

The Garden Church Polity

ELDER LED CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Ruled by Jesus Christ

Governed by the Congregation

Led by Elders (various levels)

Served by Deacons (various levels)

Ruled by Jesus Christ

Christ is the Head of the Body

Colossians 1:18 - He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.

Christ is the Bridegroom to the Bride

Ephesians 5

Christ is the Cornerstone

Ephesians 2:20 - built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

All authority is Christ's

Matthew 28 - All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Governed by the Congregation

Governance means that local decisions are affirmed by the collective members of the body.

Congregation Biblical Support

Acts 6:3-Congregation decides Deacons

Acts 13:2-3-Congregation ordains Missionaries

Acts 15:22-Congregation involved in Council

1 Corinthians 5:2-Congregation disciplines

2 Corinthians 2:6-7-Congregation restores

Led by Elders

Three synonymous New Testament terms:

Overseer (bishop = episcopos)

Elder (elder = presbyteros)

Pastor (shepherd = poiman)

All three terms describe the same leaders:

Acts 20:28 - Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood.

1 Peter 5:1-2 - I exhort the elders among you as a fellow elder and witness to the sufferings of Christ, as well as one who shares in the glory about to be revealed: Shepherd God's flock among you, not overseeing out of compulsion but willingly, as God would have you; not out of greed for money but eagerly;

1 Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Served by Deacons

Deacons are the servants of the church

Literally "bondservant" one who waited tables

Acts 6:2-4 - The Twelve summoned the whole company of the disciples and said, "It would not be right for us to give up preaching the word of God to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we can appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

1 Timothy 3:8-13 - Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus

The Garden is a Baptist church. Now before you say, "No thank you!" in defiance, let's look at what that means for us as a church and for you as a potential member.

- Baptists give to a co-op which helps provide missions to the world, and allows us as members to work on a variety of missions projects, and gives our body access to unlimited resources for a variety of needs including: discounted school, global opportunities for service, etc.
- Baptists are historically autonomous. This means that no Baptist church has to look like any other Baptist church, but each still has access to denominational structures and support, meaning we are not alone, but also not governed from a body of humans above us.

We believe in the proper administration of the sacraments or ordinances (baptism, communion), and the pure, undefiled preaching of the gospel because the gospel should be the very heart of the church. A church that loses the gospel ceases to be a church.

Sacraments/Ordinances:

Baptism - The Garden church practices believer's baptism by full immersion. In certain exceptional circumstances pouring or sprinkling may be acceptable, but immersion is biblically, theologically, and symbolically preferred. We offer a mandatory class designed to instruct,

answer questions, and insist upon The Garden church's desire that those seeking to be baptized understand the biblical reason for doing so, and the historical reasons associated with the instruction. Baptism is best understood as the rite of commitment. It is the ordained occasion where one confesses that she or he has made a faith commitment to Christ. That commitment to Christ is lived out in a commitment to Christ's church and leads to a life lived out in union with him. When faithfully and rightly observed, baptism may also be a means of grace, not in the sense that it saves, but in the sense that it is the occasion where God acts to seal and confirm the blessings and promises of the gospel. A lovely analogy is provided by marriage, and like all analogies or parables it is not wise to take our theology from them, though it might provide a helpful illustration. Faith may be compared to the love that binds two people together. It develops internally and leads two people to make a commitment to one another. The wedding is the occasion where the love is publicly celebrated, confessed, and confirmed. It does not create the love, but it expresses and seals it in a beautiful and solemn way. Likewise, baptism does not create faith or union with Christ, but it confesses, celebrates and confirms it.

At what age can I be baptized at The Garden?

The Garden church delays the baptism of children until they show "evidence of regeneration that is independent of parental control." We loosely see this represented in Scripture at age 12 (Luke 2:41-50), but will certainly entertain the idea for baptism of younger believers while considering intentional, close consultation with their parents and them. Parents are charged to raise their children "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). As they do, quite often children at a tender age will make professions of faith. Parents want to do nothing to discourage their child's love for their Lord or act like they think the child is lying, yet they know that children's decisions can be made out of a desire to please parents or because their friends have made a similar decision. Also, they know in other areas of life they do not take a child's decision to be a firm commitment. A child may say at the age of seven that she has decided that she wants to be a doctor or wants to marry the boy next door, but experience shows that decisions are often modified over time. We believe that the Holy Spirit is involved in a decision to follow Christ in a way that may not be true of other decisions, but baptism is a decision of the church in which it endorses the reality of the child's decision. Of course, the question is unanswerable in any definitive sense. Children mature at different rates, and God is free to act as he chooses in a child's life. That is why we are happy to have the conversation with parents who really think it is time, but our purpose for delay is because of the many who walk away from the church baptized and uncertain of the meaning. And since we seek regenerate membership through instituting believer's baptism, we set up systems to ascertain as much as possible that those to be baptized are true believers.

Who can baptize at The Garden - The evidence we see throughout Scripture, when the baptizer is named, is that the one who brings the baptized to the faith is the one who performs the baptism (Acts 8:36-38; 16:27-34). The Garden Church wants to encourage this practice by empowering those who are sharing the gospel with others, to be those who are baptizing those they bring to the faith. If someone is not comfortable in this, a leader in the church will step in to perform the baptism.

Communion or The Lord's Supper - If baptism is the wedding ceremony in which a believer publicly declares his or her commitment to Christ, the Lord's Supper is similar to a wedding anniversary celebration in which the wedding vows are renewed. Significantly, it is the only act of worship for which we are given specific instructions in the New Testament, and an act that almost all Christians have observed down through history. When we partake of the bread and drink of the cup, we join a band of untold millions. We believe that we are in communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit while partaking of this sacrament, proclaiming the gospel message of Christ's death as the sustenance of the Christian life. The very elements of bread and wine speak of nourishment and refreshment. Thus, the Lord's Supper is the ordinance of ongoing sanctification, or the continual renewal and furthering of that initial commitment. By its very nature, baptism is a unique, singular occurrence, while the Lord's Supper must be regularly repeated. The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of renewal. Renewal to Christ as we follow his command of "do this in remembrance of me." The word *anamnesis*, remembrance, is far richer than a mere recollection or commemoration. It is recalling an event with such vividness and power that it effects the present, bringing all the benefits of Christ's death to bear, remembering that his body was broken for you (1 Cor. 11:24). As we genuinely and biblically remember, we cannot help but renew our love, thanks and worship of Christ. On the divine side, the Holy Spirit uses this occasion to nourish us spiritually as we come in faith. Faithful, believing remembrance has as its goal the renewing of our relationship with Christ. Renewal to Christ and his church as the occasion when the body joins in unity and love for one another as we are warned to not eat or drink without recognizing the body (1 Cor. 11:29). Renewal to our commitment to his mission as in it we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). His coming reminds us that one day we will partake of the Supper with our Lord at the marriage feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:9). With that hope in sight, we renew our commitment to proclaim Christ's death until faith becomes sight and remembrance becomes reality. The renewal called for by the Lord's Supper thus looks back to the past in remembrance, looks around in the present to the fellowship we experience with Christ and the body of believers, and looks ahead to the consummation, when Christ returns.

Who can take The Lord's Supper -

The Garden Church believes in open communion. This is so that Christians who are visiting our church can partake in this Holy ordinance with the body of Christ. It is strongly urged of all who participate in communion that they be baptized believers with a clear conscience before the Lord. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself (1 Cor 11:29). We will allow time in our service to come to the Lord in confession and repentance individually or with a group, so that you may come to his feast with a pure heart before partaking.