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Bylaws of Vine Church

Carbondale, IL

(Approved 03/02/2025)

Article I: Name, Location and Purpose

Section 1: Name

The name of this church shall be Vine Church, Inc. (hereafter referred to as "Church").

Section 2: Location

The principal office of the Church shall be located at 1445 S Wall St, Carbondale, IL 62901.

Section 3: Purpose

The purpose of the Church is to glorify God by living in joyful surrender to Jesus our King by:

1. Gathering to worship God
2. Preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ
3. Teaching the members to obey all that Jesus Christ has commanded
4. Loving one another as members of the body of Jesus Christ
5. Equipping the members for ministry to the Church and witness to the world

Article II: General

Section 1: Organization

The Church is an independent organization. It may partner with other organized entities. All elders, deacons, members, staff and other persons acting on behalf of the Church, or at the request of the Church, shall abide by these bylaws.

Section 2: Statement of Faith

All of the policies and actions of the Church and its members shall not conflict with the Member Statement of Faith (**Exhibit B**). In addition to the Member Statement of Faith, the Church affirms the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed.

Article III: Membership

Section 1: Qualifications

All who profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are members of the universal body of Christ and are invited to membership in the local body of Christ with the Church. A candidate for membership in the Church must complete the Membership Series, sign the Member Covenant (**Exhibit A**), be approved of by the elders and be welcomed into membership at a members' meeting.

Section 2: Church Discipline

Members whose conduct consistently or grievously contradicts the teaching of Jesus Christ will be subject to church discipline as required in Matthew 18:15-20. The process for church discipline is outlined in our Commitment to Discipline and Accountability within our Relational Commitments (**Exhibit E**). Members who refuse to repent may be subject to dismissal from membership.

Section 3: Termination

Membership may be terminated by death, resignation or dismissal. A resignation from membership is possible only when a member is not in the process of church discipline. Periodically, at the discretion of the elders, members will be removed who have left the Church without consulting the elders or have been inactive for more than six months.

Section 4: Transference

Members in good standing may request a letter of recommendation to present to a different church. Members who unite with a different church will be removed from membership in the Church.

Section 5: Indemnification

Members, and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or engage with the Church, agree that there shall be no appeal to any court because of dismissal from the Church or because of public statements to the Church at the later stages of church discipline.

Section 6: Meetings

There shall be a regular members' meeting not less than four times per year. In addition to other objectives, the members' meeting will be an occasion for reaffirming the Member Covenant and recommending and installing new officers in the Church.

Article IV: Officers

Section 1: Elders

All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus Christ. He is the head of his body, the church. Jesus Christ has established the office of elder (overseer, bishop, shepherd, pastor) in the church to be held by a plurality of qualified men who govern the church under the authority of Jesus Christ according to his words contained in the Bible.

IV.1.A. Qualifications

Elders are tasked with the ordination of elders and welcome help and insight from the members in identifying capable and qualified individuals. An elder must meet the following qualifications:

1. Be a member of the Church
2. Agree to the Elder Covenant (**Exhibit C**) and Elder Statement of Faith (**Exhibit D**)
3. Posses a godly aspiration from the Holy Spirit to serve humbly in this noble task

4. Exhibit character qualities that place him above reproach in private and public life as prescribed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9
5. Maintain and promote Biblical unity amongst the elders, deacons and members
6. Be approved by the other elders and tested by the members

IV.1.B. Ordination

Upon the identification of a candidate from the elders or members, the candidate will be assessed based upon the qualifications of the office. The candidate will then be asked to serve in the office and presented before the members of the Church for examination. The members will then have 21 days to bring any relevant or potentially biblically disqualifying concerns to the elders. If there are no valid objections, the man will be ordained by the elders through the laying on of hands at the next members' meeting.

IV.1.C. Responsibilities

The elders are responsible for prayer, teaching the whole counsel of God, conducting worship services, administering the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, approving new members, overseeing the process of church discipline, terminating membership, installing new elders and deacons, equipping the members for the work of ministry, shepherding the flock of God by providing care and counseling for members, performing weddings and funerals, overseeing the work of volunteers and contractors, reporting and recording official Church business and mobilizing the Church for its purpose.

IV.1.D. Composition

The eldership is composed of staff and non-staff elders. Staff elders receive compensation from the Church and non-staff elders serve voluntarily without financial support from the Church. The elders are equal in authority and decision-making power. They may serve in different roles that correspond to their spiritual gifts. The elders will designate who serves in which role.

In compliance with the State of Illinois, the elders will designate a Board of Directors to serve in compliance with the State's requirements for a Not for Profit 501 c3 organization. That Board will meet the State's requirements with the following officers of President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer. The Board will not have less than three members. All of the members will be elders. While there may be exceptions, the goal is for at least half of the Board to be made up of non-staff elders.

The Board will have the following responsibilities:

1. To recommend an annual budget for the Church to be approved by the elders
2. To oversee the accounting and disbursement of funds by the Bookkeeper
3. To execute legal documents relating to real estate, Church property, and Church finances with the approval of the elders

4. The non-staff elders on the Board will fix compensation and approve employee contracts

IV.1.E. Removal

An elder shall be removed from the office in the following instances:

1. Departure from Biblical qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9
2. Breach of belief or practice of the Member Statement of Faith, Member Covenant, Elder Statement of Faith or Elder Covenant
3. Failure to maintain and promote Biblical unity amongst the elders, deacons and members
4. Failure to faithfully fulfill the responsibilities of an elder as stated in IV.1.C above
5. Any other failure that would fall under the category of actions that demand church discipline

A majority of the elders must agree for an elder to be removed from the office. Upon removal, his ordination shall be revoked. When an elder is removed because of sin that is deemed sufficient to disqualify him from the office, his removal shall be accompanied by a public rebuke and notice shall be made to the Church as prescribed in 1 Timothy 5:20.

IV.1.F. Quorum

A quorum represents at least one half of the staff and one half of the non-staff elders. A quorum of elders must be present and unanimously agree on changes to the Member Statement of Faith, Member Covenant, Elder Statement of Faith or Elder Covenant. Otherwise, decisions will be made with a majority of the elders present and with a majority consensus.

Section 2: Deacons

Deacons are qualified men and women who serve by leading the many ministries of the Church. Because this office is not one of authority in areas of teaching and leading, men and women are eligible to serve in it. (Female deacons are not in violation of Paul's prohibition in 1 Timothy 2:12).

IV.2.A. Qualifications

Elders are tasked with the installment of deacons and welcome help and insight from the members in identifying capable and qualified individuals. A deacon must meet the following qualifications:

1. Be a member of the Church
2. Exhibit character qualities that place him or her above reproach in private and public life as prescribed in 1 Timothy 3:1-8-13
3. Maintain and promote Biblical unity amongst the elders, deacons and members

IV.2.B. Installment

Upon the identification of a candidate from the elders or members, the candidate will be assessed based upon the qualifications of the office. The candidate will then be asked to serve in the office and presented before the members of the Church for examination. The members will then have 21 days to bring any relevant or potentially biblically disqualifying concerns to the elders. If there are no valid objections, the deacon will be installed through the laying on of hands at the next members' meeting. A deacon will serve on an as needed basis or until they no longer desire to serve in the role.

IV.2.C. Responsibilities

The word for deacon literally means servant, and they serve by assisting the elders in caring for the Church, often meeting practical needs. These ministries include, but are not limited to, small groups, kids and youth programs, care and mercy ministries, women's ministries, men's ministries, missions, worship team, and finance.

IV.2.D. Removal

A deacon shall be removed from the office in the following instances:

1. Departure from Biblical qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13
2. Breach of belief or practice of the Member Statement of Faith or Member Covenant
3. Failure to maintain and promote Biblical unity amongst the elders, deacons and members
4. Failure to faithfully fulfill the responsibilities of a deacon as stated in IV.2.C.
5. Any other failure that would fall under the category of actions that demand church discipline

A majority of the elders must agree for a deacon to be removed from the office.

