

Church Membership at Christ City Church

(and related issues around baptism, communion and church discipline)

NOTE - this paper was originally written in April 2021 and then went through various updates and iterations as it was shared with the leadership team, the wider leaders and the advisory team. This is an ongoing discussion and there may be further development, but this gives a helpful guide if you would like to understand our approach to church membership. If you have done BELONG then you have already taken part in the outworking of this.

Over the six and a half years since Christ City Church began, we have tried to embed into our DNA much of the outworking of what it means to be God's people, committed to him and to one another. Whilst we rejoice that through God's grace many of the elements of church membership already exist in our church, like in a relationship, there is a time to say 'I do' to demonstrate one's love and to be willing to commit to the giving and receiving which love requires.

After washing his disciples' feet, Jesus said in John 13:34-35 that if we love one another as he has loved us, then the world would know we are his disciples. What is the greatest demonstration of this love? Jesus laid down his life for his friends. This is real love – a love that commits, a love that cares, a love that follows through, a love that gives itself up for the other.

In this paper we want to look at how we can build on the DNA and existing structures which are already in place, without losing any of the positives of our current model, to create a clearer understanding of church membership which will help us as we grow and seek to plant new churches. Church membership enables pastoral care, intentional discipleship, corporate mission, loving shepherding, positive decision-making and careful church discipline.

We will begin by looking at the difference between committing to a church and being a consumer of a church. We will then consider the power that Jesus vested in the church and reflect on the essential roles that baptism and communion play in defining and maintaining church membership. We will suggest some practical ways forward for us and will finish by considering how church membership enables us to practice church discipline well.

Please note, this is a 'work in progress' and there may be updates as together we learn how best to move forward. We have appreciated input and feedback from the wider leaders in CCC. We need all the wisdom, questions and suggestions of God's church. In time, we plan to break it up into smaller portions and include simple FAQs, so it is easier to digest. We expect this process to take some time and we also know we will need to teach more on this subject in the coming months and years so everyone understands what we're doing and why. We want this to be a positive step forward for us as a church with the emphasis more on what it means to be a church member, which arises out of our union with the Father, Son and Spirit through faith, expressed in baptism, rather than the specific steps of how to become a member at CCC.

So, without any further ado, let's consider our culture and how we think about love.

Committing vs Consuming

Much of the way we live in the west is based on being a consumer - taking as much as we want, when we want it, for as long as we want. We enjoy the benefits without necessarily accepting all the responsibilities. We often appreciate the perks without experiencing any limitations. If you can get a better offer elsewhere, then you're free to leave and take that better offer.

Instead of consumer relationships, the scriptures encourage relationships of commitment. These are relationships which carry obligations and where the good of the relationship takes precedence over the immediate needs of the individual. Committed relationships are long term, they don't easily break, they survive the ups and downs of emotions and circumstances, they usually require forgiveness at some point, and they are ultimately what makes life meaningful to us.

Reflecting on the nature of love as defined by the scriptures, Tim Keller puts it like this:

When the Bible speaks of love, it measures it primarily not by how much you want to receive but how much you are willing to give of oneself to someone. How much are you willing to lose for the sake of this person? How much of your freedom are you willing to forsake? How much of your precious time, emotion, and resources are you willing to invest in this person?¹

When Jesus calls us to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34-35) he is calling us to love each other like this, because this how Jesus has loved us! God loved us by giving us his Son and giving us himself (John 3:16, Galatians 2:20).

What has all this to do with church membership? The Bible describes the church as a family, a body and a kingdom of priests. For all those metaphors to be lived out we need to understand who the family members are, who is a part of the body, who is a priest in God's kingdom. What does it mean to commit to, to take responsibility for and to care for these people? Church membership is the way that we all become aware of our responsibilities - firstly towards God, and then towards one another. Church membership is about a church taking specific responsibility for you, and you for the church.

Church membership is a way of saying - I am willing to not just receive the benefits of the church (community, friendship, care, guidance, support etc) but also to give into the church even when it costs me. I am willing not just to participate in the activities of the church but also the commitments required of being the church - my love has reached that level. That is what church membership is all about.

¹ Pg78, the meaning of marriage

The Keys of the Kingdom & the Citizens of the Kingdom

To be clear, the New Testament never talks specifically about ‘church membership’ per se, but it assumes it. Without church membership, many of the practices and commands of the New Testament are hard to follow. For example, baptising new believers (Acts 2:38-47), sharing the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20-33), elders taking responsibility for specific sheep (1 Peter 5:2, Acts 20:28), the people submitting to their leaders (Hebrews 13:7 & 17), exercising church discipline (1 Corinthians 5) or keeping lists to care for those in need (1 Timothy 5:9) all imply this idea of membership. What Jesus did make clear was that the church has ‘the keys of the kingdom’².

Keys are a symbol of power as they are the means Jesus gives to the church by which someone gets into the kingdom or is kept out of the kingdom. Jesus said that what would be loosed on earth would be loosed in heaven and what would be bound on earth would be bound in heaven³. Jesus was giving this power to Peter and the church to be God’s official representatives on earth. When they affirm those who are truly part of the kingdom, they announce an official judgement on heaven’s behalf. The decisions that are made on earth regarding people’s status within the kingdom are reflected in heaven. Jonathan Leeman writes:

In other words, the apostles had heaven’s authority for declaring who on earth is a kingdom citizen and therefore represents heaven.⁴

Leeman describes how the local church is like an embassy that gives out passports for citizens of heaven, declaring them to be part of the kingdom of God to the nations of the world. We cannot declare ourselves to be part of the kingdom; we need someone else to do that for us – that is what the church does⁵. Like an embassy, we *declare* them to be citizens of the kingdom. We announce an official judgement on heaven’s behalf.

So, what are the keys of the kingdom? Tim Chester mentions three keys.⁶ Firstly, proclamation (John 20:21-23) – as we proclaim the good news, if people respond with repentance and faith, their sins are forgiven. But if they reject our proclamation then they are not forgiven. What happens on earth affects what happens in heaven. Secondly, church discipline (Matthew 18:15-18) which we’ll come to at the end of this paper and thirdly through baptism and communion. We’ll look at these in the next part of the paper.

² See Matthew 16:18-19 and Matthew 18:15-20, and also John 20:21-23.

