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STATEMENT ON ABORTION

The purpose of this document is to clarify publicly the position that South Park Church holds regarding abortion and to provide a basis for counseling by the pastoral staff. It is not intended to require disciplinary procedures for those who have made personal choices contrary to the position here affirmed. On the other hand, there is the possibility that actions contrary to this statement could be considered as matters for disciplinary action, but this will be according to the discretion of the Pastor and Deacon Board. Should disciplinary action be deemed advisable in any individual case where it is believed that a disregard for human life has been demonstrated, this document could then provide criteria by which an equitable and just decision could be reached.

Human worth is a consequence of being made by and in the image of a personal God¹ who is sovereign over history and places us within the framework of God's continual acts in history. The dominant philosophy of this age opposes this world view and life view and asserts the dignity and worth of people and their capacity for self-realization through reason apart from the supernatural and sovereign involvement of a personal God.

Clear lines of confrontation between these two opposing faiths are not easily discerned by the Christian community, both individually and corporately. Cultural conditioning, sin, and ignorance of God's revealed will all mitigate against a clear perception of many ethical and moral issues. Nevertheless, we affirm the authority and witness of God's revelation in Scripture and the heritage of Church history regarding the dignity and capacity of all human life and oppose anything that would blur or lessen its value.

We humbly recognize the complex presuppositions, realities and implications of ethical/moral decision making, and confess our own sinful silence in failing to act where the lines of conflict are obvious. We accept the challenge to confront the pragmatism of this age and seek to move away from past indifference and the subtle seductive power of this age. We therefore affirm that abortion on demand is morally wrong.

¹Genesis 1:26,27; 9:6

We believe that all human life is a gift from God and is, therefore, sacred.² The Lord has created all life sacred and cherishes all lives: including all those that have been marked by the effects of the fall of nature, resulting in physical and mental abnormalities.³ We believe that Scripture confers human rights on the unborn and provides penalties for actions that result in the death of the unborn.⁴ Furthermore, Scripture repeatedly affirms God's interaction with persons before birth.⁵ The fetus is not a growth or piece of tissue in the mother's body, nor even a potential human being. The fetus is a human life who, though not yet mature, is growing into the fullness of the humanity it already possesses.⁶ The humanness of the fetus is confirmed by modern medical science. From the moment of conception a unique genetic code distinct from both parents is established, sex is determined and the only requirements for development into an adult human being are time and nutrition.

Thus we affirm that the moral issue of abortion is more than a question of the freedom of a woman to control the reproductive functions of her body. It is a question of moral responsibility involving at least two human beings at different stages of maturity. Abortion transcends issues of person, economic and social convenience, or compassion. No woman gives birth to herself. She gives birth to a child that is a distinct body and personality from herself. Consequently, even if we would agree that every woman has a right to do with her body as she sees fit, we cannot conclude that she therefore has the right to take the life of her child. However, in the rare situation when the life of the unborn child mortally threatens the equal life of the mother, the mother is not required to sacrifice her life. The sixth commandment prohibits the presumptuous taking of life. Sparing the mother is in effect an act of self-defense and is therefore permissible. In cases of rape or incest, the child has done no wrong. He/she must not be forced to suffer for the sins of the father.⁷ To take the child's life would be presumptuous. The life of one is not to be forfeited for the quality of life of another.

We believe that the Church is commissioned to declare and demonstrate this high regard for human life, the reality and complexity of the sinful human condition and God's forgiveness through grace and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. The community of Christian believers furnishes the context out of which this declaration and demonstration grow. It is the responsibility of the Church to insist that society not adopt a policy that would deny the sanctity of human life and lead people to take life lightly.⁸ The Church must advocate the protection of

²Exodus 20:13

³Exodus 4:11; John 9:1-3

⁴Exodus 21:22-25 (NIV) This describes premature birth with no injury, as opposed to a miscarriage as suggested in some translations. Even the inhumane Assyrians considered the fetus a life. Their laws require that a miscarriage caused by a blow be compensated for by a live (Middle Assyrian Laws #50) and that a woman who has an abortion ("has a miscarriage by her own act") be punished not only with death but that a proper burial be withheld—the most severe of punishments (Middle Assyrian Laws #53).

⁵Job 10:10-12; Jeremiah 1:5; Psalms 139:13-16; 51:6; Judges 13:4,13; Luke 1:15; Matthew 1:20; Galatians 1:15

⁶Psalms 51:5; John 9:2 Suggesting the existence of sin prior to birth, certainly implies personhood. Even the atrocity of ripping open pregnant women to kill the fetus (2 Kings 15:16; Hosea 13:16) presupposes the personhood of the fetus.

⁷Deuteronomy 24:16

⁸This would be part of our function as light and salt (Matthew 5:13-16).

the freedom of those who cannot protect themselves.⁹ The Church must therefore seek to protect the unborn child's freedom to live. In addition, Christians must reach out to those who are confronted with the crisis for which abortion seems a solution with the offer of a biblical alternative, providing the practical care and compassion needed.¹⁰

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only adequate answer to the terrible spiritual, moral and social dilemma confronting the society that legalizes abortion and the parents contemplating abortion. Christians are called to live in active tension with culture neither becoming complacent toward evil or proponents of it, but promoting the truth of God's revelation. The current state of affairs in our society compels Christians to share in the responsibility for the tragedy upon us, to promote justice and propagate the promises of grace. Christians have a responsibility to be involved in the legislative process of our democratic society for the purpose of guarding the freedom of the unborn. The church also has the obligation to educate its own constituents and society itself concerning the complex issues surrounding abortion and equip people with a biblical alternative. God has commissioned the Church to experience and express the redemption that is available in Christ Jesus. Therefore it is precisely to those who are in trouble and despair that the Church has to present the message of forgiveness and redemption. Even those who have sinned must be sheltered by Christian love and assured that no one is beyond the scope of God's forgiveness. The Church must also create alternatives and share the burden of caring for the various individual sin involved in these difficult circumstances. May God's grace and wisdom prevail as we seek to work for an end to abortion.

Adopted by the Board of Deacons
December 3, 1986
Modified from the Statement of the
Conservative Congregational Christian Conference

⁹E.g. Isaiah 2:17 Certainly much of the law seeks this end (cf e.g. Deuteronomy 24:6–22).

¹⁰James 2:14–17; 1:27

DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE POLICY

Divorce: Biblical Material

Marriage is a covenant, an oath and a commitment. The sundering of a marriage is a serious matter before God, who has instituted marriage and is the one in whose name the oath has been taken. Each couple that is married, explicitly consents to certain terms by way of the marriage vows. In some weddings these are treated in a matter-of-fact fashion, while in others they are taken very seriously. In some weddings the terms are standard, in others they are very detailed, and in still others they are intentionally diluted. We should not be under the delusion that the humans involved are the only ones who have any input onto the terms of the marriage agreement. Rather, God has certain minimal demands that are inherent in any marriage commitment, a right that is His as author of the institution.

While any covenant requires loyalty (this is the essence of the Hebrew term “*hesed*” that describes God’s attribute concerning His covenant with Israel.), the length of term of the covenant is usually part of its stipulations. In a marriage covenant, however, there is no choice in this matter. It is set by God as a lifelong commitment and requires a full life of commitment to the marriage partner.

In the Old Testament there is a distinction between vows (*nederim*) and oaths (*shebu’othy*). Vows can be mediated and altered given certain conditions. Oaths may never be broken without bringing dire consequences on the individual. Marriage falls into the latter category; it is an agreement made with another individual before God. God is called to witness the agreement and is considered to enforce the agreement. When one breaks an oath, he invites the punishment of God. Sundering marriage involves the breaking of an oath, disloyalty to a covenant and renegeing on a commitment. Each of these is an act of sin in the eyes of God.

CONCLUSION #1: Sundering marriage is a serious sin in God’s eyes regardless of the strength or weakness of the individual’s concepts of marriage or the nature of the marriage vows.

There is no single instance where the Bible explicitly grants the right to sunder a marriage. In Ezra 9–10 we have a case where divorce is ordered by Ezra, one of the leaders of the post-exilic community, but that is neutrally reported by Scripture. It is presented as the decision that he made under the circumstances, but then it is passed by without comment; no approbation nor condemnation is given. This cannot be cited as a case of approved sundering. Ezra is basing this on legal passages concerning the ethnic preservation of Israel.

Many have cited the well-known “exception clause,” “except for *porneia*,” (some kind of sexual misbehavior), as giving a right to divorce, and such may be implied. But the thrust of the passages (Matthew 5:32; 19:9) is to identify which of the couple is responsible for sundering the marriage and the resulting adultery. This is intended to correct the abuse of Deuteronomy 24. The divorcing husband is responsible for sundering the marriage unless the wife is guilty of *porneia*, in which case she bears the responsibility for her situation because she sundered the

marriage before the divorce took place. The existence of *porneia*, though it may be grounds for divorce, does not condone sundering, for that had already occurred. So Christ is not speaking about when divorce is or is not legitimate, but if sundering has already taken place, divorce has an implied legitimacy.

CONCLUSION #2: The Bible nowhere concedes the right to sunder a marriage.