Article VI: Administrative Matters

Section 1: Church Employees

In addition to staff elders, the Church may employ additional personnel. The hiring and responsibilities of staff will be determined by the elders.

Section 2: Finances

No part of the contributions of the Church will inure to the benefit of, or be distributable to its elders, deacons, staff, members or other private persons, except that the Church will be authorized and empowered to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth herein.

Notwithstanding any other provisions of these articles, the Church will not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a church exempt from Federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law) or (b) by a church, contributions to which are

deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law).

VI.2.A. Budget

The financial planning of the Church shall be done through the medium of annual budgets for carrying out the various programs of its work. All contributions will be used to carry out the purpose of the Church.

VI.2.B. Accounts

Financial receipts from all sources shall be accounted for by the Bookkeeper according to the purposes for which contributions are designated. The Bookkeeper of the Church shall disburse these funds promptly according to the financial program of the Church as detailed in the budgets or other authorized designations.

VI.2.C. Indebtedness

No note or contract exceeding 1% of the total annual budget whereby the credit of the Church is pledged shall be made except by approval by the elders.

VI.2.E Financial Accountability

Procedures for financial oversight and security are established as described in the Financial Standards for Oversight and Security (**Exhibit F**).

VI.2.F Property

All property purchased by the Church will be held in the name of the Church. All funds received by the Church will be held in an account of the Church. No property will be distributed to elders, deacons, staff or members (unless of insignificant value). As a general rule, unused property will be sold for reasonable value or donated to another church or charity.

Section 3: Amendments

Any amendment to these Bylaws will be approved by the elders and communicated to the members.

Section 4: Dissolution

Upon the dissolution of the Church, the elders will, after paying or making provision for the payment of all of the liabilities of the Church, including any severance of current employees granted by the elders, dispose of remaining assets in the following manner: All remaining assets will be distributed for one or more exempt purposes within the meaning of section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, or the corresponding section of any future federal tax code. Specifically, the assets shall be given without cost to one or more like-minded churches and/or non-denominational, evangelical, or tax-exempt religious organizations. The elders shall choose the recipients.

Section 5: Indemnification

The Church indemnifies each of its elders, deacons and staff against reasonable expenses, judgments, fines, settlements and other amounts actually and reasonably incurred in connection with any proceeding, event, or decision arising out of the fact any such person is or was an elder, deacon or staff member and will advance to such person expenses incurred in defending any such proceeding to the maximum extent permitted by such laws provided such proceeding, event or decision was lawful and in accordance with the Bylaws. The elders may in its discretion provide by resolution for such indemnification of, or advance of expenses to, other representatives of the Church.

Attached Exhibits

- Exhibit A: Member Covenant
- Exhibit B: Member Statement of Faith
- Exhibit C: Elder Covenant
- Exhibit D: Elder Statement of Faith
- Exhibit E: Relational Commitments
- Exhibit F: Financial Standards for Oversight and Security

Member Covenant

Exhibit A

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

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Spirit and the instruction of the Bible, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and peace; to promote its spirituality and fruitfulness; and to sustain its worship, ordinances, and discipline.

We further engage to not neglect meeting together but to faithfully gather at Sunday services for worship; to uphold the Member Statement of Faith; to welcome, test biblically, and apply instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Statement of Faith; and to follow the leadership of the elders in accordance with the Elder Covenant and the Bylaws.

We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of this church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel in this city and among all the nations.

We will devote ourselves to the pursuit of holiness, welcoming the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, and striving to fight sin through regular confession and repentance, refusing to be conformed to the image of this world.

We further engage to maintain personal and family devotions; to seek the salvation of our friends and family; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to walk wisely in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our conduct.

We further engage to pursue consistent fellowship with other members; to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech.

We further engage to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay by keeping our Relational Commitments.

We further engage that when we remove from this place, we will notify the church leaders, and, if possible, unite with a like minded church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant.

Member Statement of Faith

Exhibit B

The members of Vine Church solemnly and joyfully affirm the following truths from the Bible.

The Word of God

We believe that the Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the authoritative and powerful Word of God, verbally inspired by God, and without error in the original manuscripts. We believe that God's intentions, revealed in the Bible, are the supreme and final authority in testing all claims about what is true and what is right. In matters not addressed by the Bible, what is true and right is assessed by criteria consistent with the teachings of Scripture.

The Trinity

We believe that there is one living and true God, eternally existing in three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; and that these are the same divine essence, are equal in every divine perfection, and that they execute distinct but harmonious offices in the work of creation, providence, and redemption.

God the Father

We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power, and love. We believe that he concerns himself mercifully in the affairs of men, that he hears and answers prayer, and that he saves from sin and death all who come to him through Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ

We believe in Jesus Christ, God's unique and eternal Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. We believe in his virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and teachings. We believe in his substitutionary atoning death, bodily resurrection, ascension into heaven, perpetual intercession for his people, and personal visible return to earth.

The Holy Spirit

We believe in the Holy Spirit sent into the world by God to glorify the Son of God. We believe that he convicts people of their sin and need for salvation, and without his work of regeneration no one would come to faith. We believe he indwells everyone who trusts in Jesus, providing guidance and power, and helps them make progress in overcoming sin and in becoming more like Jesus in thought, deed, and love for God the Father.

The Human Condition and Salvation

We believe that humanity was created by God in his own image and for his glory; but that we sinned and fell short of God's glory, and thus incurred physical, spiritual, and eternal separation from God. We believe that all humans are born with a sinful nature, and are

sinner by choice and therefore under condemnation. We reject justification based on any human effort, and we believe that only those who have been born again, and thus trust Jesus Christ as their Savior, by virtue of his atoning death on the cross and submitting to him as Lord of their lives, are adopted, delivered from condemnation, and receive eternal life. We believe that this faith leads to a heartfelt turning from sin. The Christian life involves growth in grace through persevering, Spirit-empowered resolve to reckon ourselves dead to sin and alive to Christ.

Marriage and Sexuality

We believe that marriage joins one man and one woman in a single, exclusive, lifelong union and that God designed and directs sexual intimacy exclusively for one man and one woman married to each other. Any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography, or any attempt to change or disagree with one's biological sex is sinful and offensive to God.

The Church, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper

We believe in one holy, universal Church made up of all who trust Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We believe that God calls us to unite with other believers in local churches to help each other to value Jesus above all else, to praise him together, to make disciples, to grow in our love and knowledge of him, and to stir each other up to good works. We believe that Christians should be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and regularly share in the Lord's Supper to remember Jesus until his return.

The Last Things and Two Destinies

We believe in the personal, visible, and bodily return of Jesus to earth and the establishment of his kingdom. We believe in the resurrection of the body, the final judgment of all people, the eternal happiness of the righteous in God's presence, and the eternal misery of the wicked.

The member statement of faith is adapted with permission from Cities Church.

Elder Covenant

Exhibit C

Having been called, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to hold the office of elder, and having been tested by the qualifications in Scripture and the members of the church, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with the members of Vine Church.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Spirit to pay careful attention to ourselves, keeping a close watch on our lives and teaching; and to oversee and care for the church which Jesus obtained with his blood.

We engage to manage our own household well, to love our wives as Christ loved the church and to not provoke our children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

We also engage to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ; to not shrink from declaring the whole counsel of God; to give instruction in sound doctrine and refute those who contradict it with complete patience and in accordance with the Elder Affirmation of Faith.

We further engage to be devoted to prayer, seeking God for the needs of the church with thanksgiving; to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up of the body of Christ; to preserve the unity of the Spirit and to warn those who are divisive so as to protect the church from division and harm.

We moreover engage to be servants of all; to lead the church with humility and love; and to make disciples of the nations with courage and faith.