³ The language of binding and loosing comes from a judicial context - for example a rabbi or judge might decide whether a law applied to or bound a particular person in a certain set of circumstances

⁴ Pg58, Leeman

⁵ In light of this, Leeman provocatively says that we do not ‘join’ a church but ‘submit’ to the church. This isn’t a voluntary club that we sign up to because it meets some of our personal needs. This is God’s local representation of his kingdom that we submit ourselves to as we submit ourselves to King Jesus

⁶ Page 152-154, Leeman

Acts 2:38-47 is one place where we see the keys powerfully in action as new kingdom citizens are declared among the nations and the beautiful life of the new community of Jesus is seen in action. How did it happen? Peter preached to the crowds at Pentecost, many were cut to the heart and asked what they must do to be saved. Peter tells them to repent and be baptised so they might be forgiven and filled with the Spirit. He urges them to separate off from the corrupt generation. That day three thousand were added to their number. New members were recognised and welcomed in - three thousand passports were handed out, to use Leeman's metaphor. What then happened? They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. They had everything in common. They met together daily. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. They started to live out their commitment not just to Christ but to one another.

The early church epitomised what it was to be a committed community across all earthly divides (economic, racial, cultural or geographical). They were united in Jesus and therefore united in mission, in love, in worship, in purity and in mind. In a similar way, we have a fantastic opportunity in Dublin, which has just as much economic, racial and cultural diversity as those first century Roman cities, to live out Christ's intention for his local church through committed community.

Baptism

As we see in Acts 2 and other passages⁷, baptism is central to your membership of the wider church – God's people – and also more practically to membership of your local church community. In baptism, all your old loyalties and identities dissolve in the waters and are replaced with new allegiances to Christ and his people. There is one body because, Paul says, we all share in one baptism (Ephesians 4:3-4).

Tim Chester helpfully applies this to the process of church membership today. He says:

There are legal and practical reasons why many churches have a formal membership list. But you do not become a member of the church when your name is added to a list. The list will simply be an administrative and legal convenience. ***You become a member of the [global] church when you are baptised*** (emphasis added).⁸

Baptism is a corporate act through which we welcome people into membership, or to use Leeman's analogy again, we hand them a passport and affirm that they belong to God's kingdom. In baptism, it's not simply the candidate making promises to God of their commitment to him, but God speaking to them, through the church, of his promises of commitment to them. In baptism, we declare God's

⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, Ephesians 4:3-6

⁸ Chester's final statement will be central in our understanding and our process of enacting church membership – we'll use baptism and communion, alongside teaching, 1-2-1 conversations and connect/belong to bring someone into membership. See details later in the paper

promises over the person who has repented and believed – promises of forgiveness, adoption, eternal security, new life, etc.

Two key questions arise when considering the practical outworking of this in our context at Christ City Church. Firstly, what about those who haven't been baptised who attend our churches regularly? Secondly, what about those baptised as infants?

For those who attend regularly at CCC but are not baptised, we will take the time to explain the power and significance of baptism, understand their reasons and hesitations for not being baptised, and if they are truly a believer we will encourage and exhort them to receive the gift with joy. As Tim Chester puts it, “asking why we should get baptised is like asking a couple why they want a wedding”.⁹

What about those who have been baptised as infants? At Christ City Church we believe that baptism is for believers because in the New Testament, baptism is always tied to faith¹⁰. There are no examples of children being baptised in the New Testament and the few references to ‘households’ in the book of Acts is an argument from silence – we do not know that included children. For those who have been baptised as infants we will encourage them to look into the matter for themselves, to consider our position (we will gently try to persuade and give them resources to do so) and to reflect on what their baptism as an infant meant to them and their parents. That said, we recognise this is a secondary issue and people far wiser, more theologically astute and more godly than us are persuaded that infants of believing parents can be baptised and therefore we will not make it a central nor defining issue.¹¹ We respect those who are persuaded of infant baptism and welcome them into the church and into church membership.

Communion

If the waters of baptism are about union with Christ, the bread and the wine are about communion with Christ. If baptism is the way you join the church, communion is the way you belong to the church. This means baptism goes before communion. You join before you belong.

To use the marriage analogy, if baptism is the wedding day, communion is the ongoing physical intimacy in a marriage. Why does the Bible say you must get married before you have sex? It is because the commitment needs to be confirmed before you express love by becoming one flesh. In the same way, you

⁹ Pg129, Chester

¹⁰ Acts 2:38, Acts 2:41, Acts 8:12-13 and most clearly Colossians 2:11-13

¹¹ The argument for infant baptism of believing parents, is that since children were included in the covenant under the Old Testament (where the sign was circumcision) then they should be included under the New Covenant (where the sign is baptism). Later on, those who have been baptised as infants confirm this for themselves should they want to. One of the positives of the argument for infant baptism is it naturally places more focus on the grace of God rather than the faith of the candidate.

cannot express belonging to the church in communion until you have first joined the church in baptism. Chester puts it like this:

Taking communion before being baptised is like having sex before marriage; you are trying to grab the benefits of a covenant relationship without the commitment.

Think of it like this. Whatever reason someone gives for not being baptised is a reason for not taking communion. Or, to turn it around, whatever reason someone gives for taking communion is a reason for first being baptised.

If you are not prepared to be baptised, then you are not ready to take communion.

This is enormously helpful in counselling those who have not been baptised, as we teach them on the power and value of baptism, and communion. It's also helpful for parents in Christ City Church to know that even when children express faith at a young age, we wait for them to be ready for the commitment and sacrifice that baptism signifies before giving them communion. For those parents, it might be helpful for them to consider waiting until their children's faith has been tested through adolescence, and for the church to see that their desire to be baptised continues over a prolonged period, before encouraging them to be baptised.

Chester brings another helpful practical application for those joining a church who are already baptised and highlights the importance of communion in this process.

If you are moving to another city and you have already been baptised, then you start being part of a new church when you start taking communion, because communion is how we express our ongoing belonging to the church.

Another practical question then comes - what about newcomers who take communion who haven't been baptised? Or similarly, what about those who have been baptised as infants as part of a cultural ceremony but have never trusted in the promises of God for themselves? Chester puts it like this:

There is no need to dive across the room and snatch it from their hands. They are not about to eat poison or corrupt the cup. For them it is just bread and wine. But use this as an opportunity to talk with them about their commitment to Christ and his people. You might say, "I saw you taking communion. That's an expression of faith in Christ and union with Christ. Is that a step you've taken? I'd love to hear about it. And if you're united to Christ by faith, then we should baptise you."

If they're not ready to do that, then they are not ready to take communion. All we're doing is asking them to be consistent and consider their position.

