

“Care & Correction” or “Shaming?”

By Dr. David R. Fletcher



W A T E R M A R K
C O M M U N I T Y C H U R C H

**The Case Against Watermark
Community Church of Dallas
Draws National Media Attention**

Sorting Out Personal Rights and Biblical Principles

The newspapers screamed headlines such as “Is Public Shaming by the Church Legal?” and “Church, ex-member battle over discipline.” The story ran from coast to coast and was fodder in blog discussions, hallway chatter, legal circles and church meetings. A seminal event in dealing with a church member had been captured by the national media. In the past, churches has been accused of being “too soft” on members who stray from the path, but now a church was attacked as being strident and invading personal privacy. ABC News said:

A female member of the Watermark Community Church, a non-denominational evangelical church in Dallas, Texas, reached out to her pastor after her husband had an alleged affair with another woman. But when the husband, identified only as “John Doe,” failed to reconcile with his wife, he said the church’s minister, Todd Wagner, shamed him from the pulpit.¹

The Dallas Morning news quotes:

¹ “Is Public Shaming by the Church Legal? Texas Appeals Court Will Decide if Church Can Release Private Info.” Mike von Fremd, ABC News *Good Morning America*, May 28, 2006. Accessed online at: <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2013910&page=1>

As Watermark's senior pastor, the Rev. Todd Wagner, told his congregation last month: "Sue me. Nail me to a tree. Tell me you hate me. Misrepresent my motives. We're going to love you anyway."²

In a sermon at this time entitled "I Love You. So Sue Me," Wagner spoke about the issues of love, care and correction.³ The church replied and told their side of the story on their website.⁴

Todd Wagner is the founding pastor and dynamic communicator of Watermark Community Church of Dallas, Texas. The six-year-old mega-church, with 3,000 people in worship, found itself in the national spotlight. Wagner is accustomed to the press. In 2004 he was interviewed by Morley Safer of CBS's popular show, *60 Minutes*, concerning the *Left Behind* book series:

At the Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Rev. Todd Wagner tells his flock that the books may be fiction, but they are based on hard facts. Non-believers are doomed. Safer asked Wagner who would be "Left Behind": "What would be my fate?"

"Folks like yourself that are gonna be here, are gonna go through all the events that Christ outlined in Mark:13 and Matthew:24—some of which are quite horrific," says Wagner. "It would be the time of trouble like we've never seen before."

For evangelicals, the Rapture and what follows are factual history, history of the future, prophecy. "It's not a minority view, it's not a group of folks that are niched somewhere over there. It's a very mainstream view," says Wagner.⁵

Few pastors are interviewed on *60 Minutes* and Wagner directly answered Safer's personal question. This illustrates that Wagner is not afraid to publicly engage with

² "Taking Tough Love to Task: Church, Ex-Member Battle Over Whether Discipline Went Too Far," by Jeffrey Weiss and Michael Grabbell, *The Dallas Morning News*, 12:00 AM CDT on Sunday, June 4, 2006. http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/DN-nuwatermark_main_04met.ART.State.Edition2.908b771.html

³ "I Love You, So Sue Me." Sermon by Todd Wagner, Watermark Community Church, May 2006. "In a fireside chat format, Todd and friends discuss everything from current events at Watermark to love, confrontation, reconciliation - and even the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment." <http://www.watermarkradio.com/2006/05/index.html> linked to <http://av1.watermarkcommunity.org/audio1/20060507.mp3>

⁴ "Statement," Watermark Community Church, archived web page on May 30, 2006.

⁵ "Rise Of The Righteous Army: Evangelical Movement Shapes Culture With 'Left Behind' Series." By Morley Safer. *CBS News*, *60 Minutes*, February 8, 2004. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/02/05/60minutes/main598218.shtml>

challenging issues.⁶ Because of this confrontation of culture with Wagner’s biblical values, Watermark Church has been enormously successful. Besides launching dozens of ministries in their short life, the church has raised \$21 million in cash for their building program.

Had Todd Wagner been unfair to single out an individual and share confidential material, information that perhaps derived from a counseling session? Or, had Wagner acted according to biblical principles, consistently carried out according to the church’s established values and policies?

The Media’s Story

The best way to introduce such a case is for both Watermark Community Church and the national media to “tell their own story.” The story broke in late May, 2006. The following is a story released by ABC’s *Good Morning America*:

A female member of the Watermark Community Church, a non-denominational evangelical church in Dallas, Texas, reached out to her pastor after her husband had an alleged affair with another woman. But when the husband, identified only as “John Doe,” failed to reconcile with his wife, he said the church’s minister, Todd Wagner, shamed him from the pulpit. And the minister didn’t stop there. When the husband tried to resign from the church, Wagner allegedly threatened to mail a dozen letters—half to Watermark Community Church members and the other half to members of other churches who know and have worked with John Doe—detailing the alleged affair.

Kelly Shackelford, chief counsel of the Liberty Legal Institute, a Texas organization that fights for religious liberties, said the church is behaving this way because it feels it must save the marriage. “They love this individual,” Shackelford said. “They love the people around him and want to do everything they can to bring him back into the fold and get his life straight on path.” John Doe does not feel the love. He is suing the church over the letters and said he is no longer a member. But the church says its covenants, which Doe signed, does not allow members to leave the fold. “All members submit themselves and may not resign from membership in an attempt to avoid such correction,” Shackelford said.

What Secrets Are Sacred?

This case has caused some to question what a church is and what secrets—if any—can be kept sacred. “What you share with a pastor in confidence has just

⁶ See also “The Gift of Giving: Watermark Church Members, Handed Envelopes of Cash, Find Creative Ways to Spend It for Good,” by Jeffrey Weiss, *The Dallas Morning News*, March 24, 2006. <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/religion/stories/032506dnrelwatermark.3ef8952.html> (also see Appendix I).

an almost sacred quality to it,” said Robin Lovin, a Methodist minister and ethics professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. In his book, “Christian Ethics: An Essential Guide,” Lovin writes that people would not seek help from pastors in their church without the promise of confidentiality. “That is what encouraged people to bring their problems to people who can help and if they can’t trust that confidentiality then of course they won’t seek assistance,” Lovin said.

A Texas appeals court will decide whether the Watermark Community Church went too far in its attempt to save a church member’s marriage. A lower court has already ruled that the church is free to release private information about its members. John Doe’s attorney says his client is now considering a civil lawsuit against the church for slander.⁷

This was not the only article, others ran this item. The Dallas Morning News ran an article entitled, *Pair fights church on sharing confessions*. Further details are added in this story:

“The basis of the lawsuit was the church wanted to go outside of the church and the community at large, including potentially even their employers,” said Jeff Tillotson, attorney for the man and woman.

They obtained a temporary restraining order April 28, preventing the church from releasing information about them.

But the order was dismissed May 5 by Associate Judge Sheryl McFarlin after Watermark’s lawyers argued that it violated the church’s right to freely exercise its religion.

The case is winding its way through appeals.

Mr. Tillotson said the case holds major implications for church members in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

“The typical notion of a Dallasite is that if you don’t like a church, you can just leave, and that’s apparently not shared by some of these churches,” he said. “And then when you say I want to get off this merry-go-round, their response is you can’t quit to avoid discipline.”⁸

A later story by the Dallas Morning News added:

⁷ “Is Public Shaming by the Church Legal? Texas Appeals Court Will Decide if Church Can Release Private Info.”

⁸ “Pair fights church on sharing confessions,” by Michael Grabell and Jeffrey Weiss, Dallas Morning News, May 28, 2006. See <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/14799>

The wife confronted her husband – by herself and with friends – and he confessed, church leaders said. But early this year, the wife, who also declined to be interviewed, discovered that Mr. Doe was continuing his affair with Ms. Roe, and she filed for divorce, church leaders said.

At a regular evening church meeting, the wife Doe asked for a public prayer, which Mr. Wagner offered. Identifying the wife by name, he prayed that she and her husband would reconcile. While he discussed some difficulties in the marriage, Mr. Wagner said, he did not specifically mention infidelity.

Watermark officials asked the wife to make one more try at reconciliation, one last meeting with close Christian friends who might be able to work with her husband. She supplied the names of 14 people, half of whom were not Watermark members. The church sent a letter to the 14 describing the situation and inviting them to a meeting, but Mr. Doe refused to attend, church leaders said.

Then the church sent a letter to Mr. Doe telling him that it planned to contact the woman who was allegedly his paramour – and who is not a Watermark member. The letter also said the church would write to the 14 people invited to the meeting, letting them know about his unwillingness to cooperate, and to the national Christian organization where he was a board member. (Mr. Doe has resigned from that board, Mr. Wagner said, and the church no longer intends to contact the organization).