Elder Statement of Faith

Exhibit D

While members are not required to affirm the elder statement of faith, they refuse to be divisive concerning the teaching of the elders which corresponds to it. That being said, the elders of Vine Church solemnly and joyfully affirm the following truths from the Bible.

SCRIPTURES

God and Revelation

Our eternal, transcendent, all-glorious God, who forever exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is by his very nature a communicative being. He both creates and governs through his words and has graciously revealed himself to humanity in order to commune with us. He has revealed himself through creation and providence in ways plain to all people, leaving no one without a testimony of himself. He also revealed himself through specific words, that we might come to a fuller knowledge of his character and will, learning what is necessary for salvation and life. Through the medium of human language, which is suitable and adequate for communication with those who bear his image, God has preserved in Holy Scripture the only authoritative and complete revelation for all humanity.

The Origin of Scripture

All of Scripture is breathed out by God, being accurately delivered through various human authors by the inspiration and sovereign agency of the Holy Spirit. We therefore receive the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments as the perfect, infallible, and authoritative Word of God. With the fullness of revelation given in Christ and his completed redemptive work, no new normative revelation will or need be given until Christ returns. In its original manuscripts, the whole of Scripture (and all its parts) is inerrant—without error in all it affirms. Because there is one divine author behind all of Scripture, we are able to arrive confidently at a harmonious, doctrinally unified understanding of the whole. Furthermore, God in his loving providence has determined to preserve his Word as pure and trustworthy throughout history, just as he guided the early church in discerning and identifying the canon of Scripture he inspired.

The Attributes of Scripture

Believers live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The Word of God is therefore necessary and wholly sufficient for knowing the Father's love in Christ, experiencing his glorious plan of redemption, and being instructed in the way of fruitful and godly living. The Word of God is clear, and everything we need in order to know, love, and fellowship with God can be plainly understood through ordinary means, without appeal to any human authority. Although not all Scripture is equally plain, when its intended meaning is misunderstood, the fault lies not in the clarity of God's communication but in the recipient. Scripture alone is our supreme and final authority and the rule of faith and life. The Scriptures must not be added to or taken away from, and all creeds, confessions, teachings, and prophecies are to be tested by the final authority of God's Word.

The Reception of Scripture

We come to know that the Bible is God's Word through Scripture's own self-attesting authority and by the work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness through the Word in our hearts. As the Scriptures are preached and read, the Spirit delights to illuminate our minds so that we understand, cherish, and obey his Word. God's intended meaning is revealed through the intentions of the inspired human authors, rendering the truth of God's Word a fixed, historical reality. Therefore, the Bible is to be prayerfully interpreted according to its context and original intent, with due regard to the progressive nature of revelation and the collective interpretation of believers through the ages. Ultimately, Scripture interprets Scripture, and the meaning of each text must be understood in light of the whole. As we devote ourselves to God's Word, we commune with God himself and are fortified in faith, sanctified from sin, strengthened in weakness, and sustained in suffering by his unchanging revelation in Scripture.

THE TRIUNE GOD

The Nature of God

There is only one true and living God, who is infinite in being, power, and perfections. God is eternal, independent, and self-sufficient, having life in himself with no need for anyone or anything. He is spirit, transcendent and invisible, with no limitations or imperfections, immutable, and everywhere present with the fullness of his being. His knowledge is exhaustive, including all things actual and possible, so that nothing—past, present, or future—is hidden from his sight. God is not divided into parts, but his whole being includes all of his attributes: he is entirely holy, loving, wise, just, good, merciful, gracious, and truthful. Our God is the infinite fountain of being who created all things, and all things exist by him and for him. He is supremely powerful to perform all his holy and perfect will, ruling over his creation with total dominion, righteousness, wisdom, and love. In his transcendence, God is incomprehensible in his being and actions, yet he reveals himself such that we can know him truly and personally.

The Holy Trinity

The one true God eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—infinately excellent and all-glorious. Each person is fully God, sharing the same deity, attributes, and essential nature, yet there is but one God. Each person is distinct, yet God is not by this distinction divided into three parts, natures, or gods. The Father has always existed as Father, the unbegotten fountain of all life. The Son has always existed as Son, eternally begotten of the Father, uncreated and without beginning, of one essence with the Father. The Holy Spirit has always existed as Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son, and of one essence with them. The Godhead thus exists in a perfect unity, indivisible as to nature and substance, yet inseparably distinguished as persons who enjoy a fullness of fellowship and love.

The Relations and Actions of the Trinity

The persons of the Trinity, being one in nature, are also inseparably united in their external works, such that to deal with one person is to deal with the Trinity as a whole. Yet within this unity there are distinctions in the way the divine persons relate to each other and to creation, although there is no

difference in essence or attributes. Within the Godhead, the ordered relations among the persons are eternal yet without any inequality. In the works of creation, providence, and redemption, the persons fulfill roles consistent with their eternal relations: the Father originates, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit completes. Nevertheless, the three, thus distinct, are neither divided nor mixed, are of one and the same essence, are equal from all eternity, and are worthy to be worshipped as the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES

God Ordains All Things for His Glory

From all eternity, God sovereignly ordained all that exists and all that occurs in his creation, in order to display the fullness of his glory. God's plans are efficacious, always coming to pass, and they are universal, encompassing all the affairs of nature, history, and individual lives. These decrees are an exercise of his free, unchangeable, wise, and holy will. Yet God, in his foreordination, is not the author of sin, nor do his decrees negate the will of his creatures, who act with the power of willing choice in accord with their nature. His ordaining and governing all things is compatible with his creatures' moral accountability such that God never condemns a person unjustly. Therefore, all persons are responsible for their actions, which have real and eternal consequences.

God's Grace in Election

God in his great love, before the foundation of the world, chose those whom he would save in Christ Jesus. God's election is entirely gracious and not at all conditioned upon foreseen faith, obedience, perseverance, or any merit in those whom God has chosen. His decision to set his saving love on the elect is based entirely on his sovereign will and good pleasure. The number of God's elect is fixed for eternity, and no one who has been chosen by God will be lost. In the mystery of his will, God passes over the non-elect, withholding his mercy and punishing them for their sins as a display of his holy justice and wrath.

As God has appointed the elect to glory, so has he foreordained all the means necessary to carry out his saving purposes. Those whom he has predestined are redeemed by Christ, effectually called to faith by his Spirit, justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by God's power to the end. God does all of this in order to demonstrate his mercy to the praise of his glorious grace.

Although attended with mystery, the doctrine of election should not produce speculation, introspection, apathy, or pride but rather humility, gratitude, assurance, evangelistic passion, and eternal praise for the undeserved grace of God in Christ.

CREATION, PROVIDENCE, AND MAN

God Creates and Rules All Things

In the beginning, the triune God freely created out of nothing the universe and everything in it by the word of his power, all for his own pleasure and the display of his glory. God declared the entirety of his

creation to be very good, and even in its fallen state it tells of his greatness and is to be delighted in and stewarded for his glory. As supreme Creator, God is separate from and transcendent over all he has made. As sovereign Lord, he is present with his creation to sustain all things, govern all creatures, and direct all circumstances in accord with his holy and loving will. In everything God supremely acts for his glory and for the good of his people in Christ, granting us great comfort and unshakable hope in God's love, wisdom, and faithfulness to us in this life and in eternity.

Man's Creation in God's Image

God created man, male and female, in his own image as the crown of creation and the object of his special care. God directly created Adam from the dust of the earth, and Eve from Adam's side, as the parents of the entire human race. They were created to know and glorify their Maker by trusting in his goodness and obeying his word. God gave them dominion over all creation, to fill, subdue, and steward the earth as his representatives. All human beings are likewise made in the image of God. Despite the effects of the fall on sinful humanity, all people remain God's image bearers, capable of fellowship with him and possessing intrinsic dignity and value at every stage of life from conception to death. Redemption in Christ progressively restores fallen men and women to their true humanity as they are conformed to the image of Christ.

