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welcome

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the **Ready to ROL** New Members course.

We are thrilled that you are considering being a part of our community. This course aims to give you a better understanding of who we are as a church, what we believe, and the journey we are on together.

We are one of the many Christ-centered churches that make up the body of Christ in Harare, with each church playing their role in obedience to the great command of our Lord Jesus and His great commission:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself'
Matthew 22:37-38

'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them all I have commanded you!'
Matthew 28:19-20

Our prayer is that after attending this course, you will clearly understand the way that we are trying to fulfill these. If you feel the Lord would want you to join us on this great mission, we would be very excited to have you become part of our church.

With love,

Scott, and the River of Life Church eldership team

two great questions to start:

1

what's so amazing about grace?

At the outset of this course, we would love you to know that we are essentially a people of GOD'S AMAZING GRACE. God's grace is the means by which we receive the fullness of His blessing and love, both as individuals and as a church.

The Bible is clear that each of us, by nature, is sinful and fallen which has caused a break in our relationship with God and is deserving of eternal punishment. However, in God's amazing grace he sent his Son, Jesus, to die in our place and for our sin, offering us eternal life and restored relationship with Him as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This gift of eternal life is received when we genuinely surrender our lives to Him, repenting of our sin and self-centered ways, and put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As the 16th century reformers expressed, we are saved

As Scripture says (Sola Scriptura)
 By Grace alone (Sola Gratia)
 Through faith alone (Sola Fide)
 In Christ alone (Solus Christus)
 To God's Glory alone. (Soli Deo gloria)

'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do'.¹

¹ Ephesians 2:8-10

what on earth is the church for?

The church consists of everyone, in every nation and in every age, who has put his or her faith in Christ. As such, God's plan is for every believer to be meaningfully identified with the church in their specific context and to become a fully functioning part of the body². In this sense the purpose of the church is for the greatest demonstration of the Glory of God made known through the blessing of all nations³. This great purpose of God, outworked through his people, resounds throughout Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Terry Virgo comments on the Apostle John's writing of the Book of Revelation:

John was amazed. He had never seen anything like it. The sight drained his strength and he collapsed to the ground paralyzed with fear and wonder. Then the most tender voice he had ever heard - strangely familiar it was - told him not to fear. He looked again. None other than the glorified Christ stood before him; the one he had seen humiliated and crucified, now in glory that defied description. The King of the universe and the Lord of history had come to speak to John and to tell him a series of amazing secrets about the world and its ultimate destiny. Breathtaking visions were about to be revealed, with implications that stretched down through the centuries.

But first, Christ, the Master of all history, wanted to speak to some particular local churches about their present problems and pains, their joys and fears.

We tend to think that although Christ loves the worldwide church, local churches have no special place in his affection. But the book of Revelation⁴ shows Jesus, not as one vaguely in the midst of the church, but walking among the individual lamp stands. He knows each local church intimately. He commends one and warns another. He notes steadfastness here and apathy there. Each is an open book to him. His longing for a

² Acts 2:41 & 47, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4

³ Genesis 1:26-28, Genesis 12:1-3, Matthew 28:19-20

⁴ Revelation 1:1-20

bride is seen in his concern and ambition for each congregation. 'Christ loved the church and gave himself for her'.⁵

She is His special delight in all the universe. She is His joy, His preoccupation, His passion, His darling bride. In all creation one thing fills the heart of Christ — His beloved church. We need to rediscover the incredible value and significance of the local church in God's plan and perspective for the Gospel to reach the world and the discipleship of every believer. The church is not to be ignored and despised; but to be honoured and cherished. Each local church is of peerless worth to Christ.

(Extract from Terry Virgo's book – 'A People Prepared')

Here are some 5 reasons why we are convinced of the significance of local church membership:

The New Testament's structure: The epistles were written to local churches on the assumption that all believers would be members of local churches.