There was never a plan to inform the entire congregation about the affair, the pastor said.

Mr. Wagner and two other Watermark leaders called Ms. Roe and suggested that she tell her boss, the pastor of another Dallas-area church, about her relationship with Mr. Doe. If she didn't, they said, they would call the pastor, "even as we would want and expect others to contact us if one of our employees or members was engaging in activities damaging to the reputation of Christ," according to a prepared statement from the church.

Mr. Wagner said this week that he believed he was obligated to contact the woman's boss even though she never signed up for Watermark's discipline, because all Christians are obligated to one another.

"If a sister sins, she is a sister in Christ," he said. "We are commanded to love our neighbor."⁹

⁹ "Church, ex-member battle over discipline" by Jeffrey Weiss and Michael Grabell, Dallas Morning News, Sunday, June 4, 2006, <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/latestnews/stories/060406dnmetnuwatermark.86c7c7d.htm> Note there appears to be conflicting data about Ms. Roe: some accounts place her in Tennessee while others say she works for a Dallas-area church.

CBS also picked up the story for local and national publication.¹⁰ A final story from September, 2006, added more details and gave an update on the appeal:

The last step was to make the end of the process (and by the way, the adulterous relationship) public to some of Mr. Doe's associates, who already knew about it, and to Ms. Roe's bosses, who did not. Ms. Roe, the Other Woman, works for a church in Tennessee.

Mr. Doe and Ms. Roe went to court seeking an injunction against Watermark from making their relationship public. The district court threw out the case, saying it had no jurisdiction in church matters. Doe and Roe appealed.

The appeal was heard here in Dallas on Wednesday. No decision yet. But sitting through the oral arguments was both hugely entertaining and cause for some confidence in our judicial system.

The three judges asked great questions and seemed fully engaged in the case. The process reminded me of the "lightning round" of a TV game show.

The lawyer for Mr. Doe and Ms. Roe got exactly one paragraph into his prepared text before the questions started. When the lawyer for the other side stepped to the lectern, he didn't even get to finish a single sentence before the questioning began.

Jeff Tillotson, the plaintiff's lawyer, got thumped about whether Mr. Doe, now a former church member who nonetheless had signed an agreement to follow the discipline process, should be treated differently than Ms. Roe, who was never a member of the church.

Kelly Shackelford, representing the church, was repeatedly asked what right the church had to discipline a non-member.

Who will win? I have as much experience reading appellate panels as I do handicapping cricket matches. But if I had to guess, I'd say the tone of the questions leaned toward ruling for the church on Mr. Doe and against on Ms. Roe. Assuming there's a legal and practical way for that to happen.¹¹

So, that's the media's perspective. But what about the church's view?

¹⁰ "Dallas Church Fights Right To Expose Affair," by Jay Gormley, May 25, 2006 10:02 pm US/Central, CBS 11 News Dallas, http://cbs11tv.com/local/local_story_145230233.html

¹¹ "An update on the Watermark Church appeal," by Jeffrey Weiss, in Religion Sneak Peak, Dallas Morning News, 06:44 PM CDT on Thursday, September 28, 2006. <http://www.dallasnews.com/s/dws/nwsltr/religion/stories/092806dnrelnewsletter.272dfc2b.html>

The Root of the Legal Issue

The legal code in the United States includes a concept known the ecclesiastical abstention doctrine. “That doctrine prohibits the civil courts from exercising subject matter jurisdiction in instances involving church doctrine, church governance and the church’s right to discipline its members for lapsing into behavior it deems immoral.”¹²

Notice that a central aspect of this doctrine is that it focuses on the civil courts. The ecclesiastical abstention doctrine does not exempt the church or its officials from criminal statutes. *Texas Lawyer* expands on the root doctrine:

Ecclesiastical abstention holds that to allow the courts to intervene in matters deeply rooted in religion would violate the First Amendment’s free exercise and establishment clauses. It bans courts from hearing these kinds of cases, much less deciding them.

“We have the doctrine because people believe a lot of very different things about religion and are entitled to create the kinds of churches they want,” says Douglas Laycock, a professor of constitutional law at the University of Texas School of Law ... “When the state interferes with the internal affairs of a church, it deprives all of its members of the right to act on their understanding of their faith.”¹³

The Watermark case was *John Doe and Jane Roe v. Watermark Community Church* and was heard by 5th Court of Appeals in Dallas on September 27. John Doe is the pseudonym for the man accused of adultery, and Jane Roe the pseudonym of the woman in the affair (not his wife).

Both sides in the Watermark case hired legal counsel. Doe hired Jeffrey Tillotson, a partner in the Dallas law firm of Lynn, Tillotson & Pinker. According to Texas Lawyer, Tillotson maintains about Doe that:

Doe also maintains that confidential disclosures were made in a secular setting—lunch—to his friend who also happened to be his pastor. Because Doe resigned from Watermark before disciplinary proceedings were instituted against him, and Roe never was a member of the church, neither can be subject to the church’s discipline argues their attorney Jeffrey Tillotson. “Under Watermark’s conception of the case, they could find some sin that my client commits in 25 years from now, and still attempt to go through their Matthew 18 process.”¹⁴

¹² “Two Texas Cases Test Ecclesiastical Abstention Doctrine,” by Mark Donald. *Texas Lawyer*, Vol. 22, No. 24, August 14, 2006, p. 16.

¹³ “Two Cases,” p. 16.

¹⁴ “Two Cases,” p. 17.

While that may be hyperbole, Tillotson takes the issue further by stating: “The way Watermark has described the application of the [ecclesiastical abstention] doctrine, there are no limits short of child molestation and human sacrifice.”¹⁵

Watermark responded to the suit with a legal brief to the 5th Court. According to *Texas Lawyer*, that brief said:

- ◆ Doe and his wife signed a membership covenant with Watermark in April 2005.
- ◆ Doe’s wife first approached the church for counseling about her husband’s affair. “In response to her request for help, the church began a disciplinary process involving Mr. Doe to bring him back to his “religious practices” and “bring healing and restoration to the spouses of a broken marriage.”
- ◆ By signing the membership covenant, he waived any right to have the disciplinary proceedings remain confidential.
- ◆ “In an April 26 letter, which is detailed in Watermark’s brief, church elders informed Doe that unless he responded to them by May 1, the elders would be obliged to “inform the body of Christ of such actions which do not coincide with your professed beliefs and reflect an unrepentant heart.”¹⁶

Roe and Doe responded:

- ◆ “Appellant Roe alleges in her brief that church “representatives” phoned her and threatened to reveal Doe’s confidences to Roe’s employer, a Nashville church, and “members of Ms. Roe’s Nashville community” where she resides.”
- ◆ “On April 28, Doe and Roe filed a suit in the 162nd District Court of Dallas County alleging breach of fiduciary duty, and sought to enjoin the church from further disclosing Doe’s confidences. A temporary restraining order, though initially granted, was later dissolved by the trial court, which dismissed the case. Doe and Roe later then appealed.”¹⁷

Kelly Shackelford was Watermark’s attorney. He sees the Watermark case as seminal for religious freedom:

In my opinion, the cases described below so affect the Church that every congregation in Texas should be earnestly praying for these cases with intensity and persistence.

Westbrook v. Penley – We will be arguing this case before the Texas Supreme Court on September 26th. This case arose out of a church following Matthew 18. The case result will go much broader either way—affecting the freedom of all

¹⁵ “Two Cases,” p. 16 (brackets original, ed.)

¹⁶ “Two Cases,” p. 17.

¹⁷ “Two Cases,” p. 17.

churches and religious schools to follow their doctrine. This is the first time the Supreme Court has dealt with this issue, and it will decide whether plaintiff attorneys can start bringing cases against Texas churches statewide.

Doe v. Watermark Church – I will be arguing this case on September 27th at the Dallas Court of Appeals. It obviously covers the same big constitutional religious freedom issues as the Penley case does (whether individuals can now begin suing churches across Texas). Even worse, this one involved an actual Restraining Order prohibiting the church from engaging in religious speech on particular sins. We have had the injunction thrown out so far.¹⁸

The legal issues center on the doctrine of ecclesiastical abstention and whether it applies to the Watermark case—and if so, how much?

Watermark’s Response to the Nation

Todd Wagner had discussed the concepts of “care and correction” in a 26 minute interview on the Drew Marshall Show, an internationally syndicated radio show.¹⁹ On a Sunday morning in late May, he talked to Watermark Church about the issues of love, care and correction in a sermon entitled, “I Love You. So Sue Me.”²⁰ In this message, he also interviewed Watermark’s attorney, Kelly Shackelford and discussed “the issues of the wall of separation of church and state.” Both the sermon and the Drew Marshall interview are available for download at the church’s website, *Watermark Radio*.