Man as Male and Female

Men and women are both made in the image of God and are equal before him in dignity and worth. Gender, designated by God through our biological sex, is therefore neither incidental to our identity nor fluid in its definition, but is essential to our identity as male and female. Although the fall distorts and damages God's design for gender and its expression, these remain part of the beauty of God's created order. Men and women reflect and represent God in distinct and complementary ways, and these differences are to be honored and celebrated in all dimensions of life. To deny or seek to remove these differences is to distort a fundamental way in which we glorify God as male and female.

Marriage, Sexuality, and Singleness

Biblical manhood and womanhood enrich human flourishing in all its dimensions. God instituted marriage as the union of one man and one woman who complement each other in a one-flesh union that ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. This remains the only normative pattern of sexual relations for humanity. Husbands are to exercise headship sacrificially and with humility, and wives are to serve as helpers to their husbands, willingly supporting and submitting to their leadership. Together these complementary roles bring joy and blessing to each other and display the beauty of God's purposes to the world. Single men and women are no less able to enjoy and honor God and no less important to his purposes. They also are to give expression to God's image in distinct and complementary ways, flourishing as his image bearers and bringing him glory in their singleness.

MAN'S SIN AND ITS EFFECTS

The Origin of Sin

God originally created man innocent and righteous, without stain or corruption. In this state, Adam and Eve enjoyed a fullness of life in communion with God, delighting in him and his righteous will yet capable of transgressing. Despite these privileges, they were led astray by Satan and willfully sinned against their Creator by doing what he had forbidden. In their rebellion they doubted his character, rejected his authority, and disobeyed his word. Man's trespass of God's command brought enmity with God and the curse of death. Because God had established Adam as the representative head of the human race, his sin was imputed to all his descendants, bringing guilt, condemnation, and death to humanity. Therefore, we are all by nature corrupt and inclined to evil from conception.

The Effects of Sin

From the inherited corruption of humanity arise all the sins that we commit. All people are now by nature enemies of God, living under the power of Satan, subject to the curse of the law, and deserving of eternal punishment. Moreover, the whole nature of man has been corrupted by the fall, and no part of man is untainted by sin. Although fallen people remain in the image of God and manifest the virtues of common grace, they are incapable of pleasing God, meriting his favor, or freeing themselves from their bondage to sin. Their hearts are hardened, their understanding is darkened, their consciences are corrupted, their spiritual sight is blinded, and their deeds are evil. Therefore, all people are dead in sin and without hope apart from salvation in Jesus Christ.

The curse of the fall corrupted not only mankind but the entire created order, subjecting the world to futility, decay, and death. Both the cursed creation and moral evil produce calamity, suffering, hostility, and injustice in the world. The groaning of the created order reminds us of our fallenness and causes us to long for the redemption of all things under Christ.

THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Incarnation and Two Natures

In the fullness of time God the Father sent his eternal Son, the second person of the Trinity, into the world as Jesus the Christ. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, taking on himself a fully human nature with all its attributes and frailties, yet without sin. In this union, two whole, perfect, and distinct natures were inseparably joined together in the one person of the divine Son without confusion, mixture, or change. Our Redeemer acted in and through both his human and divine natures, in ways appropriate to each, with both natures being preserved and neither diminished by the other. Yet both his human and divine natures are united and find expression in the one person of the eternal Son. Thus our Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son incarnate, is fully God and fully man, able to be our all-sufficient savior and the only mediator between God and man.

Earthly Life and Ministry

As God's incarnate Son, our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated the kingdom of God, fulfilling God's saving purposes and all Old Testament prophecies about the One to come: he is the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Prophet like Moses, the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the Son of David, the Suffering Servant, and God's appointed Messiah. As such he was anointed by the Holy Spirit and lived a sinless life in complete obedience to his Father. Jesus entered into full human existence, enduring the common infirmities, temptations, and sufferings of mankind. He perfectly revealed the character of God, taught with divine authority and utter truthfulness, extended God's love and compassion, and demonstrated his lordship through the working of miracles and the exercise of divine prerogatives.

Death, Resurrection, and Reign

Having fully obeyed his Father in life, our Savior was also obedient unto death. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, dying a substitutionary death for the sins of his people. He was buried and arose bodily from the dead on the third day, vindicating his identity and saving work as God's Messiah and guaranteeing the defeat of death, our future resurrection, and the glorification of our physical bodies. Forty days later Jesus ascended bodily to heaven, where he is now enthroned at the right hand of God, reigning over all things, and interceding for his people as their Great High Priest. One day he will return to judge all people and angels, putting all his enemies under his feet and dwelling with his people forever.

THE SAVING WORK OF JESUS CHRIST

The Humiliation of Christ in His Saving Work

In the entirety of his life and death, Jesus Christ humbled himself to serve as our mediator in obedience to his Father's saving purposes. As the second Adam, his sinless life of wholehearted obedience to God's law obtained the gift of perfect righteousness and eternal life for all of God's elect. In his substitutionary death on behalf of his people, Christ offered himself by the Spirit as a perfect sacrifice, which satisfied the demands of God's law by paying the full penalty for their sins. On the cross, Christ bore our sins, took our punishment, propitiated God's wrath against us, vindicated God's righteousness, and purchased our redemption in order that we might be reconciled to God and live with him in blessed fellowship forever.

The Efficacy of Christ's Saving Work

God the Father was pleased to accept Christ's sacrifice as a complete atonement for sin, raising him to new life and vindicating his identity and work as the Messiah. For those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, God's righteousness requires no further sacrifice for sin, nor is there any human achievement or merit to be added to Christ's accomplishment. The atoning work of Christ is wholly efficacious, securing the full salvation of all the elect by purchasing the forgiveness of sins, the gifts of faith and repentance, eternal life, and every other blessing that comes to God's people. As the sole and sufficient atonement for sin, Christ's saving work is to be proclaimed to all people without exception as the only means of reconciliation with God. There is no other mediator between God and

man than our Savior, Jesus Christ, and he will receive with redeeming love all who come to him in faith.

The Exaltation of Christ in His Saving Work

The exaltation of Christ in his resurrection, ascension, and reign reveals the full glory of his mediatorial work. Raised by the power of God, Christ triumphed over sin, death, and Satan, and, as the firstfruits of the new creation, gives eternal life to all who are united to him by faith. Having ascended to the Father's right hand, Christ pours out the Spirit on his people and intercedes on their behalf as a Great High Priest, constantly advocating their cause and granting them access into God's presence. As the exalted Lord, Christ reigns with all authority as universal king and head of his church, governing the affairs of men and nations and empowering his people to be victorious over sin and Satan. The consummation of Christ's saving work will occur when he returns to judge the world in righteousness, deliver the kingdom to his Father, and receive eternal worship as King of kings and Lord of lords.

THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Person of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, who proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. He is equal in deity, attributes, and nature with the Father and the Son, and with them is to be worshipped and glorified. The Spirit manifests God's active presence in the world, giving life in God's creation and new creation. Existing forever with the Father and the Son, the Spirit is the agent of all blessing to God's creatures and makes possible communion with him.