It is stated in the Bible: Those who accepted His message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number...and the Lord added to their number daily.⁶

It is implied in the Bible: The descriptions of life amongst the early believers imply an up-close-and-personal local church community.⁷ Furthermore, a consistent biblical metaphor for the church is that of a body – an intimate functioning body, not just a worldwide 'cyber' body.

New Testament language of leadership and followership: The Bible cautions church leaders that they will be held to account for how they lead⁸. Equally, followers are instructed to obey their leaders. This obviously presupposes a structure where you know who is leading and who is following.

New Testament discipline: Paul instructed churches that in cases of ongoing unrepentance, they should finally resort to putting people out of the church.

⁵ Ephesians 5:25

⁶ Acts 2:41 & 47

⁷ Acts 2-4

⁸ 1 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 13

one: history of river of life

PJ and Ashleigh Smyth planted River of Life Church, with a core group of friends, in January 1997. Meeting on a Sunday evening at St John's Prep School, the church rapidly grew to a lively congregation of over 150.

In 2001, we moved to Mount Pleasant School Hall and from there grew and planted into various congregations, such as ROL Westgate, ROL Byo (which became New Creation Church) and ROL Eastlea. As ROL Eastlea we moved to our current site, having been donated the original church building by the former 'Kings Church' through Gary Strong who had retired. Around this time we submitted ourselves to the apostolic leadership of Terry Virgo and joined Newfrontiers as a worldwide family of churches.

In 2004, after the Smyth's were called to Johannesburg to establish GodFirst Church, Scott Marques was appointed as lead elder of River of Life Church.

Ten years later, Greystone Park Fellowship (who had also joined Newfrontiers) asked Scott for assistance in strengthening their leadership team and in transition for Rikki Decker, who had led for 30+ years. In prayer and planning it became apparent that perhaps God was leading into a merger of the two churches - with five Sunday meetings across the two venues. This new multi-site River of Life Church was launched in January 2015, meeting in the Eastlea and Greystone Park locations.

Newfrontiers has itself transitioned and multiplied in the past few years, now representing twenty interdependent 'apostolic spheres' around the globe. River of Life is part of one of these spheres called Disciple Nations (DNa).⁹ Disciple Nations serves numerous churches, mainly in Southern Africa, with an emphasis on

churches growing
churches generating productive surplus
churches prioritizing the raising of the next generation.

God continues to bless and grow River of Life as a vibrant local church community, as well as being a significant apostolic launch pad for the extension of God's Kingdom in Zimbabwe and beyond.

⁹ Disciple Nations is a family of churches lead by Scott Marques with Peter Cunningham, Tapiwa Chizana, Andrew Ellis, Alan Norton ,Tongai Mahobebe and Andrew Cunningham.

two: vision

*“Then the Lord replied: **Write down** the vision and **make it plain** on tablets so that whosoever reads it **may run with it**. For the vision awaits an appointed time; the vision speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though this vision linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay.”¹⁰*

A vision needs to be (1) **Written** (2) **Simple** (3) **Cause us to run**. And our church is a church on the move. Sometimes we sprint, most of the time we jog steadily, but we never amble.

Here is our Vision:

**To glorify God
by extending His kingdom
through planting and strengthening new testament
churches.**

To Glorify God

This is the chief end of man and is the reason for our creation. We are to bring Him glory in our thoughts, words and deeds. Countless times in the Bible there are phrases such as “For my name’s sake” or “For the glory of my name”. Jesus even taught us to pray that God’s name would be *hallowed!* Our personal mission in life should be “TO BRING GOD GLORY”. Therefore, whether we are raising kids, a student or a businessman, our goal should be to make God’s name famous.

This sounds good, but how can we ‘put legs on’ glorifying God? How can we do it in an effective, sustainable and above all biblical way? How exactly will we see God become famous in our communities? The answer is ...

¹⁰ Habakkuk 2:2-3

By Extending HIS Kingdom

The words after 'hallowed be thy name' are of course 'Your Kingdom come.'