In response to the articles in the media, the Elders posted official statements on the church’s website. Watermark Community Church is led by its Elders, a group of five men. Seeing that they had acted in accordance with the church’s stated and published values, they felt no compunction about countering the media’s stories.

The church’s statement was prefaced with a link to a web page of a “collection of quotes from the Dallas Morning News about our care and correction process.”²¹ Whereas the national media had used the terms “shaming” or “church discipline,” Watermark prefers to call the process “care and correction.” The church’s statement began by noting:

¹⁸ “These Texas, Religious Cases Will Set Precedent for our whole Nation,” in Capitol Watch, September 11 2006, Kelly Shackelford, Liberty Legal Institute & The Moral Action Committee of the BMA of Texas.” http://texasmoralaction.org/cap_watch.htm

¹⁹ “Does the Church Have the Right to Reveal a Person’s Private Sins?” Interview (linked to <http://av1.watermarkcommunity.org/audio1/20060603.mp3>) with Todd Wagner on “The Drew Marshall Show” <http://www.watermarkradio.com/2006/06/index.html>

²⁰ “I Love You, So Sue Me.”

²¹ The link provided by Watermark is: <http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/communications/dmnews.pdf>

As a result of the interest and confusion generated by recent media accounts of a lawsuit filed by a Watermark member against the church, it is our desire to clearly summarize pertinent facts. Our purpose in sharing these facts is to allow those wanting to understand our actions the opportunity to deal with truths and not be forced to speculate.²²

1. “Mr. Doe and Mrs. Doe” are married and are members of Watermark.
2. “Mrs. Doe” came forward asking for help related to challenges in her marital relationship.
3. “Mr. Doe or Ms. Roe” did not reveal information or participate in a “private confessional” with any Watermark staff that resulted in this process.
4. As part of the process, “Mr. Doe and Mrs. Doe” included other people, both members at Watermark and others outside Watermark, in the discussions regarding the marital struggle. There was never a one on one confessional between Mr. Doe and Todd Wagner, or Mr. Doe and any other staff or church member that initiated the Matthew 18 process, as has been reported in the news. As “Mrs. Doe” sought help to repair the marriage, she approached the church and as a result the church continued to reach out to “Mr. Doe” and later “Ms. Roe” in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17.
5. The final step in the Matthew 18 process was to close the communications with those that were personally involved with “Mr. and Mrs. Doe and Ms. Roe” and to clarify the church’s need to separate from “Mr. Doe’s” continued behavior. The lawsuit was filed in April by “Mr. Doe” and “Ms. Roe” to prevent this letter from being sent to those people already involved with “Mr. Doe and Ms. Roe.” There was never a planned letter to the entire congregation—indeed, close to 100% of the membership knew nothing of “Mr. and Mrs. Doe and Ms. Roe” until the lawsuit was filed.
6. A temporary restraining order was entered without Watermark being present to challenge any representations made at the hearing. After a hearing with all present, the Court dismissed the case. The dismissal was upheld by a district judge days later. With the case now twice dismissed, “Mr. Doe and Ms. Roe” filed an appeal with the Dallas Court of Appeals, which is currently pending.
7. As in any similar case, we encourage all followers of Christ in relationship with such individuals, to continue in prayer for them, while calling them to a true knowledge of the Lord, repentance in their sin and reconciliation to: God, their spouse, and other damaged relationships – including the church (Watermark and universal body of Christ). We eagerly await the day that “Mr. Doe” chooses to reconcile. We long to “forgive and comfort him, [that he may not] be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” and we may “reaffirm our love for him” (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). We ask that you continue

²² This first paragraph of the statement is found on the statement’s web page (“Statement,” Watermark Community Church, archived web page on May 30, 2006) and is copied on the Watermark Radio page about the Drew Marshall show (“Does the Church Have the Right to Reveal a Person’s Private Sins?”).

to love “Mr. Doe” along with us in accordance with scripture, urging him to seek restoration in all his relationships.

Colossians 4:2-6,
The Elders of Watermark Community Church²³

Watermark Church had no problem asserting their perspective on the facts, sometimes directly countering items related in the media stories.

Watermark’s Values and Membership

The “Care and Correction Process” for Watermark is rooted deeply in the church’s values. The church desires to “radically commit ourselves to authenticity because nothing chases away skeptics faster than hypocrisy.” The Church has what it calls the “ABC’s of Watermark” to communicate its self-defined vision (the ABC’s are not to be confused with the American Broadcasting Company). The “A” is for Authenticity:

A—Authenticity—We radically commit ourselves to authenticity because nothing chases away skeptics faster than hypocrisy. As we become authentic “Christ followers,” we will be most effective in introducing others to the life-change that comes through a relationship with Jesus Christ. God’s Word calls all individuals to be complete in their understanding of Jesus Christ and in their response to Him. As His church we must balance our ministry efforts to match this purpose.²⁴

The church concludes the “ABC’s” with a statement on their importance:

In short, if the Watermark community is known for its **Authenticity**, it will draw people into the process of balanced ministry characterized by the **4B’s**, which will then produce followers of Christ whose lives are increasingly described by the **5C’s**.²⁵

²³ “Statement,” Watermark Community Church, archived web page on May 30, 2006.

²⁴ “The ABCs of Watermark,” www.watermark.org. The “B” and “C” items are:

“B. We instruct and encourage the unchurched, dechurched, dead-churched and unmoved to experience a life of full devotion to Christ by offering ministries that call people to: **Believe** in Christ, and take steps to; **Belong** to His body, where they will; **Be trained** in truth; and **Be strong** in ministry.”

“C. As the Holy Spirit works in our lives through the 4 b’s, we will continually grow in our ability to live as fully-devoted followers of Christ. We use five c’s to capture what should increasingly define a life of full devotion: **Committed to God**, His Word, His Cause, and His people; **Competent** in doctrine and in doing; **Connected** to others in the body of Christ; **Contributing** to the work of Christ with our lives and resources; **Creative** in the way we live and seek to do ministry” (emphasis theirs, ed).

²⁵ “The ABCs of Watermark,” www.watermark.org.

This statement shows that the church has a highly developed sense of calling and focus. Their desire is for “authenticity,” which is the first “A” of the ABC’s, has great bearing on this case. Thus, the “Care and Correction Process” is at the heart of Watermark’s values.

An outworking of this desire for authenticity is what Watermark calls “Committed to Community.” One can here begin to see the outworking of the “Care and Correction Process.” The church believes that “Belonging to our community requires a visible commitment to being intentionally involved with others in accountable and encouraging relationships.”²⁶ Membership is important at Watermark:

Membership in our body requires a tangible commitment to our purposes and our vision as outlined in our membership class. Everyone is welcome to attend our church and participate in our times of celebration and encouragement. It is our intention, however, to call all believers in our midst into membership.

We desire our fellowship to be a caring family that values community, informality, spontaneity, freedom of expression, humor, fun, commitment and loyalty. In our pursuit of holiness, we will acknowledge our imperfection and provide an environment in which people are free to risk, fail and find grace and encouragement in time of need.²⁷

Thus, the desire for authenticity drives the church to have a church membership that emphasizes accountability. The “Care and Correction Process” is rooted in church membership—and the process is primarily directed toward members.

The constitution of the church explains the role of members and their expectations. Section 1 of Article IV of the church’s constitution describes two types of membership at Watermark:

While we acknowledge that all true believers in Jesus Christ are positionally members of the church universal, membership in this local body requires participation in, and commitment to:

- ◆ the Beliefs & Governance of this church;
- ◆ intentional community with members of this local body; and
- ◆ the use of whatever gift(s) he has received to serve others, in order that he may do his part in faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

As a result, we acknowledge two types of membership at this church:

²⁶ “Core Values: Committed to Community,” www.watermark.org

²⁷ “Core Values: Committed to Community,” www.watermark.org

1. **Positional Membership** – which includes all true believers in Jesus Christ; and
2. **Participatory Membership** – which includes true believers in Jesus Christ who have committed themselves to this local body as outlined above (hereinafter “Members”).²⁸

Section 2 describes the fourfold process of becoming a “participatory member” at Watermark:

Individuals may present themselves for Membership upon making a profession of personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Each potential new Member shall: 1) make a written statement of his faith in Christ and his intent, with God's help, to pursue a life that will bring glory to God; 2) assent to the Beliefs and Governance of Watermark Community Church; 3) attend the church's New Member Class; and 4) sign the Membership Covenant.²⁹

This fourfold step includes attending a new member class. Thus, membership at Watermark is not open to a “transfer by letter” or “walking an aisle.” Membership at Watermark takes an individual's desire and protracted action.