Despite the above conclusion, it also must be recognized that the Bible does assume divorce is taking place, yet makes no blanket condemnation of it. In Matthew 19:4–8, Christ makes it clear that marriage is an institution established by God and not to be tampered with by man. Divorce is not an intended part of that system, and man has no authority to negate or override the joining act by God by sundering a marriage (it is this passage from which the term “sundering” is taken). In Malachi 2:16, we find the direct statement that God hates divorce, but that too does not mean that it is never allowable. We can be sure that God, likewise, hated the “divorce” that He had to undertake against His covenant people (Jeremiah 3:1–10; Isaiah 50:1), yet He did it anyway out of necessity. (It should also be noted that Malachi 2:16 has some very different translation alternatives.)

CONCLUSION #3: The Bible makes some very strong statements against divorce, but makes no blanket condemnation of it. It is rather the sundering of marriage that is condemned, and where divorce does that, it shares the condemnation.

While there is no blanket condemnation of every kind of divorce, there are certain categories of divorce, all causing sundering, that are singled out for comment. Malachi 2:14 condemns the actions of the Israelites of that time of divorcing “*the wife of your youth*” in order to marry foreign women. This is equated with “profaning the sanctuary of the Lord” (the result of sin in their midst). The Gospels’ sections on divorce likewise, at a minimum, identify as adulterers those who are divorcing their wives with the intention of marrying another. Switching wives is a violation of the first order and is not to be tolerated as a reason for divorce. It is simply adultery.

This still leaves some questions unanswered, however, concerning the situations in which divorce may be allowable, though it is never the preferred option or considered a “right.” At best it is a reluctant allowance in cases when the marriage has already been sundered. But when does that exist? Both Moses (Deuteronomy 24:1–4; see Matthew 19:8) and Ezra (Ezra 9–10) allowed for divorce in certain circumstances. These involved cases where the ideal of marriage was abandoned to preserve something close to the ideal in other areas. In Deuteronomy 24 divorce was allowed to preserve intact the dignity of the woman who had become susceptible to mistreatment because of something over which she had no control. The law gave the man the option of divorcing her rather than trapping her in a situation where she was likely to be deprived of basic rights inherent in marriage and human dignity. By Jesus’ day, the Jews were using this section of Deuteronomy as a virtually blank check for divorce, which it was never intended to be.

Therefore, while the sanctity of marriage is to be protected in every possible instance, it is not the highest obligation. Living in a sinful world (note Christ’s “because of the hardness of your hearts” Matthew 19:8) requires that choices be made concerning what is to be preserved when several moral issues are in jeopardy. Exodus 21:8–11 discuss the matter of a concubine

who is being deprived of certain basic human rights by her master/husband. In this passage she is given the option of leaving him in such a case. While it may be arguable that a concubine is in a different legal category than a wife, it also could be argued that if a concubine has certain mandatory entitlements, how much more so a wife. Whatever the case, it is clear that here, as in Deuteronomy 24, there are certain basic human rights that are to be protected even more so than the sanctity of a marriage covenant. The violation of those rights constitutes a sundering of the marriage.

CONCLUSION #4: Where human dignity or the existence of basic human rights (both as definable from Scripture) is being threatened in a marriage relationship such that the marriage is considered sundered, preservation of human dignity takes precedence over preservation of the marriage relationship, and divorce is allowable.

In the case of Ezra's allowance of divorce (in reality here, it was a requirement), the situation concerns the integrity (from an ethnic standpoint) of the Israelites as a distinct people. Here again the issue is over what is most important to preserve. If we did not have Paul's comments of 1 Corinthians 7:10 ff., we might be inclined to think that preserving the integrity of Christianity would allow a Christian to divorce a non-Christian. But Paul specifically instructs against that (v. 12–13). It would appear then that because of the differences in the nature of the entity, the integrity of the spiritual nature of the Church need not be threatened as it was by the intermarriages in Ezra, at least not to the extent that it would take precedence over the sanctity of marriage.

The final question to consider is the effect of adultery on the divorce issue. Does the commission of adultery by one partner entitle the other to a legitimate divorce? This is most readily discussed in consideration of the marriage as a covenant. As evidenced by the parallels of God's covenant relationship with Israel, the loyalty that was minimally expected was the result of the choice of each party to have an exclusive relationship with the other. God had chosen Israel, and Israel alone, out of all the peoples of the earth. Israel was responsible to worship only the Lord. This loyalty was required as the basic and conditional element within the covenant relationship. The Lord had promised never to break that covenant, and Israel was threatened with dissolution of the covenant if she failed in carrying out the stipulations.

The frequent biblical analogies between the covenant with Israel and the covenant of marriage gives us the basis for seeing a precedent being established here by which loyalty (though in a minimalistic sense) exclusively to the marriage partner is the foundation of the marriage covenant. If that loyalty is abandoned in its most basic sense, by adultery, sundering has occurred and the option would exist for divorce to take place with legitimacy, for the covenant would have already been broken. It should be noted, however, that the example set by the Lord in the case of Israel would commend patience and forgiveness as preferable, even in the light of multiple offenses.

CONCLUSION #5: Adultery, as a violation of the basic loyalty on which the covenant of marriage is premised, is grounds for legitimate divorce in that sundering has already occurred, though forgiveness and reconciliation are preferred.

Divorce Policy

1. In attempting to mirror the Bible's strong statements against divorce, South Park Church is committed to preserving marriages and treating divorce only as a last resort born out of desperation in the following situations where Scripture seems to suggest that sundering has already occurred:
 - A. Adultery by one of the marriage partners. (Our commitment to reconciliation would generally expect to find a lifestyle of adultery before divorce would be considered.)
 - B. Physical or sexual abuse threatening the health or the welfare of spouse or children.
 - C. Physical desertion by the unbelieving spouse resulting from the conversion and faith of the believing spouse (1 Corinthians 7:15; c.f. Exodus 21:8–11).

In any other circumstance, divorce itself would constitute the sundering, and is therefore unacceptable and an act of adultery.

2. Under no circumstances will divorce with the intention of getting rid of one spouse to marry another be tolerated.
3. Commission of sundering divorce, hereafter termed “wrongful divorce,” will automatically initiate disciplinary and/or disfellowshipping procedures. Sundering a marriage (regardless whether a legal divorce ensues) also will initiate disciplinary and/or disfellowshipping procedures.

Remarriage: Biblical Material

The bulk of the biblical material regarding remarriage is found in the various parallel gospel accounts: Matthew 5:31–31; 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18. The passages admit of two basic interpretations.

1. Traditionally it has been considered that in these passages Christ identifies divorce and remarriage as adultery unless “*porneia*” has been committed. It is assumed that if *porneia* is present, divorce and remarriage do not constitute adultery. According to this interpretation, if *porneia* has not occurred, Scripture does not differentiate between guilty or innocent parties or between the initiator of the divorce and the one who has had divorce forced on them. Any remarriage after a divorce is considered adultery unless it can be demonstrated that the other party committed *porneia*, which itself is variously interpreted.
2. A second alternative involves a variant understanding of how a few of the verbs are to be translated. Instead of reading in Matthew 5:32, “*Whoever marries a divorced woman*

commits adultery,” we would read, “*Whoever marries a woman who has herself divorced commits adultery.*” (The form is a middle/passive, This translation renders it in the middle voice rather than in the passive as done by the traditional translation.). Another change would be in the first part of Matthew 5:32 (and in similar statements). Instead of “Everyone who divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, makes her commit adultery,” the translation would be “Everyone who divorces his wife, except for *porneia*, causes her to be considered an adulteress” (attempting to account for the passive aorist infinitive, as well as reconciling to the situation in Deuteronomy 24). A final difference in this interpretation is the judgment that the close conjunction between divorcing and remarrying in these passages is not incidental. But rather, that it intends to address the situation in which the remarriage is following right on the heels of the divorce and that it was for the purpose of remarriage that the divorce took place.

The results of these three differences can be most clearly seen in the following revised and amplified translation of Matthew 5:32: “*But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, stigmatizes her as an adulteress (thereby committing a great injustice against her), unless she has committed porneia (implied: in which case she has brought it on herself). Furthermore, whoever marries a woman who has herself divorced (implied: in order to get involved in this second marriage) commits adultery.*” According to this interpretation, the regulation concerning remarriage given in these gospel accounts would be as follows:

1. Prohibition against marrying a woman who has engineered a divorce for herself to remarry (Matthew 5:32; Luke 16:18b). (This would address directly the well-known case of Herod who John the Baptist had condemned. Herodias, his brother’s wife had engineered a divorce for herself in order to marry Herod.)
2. Prohibition against divorcing a wife/husband with the intention of taking another marriage partner (Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11–12; Luke 16:18a).

Each of the interpretation models have their respective problems. The first model is the strongest from a technical perspective. It is the clearest reading of the texts involved. This gives it a methodological edge. On the other hand, it has created much frustration in that it defies application. Most feel uncomfortable (even with themselves) in suggesting that remarriage would be an act of adultery for an individual who has been the victim of an abusive spouse who divorces her against her wishes, yet has not committed *porneia*. The problem comes in dealing with an innocent individual in the very difficult circumstances after such a divorce (lonely, single, economic problems, etc.). This has seemed to contradict God’s concern with justice and the protection of the disadvantaged. In this system the guilty ignore the supposed consequences while the innocent are often left wondering if Christianity is worth it all, and “What kind of God is this?”. It is difficult to apply this interpretation then without feeling as if many of God’s attributes are being bypassed in the process. Furthermore, this reading created what some interpreters have seen as an apparent contradiction with 1 Corinthians 7:15 where Paul allows for the remarriage of the believing woman who has been deserted by her husband. If the gospels are read the way that this interpretation suggest, Paul is allowing something which Christ specifically identifies as adultery. These problems have led some to consider model two.