Now think about it, God's name is only glorified where His rule is acknowledged. A king is only glorified in His Kingdom. Therefore, we 'put legs on' glorifying God by actively extending the borders of His Kingdom in the community around us.

When Jesus walked the earth he declared 'the Kingdom of God is among you'. This should also be our declaration wherever we go. We bring the Kingdom.

The Kingdom advances every time:-

- a person is born again (they become part of the Kingdom).
- Righteousness is chosen over sin.
- God's ways are brought daily into family life, business life, all of life.

How can we 'put legs on' extending the Kingdom? How can we do it in an effective, sustainable and above all a biblical way? How exactly will we see God's Kingdom come in our communities? The answer is ...

Through PLANTING & Strengthening New Testament Churches

Throughout the gospels, Jesus spoke mostly about extending the Kingdom. Then, in Acts 1, Jesus met with his disciples and again spoke about the Kingdom. How was it going to advance in an on-going, sustainable, healthy manner?

The answer? Wham! ... Acts 2 and THE FIRST LOCAL CHURCH is born in Jerusalem.

From that moment on, history is the story of the establishment and multiplication of vibrant local churches that become lamp-stands in communities. This is how the Kingdom is advanced. Local churches in every community are to be beacons of light that help people to be born again, and then train them and motivate them to extend the Kingdom in their homes and places of work.

three: mission

To be a significant Antioch-type church, serving as an apostolic base demonstrating New Testament Church as a dynamic, gospel-centered, outward-looking community for the sending, receiving and equipping of the saints for works of ministry.

What is an Antioch-type apostolic base? Well the answer is in Acts 13.

A dynamic, gospel-centred, missional community

Theology:

1. ***Dynamic:*** God himself is dynamic: creative, vibrant, powerful, impactful and inspiring. HE IS ALIVE – He is the Creator. We are His regenerated creation.
2. ***Gospel:*** Jesus is the good news of the gospel. He fulfilled the Old Testament law and prophecies of God. He is God revealed. He is the way to go! We want to be on track with Jesus and the teaching of His Word for living life.
3. ***Missional:*** God is on a mission and we are to be part of it. Jesus fulfilled His mission, and His spirit empowers us to be on His mission, the Great Commission.
Think of God's mission as having a church, rather than the church having a mission
4. ***Community:*** God himself is a warm, loving, triune community. The primary biblical image for God is 'Father' and the church is 'family'. We want to follow the example of the New Testament Church as a warm community.

Application:**1. DYNAMIC – We are a new creation**

We are God's children, created in His image and mandated to reflect His likeness in every area of life. We seek to be creative, expressive, and sincere in our worship of God. We celebrate colour, diversity, language, and gifting in the way we love God and each other. We are not perfect and so we need His life, renewal and dynamism in us if we are going to look and act like Him, and be relevant to others.

2. GOSPEL-CENTERED - We are followers

We follow Jesus and show others His way, not ours, as the only purposeful, satisfying life. The view we have about God and the gospel, our theology, shapes our relationship with Him and our mission for Him. We rely on His Holy Spirit as we teach His Word bringing faith, understanding and change.

3. MISSIONAL COMMUNITY - God has designed us to extend His kingdom

Our meetings are to help the unbeliever towards the line of faith and to encourage and equip the believer to be on assignment at home, at work and in the community. We want to love and serve all those in our sphere of influence and we hope to win many to Christ. In addition, our resources are our ammunition. Each member is massively involved in giving time, skills, finance and other resources to God's mission.

*We don't have a missions department. As a church, we **ARE** a missions department.*

four: core beliefs & vital doctrines

1. Absolutes:

These are non-negotiable and you would need to agree 100% with our absolutes. For example:

- Jesus will return
- That we should be filled with the Holy Spirit

2. Interpretations:

These are non-essentials and there is room here for diversity of *respected* interpretations of scripture. However, we suggest that you are at least 80% in agreement with our interpretations or else you will be often frustrated.