Membership at Watermark contains aspects of the “Authenticity” in the “ABC's.” The Elders are charged with overseeing the spiritual health of the Watermark congregation:

A person is a Member of this church only as long as he lives within this community of faith and is actively pursuing the Calling, Convictions and Commitments of this church. It is the Elders' responsibility to “know well the condition of the flock,” to encourage steadfastness of all individual Members and to advise Members of the consequences of not abiding by their commitments as Members, including eventual removal from Membership.³⁰

Thus is seen that the Elders may advise members about not living according to the “calling, convictions and commitments of this church.” Section 4 details the “care and correction of participatory members:”

It is the responsibility of the Board of Elders, as described in Acts 20:28, to “be on guard for themselves and all the flock among which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Shepherding includes both the care and correction of the sheep. As a

²⁸ Constitution of Watermark Community Church, Article IV—Our Membership, Section 1: Membership (emphasis in the section is theirs).

²⁹ Watermark Constitution, Article IV—Our Membership, Section 2: Qualifications for Participatory Membership.

³⁰ Watermark Constitution, Article IV—Our Membership, Section 3: Participatory Membership Rolls.

consequence, the Board of Elders may separate a member of the flock from Membership for:

- ◆ departure from his previously expressed agreement with "Our Beliefs";
- ◆ conduct that mars the testimony of the church or evidences a continued unrepentant departure from biblical morality;
- ◆ manifesting disinterest and/or inactivity in the life of the church; or
- ◆ other reasons as set forth in the Scriptures.

The separation process shall follow that laid out in Scripture. By applying for and accepting Membership in this church, all Members submit themselves to the care and correction of the Board of Elders, and may not resign from Membership in an attempt to avoid such care and correction.³¹

This section contains material which the media highlighted—that an individual “may not resign from Membership in an attempt to avoid such care and correction.” Watermark is explicitly clear in their constitution about their desires for “care and correction.”

Concerning the termination of membership, there is both voluntary and involuntary termination:

1. Voluntary termination of Membership is available to any Member in good standing upon written request of that Member. Where appropriate, upon request, Members may be granted a letter of transfer to the evangelical church of their choice. The Board of Elders may reinstate voluntarily terminated Members upon satisfactory fulfillment of the new Member process and approval.
2. At the discretion of the Board of Elders, Members who move from the Dallas area may be removed from Membership. Involuntary termination may result if a Member fails to submit himself to the Board of Elders and when in the sole opinion of the Board of Elders, it is necessary for the care or correction of the church or the terminated Member. The Board of Elders, in its sole discretion, may communicate to the congregation the fact of, and reason for, involuntary termination of a Member.³²

The Board of Elders is the sole arbiter of membership issues for the church. In the “Care and Correction Process” the Elders will hear the issues and solely make any decisions for the members and church.

The Appendices contain more information that relates to Watermark’s “Care and Correction.” Appendix I contains the church’s membership covenant.

³¹ Watermark Constitution, Article IV—Our Membership, Section 4: Care and Correction of Participatory Members.

³² Watermark Constitution, Article IV—Our Membership, Section 5: Termination of Participatory Membership.

Comments by the Community

Once Watermark's discipline case went national, there were many comments made in public and private forums. While some admired the process, others detested it.

One religion blog commented on the legal implications of Watermark's actions:

Legally, I think the question is whether the church has the right to send the letters in the first place. The plaintiff's resignation is actually irrelevant to that question; there is no legal obligation to submit to church discipline, whether or not you are a member of the church ...

... but I can see two possible grounds why the letters might be illegal: libel, or invasion of privacy. Truth is a defense to libel, and the plaintiff does not seem to be denying the truth of the allegations. Invasion of privacy, is probably a stronger claim (under grounds of public disclosure). As far as I know, however, neither claim would justify a prior restraint. (In other words, the court could punish the church after the fact, but could not prevent them from sending the letters in the first place.) Another possible complaint would be breach of fiduciary duty, but the courts have generally shied away from assigning a fiduciary duty to clergy, since it would involve defining the clergy's responsibilities in a way which might be incompatible with church doctrine.³³

The author moves from his perspective on the legal issues to personal reflections:

As an ex-Jehovah's Witness, the Pastor's comment was particularly creepy to me ... The notion that 'love' means imposing your morality on someone who disagrees with it is a disgusting and dehumanizing concept. While this instance may not be as severe as the Witnesses' practice of "disfellowshipping," they're both instance of the same controlling, self-righteous mindset.³⁴

Another person, under the moniker "Sportin' Life," commented on the "moralizing":

I don't necessarily think the legal system is the best way to deal with this sort of obnoxious, invasive moralizing. This type of Christian should instead simply be shunned by everyone decent. It's interesting to remember, though, that in some cases those with "religious" credentials have the legal right to maintain silence

³³ "The Free Exercise of Public Shaming," by dang (Daniel Glick) @ 11:12 am.
<http://www.danielglick.com/wp/?p=678>

³⁴ "The Free Exercise of Public Shaming," by dang (Daniel Glick) @ 11:12 am.
<http://www.danielglick.com/wp/?p=678> He links the reference to "disfellowshipping" to
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disfellowshipping#Jehovah.27s_Witnesses.

about actual crimes that are reported to them by church members during a confessional moment.³⁵

This position by “Sportin’ Life” is interesting and raised questions. Should the church not take moralistic positions? Delta commented on the use of the word “love”:

That’s pretty scary. I’ve gotten so tired of Christians using the word “love” to mean hate or bigotry. Maybe Congress should consider a federal amendment protecting the traditional definition of love as being “A deep, tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as that arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness.”³⁶

Delta’s views do not take into such concepts as “speaking the truth in love” from Ephesians 4:15, or the popular concept of “tough love” as advocated by many counselors. Avia commented in the same blog, comparing the issue to “blackmail”:

How very cute: it appears that this particular church has deemed “Freedom of Religion” grounds for blackmail.

There is a short story by Stephen King called “Quitters Inc” in which an organization refuses to let its members leave (or else)... once again in pursuit of the “good” of the person who is trying to leave.³⁷

An anonymous response countered these views: “There was no one-on-one confession ... once again, the media got the story wrong.”³⁸

Such discussion can be beneficial, as Izaak comments:

I have been reading your blog in general. I am happy to see you are passionately engaging issues I care about. It helps me to see the arguments laid out clearly and transparently, even if I don't agree with them. I am a Christian. Keep up your search for truth.³⁹

³⁵ “When Christian Attack,” a blog by “Sportin’ Life” (<http://www.blogger.com/profile/13011849>). <http://sportinlife.blogspot.com/2006/05/when-christians-attack.html> May 29, 2006 on “It Ain’t Necessarily So, A Site for Scoffers and Skeptics.”

³⁶ “When Christian Attack,” response by Delta, <http://sportinlife.blogspot.com/2006/05/when-christians-attack.html> May 29, 2006 11:36 PM on “It Ain’t Necessarily So, A Site for Scoffers and Skeptics.”

³⁷ “When Christian Attack,” response by Aviaa, <http://sportinlife.blogspot.com/2006/05/when-christians-attack.html> May 31, 2006 1:23 PM on “It Ain’t Necessarily So, A Site for Scoffers and Skeptics.”

³⁸ “When Christian Attack,” response by Anonymous, <http://sportinlife.blogspot.com/2006/05/when-christians-attack.html> May 31, 2006 5:05 PM on “It Ain’t Necessarily So, A Site for Scoffers and Skeptics.” The responder also says “see www.watermarkcommunity2.org/pages/legal.”

³⁹ “When Christian Attack,” response by Izaak, <http://sportinlife.blogspot.com/2006/05/when-christians-attack.html> June 1, 2006 2:06 PM on “It Ain’t Necessarily So, A Site for Scoffers and Skeptics.”

In another blog, Kevin Bussey registers disbelief:

I believe in church discipline. I believe the church went through the appropriate means according to scripture up until the man wanted to leave the church. But Watermark's bylaws say a member ***"may not resign from membership in an attempt to avoid such care and correction."*** How can a person not resign? Somehow this sounds almost cult-like. You can't force someone to change can you? What do you think?⁴⁰

Watermark is stirring people to think about "care and correction!"

In a blog entitled "Reformed Baptist Thinker," John (no last name) describes himself as "a former Mormon who was saved by Jesus Christ in college. Now I am pursuing my MDiv at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary focusing on apologetics." John says, "In his ministry, Jesus laid out how we should hold fellow believers accountable. Matthew 18:15-20 provides us with the process of church discipline. But is it legal in our country?"⁴¹ Here the issue is the difference between biblical and societal values.

