision and your leaders:
 1. **With one another** | As Philippians 1:27 says, *“So that I may hear that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.”*
 2. **With the overall vision** | As Matthew 28:18 encourages, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*
 3. **With the leaders serving you** | As Hebrews 13:17 establishes, *“Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no benefit to you.”*

We believe these 4 things are healthy for all Christians and specifically what making disciples at Stone Church is all about. If for whatever reason you are unable to lean into any of these for a season that is okay! We understand different seasons require different adjustments. If you ever find yourself unable to commit to 2 out of the 4, please have a conversation with your Family Night leader or an elder so we can care for you and walk alongside you. These 4 things are not a “test,” but rather a sign of commitment and health!

PART 3 | HOW WE DO CHURCH LIFE

5 KEY VALUES

Gospel Centered. It’s not about us or what we’ve done: it is all about Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Jesus is the hero! Whether in our teaching on a Sunday or in conversations at the school gate the gospel is at the heart of all we say and do.

Mission Focused. The local church is a mission movement and not just a gathering of people. We aim to engage with our context, helping people see their need of God, and speaking of a true hope. We need to create the right atmosphere for mission and not be afraid of making mistakes. We constantly try new ways of sharing the gospel as Jesus sends us into our city!

Disciple Making. Jesus was extremely clear in his command to *make disciples*. Our primary way of making disciples at Stone Church is in relationship through our Family Nights. As we grow in relationship, we grow in discipleship of Jesus and one another.

Spirit Empowered. We cannot do any of this without the Spirit empowering us. Jesus tells us in John 7:37-39 that from our hearts will flow rivers of living water. To experience the presence of the Spirit begins by believing in Jesus! Being Spirit empowered gives us great power to do things which, on our own, would be impossible. Being Spirit-empowered means we intentionally seek the presence, fruit and gifts of the Spirit. We fully believe the gifts of the Spirit are for the church of Jesus today! We invite the gifts actively as a church body!

Elder Led. The apostle Paul describes the church as, “A pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The local church is meant to be solid and reliable, and this means it needs structures of organization and leadership. We understand that the local church should be a well-functioning family with father-like elders in place who are qualified by both character and ability. The security provided by the elders enables all church members to flourish in the gifts God has given them. We believe the wives of elders play a key role in the discipleship and shepherding of the church.

PART 4 | WE AFFIRM THE APOSTLES CREED **WRITTEN IN 1390, THIS CREED HAS UNIFIED CHRISTIANS FOR CENTURIES!**

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic (meaning united) Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PART 5 | GENDER ROLES **AS IT RELATES TO ELDERS AND DEACONS**

This is an open hand issue – meaning it is not our desire to argue over this stance and we can agree with brothers and sisters in Christ who take a differing stance than us. Our only source of inspiration regarding this topic is the Bible’s instruction.

Male and Female Deacons. Stone Church has both male and female deacons who serve the church through leading serve teams and Life Groups. The deacons serve alongside the elders as a team of servants guiding and caring for the church. The two main passages informing our view for male and female deacons are 1 Timothy 3:8 and Romans 16:1.

1 Timothy 3:8-11 *In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. 9 They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. 11 In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*

Both sections which list elder qualifications (1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:5-9) lack qualifications for wives or women. The term translated here as women is also often used to refer to a wife or wives. This ambiguity is argued over by those who think women should or should not be deacons, but there is one clear example of a woman being considered a deacon.

Romans 16:1-2 *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.*

Regarding this topic, Thomas Schreiner states: *“The question as to whether women should serve as deacons is unclear in the Bible, and so it makes sense that sincere interpreters of Scripture differ on the matter. Thus, we must beware of dogmatism and an uncharitable spirit when adjudicating the evidence. The issue is addressed directly in only two verses (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11), and the meaning of both is disputed. The disagreement surfaces in English translations. Romans 16:1 in the NIV reads, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.” The CSB translates the same verse, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae.” A similar difference shows up in 1 Timothy 3:11, rendered in the NIV: “In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.” The CSB translates it as, “Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.” The NIV in using the word “women” suggests they were deacons, while the CSB inclines to “wives” of deacons. Local churches don’t have the luxury of leaving the matter undecided. They have to decide whether women will serve as deacons, and I will argue that the best reading of the evidence supports women serving as such.”*

- You can read the full article at the Gospel Coalition: “Does the Bible Support Female Deacons? Yes.”

Male Elders. Stone Church eldership is reserved for qualified male elders who work in tandem with their wives and the deacons to guide and shepherd the church. The two main passages informing our view for male only elders are 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Many egalitarian pastors and theologians that we respect, like John Mark Comer and Dallas Willard have concluded these qualifications are for women as well. Although we disagree with them for our personal context, we respect their contribution to the conversation and seek to learn from them with a humble heart. It's also helpful to note that complementarian eldership is a requirement for Advance partnership. This is a uniting characteristic of every Advance church.

WHAT NEXT?

If after reading this packet you feel led to partnering together around the vision of Stone Church, please chat with your Life Group leader or an elder at a Stone Church service.