For example:

- When and how Jesus will return
- When and how you get filled with the Holy Spirit.

3. Personal Preferences:

These are subjective opinions. But again, anything less than 80% preference for the way we do things will leave you frustrated.

For example:

- Length of meeting
- Style of worship

Our Absolute Beliefs

Bible: We believe that the Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament in their original writings are fully inspired by God and accept them as the supreme and final authority for faith and life.

Trinity: We believe in the sovereignty of the one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sin: We believe that human beings, though created in the image of God, are sinful, guilty, and lost without Christ.

Deity of Christ: We believe that Jesus Christ, as begotten by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, is true God and true man.

Cross: We believe that on the cross, Jesus Christ became sin for us, was judged by God and died in our place.

Resurrection: We believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, His ascension into Heaven, and His present ministry as our High Priest and advocate with the Father.

Conversion: We believe that all who are justified by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, are born again of the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God. We believe that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, does not lead to God but to judgement and damnation, for Christ is the only Way.

Holy Spirit: We believe in the ministry and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We believe in the importance of each believer being filled with the Holy Spirit by which they are empowered and equipped for service.

Heaven and Hell: We believe in the resurrection both of the just and the unjust, the eternal blessedness of the redeemed, and the eternal damnation of those who have rejected God's offer of salvation in Jesus Christ.

Church: We believe that the local church should be the expression of the one true and universal Church and therefore that new birth and personal confession of faith in Christ are essentials of Church membership. We desire to fellowship and work with other ministries and congregations with the same profession of faith for the spreading of the gospel and equipping of the Saints.

Second Coming: We believe in the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ in power and glory to judge the living and the dead.

Communion: We believe that the Lord's Supper is the partaking of the emblems, which symbolise the broken body and shed blood of Christ, in remembrance of His sacrificial death until He comes. We aim to take it every couple of months on Sundays, and more regularly in Life Groups. We increasingly find that small groups are the best forum for a meaningful communion.

Water Baptism: We believe that in accordance with the command and example of Christ, water baptism should follow repentance. We believe that water baptism is the external sign of an internal work.

five: values

It has been said that only 20% of communication is verbal and that at least 80% of communication is non-verbal. This affirms that 'it's not WHAT you say, it's HOW you say it'. You can even say the words 'I love you' many different ways, communicating many different messages. For this reason, values are important – they are the things that determine HOW we speak and act. This overview of our 'Top 20 Values' is designed to give you a good feel for our values as a Church

Top 20 Values

- We **ENTHUSIASTICALLY SUBMIT OUR LIVES TO GOD'S WORD.**
We believe that the Bible is God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit and without error. It is the final authority for our lives. Although we acknowledge that there are some nonessential issues that will be subject to opinion (e.g. when exactly Jesus will return), there are some essentials that we would hold to uncompromisingly (e.g. that Jesus will return).
- We are **WHOLEHEARTED IN OUR COMMITMENT TO CHRIST.**
We have this passion because we believe that **Jesus Christ is God**, who became man, born of a virgin and was crucified for the sins of the world. We believe that Christ's death on the cross satisfied God's wrath against the sin of mankind and that, in love, God offers forgiveness in Christ, to all who will repent and receive him as Lord. We believe that Jesus rose again on the third day and ascended to heaven having appeared to many. We believe that he sent His **Holy Spirit** as He has promised, and as had been prophesied, to baptize and prepare the Church to be the Bride of Christ as we fulfill his mandate to 'GO' into all the world and make disciples of all nations. As the hymn-writer penned 'Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all'.
- We **HOPE IN CHRIST THROUGH ALL CIRCUMSTANCES.**
We hold fast to the gospel of grace – that God's love for us is complete, unchanging and unconditional. Those who put their faith in Christ receive eternal life, forgiveness, sonship and glory as a free gift from God. Our salvation is not dependent upon our effort or goodness but upon the free gift of grace from God. ¹¹