Church Membership – Our Current Situation and some Considerations

Whilst Church City Church hasn't yet applied a specific process of membership, there are some structures in place which have been beneficial which we can build on as we think about how to strengthen what we currently do.

'Connect Night' (which will be called 'Connect') has played a key part in our organic approach to church membership, as have city groups. These two things have acted almost like an informal membership. We also did a series of events called 'Renew' in May 2019 which was a good indicator of who was with us and what we were calling people to. Additionally, the staff & leadership team keep a track of who attends church, in terms of Sunday Gatherings and City Groups. Finally, attendance on our weekends away show those who we think consider themselves a part of the church. In all these ways, church membership has been in most cases, very effective and natural. Additionally, we have spoken into the lives of those who were living in a way that didn't honour God. We have exercised church discipline in different ways - withholding communion, asking people not to attend because of their behaviour, and we have refused to baptise when it was clear that they were not ready to submit to Jesus as Lord in all areas of their lives.

However, the current organic model does create some challenges and at different times, cracks have been revealed. Since there has been a lack of understanding of what it means to be a church member¹², and on what communion and baptism signify, in the few cases of church discipline, this process has not been straightforward to handle both from the position of those bringing the challenge and those receiving the challenge. Those bringing the challenge have felt isolated and vulnerable, since the weight of what was happening wasn't always shared with anyone in the wider church. Those receiving the discipline may have felt it had come 'out of the blue' in terms of their expectations of what it means to be part of CCC and that it was not the place of the church, or church leaders, to speak into their life in such a direct way. Additionally, occasions like this can give rise to gossip and misunderstanding if not clearly explained. Lessons have been learned from these experiences and the challenges have not just been because of a lack of understanding around church membership, there were other factors involved. God in his grace has held us, protected us, refined us and taught us.

Aside from church discipline, other weaknesses of our current model have been exposed. For example, those who are 'fully in' have sometimes found it a challenge to form long term community in Dublin. On some occasions, those who feel very committed to CCC, to Dublin and to our mission to seek the spiritual, cultural and social good of the city are often hurt or disappointed when people they thought were 'in', unexpectedly leave or make life decisions that reflect that they are not so committed to the relationships or mission of the church as they had thought. The answer to this challenge is not primarily answered by church membership, but through guarding our hearts and loving people regardless of what they give back. It's important that those of us who are 'long termers' don't harden our hearts or

¹² We had previously said 'no formal process' of becoming a church member – but it's more about teaching and understanding.

become bitter or resentful to those who stay for a short time, and we mustn't fail to love them whilst they are here or bless them when they go¹³. However, as people look to invest in Dublin for the long term, raise children and settle down, understanding who will be in that journey alongside them for the long term, in friendship and in mission, is important and a clearer understanding of church membership can help with that.¹⁴

Something else to consider is that typically as a church we have been good at reaching the newer, more transient residents but less good at reaching the longer term, established residents of Dublin. As we look to the future and make strategic decisions around staffing, ministries, mission, finances, congregations and locations in order to reach the more established long-term residents, it becomes even more important to know who is with us.

Finally, as we think about leadership (elders and deacons)¹⁵ and our responsibility before God to shepherd the flock under our care through teaching, discipleship, direction and example, it is helpful to know who we are responsible for – who is putting themselves under the leadership of the church and asking for that guidance and discipleship. A clearer understanding of church membership is a helpful way for people to say, “I am looking for your oversight and discipleship in my life.” Additionally, it gives a clearer way to challenge, and at times even remove leaders in CCC if that is necessary.

Church Membership – An Organic and Structured Way Forward

Without losing any of the strengths of the current mode of operating and without raising the bar so high that it makes it impossible to join, without creating a two-tiered system and without it becoming a ‘tick-box’ exercise, we want to add in a few more structural pieces to help people understand the significance of joining CCC and becoming a member.

Firstly, ‘Connect’ can remain as it is, though the recommendation is that aside from Maffy (or Steve) who run the evening, at least one staff member and one leadership team member should attend. We encourage everyone who comes to

¹³ A very helpful article on this is by Bill Riedel, ‘[Hug The Parade - Ministry Challenges and Opportunities in Transient Places](#)’ - Riedel makes the helpful point that we can call people to stay whilst reminding everyone of their freedom in Christ. In another helpful article by John Starke, ‘[Two Things to Consider Before Moving Out of the City](#)’, Starke suggests ‘covenant and calling/vocation’ as the two primary criteria for making life decisions, not ‘comfort and opportunity’, though the article is well balanced by talking about how God’s grace covers all.

¹⁴ Additionally, one of our strengths is that we teach and encourage everyone that they have gifts to give to the church and we encourage them to use those gifts to serve on Sunday teams and in City Groups. However this can sometime be rushed and the messaging can feel like “get involved asap” or worse “only those who serve really belong”. This has led on one or two occasions to putting people in serving roles or positions of leadership that they were not ready for. Later it became apparent that they were not committed to Christ or the church in the way we had thought or expected. Sometimes this was unavoidable, but at others times we rushed to fill roles rather than take the time to know and care for the people and then over time find the right way and place for them to flourish as they serve. We are much better at this now, with a bigger team and a bigger church, but as we look to plant again it is worth being mindful of this.

¹⁵ 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 1:1-5, Acts 20:17-38 and Philippians 1:1-2

CCC to attend, and the emphasis is on ‘connecting’. At Connect we teach the big story from scriptures about what God says about his people, from Genesis 12, Exodus 19 & 1 Peter 2. We unpack how we put that into practice in our vision and values, our different places to belong and the church rhythms. At the end of Connect we ask people to consider committing in three ways – (a) relationally (a city group), (b) practically (financial giving) and (c) vocationally (through exercising their gifts, typically on a Sunday, though increasingly in other areas too). Connect runs once or twice a term, depending on the number of new people. Currently this is overseen by Maffy who oversees all areas of welcome and integration of new people into the church. Each person who comes is followed up 1-2-1 by a staff or leadership team member.