The Work of the Spirit Prior to Christ's Coming

The eternal Spirit was present at the beginning of God's creation, carrying out the creative word of God and giving life to all things. In God's work under the old covenant, the Spirit was present with God's people to consecrate, deliver, guide, and grant saving faith in the promises of God. He empowered prophets to reveal God's Word, appointed elders to render judgment, raised up judges to bring deliverance, anointed priests and kings as his representatives, and inspired the record of old covenant revelation. Through all the institutions and offices of the Old Testament, the Spirit's work pointed to the ultimate revelation of God through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Work of the Spirit in Christ and the New Covenant

The Spirit's work in the new covenant centers on Christ and the church. It is by the Spirit that Jesus Christ was conceived and born of a virgin, anointed to fulfill his earthly ministry, empowered to offer his life as a sacrifice, and raised in resurrection power. After Christ ascended to the Father's right hand, the promised Holy Spirit descended at Pentecost and ushered in the new era of the Spirit's fullness, indwelling believers and empowering them for life and service. The Spirit glorifies Christ and bears witness to him, convicting the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. He inspired the record of new covenant revelation and makes it effective in people's hearts through the gift of regeneration. He illuminates God's Word to his people, assures them of God's love, comforts them with his presence, intercedes on their behalf, and sanctifies them in conformity to the image of Christ.

The Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ, the seal of our salvation, the firstfruits of our redemption, and the guarantee of our inheritance.

THE GOSPEL AND THE APPLICATION OF SALVATION BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Gospel

The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and all that he did in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish salvation for humanity. Therefore, the gospel is not a human action or achievement but rather an objective, historical, divine achievement that remains true and unchanging regardless of human opinion or response. The gospel stands as the core message of the Bible, which in all its parts testifies to God's saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ. This good news is the power of God for salvation for all who believe, providing hope for the lost and abiding comfort and strength for the believer. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.

Effectual Calling, Regeneration, and Conversion

God commands the gospel to be proclaimed to all people everywhere, but all people are spiritually dead and unable to respond to this saving news. Therefore, God graciously and effectually calls to himself those he chose to save in Christ. Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Holy Spirit regenerates the elect and brings them into a living union with Christ, bestowing new spiritual life, opening their eyes to see God's glory in Christ, and enabling them to respond to the gospel in faith and repentance. With a renewed heart and mind, we receive Christ and rely fully on him for salvation, turning from our sinful, self-seeking way of life to love and follow Christ in joyful obedience. Only those who respond to the gospel in this way will be saved, yet even this response is a gift of God's merciful grace, ensuring that he alone receives the glory for our salvation.

Justification and Adoption

In their union with Christ, believers freely receive all the benefits of the gospel. Those whom God effectually calls to himself, he justifies in Christ, forgiving all of their sins and declaring them righteous and acceptable in his sight. This declaration is judicial, addressing not our nature but our status with regard to God's law; it is definitive, being neither gradually gained nor able to be lost; and it is gracious, a free gift of God's righteousness based on nothing worked in us or by us, but received freely by faith. The sole ground of our justification is the righteousness of Christ, whose life of perfect obedience is imputed to us and whose substitutionary death on our behalf completely satisfies the demands of God's justice toward our sins. Those whom God justifies, he adopts into his family, granting them the full status, rights, and privileges of beloved sons. As God's children, we receive his name, enjoy access into his presence, experience his care and discipline, and eagerly await the glorious inheritance he promises his own.

Sanctification, Perseverance, and Glorification

As the all-sufficient Savior, Christ also sanctifies his people, cleansing them from the impurity of sin and setting them apart for God and his service. The renewing work of the Holy Spirit breaks their

bondage to sin and Satan and raises them to new life, enabling believers to put sin to death and grow in likeness to Christ. Sanctification is therefore both a definitive act of God and a progressive work of the Spirit. Believers must persevere in faith and obedience in order to be saved. Yet this perseverance is also a gift of God in Christ, who preserves his own and keeps them safe forever. The ultimate goal of sanctification is our full conformity to Christ's image, which will finally come when believers are raised physically with Christ in glory, freed from sin and exulting in the presence of God forever.

THE EMPOWERING MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT

The Filling of the Spirit

When Christ ascended, he poured out the Holy Spirit on the church, ushering in a greater experience of God's presence and power among his people. The Spirit transforms hearts by the miracle of regeneration and indwells all believers in abundant, new covenant measure. The Spirit also desires to fill God's people continually with increased power for Christian life and witness. To be filled with the Spirit is to be more fully under his influence, more aware of his presence, and more effective in his service. All Christians, therefore, must continually seek to be filled with the Spirit by living and praying in such a way that invites the Spirit's work among us, actively longing for God to accomplish his gracious purposes in us and through us. The filling of the Spirit brings to God's people a deeper knowledge of Christ, an increased desire for holiness, a stronger commitment to unity and love, a greater fruitfulness in ministry, and a deeper gratitude for our salvation.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Christ loves the church, his body, and provides for its health and growth through the Holy Spirit. In addition to giving new life, the Spirit sovereignly bestows gifts on every believer. Spiritual gifts are those abilities and expressions of God's power given by his grace for the glory of Christ and the building up of the church. The variety of these gifts—some permanent and some occasional, some more natural and some more remarkable— reflects the diversity of the members of Christ's body and demonstrates our need for one another. The gifts are not to be exercised with apprehension, pride, or disorder, but with faith, love, and order, and always in submission to the authority of Scripture as the final revelation of God. With the exception of those among the apostles who were commissioned as eyewitnesses of Christ and made recipients of normative revelation, the full range of spiritual gifts remain at work in the church and are given for the good of the church and its witness to the world. We are therefore to earnestly desire and practice them until Christ returns.

LIFE IN CHRIST

Growing in Christ

All believers, by virtue of their union with Christ, are progressively transformed into his image. Although the ruling power of sin in our lives has been broken, remnants of corruption remain in our hearts that we will fight throughout our lives. This lifelong process of growth takes place as the Spirit empowers us to abide in Christ and strive for holiness in every area of life. Resting in Christ's finished work never renders our effort unnecessary but rather enables the joyful pursuit of loving and pleasing God.

Compelled by grace, believers grow in the knowledge of God, obey Christ's commands, walk by the Spirit, mortify sin, and pursue God's priorities and purposes. Although such actions are not the ground of our salvation, they demonstrate the authenticity of our salvation and are a means by which God keeps us faithful to the end. Among the many public and private means of grace, the Word of God, prayer, and fellowship are primary instruments of our sanctification, fostering communion with God and training us together to glorify him, love others, and testify to Christ in the world.

Waiting for Christ

Living the Christian life involves longing and waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although believers are new creations in Christ and presently enjoy the blessings of his resurrection power, their sanctification remains partial and incomplete in this life. Furthermore, they continue to live in mortal bodies in a creation subject to futility, opposed by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The Word of God assures us that we are his beloved children, yet such an assurance does not remove the reality of suffering, sorrow, and persecution in this present age. The gospel enables us to rejoice in the midst of tribulations, assured that his purposes are working for our good even in circumstances we do not understand. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, we endure in faith and abound in hope, confident that a day is fast approaching when sin and sorrow will be no more.

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Universal Church

The universal church is the true, worshipping community of God's people, composed of all the elect from all time. Throughout salvation history, God by his Word and Spirit has been calling sinful people out of the whole human race to create a new redeemed humanity, whom Christ purchased with his blood. With the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost, God's people were reconstituted as his new covenant church, in continuity with the old covenant people of God but now brought to fulfillment by the work of Christ. All of God's people are united in one body—with Christ as the supreme, sustaining, and life-giving head—and set apart for God's own possession and purposes.

The Local Church

As an expression of Christ's universal church, the local church is the focal point of God's plan to mature his people and save sinners. Therefore, all Christians are to join themselves as committed members to a specific local church. A true church is marked by the faithful preaching of the Word, the right administration of the sacraments, and the proper exercise of church discipline. Even true churches are imperfect: they often contain a mixture of unbelievers hidden among the true flock and are vulnerable to theological error and moral failure. Yet Christ is unwavering in his commitment to build his church and will surely bring it to maturity.