¹¹ Ephesians 2:8-9

- We are a **PEOPLE OF PRAYER**.
We are committed to prayer being a characteristic of all our meetings, with some meetings devoted solely to prayer.
- We are **INTENTIONAL ABOUT EVANGELISING UNBELIEVERS**.
In the light of God's amazing grace, we have been commissioned to reach the world with this good news. We are therefore a pioneering, then pastoral people. We are a pioneering community on a mission and we meet each other's need along the way.
- We **EAGERLY DESIRE THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT**.
We believe in 'the priesthood of all believers', that each person in the church is graced by God with different gifts and talents for building up the church and for reaching the world with the Gospel. We believe that the people, not the building, are the temple of God.
- We **CULTIVATE A FAMILY ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE & INCLUSION**.
As the early believers met 'house to house', so we too are committed to meeting in small groups in homes on a regular basis. These Life Groups and Small Groups are where we enjoy friendship, care for each other and are most effective in the outworking of service in the church.
- We **HIGHLY VALUE HUMILITY IN LEADERSHIP**.
We endeavor to follow the down-to-earth, servant-leadership style of Jesus and Paul and the other biblical leaders, being transparent, relevant and approachable. Our dress, style and reference to each other will reflect this.
- We **ADOPT BIBLICAL GOVERNANCE MODELS FOR CHURCH-LIFE**.
We believe, according to Ephesians¹², in the gift of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. for the building of the church until she reaches maturity. For this reason we are eager to receive these gifts into the fabric of our church. In the same vein, according to Timothy¹³ and Titus¹⁴, we believe in local church governance through elders, as men given oversight of the church, under Christ.
- We **CELEBRATE DIVERSITY AS THE DESIGN OF GOD**.
We are deeply committed to building a diverse church that includes many different cultures, languages and age groups because we believe this brings greatest glory to God. We do not want to just preach this truth, but fully live it out in a cross-cultural expression of the wisdom of God.

¹² Ephesians 4: 1-16

¹³ Timothy 1&2

¹⁴ Titus 1:5-9

- We **ENCOURAGE GROWTH AND MULTIPLICATION OF CHURCHES.**
We are committed to church planting because of the vast number of people who do not know Christ in Zimbabwe and other nations.
- We **REMEMBER THE POOR.**
We believe that this is a fundamental characteristic of a church that truly understands God's grace and an apostolic imperative for New Testament church expression. We are pro-active in setting up initiatives that benefit the poor, such as those advocating for orphans (The Michael Project), those equipping for business and agricultural productivity (Foundations for Farming and others) and those providing crisis care (Revive, Chiedza and others).
- We **SEEK TO ADVANCE THE KINGDOM OF GOD.**
We believe that the rule of Christ or the Kingdom of God is to be extended into all of life. The expression of the grace and glory of God should be abundantly evident in our families, work place and every area of our lives as we seek first the Kingdom of God.
- We **PROMOTE GODLY SEXUALITY & NURTURE MARRIAGE.**
We place emphasis on building foundations for strong marriages and thriving children. We see healthy families as a fundamental building block for vibrant churches.
- We **GIVE GENEROUSLY WITH FAITH AND JOY.**
We reflect the grace of God in the way we give of our time, finance and resources that God has entrusted to us, with generosity and faith.
- We **EXUBERANTLY REJOICE IN THE GLORY & VICTORY OF CHRIST.**
We enjoy lively, zealous, heartfelt times of sung praise and worship together in many of our meetings, as well as on our own. We eagerly expect the gifts of the Spirit through the contributions of people in these times.
- We **MAKE DISCIPLES.**
We are committed to evangelism and to seeing people added and devoted to Christ through discipleship.
- We are **OPEN TO CHANGE.**
We are a people on the move and want to remain flexible and dynamic as a church. Through times of change, we rest in the absolute security of God's unswerving commitment to us and our undying commitment to one another.

six: what about the vibe?

Vision is what we are trying to do.

Values describe how we do what we do.