Secondly, I want us to consider, as a follow up from Connect, that we run something called ‘Belong’. This can be run twice a year, and we would encourage all those who say CCC is their church, who have attended Connect, and have been a part of us for 6+ months (and therefore most likely in a city group) to attend. This can be led by Steve or Maffy, again with a staff and leadership team member in attendance and can be seen as a ‘part 2’ of Connect. Whereas Connect is focussed on ‘connecting’, Belong will, unsurprisingly, be focussed on ‘belonging’. During this evening we will recap some of the teaching from Connect but also teach further into what it means to be a committed community on mission together and the roles, responsibilities and expectations of that. We can revisit core beliefs and give an opportunity to ask questions. The suggestion is that at the end of the evening we revisit the three areas of commitment from Connect (relational, practical and vocational) but also talk about baptism, communion, oversight and church discipline. Each person who attends Belong will be followed up 1-2-1 by a staff or leadership team member. To be clear, there would be no formal acceptance of membership (written or vocal). If the person who comes to Belong then gets baptised (if they are not already) and/or chooses to participate in communion then they are to be considered a member of CCC.

Thirdly, we want to introduce ‘Renew’ (in September or February). This will be a chance for the whole church to seek God together to be refreshed, re-envisioned and refocussed, so we can then recommit to him, to his mission in Dublin and to his church family at CCC. Over one or two Sundays, at midweek city groups and through some personal devotional material, we want to teach about church membership and use both services and our city group meetings to share the Lord’s Supper. Tim Chester puts it like this:

Every Lord’s Supper is a covenant-renewal ceremony...but it might be helpful to have an annual communion service in which covenant renewal is the main focus, a chance to recommit to be members of the church.

We remember our covenant commitments, not just recalling that they exist but recommitting ourselves to those commitments.¹⁶

¹⁶ Pg123-124 (see Q&A below for fuller quotes on examples Chester gives on what we might commit to)

The covenant we enter into is with Jesus, by his grace and in his blood ([Luke 22:20](#)), and so we first give our allegiance and commitment to him. As we do that, we are reminded that we do not do this as individuals but together, as one body, one family and one people. So as an overflow of our recommitment to him, we respond to his call to love one another as he has loved us, and to share his message with a lost world. Once a year, at Renew, we want to take time do this well and thoughtfully, to strengthen our ties to our Lord, to his family and to his mission.

In terms of baptism, for anyone who comes to faith and wants to be baptised, we run a meeting to explain baptism, clarifying the significance of baptism, not just in relation to Christ but to the church. After this, they are then followed up with 1 or 2 existing leaders to ensure they are ready and understand the importance of baptism, and to reflect on and prepare sharing their story. We would then encourage them to go to Connect, Belong and participate in Renew as and when they occur.

For those joining our church as existing baptised believers, we would welcome them through:

1. Connect (plus follow up conversation with staff/leadership team)
2. Belong (plus follow up conversation with staff/leadership team)
3. Taking communion and participating in Renew.

Given the transient nature of Dublin and the wide variety of church backgrounds that people come from, this 3-step process alongside communion and the organic relationship building and community formation, will give us the opportunity to understand if someone has really grasped the gospel, trusted in Christ as Saviour and are living with him as their Lord. Where there may be a discrepancy between their profession to be a Christian with their beliefs and practice, we can find appropriate ways, as we build a relationship with them, to instruct them from the Bible. As 2 Timothy 3:15-17 says, *"...the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

Finally, the main way church membership is outworked is in a city group. This is what we say at Connect – city groups are the primary means of belonging in Christ City Church, the place to form community, grow in faith, exercise your gifts and learn to share the gospel with others. As leaders and those responsible for shepherding the church, this is primarily done through city groups, particularly as the church grows in number. Tim Keller, speaking into a larger church, but with the transient dynamic of city centre ministry, puts it like this:

Soon I began to warn people: "If you are a member or regular attendee at Redeemer, and you have a spiritual problem, or you get sick, or you have some kind of acute need in your life – we certainly will try to help. But if you are not in a group and we are slow to respond, you don't really have a warrant to complain. It is through small groups that we can provide care

and opportunities for learning, and through the groups that we will know quickly if you have a need that the Body can meet. So practically speaking, if you aren't in a small group, you aren't fully in the church."¹⁷

Hopefully the suggestion above, with the emphasis on baptism, communion and ongoing teaching in the context of genuine community will enable us to keep all the good of our current model whilst strengthening us in a few key areas.¹⁸

We appreciate that teaching on baptism, communion and church membership in this way may naturally be challenging. We live in a commitment-phobic and anti-authoritarian culture we can't help but imbibe. The idea of a committed community with responsibilities, obligations and duties of love is alien to many people's concept of church and typically people join a church like a consumer looking for what best fits their needs. Making decisions that are selfless and not self-serving is something that is challenging to all of us. Additionally, given so many stories of abuse of leadership, past and present, in the church, in the family and in society at large, we understand that it might be difficult to submit to flawed leadership. Submission in general is seen negatively in modern culture and we are taught to be wary and not entrust ourselves to others. With so many sad stories of leaders who abused their positions of authority, we need to tread carefully and humbly when asking people to commit and submit. Time, patience, grace, humility, personal example, relationship building, discipleship and clear teaching will be vital so people neither feel pressured to conform, nor pushed away. We are in no rush, and neither are we trying to get everyone to 'align' as soon as we can. We want people to see the beauty and power of the church as a covenant community and from that position, willingly and gladly submit.

For those in leadership, we must model the example of Jesus who came not to be served but to serve. He came not to take power but to give it; he came not to grasp glory but to exalt others. He made himself a servant and looked out for the interests of others and valued others above himself¹⁹. The good news is that whilst earthly shepherds will inevitably fail in their care of the sheep God gives them, the Good Shepherd will never fail, and it is to him that we all ultimately submit and can know we are saved and cared for.

Church Discipline – Informal and Formal

Now we understand what it means to be a committed community and the place of baptism and communion as the sacraments that ratify and confirm the commitment, we can think about our responsibility towards those who profess to be followers of Jesus and part of his community, and yet are clearly living in ways that go against God's will. Without this background, church discipline can seem strange to modern churchgoers and even wrong. People can quickly

¹⁷ Pg5 - Linking Strategies, a paper by Tim Keller for City To City

¹⁸ We may also decide that the AGM is for church members only, though at this stage this doesn't seem necessary.

¹⁹ See Philippians 2:3-8 which is a theological and practical reflection on the incarnation, in particularly John 13 and the cross.

misunderstand what is going on and feel hurt and judged. Our natural reactions might be - shouldn't we just love everyone? Doesn't Jesus' love accept everyone? Are you claiming to be perfect?

The two key passages on church discipline are Matthew 18:15-20 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. The two passages fit together nicely as Matthew 18 tells us about the informal and ongoing approach to church discipline (which we might call accountability) in the life of a Christian community, and 1 Corinthians 5 tells us how the final, formal step happens, in serious cases, where the person remains unrepentant. The hope and prayer is that if we are practicing Matthew 18 well, we will rarely, if ever, have to practice 1 Corinthians 5. So, let's look at the why, when, how, who and what of church discipline, drawing from the very helpful book by Jonathan Leeman on the topic.