Boris comments in another blog about the "intimidation":

Well, Kelly Shackelford begs to disagree: *Kelly Shackelford, chief counsel of the Liberty Legal Institute, a Texas organization that fights for religious liberties, said the church is behaving this way because it feels it must save the marriage. "They love this individual," Shackelford said. "They love the people around him and want to do everything they can to bring him back into the fold and get his life straight on path."*

So according to this well known advocate for religious freedom (i.e. freedom of churches to exercise power over everyone) church is only showing love toward its member through intimidation, threats, public humiliation and making public details disclosed in confidence. Schackelford isn't just anybody: he is a trusted legal bigot endorsed by Southern Baptists, Focus on Dobson, all pro "christianist white supremacist family" groups.

It's perfectly in line with a new definition of christian love: the harder you hit, more you love.

⁴⁰ "Church Discipline?" by Kevin Bussey, May 29th, 2006
<http://kevinbussey.wordpress.com/2006/05/29/church-discipline> in "Confessions of a Recovering Pharisee" (emphasis his).

⁴¹ "Is Church Discipline Legal?" by John. May 30, 2006.
<http://thereformedbaptistthinker.blogspot.com/2006/05/is-church-discipline-legal.html>

This is what's in store for you, return to good old days when public denouncement and excommunication were tools for churches to control their members. Albert Mohler and several other baptist leaders have called for more strict church discipline and here you have it. Baptist historian Gregory Wills has told how people attending interracial services were excommunicated and how women were 1.5 times more likely to get punished.

This is just one more example how christian churches are seeking power to control and punish, not to change hearts. Inside and outside the church.⁴²

Like the quote from "Sportin' Life," Boris questions Watermark's definition of the word *love*. His assertion that "It's perfectly in line with a new definition of christian love: the harder you hit, more you love" delivers a hard punch. Was Watermark being "unloving" in its response?

Conclusion

Perhaps what riled the media and the nation the most centers on this concept of "love." Boris' view was that "It's perfectly in line with a new definition of christian love: the harder you hit, more you love." The nation had not seen many churches that outspokenly advocate "authenticity." For Watermark, "authenticity" includes a "tough love."

There are regional, state and national implications of the Watermark case:

Not every theologian reads Matthew 18 as a procedural formula, said Robin Lovin, a professor of ethics at Southern Methodist University. "Methodist pastors would interpret that as advice to keep working on relationships. It's about not giving up on somebody," he said. "It shouldn't be turned into a legal process."

The Catholic Church, by far the largest Christian denomination in the United States, has no formal method for lay members to discipline one another with or without church leadership involvement, said the Rev. Thomas Green, a canon law professor at Catholic University in Washington.

But it's easy to find other churches that have adopted some form of church discipline over the past 20 years. And when discipline goes beyond face-to-face discussions, it's usually about sexual issues, said Darrell Bock, a professor of New Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and an elder at Trinity Fellowship Church in Richardson. "Issues of marital fidelity have become a litmus test for general fidelity. And in some ways, they're the easiest to quantify," he said. Several years ago, he said, his church had to deal with a man he called a

⁴² "John Doe Disciplined" in WorldViews blog <http://www.worldmagblog.com/blog/> reply by Boris at May 29, 2006 03:30 am.

“serial adulterer.” When his church discovered the man had joined another congregation, Dr. Bock’s church notified the leadership of the other church, he said.

Bent Tree Bible Fellowship in Carrollton has also used public church discipline. A worship leader whose husband discovered she was having an affair was confronted by her pastor more than a year ago. Unlike the Watermark example, the woman repented, reconciled and eventually went on a local Christian radio show with her husband to discuss the experience. Bent Tree has had four other successful reconciliations of married couples that had been split by adultery, said the executive pastor, the Rev. Tim Harkins. “Those are the home runs. That is what we are pursuing,” he said.

That’s the kind of reaction that Watermark hoped for with Mr. Doe, Mr. Wagner said. “Most folks respond really well and are grateful,” he said.⁴³

Watermark wants authentic Christians, as their documents say, “We radically commit ourselves to authenticity because nothing chases away skeptics faster than hypocrisy.”

Did Watermark cross the line? Was the church consistent with its values and principles? Are these values in line with biblical values? Is authenticity a way to define how one loves an individual?

As Jeffrey Weiss pointed out in the Dallas Morning News: “The name “Watermark” is intentionally nondenominational. It refers to the all-but-invisible mark of authenticity placed on fine paper.”⁴⁴ Watermark Church says about their name:

It is a symbol of *authenticity*. It lets people know they are not dealing with something that is counterfeit. Even so, we want to be an authentic people who are known for their transparency, integrity and sincerity of heart. We want to serve Christ together by creating an environment that allows others to be who they are as they are first introduced to and then grow into the image of Jesus Christ. When people know us well, (hold us up to the light of time and intimacy), we want them to say “there is a group of people with a sincere faith and an authentic relationship with each other and Jesus Christ.” People are drawn to authenticity.⁴⁵

Has the church given a new definition, or renewed the definition, of “authenticity” and “authentic love?”

⁴³ “Taking Tough Love to Task.”

⁴⁴ “The Gift of Giving: Watermark Church Members, Handed Envelopes of Cash, Find Creative Ways to Spend It for Good.” (see Appendix I)

⁴⁵ “About Us, Why We Are Called Watermark,” Watermark Community Church, <http://www.watermark.org/about/name.asp>

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Appendix I—Watermark in the News

The following is part of an article from the Dallas Morning News of March, 2006. The article illustrates how Watermark has been in the media—and gives good background on the history of the church.

“The Gift of Giving: Watermark Church Members, Handed Envelopes of Cash, Find Creative Ways to Spend it for Good”⁴⁶

Usually churches collect money. But Watermark Community Church in North Dallas has a style that’s anything but usual. So when envelopes were passed down the rows last December, the church was handing money out. Each envelope held cash – from \$5 to \$1,000, for a total of about \$30,000. And every person – about 1,500 at each of two services – was told to take one envelope.

Senior Pastor Todd Wagner gave these simple instructions: “You are to use that money to further the fame of who Jesus Christ is.” No random acts of kindness, the pastor said: Don’t just hand the money to the first needy person you see.

On the other hand, if members really needed the cash, they could keep it. Buy a meal. But not an extra dessert.

Earlier this month, Mr. Wagner – no relation to the Todd Wagner who is Mark Cuban’s business partner – devoted a Sunday service to telling some of the stories of how his members spent the money, which came from the church’s general fund. One man, out of work, did use his \$10 for a meal. A woman used her \$5 to buy stationery and send encouraging notes to friends.

One man bought a large-print Bible for a homeless man with failing eyesight. Several people pooled their envelopes, added money of their own, and bought food for various ministries. Mr. Wagner said other churches have made similar distributions. He called it

⁴⁶ “The Gift of Giving: Watermark Church Members, Handed Envelopes of Cash, Find Creative Ways to Spend it for Good.” The article continues with four examples of Watermark members who have used the funds given to them.

a way to live out the Parable of the Talents from Matthew 25, the story of a man who entrusts different amounts of money to three of his servants. (Two are praised for doubling their money, and the third is condemned for burying his in the ground.)

The giveaway at Watermark was the latest and highest-profile attempt by the young evangelical church to influence the behavior of its members.

Watermark was started in 1999 by eight families, including Mr. Wagner's. These days, the Sunday services fill the auditorium at Lake Highlands High School, where the congregation meets. Watermark successfully blends conservative theology and relaxed style. On a recent Sunday, almost nobody wore "Sunday best." A smattering of button-down collars passed for formal. Some people carried sport water bottles or cups of coffee. The name "Watermark" is intentionally nondenominational. It refers to the all-but-invisible mark of authenticity placed on fine paper.

Most members came from other churches. They say they were attracted by the style and emphasis of this one. "I grew up around what I would call a dead church that was full of dogged orthodoxy but completely absent of orthopraxy," or correct action, said the 42-year-old pastor. "We knew what we believed, but it didn't affect how we behaved." Here are four stories of how people used the money in their envelopes.