The second model encounters difficulties in both the technical sphere and in the application of the model. In the technical realm, it must be admitted that the translations suggested are not the first ones that would come to mind. They are conditioned by the conviction that the most evident translations (the traditional ones) do not yield logical or acceptable results. This conviction leads to the search for a linguistically legitimate alternative. Clearly, subjectivity is hard to avoid and judgment calls are necessary. Concerning the application of the model, the difficulty here is that this interpretation seem to open the way for totally removing the consequences (from society's vantage point) of what we would consider the sin of wrongful divorce. The only remarriage that would be explicitly prohibited is the marriage to someone for whom the divorce was engineered. This does not seem to have sufficient deterrent value, and has been considered as taking the teeth out of any statement against divorce.

Besides the technical issues, the main distinction between the two positions is that the first (traditional) appears to treat the innocent as harshly as it treats the guilty, while the second appears to nullify the consequences on the guilty in its rush to exonerate the innocent.

Assuming that either may be defended from a technical standpoint, which direction is the Church to go? We have chosen the latter in that in the former, interpretation allows for no exceptions. The rule is hard and fast and innocent victims will be the losers. In the latter, on the other hand, the innocent are free while deterrence and consequences for the guilty may be built into the system in other places.

Reconciliation is the place where the "teeth" need to be. The seriousness of any given sin is not determined by the amount of censure which society provides for that sin. While we as Christians and as human beings would like to see society be able to reflect God's point of view concerning sin, such an expectation is unrealistic. Blasphemy, a very serious sin, takes place daily, with no societal reprisals. In the end, the seriousness of a sin is gauged not by society's response to it, but by how God views the matter. Furthermore, while the individuals who have been wronged need to be addressed, reconciliation with God is the most important process and the one that the church should attempt to ensure. Scripture rarely discusses reconciliation with wronged individuals, while reconciliation with God is one of the major concerns of the Bible.

One of the steps of reconciliation found in Scripture is public confession of wrongdoing (Numbers 5:6–7; Leviticus 5:4–5). The latter reference is particularly interesting in that it concerns the case of thoughtlessly taking an oath, which is frequently a sin that has occurred in a divorce. A second element that may be seen is straightening oneself out with the individual who has been wronged. Matthew 5:23–24 show us this ingredient (though in a restricted context).

It is left to the Church to decide how the various elements of reconciliation need to be monitored and enforced and how to insure that the process has taken place. Every caution is welcome, and stringency *ought* to be part of the outlook—for the sake of the local church, for the sake of the individuals involved who need to be fully but properly restored, and for the sake of concern for the reputation of the body of Christ. These concerns are hopefully represented in the following policy.

Remarriage Policy

1. If it is determined that a divorce is engineered so that a married individual would be free to marry another who was waiting in the wings, that remarriage is prohibited. Reconciliation for such an individual ought to require divorcing the second spouse and remarrying the first, if the first spouse desires that to take place. Because of the Church's human limitations in judging motivations and the heart, we will follow the reconciliation procedures outlined below.

Note: Prohibiting remarriage means that neither our ministers nor our facilities will be involved in such a ceremony. Furthermore, any individual who enters into a marriage that has been prohibited will be disfellowshipped.

2. Divorced individuals who are determined to be innocent of the sin of wrongful divorce are free to remarry as if they were single.
3. A divorced individual who is guilty of wrongful divorce must complete a reconciliation procedure (delineated below). Having completed that process remarriage will be possible except in the case of #1 as stated above.

Commission of Wrongful Divorce

A. If the divorce is not an allowable one as defined in the divorce policy:
Anyone who assents to the divorce has committed wrongful divorce and is guilty of sundering a marriage. This would include both partners in "mutual consent" (no-fault) divorces and the initiator of the divorce in cases where one partner was against the divorce.

B. If the divorce does fall into the allowable category delineated in the divorce policy.

Anyone who is determined to be guilty of the offense of the adultery, abuse or desertion has been guilty of wrongful divorce in that that individual has sundered the marriage. This would be true even if the "innocent" party initiated the divorce.

The commission of wrongful divorce by a member of the church will automatically initiate disfellowshipping procedures.

Reconciliation Procedure For Those Committing Wrongful Divorce

1. If the wrongful divorce was committed pre-conversion:

In this case reconciliation with God has already taken place in that the individual has been cleansed of all sin before conversion. It may be the case, however, that a rift still exists with the former spouse.

- A. A written statement concerning the individual's understanding and acceptance of the biblical view of marriage, approved by the Pastor, must be submitted to the Deacon Board so that they may ascertain that a proper view of marriage has been acquired in the discipleship process. The statement should also assure the Deacon Board that the sin has been acknowledged and thoroughly dealt with.
- B. Former spouse must be contacted for purposes of confession of sin and gaining forgiveness. A letter written to the former spouse for such a purpose must be submitted to the Pastor and Deacon Board as evidence that such a process has indeed taken place.

2. If the wrongful divorce was committed by a Christian:

In this case forgiveness and restoration are possible, but regardless, the individual should be barred from ministerial and counselling staff and referrals of the church, from service on the Deacon Board or Christian Education Board, and from teaching of any kind in a church sponsored program, in that he/she has had the integrity of their ministry compromised in this way.

- A. Reestablishment of the marriage to the former spouse is the ideal and is the only option unless the former spouse has already remarried or is unwilling. In such cases, the former spouse still must be contacted for purposes of confession of sin and gaining forgiveness. A letter written to the former spouse for such a purpose must be submitted to the Pastor and Deacon Board as evidence that such a process has indeed taken place.
- B. Public confession of the sin before the membership at a regular business meeting of the church is required.
- C. A letter must be submitted to and approved by the Deacon Board, already approved by the Pastor, so that the Board may be assured that true confession and repentance before God has taken place and that contrition is evidenced. This letter must also detail how the individual's view of marriage has changed so that the sin will not be repeated. The letter should convey an understanding and acceptance of the biblical view of marriage, and a commitment to that view.

Adopted by the Board of Deacons
January 8, 1986

MEMBERSHIP DISCIPLINE GUIDELINES

Preface

The Board of Deacons of South Park Church has adopted these guidelines with compassion and forbearance as well as an understanding of Romans 3:23 *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”*

However, when a member’s life is characterized by *continuing* and *unrepentant* sin, disciplinary action is required. The purpose to these guidelines is to facilitate the process of membership discipline with a view toward restoration. Restoration brings great joy to the church as illustrated by Christ’s restoration of Peter to fellowship and service (John 21:15–23).

I. Jurisdiction

The Board of Deacons shall provide the spiritual leadership in the church (Article IV 3a South Park Church Constitution).

All decisions and actions on church discipline shall be rendered by the Board of Deacons except members who are church employees shall be referred to the Official Board, which will proceed under these same guidelines (Article VIII South Park Church Constitution).

II. Scriptural Guidelines

Galatians 6:1: *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”*

Matthew 18:15–17: *“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

1 Corinthians 5:11–13: *“But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 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 man from among you.”*

III. Purposes of Discipline

- A. Uphold the holiness of God
- B. Preserve the purity of the Body of Christ
- C. Restore a brother or sister to fellowship with God and man through repentance
- D. Preserve the integrity of the church's witness

IV. Grounds For Discipline

- A. A life characterized by continuous and unrepentant sin.
- B. The grounds for discipline are founded upon Scripture, the South Park Constitution and Membership Covenant of South Park Church.
- C. Members of South Park Church have covenanted themselves to:
 - 1. living and conducting their lives in a manner becoming to a Christian
 - 2. "walking" before mankind in a manner that brings honor to the Lord
 - 3. avoiding worldly practices that are detrimental to a member's spiritual life and testimony

V. Procedures

- A. Initial Deacon Inquiry
 - 1. Inquiry may be initiated by information from Pastoral Staff, Deacons or third party
 - 2. Investigate
 - 3. Interview necessary parties
 - 4. Counsel as necessary
 - 5. Determine if further action is required
- B. Informal Hearing Stage
 - 1. Meeting with member by two deacons designated by the Deacon Board for purposes of discussing the specific allegations.
 - 2. The deacon chairman shall preside at the formal hearing. The member will present his/her position, supporting documents, witnesses, etc., if any.
 - 3. The Board of Deacons upon hearing the member's position and review the pertinent matters presented will take the discipline matter under advisement for purposes of determining the course of action.
- C. Formal Notification and Hearing
 - 1. Notice of a formal hearing will be sent by certified mail reciting specific allegations, setting the time and place for a full Deacon Board hearing, and advising the member of these procedures and Article 8 of the South Park Church Constitution.

2. The deacon chairman shall preside at the formal hearing. The member will present his/her position, supporting documents, witnesses, etc., if any.
3. The Board of Deacons, upon hearing the member's position will reviewing the pertinent matters under advisement for purposes of determining the course of action.