Vital doctrines are the things we all believe as we go.

Vibe is how the vision, values and vital doctrines make everything *feel*.

People may remember more how they feel about their time with us than about what we say or do, so a lot of it is about the right attitude! Our vibe is:

Authentic

We aim to be real, honest, and non-religious. What you see is what you get.
What we say we will do.

Vibrant

Zimbabwe has a vibrant, extrovert and positive culture which conveniently fits with biblical church culture! We are not cynical or brooding. We are upbeat, vibrant and fun.

Excellent

Jesus was excellent: 'He has done everything well' (*Mark 7:37*).

Intentionally Masculine and Feminine

With only 33% of the world-wide church being men, we have serious work to do. To this end we ensure a vibe that works for men without disenfranchising women.

Warm

We have a warm sense of community and genuine concern for each other.

Informal but organised

We try to be efficient and excellent but with an informal, non-corporate feel.

Serious but light

When the occasion calls for it we can be very serious but most of the time we deal with serious things with a light touch, but without flippancy.

Conversational but authoritative

We are comfortable giving an authoritative and declaratory lead in matters of doctrine and vision, but we do this with an encouraging and conversational tone.

Humble but confident

When you grasp the gospel of grace, you become simultaneously more humble (as your calling is by grace) and more confident (as your calling is by grace).

Humorous

Laughter is good for the soul and helps relational connection, so we encourage wit and humour in preaching and banter and leg-pulling between us.

seven: expressions of membership

Because you are unique, you will of course have your own unique contribution to make, but we all commit to the following five things to express our togetherness:

Being part of **Sunday Meeting** (& preferably part of a Sunday Serving Team)

Being part of a **Small Group**

Being **financially committed** to monthly tithes & offerings to the church

Being **joyfully submitted** to the leadership of the Church

Being deliberate in **hospitality and friend making** to grow our family atmosphere.

1. Sunday Meetings

In today's individualistic and independent culture where many things compete for our time and energies, it is important to reaffirm the importance of meeting together as a church on Sundays:

a. To imitate Christ and the early church: *On the Sabbath day Jesus went into the synagogue, as was his custom.*¹⁵ They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship.¹⁶

b. To display God's glorious body: Visitors often testify to the love amongst us and the power of God in bringing our wide spectrum of ages and races and colours together as one in Christ.¹⁷

c. To spur each other on to love and action: *Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing.*¹⁸

d. For our own protection: Regular time in worship and sitting under the preaching of the Word spurs us on to love God, hate sin, and keep a correct perspective on life. Wilberforce wrote, *'thank God for the day of rest and worship wherein earthly occupations assume their true size and ambition is stunted.'*

e. To be shaped by the teaching of God's word: We ache when a person misses a key preach that we know would have done them much good. We don't want people to fill the pews to boost numbers or ego, but because we are jealous with the *'that they'* of Colossians 2:2 – which is a great verse!

¹⁵ Luke 4:6

¹⁶ Acts 2:42

¹⁷ Ephesians 2:11f, Revelation 5:9

¹⁸ Hebrews 10:24

f. To serve: Service is a mark of Christ-likeness¹⁹ and a great way to express our togetherness, so every member of River of Life Church is encouraged to be part of a serving team of some sort. There is hardly a serving area on a Sunday or mid-week that is paid. The fuel of selfless love, service and sacrifice for the benefit of others drives the engine of the church. What a privilege to join Jesus in this.

g. Because you never know when it is your special moment: God-filled meetings are the most common context for God to dramatically speak to us and direct us.

Application: Each member is committed to attending on Sundays, and to joining a serving team in some capacity.

2. Small Groups

Small Groups (including Life Groups, Academy Groups, Ministry Groups and other interest groups) are a great place to make friends, grow in faith and connect with the life of the church. Small Groups are communities of +/- 8 people within the wider community of our church. The purpose of Life Groups is to *do life together* enjoying the 'C-D-E' of Small Groups :

Community: Apparently, the average church member knows a maximum of 70 people in the congregation, whether the church has two hundred or two thousand attending. We do not have to know everyone in the church to feel a sense of belonging, but we do need to know some people really well, and this can happen through being part of a Life Group.