(a) Why should a church exercise discipline?

In all our actions, motivation is the primary means by which we determine whether our actions are right or wrong²⁰. When it comes to church discipline, motivation is everything - why should we exercise church discipline? Leeman lists four motivations of love that lead to church discipline:

1. Love for the individual - that he or she might be warned and brought to repentance.
2. Love for the church - that weaker sheep might be protected.
3. Love for the watching world - that it might see Christ's transforming power.
4. Love for Christ - that the church might uphold his holy name and obey him.

²¹

Linked to these motivations of love, Leeman points out 5 purposes of church discipline, from 1 Corinthians 5, that are worth considering - to expose, to warn, to save, to protect and to present a good witness for Jesus.

- Firstly, discipline aims to expose. Sin, like cancer, loves to hide. Discipline exposes the cancer so that it might be cut out quickly (vs1-2).
- Secondly, discipline aims to warn. A church does not enact God's retribution through discipline. Rather, it stages a small intervention which points towards the greater judgment to come (vs5). Discipline is a compassionate warning. Giving false assurance to someone is not a loving thing to do.
- Thirdly, it aims to save. Churches pursue discipline when they see a member taking the path towards death, and none of their pleading and arm-waving causes the person to turn around. It's the device of last resort for bringing an individual to repentance (vs5).
- Fourthly, discipline aims to protect. Just as cancer spreads from one cell to another, so sin quickly spreads from one person to another (vs6) and discipline helps to prevent this.
- Fifthly, it aims to present a good witness for Jesus. Church discipline, strange to say, is good for non-believers, because it helps to preserve the attractive

²⁰ See 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 or Matthew 6, or Luke 21:1-4 or Matthew 23

²¹ Page 23, Leeman

distinctiveness of God's people (vs1). Churches should be salty...but if salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled on by men (Matthew 5:13).

(b) When should church discipline be exercised?

The Bible says that whenever you see a brother or sister sin (Matthew 18:15-20), or whenever we see someone caught in sin (Galatians 6:1-2), then we need to take action to challenge them, and as Paul says 'restore them gently', watching that we are not falling into sin. So, in one sense, church discipline is an ongoing organic process in the life of the community as we are committed to encouraging one another to be more like Christ – as iron sharpens iron so we sharpen one another. Most church discipline is actually everyday discipleship/accountability and loving truth-telling within the life of the community. The hope and prayer is that no-one ever has to be asked to leave the church.

That said, there are two important points worth clarifying. Firstly, we are not to become legalists who nit-pick over every area of sin we see in others. We remember Jesus' teaching to first pick the plank out of our own eye before we go and help our brother or sister with their speck²². We also remember what Peter taught when he said "love covers over a multitude of sins."²³ Leeman makes a helpful point that true disciples will be increasingly pure and increasingly poor in Spirit.²⁴ In other words, whilst we are growing in holiness and purity as the Spirit transforms our lives, we are also increasingly aware of our sin and our need of a Saviour, which means we are always contrite and humble. We are a community that has received mercy and been treated with extraordinary kindness by Jesus, so we should offer that mercy and kindness to others.

Secondly, we remember that when Jesus protected the woman caught in adultery from the judgement of the religious leaders in John 8, he ends that passage by saying "*Then neither do I condemn you*", Jesus declared. *'Go now and leave your life of sin.'*" In other words, whilst we are not to judge others, we are to urge them to leave their life of sin. There is a place for church discipline, not around what we might call 'ordinary' sins that we regularly have to acknowledge and repent of, but rather 'lifestyle sins'.²⁵ We do not exercise church discipline every time someone sins, but we do exercise it when someone is living a life of unrepentant sin, from which they are unwilling to turn.

Leeman talks about three criteria for when we must act to remove someone from a Christian community (excommunication) that we see in 1 Corinthians 5. He says the sin must be **outward, serious, and unrepentant**.

²² Matthew 7:1-6

²³ 1 Peter 4:8

²⁴ Pg64, Leeman

²⁵ In 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul lists a number of sins that were not one-off mistakes, but patterns of living that defined the church in Corinthian before they were saved. Their very identity was bound up in these activities. This is how they lived. But Paul says they have been made new, washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, so those things no longer define them.

Firstly, the sin must be outward. We cannot raise the issue of church discipline every time someone suspects pride or greed. The sin must be seen with the eyes or heard with the ears.

Secondly, the sin must be serious in that there is a danger, to the person, the community or the witness of Christ, that this sin presents. For example, there is a difference between someone who has been lax in their claiming of work expenses compared to someone engaged intentionally in money laundering. There is a difference between falling into sexual sin with your partner and actively choosing a lifestyle of cohabitation and condoning regular sex whilst not married. All of the above need to be challenged, but the latter examples are far more serious and ingrained than the former. Or to take another example, embezzlement does more damage than shoplifting and murder does more damage than embezzlement. All these sins need to be challenged, but the speed and urgency of our response to the sin depends on how serious the sin is.

Finally, the person must be unrepentant, and this is the most significant point. If Matthew 18 is being followed carefully, if church members are lovingly challenging other members on an area of obvious sin and if that person refuses to repent and remains unwilling to repent, then the church has no choice but to exercise church discipline with that member²⁶.

(c) How should church discipline be exercised?

Matthew 18:15-20 gives us the principle that as few people should be involved as is possible to bring someone to repentance. Therefore, we start 1-to-1, then involve 1-2 others, and then take it to the wider church. It is so important we follow this principle and not rush the steps. So many times, I as the Pastor have been told about an issue (whether of sin or hurt) within the community and the person telling me has not addressed it first with the other person involved. This shows that we are slow to obey the teaching of Jesus here. If someone is a new or young believer, or unsure, it is fine to involve church leadership to get guidance and support in the task of confronting someone. Paul also says in Galatians 6:1 we must be careful that we too are not tempted, so it is good sometimes for mature Christians to be involved in the process. Younger Christians are often susceptible to naive or misplaced sympathies. But otherwise, lovingly challenging your fellow church member over an issue of sin is what true Christian friendship looks like.