D. Failure of Member to Attend Hearing

In the event the member fails to appear at the informal or formal hearing stages, then the Board of Deacons will proceed and determine the course of action, in the member's absence.

E. Conclusions/Course of Action

The course of action available to the Deacon Board regarding membership discipline will be:

1. admonishment/encouragement and/or
2. suspension of membership pending the completion of the process of repentance and/or
3. determination that no further action is required or
4. expulsion from membership

VI. Restoration to Membership

A member suspended or expelled from membership may seek restoration after one year from the date of suspension or expulsion by requesting to appear before the Deacon Board. The restoration process includes:

A. Repentance

1. Give evidence that full repentance to God and offended persons is sincere and complete.
2. A public confession of singular allegiance to Jesus Christ will be required.

B. Accountability

1. Commitment to be accountable to the Pastors, Deacons and the Deacon Board appointed mentor(s). Hebrews 13:17
2. The mentoring relationship will last at least one year and *will include* regular meetings to monitor and discuss Christian conduct, restitution and appropriate restrictions in ministry.

C. Restitution

1. Appropriate restitution must be made to offended parties.
2. A plan of restitution will be formulated with the mentor(s).

D. Restoration

An appropriate celebration/announcement will publicly restore the person to church membership.

E. Ministry Restrictions

1. Restored members must wait one year before being eligible for elected office.
2. Ministry areas where the restored member has exhibited vulnerability will be avoided.

Adopted by the Board of Deacons
September 7, 1988
Amended January 4, 1989

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Synopsis of Position (details available in attached paper)

At South Park Church, women have historically had and will continue to have an integral role in our ministry. The purpose of our study has been to establish our position on the role of women in ministry through a consideration of (1) scriptural guidelines, and (2) what is appropriate to our fellowship. We recognize that other churches may interpret the Scriptures differently and have a different sense of what is appropriate in their fellowships. This is to be expected in the multi-faceted Body of Christ and should be viewed as promoting diversity, not divisions.

Teaching—It is our belief that the teaching ministry as exercised by women in our church is not prohibited by Scripture and is appropriate to our fellowship. We are anxious to safeguard our people from teachers who promote false doctrine, or beliefs or attitudes that are contrary to Scripture, whether such teachers be male or female. Orthodox and informed teachers of any gender are welcome to exercise their gifts among us.

Deacons—Given the historical view of our staff as equipping ministers and our deacons as elected by the congregation and delegated responsibilities under the constitution, we characterize our leaders as servants, not rulers. We cherish this non-authoritarian perspective as reflecting Christ's desires for the Church (Mark 10:42–45). If the office of deacon is understood as a ministry of upholding the responsibilities delegated by the congregation through the constitution, there is nothing in Scripture that would limit such service to men. Since the congregation delegates the responsibility, it must be the congregation that decides when they are ready to accept the service of women in the capacity of a deacon.

Ordination—Ordination is the verification of an individual's orthodoxy, call and credentials for the purpose of commending him/her to others for ministry. Scripture says nothing about ordination, so no criteria are offered there. If a woman should desire that we verify her orthodoxy, call and credentials, there would be no reason not to do so.

Pastoral Staff—Especially given our ministry perspective of pastoral leadership, there would be nothing in Scripture that would eliminate women from consideration of any of the pastoral positions. The question remains open, however, whether a woman would be appropriate for the most effective ministry in our fellowship. This must be decided by the congregation, and instructions ought to be provided for any search committee that would be formed.

Synopsis of Interpretations of Controversial Passages (details available in longer paper)

1 Timothy 2:8–15—We have preferred the view that Paul is here addressing the particular circumstances in the church at Ephesus where Timothy is serving. This is supported by his use of the present tense (“I am not permitting”) in 1 Timothy 2:12. As a result, we do not believe that he is placing a universal prohibition on women’s teaching. We cannot determine what “authority” he is forbidding women in Ephesus to exercise. Since the Greek word used here is used nowhere else in the New Testament, it is difficult to know precisely what the word means.

1 Corinthians 11:2–16—This passage clearly discusses what is appropriate behavior for the worship services. At the heart of the matter we would see the issue of honor and dishonor. Worship should bring honor to God. If practices or appearances that were generally considered shameful were part of worship, they would serve as distractions to the honor that was intended for God. Orderliness and propriety were therefore important. Consequently, society’s conventions concerning public speech and appearance were enjoined upon the Corinthians in order to avoid public criticism.

1 Corinthians 14:34–35—As in the previous passage, we have interpreted this as an attempt by Paul to advise against behavior considered indecorous in Roman society. Clearly he is not dictating total silence for he has just given instructions for public prayer by women in chapter 11.

1 Timothy 3—In the guidelines Paul gives for elders and deacons, purely masculine terminology is used, and a masculine perspective is adopted, especially in his admonition that the candidate be “husband of one wife.” The masculine terminology is expected in that most (if not all) serving in this office were men, and Greek regularly uses the masculine gender for mixed groups. As far as the masculine perspective, “husband of one wife” does not require the candidate to be male any more than it requires him to be married. The point is that polygamy was unacceptable. Even if Paul had meant specifically to include women this would not have been worded differently, for polyandry (a woman having multiple husbands) was not a social alternative.

Hebrews 13:17—This and other passages clearly imply that there is and should be an authority structure within the Church. We do not believe that women are restricted to being under the authority of men in the Church (though they may be in the home), because it is Christ who is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23), not men, pastors, elders or deacons.

I. Introduction

The purpose of this statement is to address the role of women in the ministry of South Park Church. It is our desire to articulate a position that is exegetically sound, socially sensitive, thoroughly evangelical, appropriate to the character of, and applicable to the broad spectrum of Christian ministry. There is a need to address this issue because the use of women in the ministry of South Park Church until this point in time has been on an ad hoc basis, lacking consistency and often failing to consider seriously and comprehensively the scriptural data.

Though women have often been relegated to a spiritually inferior status throughout history, Scripture clearly affirms, as do we, that women share equality with men in (1) being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27); and (2) being redeemed by the blood of Christ and members of His body (Galatians 3:28). Despite these significant affirmations, questions have lingered concerning whether women are eligible for certain roles in the Church, such as pastor, deacon/elder, or teacher. These questions have arisen out of passages such as 1 Corinthians 11:2—16; 14:26 and 1 Timothy 2:8—15 which could appear to place limitations on women. To some these limitations are substantiated further by the identification of a natural hierarchy established by God that needs to be maintained regardless of whether we understand the logic or not.

II. Exploration of Issues

A. Authority

The issue to be resolved in this section is whether women are permitted to function in positions of authority within the church. Much of the discussion of this issue has centered on the Greek term, *kephale* (head), which is used metaphorically to describe the relationship between a husband and wife (1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:23). Some would interpret *kephale* in these passages as a metaphor for authority (W. Grudem, “Does *kephale* mean ‘Source’ or ‘Authority Over’ in Greek Literature?” *Trinity Journal* 6 [1985] 38–59), while others would suggest that *kephale* never has that meaning and here connotes “origin” or “source” (Mickelsen, Bilezikian, Bedale; for citations and discussion see *Women, Authority and the Bible*, ed. A. Mickelsen, 97–132). Those who believe that the word speaks of authority believe that women are by that intended always to be under the authority of a man, and are so restricted with regard to functioning in authority roles in the Church.

Proponents of both sides of the *kephale* controversy can present convincing argumentation, and it is difficult at the present to come to a conclusive decision on the matter. It is possible that the issue at hand can be addressed, however, without having to make a decision on this. It has been correctly pointed out that the context of 1 Corinthians 11 gives emphasis to the issue of glory and shame (W. Liefeld, in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 136–140). Certainly, whether *kephale* is authority or source or something else, the head is representative of the body and is given prominence and eminence. The point of 1 Corinthians 11 is that women are not to bring shame on themselves, on their

husbands or on the Church. They are to give honor as honor is due. Above all, worship must bring glory to God (see the context, 1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1) and avoid bringing disgrace on the church. This may involve accepting limitations on one's Christian liberty (exactly Paul's point in the previous section, 1 Corinthians 8–10). Conduct considered disgraceful hinders the effectiveness of the gospel (Titus 2:5). This principle is universal, but the application of it may vary from one society to another. Paul in other places urges the subjection of slaves to their masters without condoning slavery.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul does not resolve for us whether there is a hierarchical structure instituted by God in which women are under the authority of men. Our question, however, is whether such an authority structure, to whatever extent it exists, mandates certain restrictions on what women may or may not do in the Church. To address this question, we must turn to Mark 10:42–45:

Jesus called them (the disciples) together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." (NIV)

Here Christ teaches that among the disciples, and, we conclude, in the Church as a whole, the servant model is the ideal, with the exercise of authority expected to take a minor role at most. Further, whatever "headship" means, there is no office in the Church (nor any human individual) that is designated as having a headship function correlating to the role the husband is given in the family. Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). Ministry is service, not the wielding of headship authority. Elders are those who direct the affairs of the local church (1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17) At South Park Church their responsibilities are delegated to them by the people that they serve (serve, not rule), such as "managing" (1 Thessalonians 5:12) and even have some "command" (Titus 2:15), but this function is never expressed in terms of exercising headship authority or serving as "head" (In Hebrews 13:17 NIV adds "authority," though no word for that appears in the Greek text. Furthermore, the verb used to command submission is not the same as that used in the passages that direct the wife to submit to her husband.) This servanthood view of church leadership is further affirmed in 1 Peter 2:5 where Peter discusses areas of submission (to civil government, 2:13–17; slaves to masters, 2:18–21; and wives to husbands, 3:1–7), yet does not include submission to authority within the framework of the Church. Instead, he urges overseers to act as faithful shepherds, "not lording it over those entrusted to you" (5:2–3).