Discipleship: The Great Commission is to *make disciples not just converts*. *Discipleship involves helping a person make consistent and tangible progress in Godly character, gifting and service.*

Evangelism: We are deliberate in never letting a Life Group become a stagnant holy huddle. Each Life Group is eager to win the lost, welcome in new people and raise new leaders. Life Groups like these can multiply before long.

Application: Each member is part of a Small Group.

¹⁹ Mark 10:45

3. Giving faithfully

*'But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness, and your love for us - see also that you excel in this grace of giving.'*²⁰

In today's context, where it seems that many churches are perceived as money-making corporations, we have been very intentional about our approach to money. We aim to ensure that we excel in giving whilst not compromising our atmosphere of grace. Here is how things work at River of Life.

a. Not a biblical law: Tithing (giving 10% of gross income) is no longer a law as it was in Old Testament times. But it is now a principle that, out of respect for the greater power of grace, should be equaled or bettered.

b. But here is the challenge: We do not want to talk about money all the time or do mini-preaches on giving each week. So here's the deal - we agree up front what the expectation is and then we all keep to it. Thus we excel in giving in an atmosphere of grace.

c. As leaders, we feel comfortable to make the principle of the tithe (monthly giving of 10% of gross income) the agreed standard for members. Whilst many of us will give more (as a regular higher percentage of income or as ad-hoc offerings above the tithe), others may need some time to re-adjust things to get up to the tithe.

d. Because we are opposed to any hint of legalism, we want everyone to do this joyfully and out of a clear conscience. To this end, if you are not comfortable with this arrangement, then please let's chat about it.

e. But let's not dodge the issue: Whilst we are adamant that this should not feel legalistic, we are equally adamant that we should not try to justify our own shortcomings of lack of discipline or stinginess in the name of avoiding legalism. For example, we pay school fees consistently every month yet we never accuse the school of being legalistic. Neither do we blame our bosses for consistently paying us a salary on a regular basis. On the contrary, we commend them for their discipline and commitment. John Piper says that *'another name for serious intention is planning... and failure to plan ...results not in spontaneity, but the same old rut'*. The principle and discipline of the tithe helps us consistently excel in this grace of giving.²¹ We have

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 8:7

²¹ 2 Corinthians 8:7

found that consistently surrendering a decent portion of our income to God on a monthly basis is an act of faith, obedience and worship that stops us worshipping money.

f. We believe that the full tithe should go to the local church: R.T. Kendall writes: *'Tithing is the solution no one talks about. If every professing Christian would tithe, every congregation would be free of financial worries and could begin to truly be the salt of the earth... "Tithes, therefore, should be exclusively for the work of the gospel. Tithes should not be given to charity or any other noble work. Non-church organizations should be supported by non-Christians, or by Christians who have first given all their tithes to the church, or by the church itself. That organization is likely to be much better off if it is not sustained by funds stolen from God and his local church'*. Occasionally people have giving commitments outside of the Church. In this kind of situation, we suggest that they tithe to River of Life Church, and give offerings elsewhere.

We encourage church members to give via electronic transfer where possible, as this is safer and easier. We also take up an offering each Sunday and there are regular gift days for specific needs.

As a church, we give away 15% per cent of our income, which goes to apostolic extension (church planting & strengthening) and remembering the poor.

Application: Each member agrees to give, or intentionally work towards giving, at least a tithe on a monthly basis. Because money is a sensitive area, and because we are opposed to any hint of legalism, we want everyone to do this joyfully and out of a clear conscience with faith.