When it comes to confronting people and exercising church discipline, there should be no rush. All the evidence and extenuating circumstances²⁷ should be considered, all sides of the story need to be understood and the person should be given the benefit of the doubt, rather than treated suspiciously or on the basis of

²⁶ There can also be cases when there is not time for the informal Matthew process and the formal process of excommunication has to happen immediately, as in 1 Corinthians 5. Leeman puts it like this – “*When a sin is so deliberate, repugnant and indicative of a deep double-mindedness that a congregation is left unable to give credence to a profession of repentance, at least until time has passed and trust has been re-earned, it should proceed with excommunication, determining to test for repentance after the fact*”(pg63. Leeman)

²⁷ Leeman has a good list of situational elements that need to be considered when exercising church discipline on page 53, showing that we must not be quick to make decisions and there is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach. Consistent is key, but so wisdom and discernment.

gossip. Leeman helpfully points out that the issue is someone's response when they are lovingly, gently and carefully shown an area of sin. He says:

Does the person repeatedly refuse to repent, such that the person's profession eventually becomes unbelievable and not affirmable? That is, does this person clench his or her fist around this sin so tightly that it outweighs all other protestations of faith?²⁸

Or elsewhere he says:

Is he or she willing to do whatever it takes to fight against the sin? Repenting people typically, are zealous about casting off their sin. That's what God's Spirit does inside of them. When this happens, one can expect to see a willingness to accept outside counsel. A willingness to inconvenience their schedules. A willingness to confess embarrassing things. A willingness to make financial sacrifices or lose friends or end relationships.²⁹

Paul's comments about godly versus worldly sorrow, from 2 Corinthians 7:8-13 are helpful. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, leaves no regret and produces earnestness, eagerness, indignation, alarm, longing, concern and readiness to see justice done.

Leeman helpfully says that the length of the process depends on how long it takes to establish that a person is characteristically unrepentant.

(d) Who receives, gives and knows about church discipline?

Paul clarifies who will receive church discipline when he says:

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who **claims to be a brother or sister** (emphasis added) but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. 'Expel the wicked person from among you.'³⁰

Church discipline is for those who claim to be a brother or sister and yet live in a way that goes against God's will and are not willing (or do not see) that they need to repent and change.

²⁸ Pg 52, Leeman

²⁹ Pg72, Leeman

³⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:9-13, at the end Paul quotes from Deuteronomy - 13:5; 17:7; 19:19; 21:21; 22:21,24; 24:7

For those unfamiliar with this teaching, it can seem on first reading to contradict Jesus' teaching not to judge others in Matthew 7. However, Jesus is not asking us to suspend all critical faculties and turn a blind eye, he is commanding us not be censorious and to ensure before we correct others, we have dealt with areas in our own lives that need correcting. This is crucial for implementing church discipline well, our posture must be one of humility and our lives must be full of integrity and transparency ourselves.

In terms of who is active in exercising church discipline, as outlined in Matthew 18, it starts with an informal approach, involving one person, then two to three people and then finally the whole church, including the leaders. In the worst cases it becomes very public and drastic as in 1 Corinthians 5, but most of the time it can be handled with smaller groups.

When someone receives church discipline, it will be important to inform the city group that the person belonged to, people relationally connected to the person, and the wider gathering of leaders. If necessary or appropriate, a members' meeting could be convened or the whole church gathered on a Sunday could be informed.

(e) What happens in church discipline?

Consistency is important when it comes to church discipline; we don't hold certain people (and their sins) to a higher account than other people (and their sins). That said, situational elements and extenuating circumstances must be taken into account, so wisdom is required for each situation. When it becomes clear however that someone is characteristically unrepentant and that their sin is obvious and serious, then these are the different ways that a person will be disciplined.

Firstly, the Lord's Supper – Since the church can no longer affirm the person's profession of faith, we refuse to give them the Lord's supper. We are 'ex-communication-ing', the person and treating them as those outside the covenant. As stated above, the aim is to warn them of the greater judgement that will come on them if they do not repent. It is not loving to give them false assurance.

Secondly, serving/leadership roles – They will be asked to step down from any roles they have in church. If someone is living intentionally in unrepentant sin, that person cannot lead others. The threat of contamination in the church and the undermining of Jesus' reputation is too great.

Thirdly, city group attendance – Depending on the situation and the sin, the person may be asked to leave their city group. This may not always be necessary but since city groups function within CCC as an outworking of church membership, this may make sense in most cases.

Fourthly, fellowship with other CCCers – Leeman helpfully talks about how the relationship the church has with the person must change. He says:

The general tenor of one's relationship with the disciplined individual should markedly change. Interactions should not be characterised by casualness but by deliberate conversations about repentance. Certainly, family members should continue to fulfil family obligations.³¹

This is not always the case, but there are situations where it is necessary to not associate at all with people who remain characteristically unrepentant.³²

Fifthly, Sunday gatherings – Typically we would encourage those under discipline to continue attending so they can hear God's word and be brought to repentance. That said, there may be times when the behaviour of a person is too divisive or dangerous, that they are asked not to attend our Sunday Gatherings.

(f) How does restoration work?

The aim and expectation of church discipline is that you will 'wake someone up' so that they repent and are restored; that is our prayer and goal. So, how does this work? As soon as someone repents, they are to be received back, publicly affirmed and treated once again as a loved and cherished family member.

Of course, there may need to be a time of testing, particularly if the sin was so deliberate (e.g murder) or so repugnant (e.g sexual predatory behaviour) that any quick words of apology would be inadequate. It is not that the sins cannot ever be forgiven, or that the person might not be immediately repentant. However occasionally, time needs to pass and the fruit of repentance displayed before a church can responsibly pronounce forgiveness.

Or maybe, if a person repeatedly sins in a certain area and then repeatedly falls, particularly if the sin involves breaking trust and results in division in the church, we may not be able to trust the words of their repentance, at least for a time. It's not that we don't want to restore the person, but given the pattern, and potentially habitual lying, it may not be wise to automatically trust the person's words. Time might be needed to demonstrate the fruit of their repentance which would result in honesty and transparency in words and actions.

Love protects and disciplines

This paper started by talking about love, a love that commits and a love that washes feet. It may be helpful to end by saying that such love also "does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth."³³ So our love for each other must be marked by truth. Paul, in Ephesians 4, says that we grow into maturity as we speak the truth in love. Additionally, we remember that our Father in heaven disciplines

³¹ Pg76, Leeman

³² See 1 Corinthians 5:9 & 12 (do not associate or eat with them), 2 Thessalonians 3:6 & 14-15 (keep away, do not associate), 2 Timothy 3:5 (have nothing to do with them), Titus 3:10 (have nothing to do with them) and 2 John 10-11 (not take into your house or welcome).