The result of this is that even if there would be some limitation on women exercising authority in the family, that would not affect any office in the church, for the offices of the church are not construed as having the same type of authority. Women are certainly free to serve, and that is how all of the offices are construed. No passage in Scripture

clearly prohibits women from serving in these offices. Some have interpreted 1 Timothy 2:12 (“I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man.” [NIV]) to mean that women may not have any sort of authority over men in the Church. However, the verb here translated “to have authority” is used only here in Scripture and the nuances of it are not clear, therefore, we hesitate to build a position on it. (For instance, a persuasive case can be built by those who contend that it concerns not simply the exercise of authority, but a domineering abuse of authority.) Even if it be true that husbands have been given headship authority over their wives in the family, that would not prevent women from being delegated responsibilities of authority in the Church, especially if the positions of authority in the Church are not viewed as entailing headship. After all, we have no difficulty with a man pastoring a church that his parents attend, yet he could be considered as under their authority.

It must be kept in mind that spiritual gifts are given to allow one to serve the Body of Christ. Serving, to some extent requires the cooperation of the one serving and the one being served. It is difficult to serve effectively if one’s service is not accepted. It is the task of the local church (in coordination with each individual) to determine how the gifts given to each can be most effectively put to use. Not every gift can be exercised in every way in every society. Gifts are to serve the Church and the cause of Christ (Ephesians 4:11–13; 1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:26). Their purpose is to build up the body of Christ, not to bring an individual sense of fulfillment. Neither men or women serve the church well if their exercise of gifts is motivated by a need for power, personal aggrandizement or selfish personal fulfillment. If the exercise of a particular gift by a particular individual in a particular place does not build up the body of Christ in that place, it may not be appropriate to exercise it. If the body is to be built up, service must be considered appropriate by those served, even though fallen, illogical or unfair reasoning may at times be responsible for people’s unwillingness to accept service. The gifts were meant to function in a fallen world and therefore must, to some extent, accommodate that fallenness. Far from being complacent or defeatist, their view merely acknowledges the necessity of a serving posture. It should always be the Church’s goal to foster converted attitudes that are scripturally based.

B. Teaching

Though the issue of teaching is not unrelated to the issue of authority, it is a separate issue because there are two passages of Scripture that directly address allowing women to teach. These must be examined.

1. 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 “*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*” (NIV) The context here suggests that the silence, also mentioned in v. 28–30, refers particularly to the circumstance of responding to those who are prophesying or speaking in tongues. Verses 32–33, & 40 show that Paul is anxious to avoid disorder or indecorous conduct by anyone.

Paul's major concern . . . is not the behavior of women but the protection of the Christian community. He wanted to protect the Christian community from being mistaken for one of the orgiastic, secret, oriental cults that undermined public order and decency. In conclusion, Paul is not writing to impose an arbitrary permanent restriction on women's ministry. Just as he counseled submission on the part of slaves to make the gospel attractive, so, in order to avoid maligning the gospel through appearing to dishonor their husbands, he counsels women to accommodate to contemporary standards of decency (Liefeld, *Women, Authority and the Bible*, [partially quoting from Fiorenza] 153–154).

1 Cor. 14 therefore has little to contribute to the issue of women teachers.

2. 1 Timothy 2:12 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." This verse must be considered within the context of verses 8–15 specifically, and within the context of the book as a whole. It is widely acknowledged that the purpose of the book of 1 Timothy is to oppose heresy, though the nature of the specific heresy is disputed. Many have concluded that the prohibition against women teaching should be understood in the context of the particular circumstances at Ephesus. The women were most vulnerable to the false teachers, and were possibly being victimized by the false teachers who were using them as a means to infiltrate the Church. If the heresy was of a pre-gnostic variety, as some assume, the reference to Eve's status in verses 13–14 makes sense since some forms of Gnosticism taught that Eve predated Adam and that Adam was the one actually deceived, but was then liberated by the knowledge possessed by his enlightened spouse (C. C. Kroeger, in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 232). This would have been particularly attractive in the feministic town of Ephesus where the goddess Diana reigned supreme.

It is also a possibility that the term used for teaching in this context (*didasko*) refers to a specific type of teaching that was more associated with the formulating of doctrine and establishment of normative beliefs and practices (TDNT II, 137-146; Liefeld, in *Women, Authority and the Bible*, 223; supported also by D. Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance" *Trinity Journal* 1 [1980] 65). This function would have been much more essential and central in the early church before Scrips widely available, and there may be little that compares to it in the teaching functions in the church today.

Even if this is not so, however, a strong argument can be made that the restriction placed on women in 1 Timothy 2:12 is both circumstantial (i.e., specifically related to the circumstances at Ephesus) and cultural (i.e., premised on the way the outside culture would have perceived the Church). The instructions are given by Paul with the terminology "I am not permitting" which suggests that the particular circumstances are responsible for that decision. If one believes that women are permanently and universally prohibited from teaching, consistency demands that they also be prohibited from braiding their hair and wearing gold or pearls (v. 9).

C. Formal Endorsement

1. **Ordination**—Ordination is not a concept that is established in Scripture. As a result we cannot define it or defend it from the text of Scripture. Some conclude therefore that it should be discontinued. South Park Church practices ordination as a means of recognizing the orthodoxy, credentials and call of an individual with the purpose of commending an individual to others. Orthodoxy is tested by having the candidate formulate and defend a doctrinal statement. Credentials are confirmed largely from academic achievement and service already rendered. Agreeing that an individual is called to a particular ministry involves identification of spiritual gifts, identification of a servant spirit, identification of a firm resolve to exercise those gifts in the service of the Church, and testimony from others regarding how those gifts have already been exercised.

Ordination is primarily practiced for those anticipating a pastoral ministry, for that is the task for which we generally need to formally commend individuals to other local ministries. At South Park Church ordination does not grant authority, for we have no authority to grant and the candidate has none to exercise except as it may be delegated by a congregation. Therefore, concerning the issue of women in ministry, there is no reason women could not be ordained, as here defined.

2. **Commissioning**—A second level of affirmation is in the practice of commissioning (Acts 13:1–3). In this practice there is not formal examination of orthodoxy, though that is a concern. We commission people to a task, not to a call or a gift. As a result, missionaries could be commissioned and recommissioned each time they return to the field. Commissioning means that we are sending them with our blessing, support and encouragement. Commissioning is not limited to missionaries. Teachers may be commissioned in anticipation of the next year of Sunday school or for Vacation Bible School, etc. But in each case, commissioning is task-oriented. As a church we have frequently commissioned women as well as men to various tasks in the past and will continue to do so, recognizing with gratitude the significant ministries carried on by women in our Church and by women that we have sent out from our midst.
3. **Affirmation of Gifts**—A third level of affirmation can come in affirmation of spiritual gifts (e.g., 1 Corinthians 12:1–11). There is not a particular ceremony or process by which this is accomplished. Rather, an individual's gifts are affirmed by the people who are served by them and witness to their presence. Affirmation is demonstrated in continued opportunities being presented in which to exercise the gift. There is no evidence from Scripture that there are any gender limitations on any of the spiritual gifts. As a church we have benefitted from women exercising their gifts in a wide spectrum of ministries.

The above represents our conclusions to the study of the issues involved. We do not come to these conclusions convinced that we have discovered *the* right answer, but that we

have used sound methods and logical inferences to construct a credible understanding of the biblical texts. Recognizing, however, that the texts can be interpreted differently suggests that we ask what may be at stake if our interpretation is not correct. Since the Scripture makes no mention of penalty or ill-consequence for pursuing one path or another, we assume that what is at stake is the effective ministry of the Church. We have proceeded with that concern in mind. Ministry is to be enhanced by those decisions, not hampered, restricted or discredited. Our decisions have been made in consideration of what can effectuate the most productive ministry.

III. Statement of Position

In this statement we will examine the several offices in the Church that have been largely restricted to men in order to ascertain under what circumstances a woman could serve in that office. In each category we will address the biblical perspective (Does the Bible allow it?), the ministry perspective (Will it produce effective service and be appropriate to the congregation?), the social perspective (Will it bring dishonor to the name or cause of Christ?), the family perspective (Can domestic requirements be met?), and the personal perspective (Is there an attitude of service?).

A. Pastor

Biblical Perspective: Once it has been established that there is no “headship” authority vested in the pastor, it becomes evident that there is nothing in Scripture that would prevent a woman from serving a church in that capacity.