Appendix II: Watermark’s Membership Covenant

The following is the Membership Covenant of the church.⁴⁷

Having trusted in Christ alone as my Lord and Savior, and being in agreement with the Calling, Commitments, Convictions, Core Values, Beliefs and Governance of Watermark Community Church, I now am called to unite with the Watermark family. In doing so, I commit myself to the Lord and to the other members of the family to protect our unity, share in, serve and support the ministry of my church family. Specifically, to be a fully devoted follower of Christ through pursuing:

1. **Belonging** to His body...
 - ◆ by attending faithfully
 - ◆ by acting in grace and love toward other members.
 - ◆ by dealing biblically with conflict and refusing to gossip.
 - ◆ by having a shepherd who will know, partner and pray with me.
 - ◆ by following the leadership.
 - ◆ by submitting myself to the care and correction of leadership should the need arise.
 - ◆ by praying for its health and impact
 - ◆ by warmly welcoming those who visit and committing myself to community with those who attend
2. Helping others **Believe** in Christ...
 - ◆ by developing relationships with the unchurched, de-churched, dead-churched and unmoved
 - ◆ by sharing my story of grace with others
 - ◆ by praying for the salvation of non-believers with whom I have a relationship
3. **Being Trained** in God’s Truth
 - ◆ by affirming the inspiration, infallibility and authority of God’s Word
 - ◆ by committing myself to read, understand and apply the Bible
 - ◆ be availing myself to the tools and resources of the church which are designed to further my understanding of and deepen my commitment to applying God’s Word
 - ◆ by preparing myself to be able to give a “ready defense” for my faith based upon God’s Word
4. And **Being Strong** in a life of ministry and worship...
 - ◆ by giving graciously as God has graciously given to me.
 - ◆ by discovering my gifts and talents.
 - ◆ by developing a servant's heart.
 - ◆ by intentionally growing and seeking to reproduce my devotion to Christ in others.
 - ◆ by annually filling out my 5C Growth Assessment

⁴⁷ “Membership Covenant.” Watermark Community Church,
<http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/members/covenant.asp>

Appendix III—Watermark Membership Process

*The following is the membership process for the church.*⁴⁸

We're excited that you've attended Connecting Point⁴⁹ and are ready to proceed with the membership process. You can follow the process below and submit all of the information on-line: Testimony, Membership Covenant, S.H.A.P.E. form. Each step has a time estimate for how long it will probably take you to complete that step. After each step, you will be brought back to this page to begin the next step.

If you would like, you may download each form in Adobe PDF format, print them out, and submit them by mail to the church offices: Testimony, Membership Covenant, and S.H.A.P.E. form.

Step 1 - Write Your Personal Testimony⁵⁰ (Estimate: 20-60 minutes)

See the provided questions for instructions on how to do this. If you need further assistance, please contact Rick Wisner at rwisner@watermark.org

Step 2 - Fill Out Your SHAPE Summary Form (Estimate: 20-60 minutes)

The SHAPE packet helps you discover your gifts and abilities and the role they play in choosing a service area at Watermark. Download this form here⁵¹ or contact Veronica Serna with questions.

Step 3 - Sign Your Membership Covenant⁵² (Estimate: 5-30 minutes)

Once you have decided to pursue membership, please read and sign this covenant. Please let us know if you have any questions.

Step 4 – Choose and Commit to An Area of Service⁵³

Look over our list of volunteer opportunities and contact the ministry of your choice. Let us know if we can be of assistance in finding a good fit for you by emailing Veronica Serna at vserna@watermark.org.

⁴⁸ "Membership Process," Watermark Community Church, <http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/members/discoveryprocess.asp>.

⁴⁹ Watermark describes connecting point classes: "Discover more about membership at Watermark and explore our values, heart and mission in a series of comfortable, informal small group meetings and events." See "Becoming a Member," Watermark Community Church, <http://www.watermark.org/connected/members.asp>

⁵⁰ This is linked to: <http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/members/testimony.asp>

⁵¹ This is linked to: http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/members/SHAPE_Packet.pdf

⁵² This is linked to: <http://www.watermarkcommunity.org/members/covenant.asp>

⁵³ This is linked to: <http://www.watermark.org/materials/ServiceOpps.pdf>

Appendix IV—Watermark’s Annual Review Process

*Watermark does an annual “5C Growth Assessment Survey” that every member must participate in. The survey utilizes a web-based form to be completed.*⁵⁴

*About the 5C Growth Assessment, Watermark says:*⁵⁵

God is in the business of changing lives. At Watermark we want everything we do to be useful and effective in helping all men and women become fully devoted followers of Christ. As such, we ask that you complete this 5C Growth Assessment. Your responses will enable us together to pursue God's purposes of conforming each of us into the image of His son, and of increasing His glory revealed through us as His church.

This information is critical. All of the responses given are used to provide direction for future strategies, staffing needs and resource allocations of our church. Additionally, your shepherd should review your responses with you and develop a plan for encouraging you to move forward in your relationship and response to Christ in the year ahead. At the conclusion of the survey, you will have the option to forward a copy of your answers to up to six individuals. One of them should be your shepherd and the other five can be members of your community group. Thank you in advance for partnering with us to evaluate and improve how we’re doing as a church at being and making disciples.

Information about this survey

- ◆ This survey is intended to be filled out by each Watermark member.
- ◆ Answers that you provide will be shared only with Watermark staff members and the six individuals you select. When you've completed the survey, you may print a hardcopy of the survey for your records. Use it with your shepherd and others in your community to develop a plan to grow in your relationship with Christ this year.
- ◆ This online survey should take **20 to 40 minutes** to complete.
- ◆ Watermark will not provide a copy of your response to your shepherd.

Getting started

1. Click the “User setup” button below to access the 2007 survey for the first time. You will be asked to provide your first and last name, email address, and create a user ID and password.
2. Please jot down your user ID and password and keep them for your records. If you exit the survey before you’ve completed it or return later, you’ll need them to log back in.
3. If you need to go back to the survey to finish it, change any of your answers, or print additional copies, you can click the “Return to survey” button below.

⁵⁴ “5C Form,” Watermark Community Church, http://www.watermarkoffice.org/5Cs_survey_assets/2006_5C_Form.pdf

⁵⁵ “5C Growth Assessment Survey,” Watermark Community Church, <http://www.watermark.org/5C/>

Watermark's 5C Form⁵⁶

God is in the business of changing lives. At Watermark, we want to be God's instruments as we live to turn the uncommitted and opposed into unashamedly-committed, fully devoted followers of Christ. Everything we do is measured by its usefulness, effectiveness, and contribution toward this purpose. As such, we ask that you complete this Growth Assessment so we can together pursue God's purpose of conforming each of us into the image of His Son and consequently God's purpose of increasing His glory revealed through us as His church. This information is critical. All of the responses given are used to provide direction for future strategies, staffing needs, and resource allocations of our church. In addition, your shepherd should go over your responses together with you and develop a plan for encouraging you to move forward in your relationship and response to Christ in the year ahead. At the conclusion of completing the Survey online, simply print out a copy of your responses and share a copy with your shepherd. Watermark will not provide a copy to your shepherd. Thank you in advance for partnering with us to evaluate and improve how we're doing as a church at being and making disciples.

Name:

Home Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

Phone:

E-Mail:

My shepherd is:

I am currently shepherding:

Gender: M F

Marital Status: Married Single

If married, provide your wedding date (optional):

How have been following Christ since:

Membership status:

- I am currently a Watermark member.
- I am not a member but in the process of joining.
- I am interested in membership. Please contact me.
- I am not interested in membership at this time.

Has God used the people, ministry and/or messages of Watermark to contribute to your decision to initially follow Christ?

Or, if you are already a follower of Christ, has God used Watermark to help you more fully follow Christ? yes no

If yes, please describe briefly: (Please write the year in which you started following Christ)

Committed to God

(Rate: Never Rarely Occasionally Often Consistently 1 2 3 4 5)

⁵⁶ "5C Form," Watermark Community Church.

1. I prioritize my life (time, money, activities & relationships) based upon my desire to serve & walk with God.
2. I recognize God's sovereign control over my circumstances in life, feeling less of a need to control people/events.
3. I seek the approval of God over the approval of man.
4. I would describe my relationship with Christ as motivated by love as opposed to duty.
5. My attitudes and actions demonstrate God's love to those both inside and outside the Christian faith.
6. I intentionally seek, love, and serve non-believers.
7. I spend individual time with God (i.e. prayer, studying Scripture, and other spiritual disciplines).