Christ has given the offices of elder and deacon to the church. Elders occupy the sole office of governance and are called to teach, oversee, care for, and protect the flock entrusted to them by the Lord. Deacons provide for the various needs of the church through acts of service. God gives these and other people as gifts to serve and equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. In keeping with God's created design Scripture reserves the office of elder for men, yet

men and women alike belong to a royal priesthood in which each member is gifted by God to play a vital role in the life and mission of the church.

The Sacraments of the Church

The sacraments are precious means of grace that signify the benefits of the gospel, confirm its promises to the believer, and visibly distinguish the church from the world. The Lord Jesus instituted two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, for faithful observance by the church until his return. Baptism is an initiatory, unrepeatable sacrament for those who come to faith in Christ that pictures their remission of sins and union with Christ in his death and resurrection. Through immersion in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the believer publicly proclaims his faith in Christ and signifies his entrance into the body of Christ. Although commanded by Christ and a true means of grace, grace is not so inseparably tied to baptism that no one can be saved without it, or that everyone who is baptized is thereby saved.

In the Lord's Supper, the gathered church eats bread, signifying Christ's body given for his people, and drinks the cup of the Lord, signifying his blood shed for our sins. As we observe this sacrament with faith and sober self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, commune with him and receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and look forward to the Lord's triumphant return.

The Purpose and Mission of the Church

As the body of Christ, the church exists to worship God, to edify and mature his people, and to bear witness to Christ and his kingdom in all the world. Governed by Scripture, the church gathers for the teaching of the Word, prayer, the sacraments, congregational singing, fellowship, and mutual edification through the exercise of spiritual gifts. As the Father sent Jesus into the world, so Jesus has sent his people into the world in the power of the Spirit. The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. We do this by proclaiming the gospel, planting churches, and adorning the proclamation of the gospel through our love and good works. There will always be a gathering of believers on earth because the Lord promises to build, guide, and preserve his church to the end of the age. When Christ returns, he will gather and perfect his church from every tribe, tongue, and nation as a people for his own possession, and he will dwell with them forever.

THE LAST THINGS

Death and the Intermediate State

Death entered God's good creation as a result of Adam's sin, and now all people are subject to God's curse of death. Yet believers have no need to fear, because Christ has conquered death and delivered us from its dominion. Although our bodies return to dust for a time, death for the Christian has become a doorway to paradise, where our souls enter immediately into God's presence to behold and enjoy our Savior and to rest from our labors. In company with all the spirits of the righteous made perfect, we will await the redemption of our bodies and our full and final salvation. The souls of the

unredeemed, however, are cast immediately into hades to experience torment as they await final judgment for their sins.

Christ's Return and the Resurrection

At the appointed time known only to God, Jesus Christ will return to the earth in power and glory as Judge and King to whom every knee will bow. Christ's personal, physical, and visible return is the blessed hope of all who trust in him. At the end of the age the just and the unjust will be raised as their souls are reunited to their bodies: the just to a resurrection of life, the unjust to a resurrection of judgment. When the dead in Christ are raised, their perishable bodies will be redeemed and made like Christ's imperishable, glorious, powerful, spiritual body. Those in Christ who are alive shall likewise be changed, and thus will all God's glorified people forever bear the image of their Savior.

Judgment and the Consummation

On the last day all people will appear before Christ, who is the judge of all. Those who suppressed God's truth in unrighteousness and did not obey the gospel of Christ will suffer the righteous wrath of God and be justly cast into the hell of fire with the devil and his angels. There they will experience eternal, conscious punishment according to their sins. Those saved by Christ, whose names are written in the book of life, will be welcomed into the joy of their master and richly rewarded for every good work done in his name. God's glorified people will inherit the kingdom from which all sin, sorrow, suffering, and death will be banished. Christ as king will set all of creation free from its bondage to corruption, making new the heavens and the earth and establishing his eternal rule in his consummated kingdom. Surrounded by unimaginable beauty, we will enjoy unhindered communion with our triune God, beholding him, serving him, worshipping him, and reigning with him forever and ever. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The elder statement of faith is used with permission of Sovereign Grace Church.

Relational Commitments

Exhibit E

Introduction

The following Relational Commitments are designed to help the members of Vine relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic relationships. These Commitments cover important relational issues, such as peacemaking and reconciliation, marriage and divorce, counseling and confidentiality, and mutual accountability.

These Commitments are intended to help protect and preserve our community of faith. By community, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to encourage and support one another as we worship God, grow in our understanding of His love for us, and seek to tell others about the salvation and peace they, too, can find through faith in Jesus Christ.

We know that true community is not easy to achieve and sustain. Each of us brings our own expectations and agendas into the church. This diversity usually leads to rich discussions and creative ministries, but sometimes it can lead to conflict. As James 4:1–2 warns, “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask.”

That certainly describes our warring passions! At times, no matter how hard we try to build and preserve a close community of faith, our desires and expectations still clash. That’s where these Commitments come in. They aim to pull together key principles from God’s Word and serve as our relational guidelines. These Commitments are designed to accomplish several important purposes:

- They remind us of our mutual commitment to work together to pursue unity, maintain friendships, preserve marriages, and build relationships that reflect the love of Christ.
- They help to prevent surprises, disappointed expectations, confusion, and conflict by describing how we expect to relate to one another within the church.
- They provide a clear track for us to run on when conflict threatens to divide us, and they remind us how to move quickly toward reconciliation.
- They establish guidelines for how our leaders will counsel others, guard confidential information, and protect our children from abuse.
- They define and limit the spiritual authority of church leaders and thereby pursue the fair treatment of all members.
- Finally, they reduce our church’s exposure to legal liability by clearly describing our relational practices and by giving all who attend our church the opportunity to be informed of and give their consent to these biblical practices.

As you read our Relational Commitments, we encourage you to study the Bible passages that are cited next to particular provisions. We want you to be confident that these Commitments are based solidly on the Word of God. If your study does not answer all of your questions and concerns, please do not hesitate to approach our elders, who will be happy to talk with you about these principles.

We encourage you to expressly embrace these Commitments and formally join our church by going through our membership class, acknowledging your faith in Christ, and signing the Membership Covenant. If you are not yet prepared to become a member, you and your family are welcome to attend Vine and participate in its ministries while you continue to consider the wisdom and biblical faithfulness of what membership here involves. We do take membership seriously. If you, with a clear, biblically informed conscience, cannot be a member at Vine, we hope in due time you will be a committed member at another Bible-believing church where you can thrive in the fullness of all that membership means.

The Relational Commitments are used with permission from Bethlehem Baptist Church.

Commitment to Peacemaking and Reconciliation

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God (Matt. 5:9).

Our church desires to build a culture of peace that reflects God's peace and the power of the gospel of Christ in our lives. As we stand in the light of the cross, we realize that bitterness, unforgiveness, and broken relationships are not appropriate for the people whom God has reconciled to Himself through the sacrifice of His only Son (John 13:34-35; Eph. 4:29-32; Col. 3:12-14).

Therefore, out of love for Christ and in reliance on the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we are committed to resolving our differences according to the following principles of peacemaking and reconciliation.

Personal Peacemaking

- Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words, and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11).
- We will seek to refrain from all gossip, backbiting, and slander (Eph. 4:29-32). If we have a problem with others, we intend to talk to them, not about them.
- We will endeavor to make charitable judgments toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will seek reconciliation without delay (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than beating them down (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- As we seek to resolve differences with others, we will look out for their concerns and interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).
- When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them freely and fully as He has forgiven us so that we might glorify His reconciling grace (Eph. 4:32).
- When two or more of us cannot resolve a conflict privately—whether it's personal or has church, business, or even legal implications—we will obey God's command to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3) by looking to our church for assistance and cooperating with our leaders or wise people they recommend to resolve the matter through biblical mediation or arbitration (Matt. 18:16; 1 Cor. 6:1-8).