Ministry Perspective: There is no doubt that some women have the gifts necessary to serve in a pastorate, but a woman cannot serve effectively as pastor if the congregation is not ready or willing to have a woman pastor. Therefore, whenever a search committee is formed, it should receive instructions from the Official Board whether it is appropriate that female candidates be considered. Such instruction ought to come with the support of a 2/3 majority vote of the congregation. In the absence of a clear mandate, prayerful discussions ought to take place and every attempt should be made to avoid divisiveness.

Social Perspective: In American society there is no dishonor attached to the Church or to the name of Christ that would come from having a woman pastor. That doesn’t mean that all would look favorably upon such a situation. Nevertheless, it is not bringing disgrace to the cause of the gospel.

Family Perspective: Scripture requires that the overseer must manage his own family well (1 Timothy 3:4). It would be expected then that a woman would be conscientious in caring for her family responsibilities in ways that are consistent with biblical concerns. Certainly this would include a carefully worked out negotiation of family roles with her husband, and would perhaps involve some restructuring of the job description to accommodate family obligations. Besides being concerned for maintaining a biblical standard, it would be imperative that a woman in this position provide an appropriate role model for the women of the congregation.

Personal Perspective: It is important that a Pastor, whether male or female, should have a servant's attitude toward his/her ministry. The seductive influence of power has cluttered the landscape of history with ineffective, divided or ruined churches. Men have seemed particularly vulnerable to its allurements. More recently some women, seeing an opportunity to improve their status and escape from the injustice that has so often victimized them in the past, have sought to accrue power to themselves. Even though the case is being ostensibly configured as a struggle for equality, appropriate equality must be sought in terms of equal opportunity to serve God without unnecessary or unbiblical restriction, rather than equal opportunity to accrue, exercise or abuse power. The pastorate cannot and must not serve as a battleground for this kind of social agenda. Women must not seek a pastorate to "make a statement" or to assert women's rights. Likewise men must not prolong or retain restrictions out of fear of some of the more radical feminist positions. The Church must not be the victim of personal or social agendas. Any man or woman who would serve the Church in the role of pastor must demonstrate himself/herself free of such aspirations. Christ's example of integrity in servanthood must be the model we follow.

B. Pastoral Staff

There would be no difference between Pastor and Pastoral staff in any of the perspectives discussed above.

C. Deacon Board

Biblical Perspective: Since the deacons are not vested with any headship authority by virtue of their office, there is no biblical statement that would prohibit a woman from serving in this capacity.

Ministry Perspective: The Deacon Board serves the local church by carrying out certain duties assigned to it in the constitution. Certainly there could be some disciplinary cases where men would carry more influence with the individual coming under discipline. But there could likewise be disciplinary cases that could be more effectively handled by women. Again, women undoubtedly do receive the gifts necessary for this type of service. The question would be whether the congregation was willing to accept service in this way. If women were to be accepted as eligible for the Deacon Board, it would be advisable to change the names of the existing boards to avoid confusion. This would require a constitutional amendment. There must never, however, be guidelines established requiring or suggesting a minimum number of either women or men that must serve on this board, lest spiritual criteria be forfeited to a quota system.

Social Perspective: No dishonor or disgrace is brought by women serving in this way.

Family Perspective: As with men who serve as deacons, it would be expected that women can only qualify if they have carried out their family responsibilities faithfully.

Personal Perspective: As with the role of pastor, anyone who would so serve must be free of aspirations to power and must not view the office as vindication of their gender or as making a social statement. The office cannot be used as a tool for personal aggrandizement.

D. Teacher

Biblical Perspective: Based on the analysis presented above, there is no general prohibition in Scripture against women teaching. It may be, however, that certain situations might arise that would necessitate that those who are unqualified or those who are channels for divisive influences (male or female) would be forbidden to teach. (This would generally not be gender specific, but, for instance, there are some teachings of radical feminism that are contrary to Scripture and by which some women are more prone to be influenced.) In such cases, there would be good scriptural precedent for denying permission to teach to those influenced by the whims of society and theology that manipulate or neglect portions of Scripture to meet their specialized agenda (e.g., the anti-war and anti-establishment movements of the sixties; the charismatic renewal movement of the seventies; the hyper-dispensational or reconstructionist movements of the eighties; etc.).

Ministry Perspective: Our church has historically shown an openness to women teachers and will continue to show honor to and make fullest possible use of those who have that gift.

Social Perspective: There is no dishonor attached in today's society to women functioning in teaching roles.

Family Perspective: Certainly any woman teacher would be expected to have an exemplary home and family situation, the same as is expected of men, for teachers serve important role model functions.

Personal Perspective: Teaching must be viewed as a service of ministry, not as a platform for personal or social agendas (e.g., for changing the way society thinks about women).

IV. Conclusion

At South Park Church women have historically had and will continue to have an integral role in our ministry. The purpose of this paper has been to establish our position on the role of women in ministry through a consideration of (1) what is scripturally permissible, and (2) what is appropriate to our fellowship. We recognize that others may interpret the Scriptures differently and have a different sense of what is appropriate in their fellowships. This is to be expected in the multi-faceted Body of Christ and should be viewed as promoting diversity, not division.

V. For Further Reading

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Adopted by the Board of Deacons
December 1989

STATEMENT ON AIDS

Purpose of the Paper

With the growing incidence of AIDS in our society, it is imperative that South Park Church should promote an appropriate Christian response to the disease and to those who suffer from the disease, as well as to the political issues that relate to the disease. Furthermore, it is necessary to articulate informed guidelines so that we can minister effectively to those who have contracted AIDS, and at the same time be sensitive to the safety of the congregation.

History of AIDS in the United States

In the United States the early spread of AIDS was largely among the homosexual community and was the result of sexual impurity and irresponsibility which the Church can do nothing but condemn. (For details see our position paper on homosexuality.) As we enter the second decade of the spread of the disease, transmission by intravenous drug users and heterosexuals has become increasingly common. Because of the history associating sinful conduct with those who contract the disease, it has been difficult for the Church to find a balanced, biblical response to AIDS victims. Compassion is most difficult to exercise when there is a widespread sentiment that someone deserves what he gets. Especially tragic is the resulting situation of those who are thereby doubly victimized. Those who have contracted AIDS from a blood transfusion have been first victims of the blood donor who had AIDS, and second become victims of society who ostracizes them as outcasts.

The Church's Response to Victims of AIDS

The path that the church must take is clear. We must renounce the inclination to infer that all AIDS sufferers are somehow connected to homosexual behavior. Instead, with the compassion of Christ to all alike, we must help victims to preserve the dignity that their illness so often strips away (Psalm 72:12–13; Matthew 9:36; James 5:11). This compassion is incumbent upon us (Luke 10:29–37) regardless of how the disease was contracted. In the case of an AIDS sufferer who contracted the disease through sinful activity (homosexuality, drug abuse), it is our biblical obligation to offer unbegrudging forgiveness through Christ when repentance is evidenced.

The Church's Reaction to the Disease

We repudiate the simplistic view that AIDS is without question God's punishment on homosexuals or drug users or on a society that tolerates them. There is certainly biblical support for the fact that various forms of disease or physical suffering could be the result of God's judgment on believers (1 Corinthians 11:30) but neither society nor the Church is in a position to decide whether any given case falls into that category. It remains a matter for the God of justice and mercy to decide. It is certainly not contrary to the plan of God to support the scientific inquiry focused on discovering a cure for AIDS.

The Church's Response to the Political Issue

It is unfortunate that AIDS cannot be viewed as simply a medical issue. Because of the high incidence of the disease within the homosexual community, it has also become a politically charged issue. The treatment of AIDS victims, the scientific research committed to AIDS, the handling of AIDS in health care insurance packages, and the employment of AIDS victims have all become hopelessly intertwined with the issues concerning the rights of homosexuals to practice their deviate and sinful lifestyle. This situation makes it impossible for the Church to address only the compassion due the victims of the disease. We also express disagreement with the politicizing of the AIDS debate that has been exploited by the homosexual community. We deplore the irresponsibility and immorality that have promoted AIDS to a national epidemic. We feel a sense of outrage for those who knowingly infect others to satisfy their depraved appetites. We consider it reprehensible that some have tried to remove this issue of responsibility and blame from the public debate.

Conclusion: Policy Statement

Our policy then, is that our church fellowship is open to all who want to worship God and learn about Jesus Christ. Therefore, all who are in any way diseased or disabled are welcome. Thus the challenge that has arisen with the disease of AIDS is how best to effectuate ministry to those who suffer with the disease and at the same time insure the safety and sense of security of others. Our commitment is to do this and to make whatever modifications need to be made.

*Specific procedures developed by the Christian Education Board can be found in the Universal Health Care Guidelines.

Adopted by the Board of Deacons
September 1990

STATEMENT ON HOMOSEXUALITY

Biblical Passages

The Bible provides sufficient comment on homosexuality in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to project a consistent and clear teaching. Besides highlighting homosexual behavior as an example of the depravity of the city of Sodom (Genesis 19), the Old Testament forthrightly condemns the practice of homosexuality and classifies it with other sexual practices that the Law considers morally wrong. Leviticus 18 provides prohibitions on incest (1–18), adultery (20), child sacrifice (21), homosexuality (22) and bestiality (23). Leviticus 20 is dealing with the same type of list as it groups together those offenses that are punishable by death.