³³ 1 Corinthians 13:8

us so that we might grow in holiness. He wants our good and he wants us to reap a harvest in our lives. No discipline is pleasant at the time, but it is a sign that we are truly his legitimate children³⁴. Discipline is a sign that God really loves us, and so as brothers and sisters, we must follow the example of our heavenly Father in both giving and receiving discipline.

Further Reading

- Truth we can touch - how baptism and communion shape our lives (Tim Chester)
- Church membership - how the world knows who represents Jesus (Jonathan Leeman)
- Church discipline - how the church protects the name of Jesus (Jonathan Leeman)
- The meaning of marriage, chapter 5 - the essence of marriage (Tim & Kathy Keller)
- What is a healthy church member (Thabiti Anyabwile)
- Hug The Parade - Ministry Challenges (and Opportunities) in Transient Places (Bill Riedel)
- Two things to consider before moving out of the city (John Starke)
- Linking Strategies - Tim Keller (City to City)

Steve Vaughan, April 2021, for discussion with leadership team, wider leaders and advisory team

³⁴ Hebrews 12:1-13

June 2021 Update

The paper was presented to the wider leaders in May 2021 and there were some helpful questions and insights that came from that which brought more clarity. Here are some answers as how to we want to implement church leadership and pastor our people through it.

1. What are people committing to when they become church members?

When people get baptised, or when they come forward for communion, we want to explain that people are committing to living out their new identity as those baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. They are children of God, members of Jesus' body, stones in the temple of the Holy Spirit, the bride of Christ, a kingdom of priests, branches connected to the vine etc. So when they are baptised, or participate in communion, they are committing to inhabit and live out these identities which they have received through the gospel.

What does that mean in practice? It means we urge and encourage our people to be disciples of Jesus, following in his footsteps, doing what he would do. Chester helpfully puts it like this:

Every Lord's Supper is a covenant-renewal ceremony...but it might be helpful to have an annual communion service in which covenant renewal is the main focus, a chance to recommit to be members of the church.

We remember our covenant commitments, not just recalling that they exist but recommitting ourselves to those commitments. Think what commitment to Christ involves:

- A radical repudiation of sin, selfishness, self-reliance and pride
- A commitment to look to Christ, and Christ alone, for salvation from sin and death
- A commitment to find our ultimate identity and fulfilment in Christ
- A commitment to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him
- A commitment to obey his every command
- A commitment to extend his reign through the proclamation of the gospel

And think too, what commitment to Christ's people involves:

- A commitment to attend regularly
- A commitment to pray faithfully
- A commitment to serve fully
- A commitment to give sacrificially
- A commitment to participate in the church's mission
- A commitment to disciple others, to be discipled, and (if necessary) to be disciplined.

It is not something to be done lightly. There should be a weight to what takes place. These are the commitments we make to Christ, and these are the commitments we make to one another.³⁵

At 'Belong' we will teach on this, so people have a clear understanding of what participating in the Lord's Supper means, and we'll use 'Renew' (see page 9 of the paper for details) to re-emphasise this and provide the opportunity to recommit ourselves. We will use wording and phrases that are appropriate for CCC (i.e not 'covenant renewal ceremony' but 'Renew') and we remember that we are to give ourselves first to Jesus, our head, and then to one another, his body.

2. So how does someone become a church member if they are already baptised?

If a new person comes along, we envision five things being in place for them to be counted as a member. Please note, all of this happens in relationship and in conversation.

1. **Organic relationship building** – this is the foundation.
2. **Baptism & communion** – As we get to know them we will naturally discover if they been baptised and if are they taking communion. If they haven't been baptised we'll speak to them about that to see if this is something they would consider.
3. **Connect** – after someone has attended for a season, we will invite them to a 'Connect' meeting, which will have a 1-2-1 follow up with a leadership/staff member
4. **Belong** – after six months of being part of CCC, and after having done Connect we will invite the person to a 'Belong' meeting. Most likely and ideally, they will be linked to a city group at this stage.
5. **Renew** – for all those who are part of CCC and who have been to Connect and Belong, we will invite them to participate in Renew. If someone slips through the gaps in terms of timings, we can use good judgement and handle that with wisdom.

When these five things are in place, we consider that person to be a member of CCC. As with many things in church life it is important to note that this isn't a 'rule book' to legalistically follow, but rather a helpful rhythm and approach. So we can be flexible and use common sense where needed.

To reiterate, the emphasis here is on

- **Clear teaching rather than a signing up process** – Filling baptism and communion with significance and meaning.
- **Clear understanding of commitment to God's people rather than formal membership lists** – understanding and living out our identities as God's people.
- **Spirit of membership rather than the letter of membership** – wisdom, grace, truth and love, are all exercised in the context of relationship.

³⁵ Pg123-124, Chester

3. What if someone has different theological views to the church?

We want to follow the maxim passed down in church history:

In essentials, unity,
In non-essentials, liberty,
In all things, charity.

So for us, theological differences around secondary issues (for example, specific political views, view on adult/child baptism, gifts of the spirit, the roles of men and women in ministry, church governance etc etc) will not be defining issues to belong and participate in CCC. We ask members to respect and honour the views of the leadership, to speak charitably if they hold a different view and to ensure to act as to promote unity, but we expect and respect the different views represented in the church. And we welcome discussion on these issues.

Church membership will be based on the fundamentals of the gospel that are outlined on our website – what we believe. This can be supplemented by the 5 ‘Solas’ of the reformation (scripture, faith, grace, Christ and God’s glory) and the Nicene Creed.

4. What if someone doesn’t agree that a certain action/choice is a ‘sin’?

For anyone acting or living in a way that is contrary to the way of Jesus we will look to engage them in conversation, to understand their situation and their current understanding, and through that conversation, instruct them from the scriptures over the issue, with wisdom and sensitivity for their situation and context. Leeman comments helpfully on how we need to be aware of ‘situational elements’³⁶. The conversation should be handled with care, with sensitivity, nothing should be forced or rushed.

If, after a number of conversations there is still no willingness to change, or willingness to see the need to change, then church discipline will need to be enacted as above. It will be important to communicate that whilst we love the person, we believe they are putting themselves in spiritual danger to continue as they are.