Competent in the Word

1. I am able to accurately study the Bible to determine principles for godly living.
2. I am able to apply Scripture to daily circumstances, situations & struggles in ways that transform my life.
3. I am able to evaluate teachings, ideas, values and lifestyles to see if they are consistent with the Bible.
4. I can answer questions about life and faith by citing specific bible verses from memory.
5. I am able to clearly communicate the Gospel with people from different backgrounds and worldviews.
6. I am able to confidently answer objections/questions concerning the Christian faith.
7. I participated in The Journey (www.jointhejourney.com) during the previous calendar year by this amount:
 1-3 months 4-6 months 7-9 months 10-12 months

Competent in Your Walk

1. I face hurts, insecurities, and/or addictions by turning to God's word, prayer and mature believers.
2. I characterize myself as content and joyful with my current circumstances.
3. I can articulate my spiritual gifts, passions and natural strengths.
4. I place others' needs before my own.
5. I treat those who can do nothing for me just as those who can benefit me.
6. I actively care for the poor and less fortunate.
7. I love all people based on their inherent God-given value, regardless of race, gender, life stage, lifestyle, or socio-economic status.
8. I listen well and empathize with those around me.
9. I live under biblical principles related to debt, budgeting and the use of financial stewardship.
10. I honor the Lord in my role as a husband/wife, parent, single adult and/or employee/employer.
 I need help related to a current issue regarding (11-16)
11. Conflict Resolution

12. Marriage
13. Debt/Money Management
14. Parenting
15. Addictions/unwanted habits
16. Dating/Courtship
17. What was most significant in your spiritual growth this year?

Complete online at www.watermarkcommunity.org

Connected to the Body

1. I am connected to an authentic group of friends at Watermark that I enjoy.
 yes no somewhat
2. The names of these friends are:
3. I have a shepherd who:
 - a. Really knows who I am and how I am doing.
 yes no somewhat
 - b. Partners with me in my effort to be faithful to Christ.
 yes no somewhat
4. My shepherd has encouraged me most by:
5. I participate in the Lord's Supper as part of my community experience:
 never seldom a few times per year
 every other month monthly

Connected to the Un-Churched, De-Churched, Dead-Churched or Un-Moved

(Never Rarely Occasionally Often Consistently)

1. I intentionally build relationships with non-believers.
2. I pray for the salvation of non-believers with whom I have a relationship.
3. I share the Gospel and my story of grace with non-believers with whom I have a relationship.
4. I pray for the salvation of people in predominantly un-reached areas/countries of the world.

Contributing

1. I handle my financial resources with the mindset that they are God's.
2. I give joyfully and cheerfully of my financial resources to the cause of Christ rather than out of obligation.
3. I give according to and beyond my ability, trusting God's provision for all my needs.
4. I see my time as entrusted to me for God's use and glory.
5. I say NO to good things in order to say YES to areas in which God desires to use me.
6. I use my gifts and talents to meet specific needs within God's Kingdom.
7. I participated by giving financially to the ministry of Watermark in the previous calendar year. yes no
8. If you participated financially, should we have record of your participation?
 yes no

9. If you answered no to the previous question, please explain why Watermark should not have a record of your financial participation:
10. List the primary ministry area in which you currently serve at Watermark:
11. List a secondary ministry area, if applicable, in which you currently serve at Watermark:
12. List a third ministry area, if applicable, in which you currently serve at Watermark:
13. Other ministries at Watermark?
14. List any ministry areas in which you currently serve outside of Watermark:
15. Are you prayerfully considering how the Lord would have you respond to the Watermark family's effort to build a home for our ministry? It is our prayer that every member responds in accordance with the Spirit's leadership with a grateful heart. Never Rarely Occasionally Often Consistently

Creative

1. I have been more creative in serving Christ this year than I was last year.
 yes no
2. If yes, how?
3. In the past year, God worked through me in the following creative ways:

Feedback

1. Our passion is that you succeed as a fully devoted follower of Christ. How can we improve in helping you grow?
2. Please select "yes" if you would like for someone to personally follow up with you concerning any of the comments you have made in the 5C online survey.
 yes no
3. Share a story about how God has used you as part of the transforming process in other's lives.

Appendix V—Watermark on Care & Correction in the Church

The following is a position paper from Todd Wagner.⁵⁷

Todd Wagner
Pastor, Watermark Community Church
On Care and Correction in the Church

Our Commitment to Care and Correction

At Watermark, we have spent much time sharing with others how we are going to work through our struggles, sins and differences. We want no one to be surprised, disappointed or confused when we care for each other in this way. We are specific about our relational commitments with our members and those who regularly attend so that everyone will expect that we will relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic, healthy relationships.

We are highly committed to each other, just as Jesus has commanded us to be, for the purposes of:

- ◆ preserving relationships;
- ◆ maintaining and promoting peace; and, ultimately to
- ◆ improving and maintaining our individual and corporate ability to speak with integrity about the transforming hope available through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

The World's View of Hypocrisy within the Church

The world has long been frustrated with the hypocrisy and inconsistency in the church. For years, the world has criticized, and I think rightly criticized, the church for failing to live up to its own standard. It is interesting, however, to note that when a church does attempt to follow the commands of Scripture and hold one another accountable, that the world criticizes it for that and wonders why we care. We care because our Lord has modeled and described for us how we are to care for each other. Our care for one another is to be marked by compassion, humility, diligence and when necessary, progressive steps of communication and correction, as described in Matt 18:15-17.

People have speculated a lot about the context of Matthew 18. The context is that God cares greatly about His children, and as a result, He expects us to care for each other just as much. He tells us He has a special heart for those who have strayed away (v. 12-14) and that it is better for us to die 'Soprano style' (v. 6) than to be careless in the way we care for and lead each other. Finally, Matthew 18 makes it clear that in everything we do we should be ready to extend forgiveness to anyone who seeks it just as He has lavishly given forgiveness to us. If we all lived with a passion to fulfill the instructions of Matthew 18, and the rest of Scripture for that matter, we would be infinitely better off.

⁵⁷ "On Care and Correction in the Church," Todd Wagner, Watermark Community Church, June 16, 2006, http://www.watermark.org/materials/CareStatement11_%2006%20.pdf

Community within Watermark Community Church

Community is a part of our name. By community, we mean a group of people who have voluntarily joined together to:

- ◆ encourage and support one another as we follow Christ;
- ◆ worship God;
- ◆ grow in our understanding of His love for us; and
- ◆ seek to tell others about the forgiveness and peace they too can find through faith in Jesus.

Agreeing to Care and Correction at Watermark

It is a natural response to run from accountability and correction. That's why, through our Watermark Membership Covenant signed by all Watermark members, we agree:

- ◆ to strengthen our ability to love each other in the midst of sin; and
- ◆ to not run away from this community to avoid care and correction.

As a community, we all state (through our Membership Covenant or other relational commitments) that we waive our right to withdraw from membership or accountability if correction is pending against us. Although anyone is obviously free to stop attending Watermark at any time, we agree that a withdrawal while care and correction is ongoing will not be considered effective until the church has fulfilled its God-given responsibilities to encourage repentance and restoration and to bring the Matthew 18:15-17 process to a close.

In the course of processing life's hurts and habits, we all share information that we want to be assured is handled with the greatest of care and wisdom. Thankfully, God has given us, in His word, the blueprint for handling every aspect of complicated life issues and relationships with excellence and love. As we gather as followers of Christ, we have an absolute commitment that all participants covenant to operate under the guidance and direction of God's word in the handling of all information shared.

God has explicitly told us of the damage that gossips, slanderers and individuals who go about as "tale bearers" bring to human relationships. His word also tells us that we are to "do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit but with humility of mind are to consider others as more important than ourselves." Part of our effort to honor this command is our commitment to the following:

- ◆ When it is necessary to share a story about a brother or sister in Christ, we must first go to that brother/sister, and explain why, in love, we are retelling a story or sharing it with others.
- ◆ Our commitment to confidence (literally "with faith") is our commitment to operate with/in faith with one another that our stories, hurts and fears will be treated with all the love, grace and wisdom that God's word commands.

True community isn't easy to achieve. Each of us brings our own baggage, insecurities and agendas into relationships. This sometimes leads to conflict. God is not surprised by

that, in fact, He has clearly laid out in His word how we are to face these conflicts with one another.

People have speculated a lot about the context of Matthew 18. The context is that God cares greatly about His children and, as a result, He expects us to care for each other just as much. He tells us He has a special heart for those who have strayed away (v. 12-14) and that it is better for us to die ‘Soprano style’ (v. 6) than to be careless in the way we care for and lead each other. Finally, Matthew 18 makes it clear that in everything we do we should be ready to extend forgiveness to anyone who seeks it -- just as He has lavishly given forgiveness to us. If we all lived with a passion to fulfill the instructions of Matthew 18, and the rest of Scripture for that matter, we would be infinitely better off.

Bitterness, gossip, infidelity, tale-bearing, abandonment, unforgiveness and broken relationships are not acceptable practices for folks who have been restored to fellowship with God through the death of Jesus. Therefore, we lean on God’s word for guidance on how we deal with these struggles in a way that will honor God, promote justice, reconcile friendships and preserve our witness for Christ.

We commit to relate to each other this way.