In the New Testament, the treatment is no less harsh. Homosexuality was clearly not one of the practices that Christian liberty or the age of grace made more acceptable. For Paul it represents the epitome of depraved conduct (Romans 1:24–32). His inclusion of homosexuals in the list of the unrighteous who will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9), as well as in the list of those for whom the Law serves a very necessary and continuing function (1 Timothy 1:10), shows us that his disapproval cannot in any way be viewed as limited to his particular time, culture or situation.

The Bible is clear then, that homosexual practice is wrong and sinful. It is not just wrong insofar as it may be promiscuous. Rather, as with adultery, incest and bestiality, it is wrong because of the nature of the sexual partner. The sexual partner may not be married to someone else (adultery), may not be a close relative (incest), may not be an animal (bestiality), and may not be someone of the same gender (homosexuality).

This does not mean that a homosexual inclination is sinful, though it may be one reflection of the fallenness of man. Sexual desires often provide an arena for temptation to sin, whatever one's sexual orientation may be. As believers, we are called upon to resist those temptations. In this sense, the homosexual suffers the same plight as anyone else. Sexual fantasizing only worsens the situation, makes resistance more difficult, and may lead to sin even though no sexual act is committed (Matthew 5:28). The only biblical solution to homosexual inclination is purity of thought and a celibate lifestyle. What is true for all Christians is also true for homosexuals, our behavior must transcend our feelings.

South Park Church's Attitude Toward Homosexuality

1. Our Counselling Strategy and Approach

Our church fellowship is open and extends compassion to all who want to follow Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. For people with homosexual inclinations there are three areas of concern and responsibility to be considered as an indication of their determination to be characterized by a lifestyle that is biblically consistent.

A. Celibacy

For persons with homosexual inclinations and desires, celibacy is the proper biblical response and, therefore, the first step in counselling people toward wholeness.

B. Psychotherapy

It is important for such a brother or sister to pursue psychotherapy to find clues regarding their inclinations and desires. Christian psychotherapy has been helpful to many toward unraveling the mixture of inputs and feelings that people have.

C. Reorientation

Our hope and goal is for reorientation of such a person toward a biblical and healthy heterosexual life. Though it is not impossible that a certain genetic condition may increase an individual's vulnerability to the development of a homosexual orientation, this position paper maintains that homosexuality is primarily a learned deviation from the biblical pattern. Despite the possibility of genetic predispositions, since homosexuality is primarily learned, reorientation is desirable. If such heterosexual reorientation cannot be achieved, our hope would be that one would accept responsible singleness as offering increased opportunity for serving the Lord. One is reminded that over the history of the Church innumerable celibate servants of Christ have been greatly used.

2. Church Membership

It is inappropriate for a member in good standing of South Park Church to be a practicing homosexual. If a member of the church has an awareness of his or her burden and is involved in appropriate counselling, that one will receive the support and encouragement of our fellowship. It is appropriate that a brother or sister working through such an issue should abstain from those areas of ministry that put them in contact with possible temptation. Any individual with a homosexual inclination who is interested in becoming a member should be responsibly pursuing the course of action listed above before applying for membership.

3. Discipline and Restoration

The Guidelines for Discipline and Restoration adopted by the Deacon Board of South Park Church will be the operative process for one who falls into sin while a member of our fellowship. The goal of such discipline will always be to bring repentance and restoration. There is no desire on the part of our church to be punitive or arbitrary in our relationship with brothers and sisters who are burdened with the temptation surrounding the sin of homosexuality. However, it is imperative that the standards of Scripture be followed if our church is to be modelled after the standards of the kingdom of Christ.

Adopted by the Board of Deacons
August 1, 1990

STATEMENT ON STEWARDSHIP

Synopsis of Position

1. Definition

Stewardship is the responsible use of expendable resources that have been entrusted to us.

2. Rationale

God has created us, redeemed us and provided for us. Our use of our resources ought to recognize his ownership and reflect his priorities, while our giving from these resources ought to reflect our gratitude.

3. Attitude Toward Stewardship

Stewardship is a worldview. It involves a person's attitude toward time, money, abilities and natural resources and the overall use of them. Use of resources must reflect our priorities and must honor the Giver. Giving from our resources, as a reflection of our gratitude ought to be generous and sacrificial.

4. Areas of Stewardship

A. Natural Resources

1. Use—Preserve and replenish
2. Giving—Provide for the poor and work for greater social equity

B. Time

1. Use—Even leisure activities and relaxation should reflect God's priorities by not bringing dishonor to Him.
2. Giving—The grateful steward will set aside time for worship and will generously give of disposable time for acts of service and goodwill.

C. Skills and Abilities

1. Use—Must strive to bring honor to the Giver of the gift.
2. Giving—Must give freely of our skills and abilities for the building up of the body, and the work of the kingdom.

D. Financial Resources

1. Use—Spending must reflect God's priorities and honor Him. Our standard is God's values, not society's or our own. We need to be content with the functional. Responsible stewardship requires discipline, sensitivity to the needs of others, denial of possessiveness, and constant evaluation of our priorities and motivation.
2. Giving—Biblical principles establish 10% as an appropriate level of giving to express gratitude. Though this is not an obligation, 10% is a minimal benchmark, additional offerings of gratitude and use of financial resources ought to be proportional to God's provisions for us.

Introduction

1. Definition

Stewardship is the responsible use of expendable resources that have been entrusted to us. It is the means by which we:

- a. attest to the priorities of our lives
- b. acknowledge the source of our resources
- c. affirm God's continuing claim of lordship and our submission to His program

2. Rationale

The Bible firmly establishes God as the Creator of all things. In Genesis, after God had finished His work, He entrusted His creation to the care of people (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). We are therefore answerable to God for how we have managed that trust. God has also created each of us. So our lives, our time and our abilities are all expendable resources that must be used in submission to the One who entrusted them to us.

For the Christian, however, God's claim upon us goes even further. The blood of Christ has purchased us. We have yielded our lives to the lordship of Christ. This means that we have acknowledged His right to direct our thoughts, attitudes, decisions and conduct. The stewardship of our lives is therefore based on God's ownership twice established (creation and redemption) and on our gratitude to God for the salvation He has provided (2 Cor. 8:9). God has not only provided salvation for us; He has also provided for our needs. In our society this means that He has provided us with financial resources. Our stewardship in this area is likewise based on our gratitude to God.

In the Old Testament stewardship of time is reflected in the Sabbath legislation. In Exodus 20 the command to keep the Sabbath is based on God's role and model as Creator. In Deut. 5, the same command is based on God's provision of freedom when He brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. Again the dual rationale of ownership and gratitude can be seen.

The rationale behind stewardship, then, is that God is the Creator and Giver of resources. Our use of these resources ought to reflect our recognition of His ownership, while our giving from these resources ought to reflect our gratitude to the One who gave freely to us.

3. Conclusion

Use of resources should be a reflection of the owner's priorities and should honor Him; giving from resources should be a reflection of the steward's gratitude.

Attitude Toward Stewardship

Our determination to be faithful stewards and our success as stewards are measures of our Christian maturity. A faithful steward recognizes that stewardship is not comprised of occasional, isolated actions or decisions. Stewardship is a worldview that therefore involves the totality of a Christian's life and perspective. Stewardship must not be restricted by equating it with giving. For instance, the issue is not just how a person gives time (to ministry, charity or service), it is how a person *uses* all of his time; the question is not just how a person gives money (or where or how much), but how a person *uses* money. Stewardship involves a person's attitude toward time, money, abilities and natural resources, and the overall use of them. What a person gives is only one aspect of stewardship. All that we have belongs to God, not just a certain proportion. We are responsible for our stewardship of all that He has given.

What should be our attitude toward the use of these resources? First, the Bible suggests that we ought to have a worry-free attitude about them (Mt. 6:24). This does not mean that we can be irresponsible, but that we ought not allow our needs to consume us. At the other end of the spectrum, we must also be careful that our possessions not rule us. The use of our resources must reflect the priorities of our lives and must honor the will of the One who entrusted the resources to us.

Scripture also has much to teach regarding the attitude we ought to have about giving our resources. If our giving is a reflection of our gratitude then we ought to give generously. If our giving is a reflection of our priorities, there will be times when we need to give sacrificially (Mark 12:41–44). We ought to give out of a pure motivation, rather than through competition or need for recognition (2 Cor. 9:5). This should result in cheerful giving (2 Cor. 9:7).

While stewardship encourages a healthy attitude toward possessions and a generous impulse toward giving, it also requires a sensitivity toward those whose resources are not as abundant as ours. In this area, our stewardship should lead us to promote strategies and structures in society that will provide for those who are in need. As a church, we should be careful that the amount of each individual's share of the costs of participating in programs or activities does not prevent some from taking part. The solution goes beyond providing subsidies, to a real sensitivity of the feelings and situation of all involved.

Areas of Stewardship

A. Natural Resources

1. Use—God has created the world for us to enjoy. Our responsibility is to preserve and replenish natural resources so that all may enjoy God's creation. God gave the Israelites instructions for using the land wisely so that they might benefit from the optimal production that the land could offer (Lev. 25:1–7). When we waste, abuse or selfishly exploit natural resources we are showing disrespect for the Creator. The stewardship of ruling over God's creation obliges each of us to the development of a sensitivity toward ecology.