5. Is baptism not baptism into the global church of Christ?

Yes and amen! When someone is baptised, they are joining the church of Jesus Christ, that spans all believers throughout all denominations, in all of history, in heaven and on earth. However, that joining of the global church of Jesus gets expressed and declared through local expressions of that global church – i.e., in a local church. Similarly, the invitation to the Lord’s Table in communion is Jesus himself inviting his people to his table, but again that gets expressed and worked out in a local church context.

6. Could it give the impression that our church is the only church that counts?

Linked to the previous question, particularly if the Leeman example of handing out passports was taken too far, this could be communicated in such a way that

³⁶ See Leeman’s list in his book on church discipline, page 53

makes it sound like our church is the only church and if you're not part of our church (or if you leave our church) then you're not a Christian. We of course want to avoid that. We all belong to the church of Jesus Christ, and we are one local expression of that.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes to 'the church of God in Corinth' (1 Corinthians 1:2) when in fact they are a group of house churches in one city. Paul then goes on to talk about (vs13-17) how he baptised a few of them (Crispus, Gaius and Stephanas) but he cannot remember if he baptised anyone else. Paul is in effect saying that he affirmed their citizenship in the kingdom and gave out the passport for those three. But his main point is that it actually doesn't matter who baptised them. What matters is that Christ was preached and through the gospel people were saved. We want to take a similar approach – it doesn't matter so much whether we or some other church baptised people and recognised them as citizens of Jesus' kingdom. What matters is that they have responded to the gospel and belong to Jesus' church.

7. What about parents who want their children to be baptised as infants?

Since we practice believers baptism, at CCC we also offer a thanksgiving service for the birth of children into the community, which gives us a chance to welcome them into the community and pray for the parents and the child.

Whilst we respect the choice of those who are convinced of infant baptism for themselves and will not put a barrier up to them joining, we will not baptise children ourselves. For any parents who would like CCC to do that then there are two choices, either they leave with our blessing to find another church where their children can be baptised, or they respect and submit to our leadership and theological position, and let their children make their own decision when they are older. We hope that if there are any in this situation in CCC, that they will come and speak to us without any hesitation.

8. How do we handle the cultural connotations around baptism in Ireland?

For many who have grown up in Ireland, they were baptised as babies as part of the culture. In many cases their parents were not practicing Christians, did not necessarily understand or agree with the theology of their child's baptism but baptised their child so as to participate in a family and cultural event.

For people in this situation, we would encourage them to be baptised again as believing adults, but respect their decision if they theologically consider the sacrament to have been effective, under the grace of God, for them. See comments above around child baptism.

Additionally, when we teach and explain baptism, we want to be really clear about what we are doing (and what we are not doing) so as to lovingly and graciously clarify for people what baptism means for us against any understanding they had from their upbringing.

9. Why are we doing this now? Hasn't it worked well so far as it is?

In many ways, what we are proposing is not really much of a change in process; it is more of a change in understanding. We want to fill baptism and communion with meaning, and help people to understand what it means to commit to Christ and his church. So we hope the feel of things will not change too much.

That said, to help with pastoral care, intentional discipleship, corporate mission, loving shepherding, positive decision-making and careful church discipline, it is helpful for people to have a clearer understanding of what it means to be part of CCC, and for the leadership to know who they are responsible, under God, for. To help us with that we'll add in 'Belong' and 'Renew'.

10. How we do we recognise members now?

Right now, members are primarily recognised if they have been to *Connect* and are actively engaged in our city groups. However in many ways we do not recognise members right now and that is the challenge.

11. Will we teach on this?

Yes, we will be teaching on this during Sunday Sermons and through *Connect* and *Belong* meetings. We appreciate that for some, church membership and church discipline will have very negative connotations, so we want to help people understand why they are actually good things. It may be appropriate to do a Sunday sermon series directly on this topic. We will take our time on this.

Additionally, we have been encouraged to train people on how they lovingly challenge others, so that we are equipped to know how to do this, and we know what mistakes to avoid.

12. Is church membership the right terminology?

Language and terminology are important. We do not want to create an exclusive club or a two-tier system. Nor do we want people to simply be ticking boxes. We also want to avoid the idea of church membership which might be akin to gym membership – where someone is paying for services. In a family or in a marriage the relationship and the mutual giving and receiving is what matters, and so it is with church membership. Partnership was another helpful word which was suggested that captures much of this, though this lacks something potentially around submission to leaders. No word is perfect. In a family you belong, and that is what church membership is all about. Belonging may be the most helpful term, so we have a 'Connect' and a 'Belong' meeting. We are open to suggestions on this as we go forward.

13. Is Matthew 18:15 only for when a brother or sister sins against you?

It might seem that applying Matthew 18:15 to the wider context of any brother who sins is not what this passage is referring to, but rather when someone sins against you. If that is the case, are we misinterpreting the passage to apply it more generally? As any translation will highlight (e.g NIV or ESV), there is actually ambiguity in the ancient manuscripts; some add the 'against you' and some omit it. Whenever we encounter a situation like this, we remain humble and look to see

if other scriptures give us guidance. Other passages do encourage us that a more general application may be appropriate in certain situations – see Galatians 6:1, James 5:19-20 & 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 for example.

14. What accountability is there for the leaders in the church?

This is particularly pertinent given some recent scandals which have occurred where church leaders have fallen from grace and it has come to light that ‘no-one really knew them’ and they had little accountability for themselves. A core value at CCC is discipleship, that each of us has a place to be known and loved, and where we are growing in our relationship with God through confession of our sins with other believers.

Of course, anyone can act deceitfully, structures will only go so far, but they are helpful to put in place and safeguard the integrity of the church’s intention in this area. Here are some of things which are in place at Christ City Church:

- Life Groups – Each leader is encouraged to be in a life group or meeting 1-2-1 with someone else. This is a place where they can be honest and be known.
- Plurality of leadership – for now this is the leadership team, in time this will be an eldership alongside the leadership team. Decisions are made together.
- The Advisory Team – the team consists of mature, gifted Christian leaders from other churches who provide support, advice and are given insight into the life of the church and the leaders
- A wider network – this may be something that we seek to find over the coming years.

15. Can short-term people and students be members of CCC?

Anyone can be a member of Christ City Church even if they are only here for a short time, or if they’re a student who might live 50% of the time in Dublin and 50% back home. A member is someone who commits to Christ and his church and looks to demonstrate that commitment whilst they are in Dublin with us. We’d be delighted to have them be part of us and are glad that they want to submit to the leadership and vision of the church and give what they can whilst they are with us. For some, we hope they catch a longer-term vision for the city. For others, we are grateful for the part we were able to play in their lives, and the gift they were whilst they were with us.