- If we have a conflict with a person who attends another church, we will make every effort to cooperate with our church leaders as they seek to work with the leaders of the other church to resolve the matter in a biblically faithful manner.
- If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will assist him in seeking to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or church discipline, we will submit to the procedures set forth in our Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline.
- If we have a dispute with or within our church as a corporate body and cannot resolve it internally through the steps given above, we will make every effort to resolve our differences through biblical mediation or arbitration before we resort to other processes.

Commitment to Preserving Marriages

They are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate (Matt. 19:6).

God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with His bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7). Therefore, He established marriage to be a life-long, exclusive covenant relationship between one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 19:4-6). God also designed it to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create stability for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.

In our society, marriages fail under a wide range of circumstances. Many people have gone through a divorce before having a relationship with Christ and have found repentance and forgiveness in coming to Christ. Others have experienced divorce through no desire or decision of their own. Still others, even after professing faith in Christ, may have divorced because of their own wrongful choices, but have since repented and received the forgiveness offered through our Lord Jesus. Whatever the circumstances, we welcome everyone to Vine—single, married, and divorced.

Because our church recognizes both the divine origin of marriage and the devastating effects of divorce, we are deeply committed to preserving marriages and preventing divorce. Toward this end, we devote regular teaching and significant ministry resources to strengthening marriages and families. We require and provide premarital counseling to help couples enter into marriage advisedly, and be well-prepared for its many challenges.

We also encourage couples to nurture their marriages by participating in a small group where they can grow together in their love for God and for one another (Heb. 10:24-25). As relationships deepen within these groups, we expect husbands to spur each other on in loving and cherishing their wives, and wives to encourage one another in respecting and loving their husbands (Eph. 5:33).

Our leaders are committed to helping individuals and couples receive biblical counsel and support when they face marital difficulties. We will discourage couples from using divorce as a way to run away from issues that instead can be resolved through Spirit-guided counseling, repentance, forgiveness, and ongoing discipleship.

Historically, respected pastors and theologians have held different positions about what the Bible teaches concerning the legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage. For example, some elders believe that Christians should not initiate divorce under any circumstances but may accept it if the unbelieving partner leaves. Other elders believe that Scripture permits (though does not mandate) divorce and remarriage under limited circumstances. Those holding this position believe that divorce truly ends the marriage and the aggrieved spouse is free to remarry in the Lord. While the church's leaders and members have different convictions on how to interpret and apply what the Bible teaches regarding divorce and remarriage, we are united in our commitment to upholding a high view of the marriage covenant.

As members of Vine Church, we agree to live by the following guidelines concerning marriage and divorce.

1. A believer and unbeliever should not marry (1 Cor. 7:39; 2 Cor. 6:14-15).
2. Since death breaks the marriage bond (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39), remarriage is permissible without sin for a believing widow or widower, if the marriage is with another believer.
3. Divorce may be permitted when a spouse breaks the marriage covenant by committing sexual immorality or abandoning the other spouse (Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 7:11, 15; 1 Tim. 5:8). Covenant-breaking sexual immorality here refers to adultery or other serious sinful sexual acts, which dishonor God and one's spouse (1 Cor 6:9, 13). Covenant-breaking abandonment here refers to deserting, actively harming, or endangering one's spouse.
4. The aggrieved partner in a biblically permissible divorce should guard against bitterness and be willing to forgive the offending spouse (Eph. 4:31-32). The aggrieved spouse may pursue restoration of the broken marriage if the offending spouse proves to be repentant and if neither party has remarried. The aggrieved party in a biblically permissible divorce may remarry a believer (1 Cor. 7:15).
5. The spouse who has broken the marriage covenant by committing sexual immorality or abandoning their spouse or who has divorced without biblical grounds should repent and be reconciled to God and, if possible, to their spouse (1 Cor. 7:11; 1 John 1:9).

While the Bible may permit divorce under the limited circumstances described above, it does not require divorce but holds out hope that God may restore broken marriages. We believe that even when human marriages fail as an earthly symbol of the union of Christ and his church, the heavenly reality of Christ's unbreakable covenant-keeping love for his people endures. We believe that God patiently bears with our sins, repeatedly calls us to repentance, and freely forgives us when we turn back to Him (Ps. 103:8-12; Isa. 55:7).

When divorce seems inevitable, an offended spouse can imitate God's love by offering a straying spouse these same evidences of grace (Eph. 5:1-2). This may involve patiently bearing neglect or lovingly confronting serious sin (Col. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1). In some situations, love may require asking the church to initiate formal discipline to rescue a spouse and a marriage from the devastating effects of unrepentant sin (Matt. 18:12-20).

Just as church leaders are involved in beginning a marriage, they should be involved when it is threatened with seeming dissolution. Therefore, when a member of Vine is considering divorce, he or she should bring the situation to the elders and cooperate with them as they determine whether biblical grounds exist for the separation, and as they endeavor to promote repentance and reconciliation, and pursue redemptive discipline, if appropriate.

Separated spouses who are moving toward divorce, but are still legally married, should refrain from dating or any other activity that is inconsistent with being married.

We rejoice that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace, and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been unwillingly divorced, as does our church. God also graciously extends His love to those who have wrongly left their marriages. That love moves Him (and us) to call them to repentance, to encourage and aid reconciliation when possible, and to gladly restore those who have done what the Scripture requires to rebuild broken relationships.

Commitment to Biblical Counseling and Confidentiality

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another (Rom. 15:14).

Our goal in providing biblical counseling is that we may “present everyone mature in Christ” (Col.1:28). We believe that the Bible is God-inspired guidance, instruction, and power for faith and life (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Therefore, our counseling relies on biblical teachings and principles applied with “all wisdom” through the Holy Spirit to each situation we counsel. We are committed to asking the question, “What does Scripture say regarding this matter?” and to counseling in the light of the response to this question.

We believe that Christ has equipped His body, the church, to provide wisdom, knowledge, and instruction to one another (Rom. 15:14) in order for each member to live a godly and holy life, pleasing God in all ways. Christ has also equipped His church with spiritually mature leaders who are able to shepherd, lead, teach, and counsel others (Heb. 5:11-14) in the church. Though the educational and experiential background of each leader who counsels at Vine is unique, the essential training and practice for all leaders who counsel at Vine centers around their ability to apply Scripture to the situation they are counseling. For this reason, those who counsel for Vine do not present themselves as psychotherapists nor mental health professionals but as biblical counselors.

In order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the role of leaders in the church that provide “spiritual counsel,” the following clarifications should be kept in mind.

1. Leaders who provide spiritual counsel may also be trained in other areas of life that are outside of the realm of providing spiritual counsel. Thus, if a doctor provides “spiritual counsel” through the church, we understand that this is separate from his providing “medical counsel” at his clinic.
2. God calls the leaders in His church to set an example “in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). If any leader should not live up to this standard in any counseling situation, the counselee should report to the leadership team any conduct that fails to meet this standard.
3. Confidentiality is an important factor in establishing a relationship to receive spiritual counsel. The leader providing spiritual counsel will keep confidentiality except in the following situations:
 - when the person who disclosed the information, or any other person, is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Prov. 24:11-12);
 - when a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to promote repentance through accountability and redemptive church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20);
 - when leaders are required by law to report suspected abuse (Rom. 13:1).

Providing spiritual counsel requires a relationship between the leader and the counselee. Occasionally there may arise a misunderstanding between the counselor and the counselee. We will seek to handle these misunderstandings in a biblical way. This includes being willing to submit to legally binding arbitration, rather than filing a lawsuit, and also not attempting to require a “spiritual counselor” to appear in court or to provide his notes.

Our desire is to provide wise, spiritual, godly counsel to each person in our church. By sharing these guidelines, we hope the biblical counseling offered at Vine will help many become mature in Christ.

Commitment to Accountability and Church Discipline

Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24).