2. Giving—God not only established guidelines for the protection of the environment, He also built in procedures for land use that would promote equity in society. Consequently, the poor had rights to follow the reapers and collect what was dropped (Lev. 19:9–10); land sales were not permanent (Lev. 25:23–28). Laws such as these recognized everyone’s right to benefit from the land without prohibiting land ownership. The principle is that good stewardship acknowledges that the land belongs to God and that it must not be used selfishly or as a means for exploiting the poor. Instead, its resources should be used to provide for the poor.

B. Time

1. Use—Throughout history a large majority of people have not had much choice as to how they used their time, for leisure time was at a premium. Survival has often been, and continues to be for many, a full time endeavor. In our society the availability of substantial “leisure” time has created a situation in which abuse can easily take place. Leisure time is another of the gracious gifts of God. How should we choose to spend it? Relaxation is important for renewing our energy, but too much relaxation can produce sloth and laziness. As faithful stewards, even our relaxation time should reflect the priorities of the Lord. Would God be pleased with the activities we engage in to relax? If the books we read or the television shows we watch or the places we go cause Him dishonor, we are not being good stewards of our time.

Likewise, it is possible to spend too high a proportion of our time on activities that are acceptable and even necessary, but which violate God’s priorities by the sheer amount of time expended. Many in our society suffer from a “workaholic” syndrome. Work is necessary and industriousness is commendable. Nevertheless, if our work habits cause us to neglect our families or leave no room for worship or service to the Lord, God’s priorities are being overlooked and we are not being good stewards. While we have all made commitments that place certain priorities on certain time slots of our week, as good stewards we must take care that our time commitments are made in such a way that they reflect our time priorities. Someone who gives a lot of time to church work is not being a good steward if they are neglecting their families in the process.

2. Giving—Time is a valuable commodity in our society, and some would rather give money than time. Yet service requires time. Time is something that we all have in equal proportion each day, though some have more “disposable” time than others. In the Sabbath regulations, one day each week was set aside to acknowledge God as the Creator of our lives and as the grantor of our freedom. Just as Memorial Day commemorates in gratitude those who have died defending our country, so the Sabbath commemorates in gratitude God’s actions on our behalf. The more grateful one is, the more conscientious will be the observance. It is a holiday: devoting the time during which we would normally work to focused activities. The grateful steward will set time aside from work to worship. The Old Testament sets one day in seven as a benchmark for the reasonable level of gratitude. Beyond this, the grateful stewards will give generously of “disposable”

time to advance the cause of Christ through acts of service and goodwill, both to the body of Christ in the work of the Church, and to the community in the name of Christ.

C. Skills and Abilities

1. Use—Whatever skills and abilities we have come as a gift from God. Faithful stewardship of those skills and abilities requires that we develop them to their fullest. Time and effort need to be expended to achieve whatever level of excellence is possible. The goal of this striving is to bring honor to the giver of the gift. As in the other areas, the use of skills and abilities should reflect the priorities of a biblical worldview. It is good stewardship to use our skills and abilities to make a living for ourselves and our stewardship would also require that our chosen vocation be viewed as an opportunity to serve and honor God. We do this by openly acknowledging Him as the source of our abilities and by honoring Him in the integrity and attitude that we bring to the workplace.

Does the faithful steward have any obligation to choose a full-time Christian vocation? No, for God uses people of all morally acceptable vocations for His service and honor. Stewardship requires that we openly serve and honor Him wherever our vocation places us. On the other hand, a balanced, biblical perspective on our skills and abilities will not permit us to overlook vocational opportunities in Church-related work or mission service because of lower pay scales or other perceived disadvantages. As the giver of the gifts, God has a right to press us into His service wherever He can use us. It is our responsibility to be sensitive to His leading.

2. Giving—Besides the day-to-day use of our skills and abilities vocationally or avocationally, there are often opportunities to give of our skills and abilities in some form of ministry or service. It is not enough to honor God through the use of our skills and abilities in the workplace, for as Christians, God has also given us spiritual gifts, often dovetailing with our natural abilities or our developed skills. The faithful steward is to give freely of these gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. This is an act of gratitude and worship. There are many thankless jobs to be done on any given Sunday. Our stewardship should lead us to service not because of the thanks or recognition that it may bring, but because we desire to serve the Lord by serving His people, whether in childcare, as an usher, or as a soloist. Only a lack of a sense of gratitude for the abilities and gifts God has given would allow a Christian to attend a church without contributing his or her abilities for the ministry of the body.

D. Financial and Material Resources

1. Use—In our society we enjoy a standard of living that is incomprehensible to most of the rest of the world. What are the demands that stewardship imposes on our extraordinary financial and material resources? In accordance with the pattern established in the other categories, our attitude toward financial resources must reflect a balanced worldview. Specifically our spending must be evaluated to determine whether it reflects God's priorities, and whether it honors Him. How do we identify God's priorities? Would they include items that provide convenience and comfort? Would they preclude items

considered luxuries? The Bible does not offer clear-cut answers to these questions, and different individuals will arrive at different answers.

While the Bible does not demand that everyone live a spartan lifestyle or make a vow of poverty, a biblical worldview prohibits us from succumbing to reckless self-indulgence. We should not buy something “because we can afford it”; nor should our purchases be justified by reference to our station in society. The fact that our friends own certain things or that advertising tells us we need certain things should not dictate what our spending decisions should be. Our standard is not society’s values, but God’s values. Perhaps we should be more willing to be content with the “functional” rather than the “state-of-the-art” or that which is the current trend. Advertising tries to convince us that prestige is a worthwhile objective and that it can be achieved by inducing envy in others. In contrast the Bible identifies envy with sin, suggesting that we should therefore not attempt to stimulate it in others. Conspicuous consumption or selfish extravagance cannot be reconciled with good stewardship. The entertainment that we enjoy must be God honoring. Responsible stewardship requires discipline, sensitivity to needs of others, denial of possessiveness, and above all, constant evaluation of our priorities and motivations. Income that is available to us that exceeds our basic needs ought to be the basis for proportionate giving above and beyond the benchmark percentages. Each spending decision should be made by first asking the question, “Is this a reasonable way to spend the money God has made available to me?” Each acquisition ought to be preceded by asking the question, “What is my motive for owning this?”

2. Giving—In the Old Testament tithing system it is mandated that ten percent is an appropriate level of giving to express gratitude to God for what He has done for us. We show gratitude to God as the source of our goods by dedicating a portion of our goods to Him, and by becoming a source of goods to others (Cf. also Acts 2:44–46; Hebrews 13:16).

No institution in Israel, including tithing, existed merely to carry out a political, economic or humanitarian function. By giving the tithe the Israelites were declaring solemnly that they were giving a portion back to the Lord who had prospered them. By giving the tithe they also recognized the validity of the priests’ and levites’ role as God’s representatives and acknowledged their right to receive support for the spiritual service they performed on the people’s behalf. The tithe ritual afforded the Israelites an opportunity to remember Yahweh’s blessings as He had remembered them, and to imitate their God’s care for slaves, the poor, orphans and widows. The tithe demanded that the Israelites serve their God at a significant cost to themselves. (ISBE, Revised Edition, IV:863, Grand Rapids: 1988)

The tithe was used to support the priests and levites, and to provide for the needy (Lev. 27:30–33; Num. 18:20–32; Deut. 12:6, 11, 17; 14:22–29; 26:12). Beyond the tithe, the Old Testament makes reference to “offerings” which are used for the erection and maintenance of the sanctuary (Cf. Ex. 35–36).

Is the situation any different now that we are not under Law? In the New Testament, Paul encourages contributions not as obligatory, but as willing gifts (2 Cor. 9:5). Tithing can therefore not be considered an obligation of law, but that does not mean that it is not an obligation of stewardship. How are we to show our gratitude to God other than by giving back a portion? If ten percent was considered an acceptable portion by God as an expression of gratitude then, why should we view it any differently today? We might consider ten percent as a benchmark just as we consider fifteen percent a benchmark for tipping. The extent of the customer's gratitude and appreciation is demonstrated in the size of the tip. It would be considered the ultimate rudeness or the consummate insult to leave no tip at all. So it is to God if we return no portion to Him. In addition, there are occasions when the situation calls for a contribution exceeding the benchmark. In these cases it is appropriate that giving be proportionate, according to the individual's ability (Acts 11:29). Is the faithful steward under obligation to tithe? Not in a legalistic way; but it is the least we can do to show our appreciation to God for what He has given us. Further, we should not be satisfied with the tithe when God begins to prosper us beyond the needs of our normal and necessary expenses. Our stewardship should grow as God continues to provide above and beyond our needs. As mentioned earlier, our determination and success as stewards are measures of our Christian maturity and commitment.

In conclusion, stewardship is a worldview that is not limited to finances, nor to giving. It involves our use and giving with regard to natural resources, time, skills and abilities, and material and financial resources. We must be aware of our stewardship responsibilities in each of these areas. We cannot exercise our stewardship in one area and assume that our obligation is cared for. Giving of our time is not a substitute for giving from our financial resources. Conversely, giving money cannot take the place of giving our skills and abilities. We must be careful to be faithful stewards in all aspects of our lives.

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