- ◆ Whenever we are faced with conflict, our primary goal will be to glorify God with our thoughts, words and actions (1 Cor. 10:31).
- ◆ We will try to get the “logs” out of our own eyes before focusing on what others may have done wrong (Matt. 7:3-5).
- ◆ We will seek to overlook minor offenses (Prov. 19:11). An offense should not be overlooked when it is dishonoring to God, is damaging to relationships, is hurting other people or if the practice is hurting the offender himself.
- ◆ We will refrain from all gossip, backbiting and slander (Eph. 4:29). If we have a problem with others, we will talk *to* them, not *about* them.
- ◆ We will make “charitable judgments” toward one another by believing the best about each other until we have facts that prove otherwise (1 Cor. 13:7).
- ◆ If an offense is too serious to overlook, or if we think someone may have something against us, we will go promptly to seek reconciliation (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15).
- ◆ When we offer a word of correction to others, we will do so graciously and gently, with the goal of serving and restoring them, rather than “beating them down” (Prov. 12:18; Eph. 4:29; Gal. 6:1).
- ◆ When someone tries to correct us, we will ask God to help us resist prideful defensiveness and to welcome correction with humility (Ps. 141:5; Prov. 15:32).
- ◆ When others repent, we will ask God to give us grace to forgive them as he has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).
- ◆ When we discuss or negotiate substantive issues, we will look out for others’ interests as well as our own (Phil. 2:3-4).
- ◆ When two of us cannot resolve a conflict privately, we will seek the help of wise people in our church and listen humbly to their counsel (Matt. 18:16; Phil. 4:2-3). If our dispute is with a church leader, we will look to other leaders for assistance.

- ◆ When informal mediation does not resolve a dispute, we will seek formal assistance from our church leaders or people they appoint, and we will submit to their counsel and correction (Matt. 18:17-20).
- ◆ When we have a business or legal dispute with another Christian, we will make every reasonable effort to resolve the conflict within the body of Christ through biblical mediation or arbitration, rather than going to civil court (1 Cor. 6:1-8). If the other party attends another church, our leaders will offer to cooperate with the leaders of that church to resolve the matter.
- ◆ If a person coming to our church has an unresolved conflict with someone in his former church, we will require and assist him to make every reasonable effort to be reconciled to the other person before joining our church (Matt. 5:23-24; Rom. 12:18).
- ◆ When a conflict involves matters of doctrine or care and correction, we will submit to the processes set forth in Scripture and our membership commitments.

My good friend, Ken Sande, at Peacemaker Ministries has helped me immeasurably over the years in developing, deploying and communicating these truths. I quote him extensively in the following passages even as I have leaned on him heavily in my previous statements. To see more of Ken's excellent work please visit his website at www.hispeace.org or <http://www.peacemaker.net/site/c.aqKFLTOBIpH/b.958123/k.CB70/Home.htm>

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

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

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

The Bible sometimes refers to this process of mutual encouragement and accountability as "discipline." The Bible never presents church discipline as being negative, legalistic or harsh, as modern society does. True discipline originates from God himself and is always presented as a sign of genuine love. "The Lord disciplines those he loves" (Heb. 12:6). "Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law" (Ps. 94:12). "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline" (Rev. 3:19).

God's discipline in the church, like the discipline in a good family, is intended to be primarily positive, instructive and encouraging. This process, which is sometimes referred to as "formative discipline," involves preaching, teaching, prayer, personal Bible study, small group fellowship and countless other enjoyable activities that challenge and encourage us to love and serve God more wholeheartedly.

On rare occasions, God's discipline, like the discipline in a family with growing children, also may have a corrective purpose. When we forget or disobey what God has taught us, he corrects us. One way he does this is to call the church to seek after us and lead us back onto the right track. This process, which is sometimes called "corrective" or "restorative" discipline, is likened in Scripture to a shepherd seeking after a lost sheep.

If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matt. 18:12-13).

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

Biblical discipline is similar to the discipline we value in other aspects of life. We admire parents who consistently teach their children how to behave properly and lovingly discipline them when they disobey. We value music teachers who bring out the best in their students by teaching them proper technique and consistently pointing out their errors so they can play a piece properly. And we applaud athletic coaches who diligently teach their players to do what is right and correct them when they fumble, so that the team works well together and can compete for the championship.

The same principles apply to the family of God. We, too, need to be taught what is right and to be lovingly corrected when we do something contrary to what God teaches us in his Word. Therefore, we as a church are committed to help one another obey God's command to be "self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined" (Titus 1:8).

The leaders of our church recognize that God has called them to an even higher level of accountability regarding their faith and conduct (James 3:1; 1 Tim. 5:19-20). Therefore, they are committed to listening humbly to loving correction from each other or from any member in our church, and, if necessary, to submitting themselves to the corrective discipline of our body.

B. Most Corrective Discipline Is Private, Personal and Informal

God gives every believer grace to be self-disciplined. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7). Thus, discipline always begins as a personal matter and usually remains that way, as each of us

studies God's Word, seeks him in prayer, and draws on his grace to identify and change sinful habits and grow in godliness.

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

If repeated private conversations do not lead another person to repentance, Jesus commands that we ask other brothers or sisters to get involved. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along" (Matt. 18:16). If informal conversations with these people fail to resolve the matter, then we may seek the involvement of more influential people, such as a small group leader, Sunday school teacher or church leader. If even these efforts fail to bring a brother or sister to repentance, and if the issue is too serious to overlook, we will move into what may be called "formal discipline."

C. Formal Discipline May Involve the Entire Church

If an individual persistently refuses to listen to personal and informal correction to turn from speech or behavior that the Bible defines as sin, Jesus commands us to "tell it to the church" (Matt. 18:17a). This first involves informing one or more church leaders about the situation. If the offense is not likely to cause imminent harm to others, our leaders may approach the individual privately to personally establish the facts and encourage repentance of any sin they discover. The individual will be given every reasonable opportunity to explain and defend his or her actions. If the individual recognizes his sin and repents, the matter usually ends there, unless a confession to additional people is needed.

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

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

If the straying individual does not repent in response to private appeals from our leaders, they may inform others in the church who may be able to influence that individual or be willing to pray for him or her, or people who might be harmed or affected by that person's behavior. This step may include close friends, a small group, other followers of Christ who could encourage or influence them, or the entire congregation if our leaders deem it to be appropriate (Matt. 18:17, 1 Tim. 5:20). For example, (hypothetically) if a young man is seducing several young woman in the church and refuses to allow us to

hold him accountable and protect others from his behavior, we will share with the body that wisdom would not have others engage with him in relationship.

If, after a reasonable period of time, the individual still refuses to change, our leaders may formally remove him or her from membership and normal fellowship. They also may inform the church body of their decision and instruct the congregation to treat the individual as an unbeliever. This means that we will no longer treat him or her as a fellow Christian. Instead of having casual, relaxed fellowship with the individual, we will look for opportunities to lovingly bring the Gospel to him, remind him of God's holiness and mercy, and call him to repent and put his faith in Christ (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20).

Appendix VI—Epilogue from Watermark

*The following is a letter on Watermark’s website that presents an epilogue to the issue.*⁵⁸

The Elders of Watermark Community Church and John Doe have recently had an opportunity to meet and discuss the issues that led to broken relationships and subsequent public filings and discourse.

As always happens when believers trust, obey and commit to resolving conflict biblically by confessing sin, seeing the “log in their own eyes” and continually spurring each other on to love and good deeds, the Lord has glorified Himself. Positive steps have been taken to begin the reconciliation of all relationships.

John Doe, in keeping with biblical wisdom, is entrusting himself to the leadership of other believers who, after meeting with the leadership of Watermark, will assume the responsibility of shepherding him as he seeks to appropriately restore all relationships. As further evidence of the expressed desire to follow God’s word, all litigation and appeals against Watermark Community Church have been dropped.

Our Commitment to Care

At Watermark, we have spent much time sharing with others how we are going to work through our struggles, sins and differences. We want no one to be surprised, disappointed or confused when we care for each other in this way. We are specific about our relational commitments with our members and those who regularly attend so that everyone will expect that we will relate to one another in a way that honors God and promotes authentic, healthy relationships.

We are highly committed to each other, just as Jesus has commanded us to be, for the purposes of:

- ◆ preserving relationships;
- ◆ maintaining and promoting peace; and, ultimately to
- ◆ improving and maintaining our individual and corporate ability to speak with integrity about the transforming hope available through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

We are committed to caring for one another with compassion, humility, diligence, and when necessary, the progressive steps of communication as described in Matthew 18:15-17.

⁵⁸ “Care Correction,” Watermark Community Church, http://www.watermark.org/about/care_correction.asp
See also, “Legal,” Watermark Community Church, <http://www.watermarkcommunity2.org/pages/legal>