4. Leading & following

Leading and following are two vital components of a healthy church and the advance of God's Kingdom. Remember, *when leaders lead and the people follow – praise the Lord!*²²

Leading: In keeping with the leadership layout of Jesus and Paul, we try to lead *gently, humbly, down-to-earth and approachably, with servant hearts, through example, with God's authority but respecting individual conscience, and through team.*²³

Following: Based on the same scriptures, we encourage followers to follow by *emulating our example, honouring the reality that we must give account to God, obeying us, helping us enjoy life and leadership, and by praying for us.*

Our Leadership Layout

- a. **Jesus is the head of the Church**²⁴
- b. **Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers** continuously help to lay solid foundations and assist us stay on course.²⁵ These recognized people have a high level of influence in the church, whilst the day-to-day responsibility for the church rests with the elders.
- c. **Elders:** Scripture presents a team of male elders who oversee the church by guarding, guiding and governing the local congregation.²⁶
- d. **Executive Team & Staff:** this is a team of men and women who assist the elders in the administration of the church and pastoring the flock. They do this mostly through our Life Groups and Small Groups.
- e. **Deacons / Service Area Leaders / Pastors:** these are men and women who work closely with the elders by serving as senior leaders.²⁷
- f. **Saints:** we are all saints who actively participate in the body, and due to unique gifts and passions, many will rise into various positions of leadership and responsibility.²⁸

Application: Our aim is to be a church whose leaders that are a joy to follow and whose followers are a joy to lead. We are committed to a gentle and grace-filled style of leadership and, in turn, each member is willing to be joyfully submitted to the leaders.

²² Judges 5:2

²³ Based on Hebrews 13:7-24

²⁴ Ephesians 1:18-23

²⁵ Ephesians 4, Acts 11-14

²⁶ Acts 14:23, Acts 20:28, 1 Timothy 5:17, 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1&2, 1 Peter 5

²⁷ Acts 6, 1 Timothy 3

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12

5. Hospitality

The primary biblical metaphor for the church is a family, and we are passionate about protecting the family atmosphere of our church. The main gift that ensures this is that of hospitality - words, actions and attitudes of love and acceptance towards others. It involves opening our homes, but it extends to Sunday meetings, Life Groups and wherever we find ourselves.

Sunday Hospitality: Our Sunday venue and all that happens there is to be regarded as your very own home where you have invited a group of people to join you for a couple of hours on a Sunday. If everyone has the attitude '*this is my home and these are my guests*' then everything else falls into place. So please arrive early and meet and greet people with a sense of responsibility. And don't just sit and wait for the meeting to start, but rather circulate and engage with different people.

Home Hospitality: Inviting people into your home is so powerful. It sends an undeniable message that you are genuinely interested in them. Get on the front foot right away with making friends!

Application: Whilst we appreciate that not everybody is an extravert, you will need to be comfortable with taking initiative to help guide and promote our wonderful family atmosphere – chatting to anyone that you don't know on Sundays and generally being warm, hospitable and pro-active in making friends.

eight: so what are my options?

Now that you have completed the **Ready to ROL** course, we would love you to make River of Life Church your home.

Should you decide to join us, we invite you on this exciting journey as follows:

1. Choose a Sunday on which we can introduce you to the church. This time of celebration should lead to more connection and friendship. You can let the leader of this course know your preferred date when are ready. On many of the *New Member Introduction Sundays* we will also take communion together as a whole church.

Membership is essentially relational, functional and authentic rather than bureaucratic. As such, there is no form to sign or administrative process to complete. Your Introduction Sunday will give you a chance to honour Christ, and your onward participation in the church the same.

2. If you have not yet been baptised in water since conversion you can sign-up for our next baptism course and we will be eager to facilitate that as soon as possible – perhaps on the same Sunday as your Introduction to the church.
3. If you are a new believer, we would love you to join *Ready for Discipleship*, which is a four week introduction to following Christ to help you build your relationship with Him.
4. Your *Ready to ROL* course leader and others in the church will always be available to help you join a Small-Group, be part of a Sunday Serving Team or anything you may need assistance with.