A. Accountability and Discipline Are Signs of God's Love

God has established the church to reflect His character, wisdom, and glory in the midst of a fallen world (Eph. 3:10-11). He demonstrates His love for His church in that He sent His Son to die for her (Rom. 5:8; Eph. 5:25). His purpose for His church is to present her as a gift to His Son; thus Scripture refers to the church as the "bride" of Christ (Rev. 19:7). For this reason the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are continually working to purify the church and bring her to maturity (Eph. 5:25-27).

This does not mean that God expects the church to be made up of perfectly pure people. He knows that the best of churches are still companies of sinners who wrestle daily with remaining sin (1 John 1:8; Phil. 3:12). Therefore, it would be unbiblical for us to expect church members to live perfectly. What we can do, however, is confess our common struggle with sin and our mutual need for God's mercy and grace. We also can spur one another on toward maturity by encouraging and holding each other accountable to love, seek after, and obey God with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love others as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31; Heb. 10:24-25).

We sometimes refer to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible does not present church discipline as negative, legalistic, or harsh. True discipline originates from God Himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines the one he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O LORD, and whom you teach out of your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive, and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship, and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly. On rare occasions, God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, He corrects us. One way He does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray (Matt. 18:12-13).

Thus, restorative or corrective discipline is never to be done in a harsh, vengeful, or self-righteous manner. It is always to be carried out in humility and love, with the goals of restoring someone to a close walk with Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1), protecting others from harm (1 Cor. 5:6), and showing respect for the honor and glory of God's name (1 Pet. 2:12).

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal, and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” (2 Tim. 1:7; cf. Gal. 5:23). Thus discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us studies God’s Word, seeks Him in prayer, and draws on His grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

But sometimes we are blind to our sins or so tangled in them that we cannot get free on our own. This is why the Bible says, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1). In obedience to this command, we are committed to giving and receiving loving correction within our church whenever a sin (whether in word, behavior, or doctrine) seems too serious to overlook (Prov. 19:11).

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. “If he will not listen, take one or two others along” (Matt. 18:16). If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called “formal discipline.”

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If a member persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to “tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17). This first involves informing one or more church pastors/ elders about the situation.

If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our elders may approach the member privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. We intend to give the member every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the member recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

If an offense is likely to harm others or lead them into sin, or cause division or disruption, our elders may accelerate the disciplinary process and move to protect the church (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11).

If the straying member does not repent in response to private appeals from our elders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person’s behavior.⁹ This step may include close friends, a small group or a Sunday school class if our elders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20).

As the disciplinary process progresses, our elders may impose a variety of sanctions to encourage repentance, including, but not limited to, private and public admonition, withholding of the Lord’s Supper, removal from office and withdrawal of normal fellowship (Matt. 5:23-24; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Matt. 18:17).

If, after a reasonable period of time, the member still refuses to change, then our elders may bring the situation before the congregation, with the recommendation that the member be removed from membership and normal fellowship. If the congregation supports that recommendation, we will treat the member as an unbeliever.

This means that the church will no longer treat the member as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the member, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the gospel to him or her, remind him or her of God's holiness and mercy, and call him or her to repent and put his or her faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

D. Commitment to Adhere to Discipline Process

We realize that our natural human response to correction often is to hide or run away from accountability (Gen. 3:8-10). To avoid falling into this age-old trap and to strengthen our church's ability to rescue us if we are caught in sin, we agree not to run away from this church to avoid corrective discipline. Therefore, we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability while discipline is pending against us. Although we are free to stop attending the church at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while discipline is pending will not stop the process of discipline until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage our repentance and restoration, and to bring the disciplinary process to an orderly conclusion, as described in these Commitments (Matt. 18:12-14; Gal. 6:1; Heb. 13:17).

If a member leaves the church while discipline is in effect or is being considered, and our elders learn that he or she is attending another church, they may inform that church of the situation and ask its leaders to encourage the member to repent and be reconciled to the Lord and to any people he or she has offended. This action is intended both to help the member find freedom from his or her sin and to warn the other church about the harm that he or she might do to their members¹¹ (see Matt. 18:12-14; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 3 John 1:9-10).

Loving restoration always stands at the heart of the disciplinary process. If a member repents, and our elders confirm his or her sincerity, we will rejoice together and gladly imitate God's forgiveness by restoring the person to fellowship within the body (see Matt. 18:13; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; 2 Cor. 2:5-11; Col. 3:12-14).

People who have been disciplined by another church will not be allowed to become members at Vine until they have repented of their sins and made a reasonable effort to be reconciled, or our elders have determined that the discipline of the former church was not biblically appropriate.

As we pursue the blessings of accountability and church discipline, we intend to hold fast to the promise of Scripture: "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:10-11).

Financial Standards for Oversight and Security

Exhibit F

Purpose

Vine Church takes seriously the task of being great stewards of that which is entrusted to us. We have many policies and procedures in place to both protect and safely handle all financial transactions.

Cash/Checks Handling Policy

We have an onsite safe which is where all liquid assets are kept. The safe is located in a security alarmed location. Each time the safe is opened, there must be two people present and neither of them are to be a pastor. The only people with the code to the safe are trusted non pastoral staff members. The petty cash is kept in the safe and any time any amount is taken out for any reason, two people must count it together, record the amount being taken, the purpose, the date and who is requesting the petty cash. That cash is then given to the requesting person by both of the other people. A receipt is then required to match the petty cash amount taken.

When offerings are collected, a member of the church as well as a pastor who oversees this area of service and one of the people mentioned above who has the code to the safe all three stay with the collection baskets and walk to the safe together. All giving is put into bank bags and entered into the safe at that time, to be counted by two people.

Cash is never handled by just one person, two people are always present with cash until it has been recorded. All cash is counted by two people and the amount of cash being deposited is recorded on a cash count summary sheet and signed off on by the two people who counted it. This amount is also matched to the deposit slip. After the cash has been counted and recorded, it is taken to the bank to be deposited by one of the counters and the receipt from the bank deposit is then checked against the original deposit slip to confirm they match and is signed off on by the other person. Checks are counted, processed and deposited with two people present.

Giving

All giving (after being counted by two people) is recorded by one person and then checked, reconciled and signed off on by the second person. Pastors are not allowed to process giving.

Expenses for Approval

All expenses go through an approval process. The purchaser has to have each expense approved by their overseer.

Signatures for Payments and Transfers

Every check and ACH payment processed requires two signatures. The signers are made up of some of the elders, board members and the facility manager. The bookkeeper processes these payments and is not allowed to be a signer. When money is transferred between accounts, two signatures are also required with the same signers and policy for payments above.

Financial Review by Third a Party

Once a year we have a complete financial review done of the previous year by a Certified Public Accountant who specializes in church accounting. He and his team have been providing financial services and guidance to churches and other Christian organizations since 2010. This review is then submitted to our bank for review and approval.

Member Covenant

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

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Spirit and the instruction of the Bible, to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and peace; to promote its spirituality and fruitfulness; and to sustain its worship, ordinances, and discipline.

We further engage to not neglect meeting together but to faithfully gather at Sunday services for worship; to uphold the Member Statement of Faith; to welcome, test biblically, and apply instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church which accords with the Elder Statement of Faith; and to follow the leadership of the elders in accordance with the Elder Covenant and the Bylaws.

We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of this church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel in this city and among all the nations.

We will devote ourselves to the pursuit of holiness, welcoming the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, and striving to fight sin through regular confession and repentance, refusing to be conformed to the image of this world.

We further engage to maintain personal and family devotions; to seek the salvation of our friends and family; to educate our children in the Christian faith; to walk wisely in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our conduct.

We further engage to pursue consistent fellowship with other members; to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech.

We further engage to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation, and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay by keeping our Relational Commitments.

We further engage that when we remove from this place, we will notify the church leaders, and, if possible, unite with a like minded church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant.

Name _____ Birthdate _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Signed _____