



P. O. BOX 3704 MERCED, CA 95344



# Statement Of Faith

Love Focus International Association operates as a non-profit tax-exempt Association of Churches. Approved by United States Internal Revenue Service under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

This **Statement of Faith** is what we believe, and it's  
who we are at the core as a body.

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## OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS

We believe in one God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (John 14:9-20; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 John 5:1-12).

We believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of all things visible and invisible. (Genesis 1:1; Matthew 5:16, 45; 6:1, 4, 8, 9; Acts 17:24-28; Hebrews 11:3; James 1:17).

We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the eternal Word, the one and only Savior. (John 1:1, 14, 29; 3:16; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-19; 1 John 4:9). Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, both fully human and fully divine; Who lived a sinless life; Who suffered and was crucified as an atonement for sin; Who rose again bodily from the dead on the third day; Who ascended into Heaven; and Who will return in victory to rule forever. (Luke 1:26-35; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 5:15-17; Luke 22:47-24:53; John 20:24-29; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 1:1-9; Colossians 3:1; Revelation 1:7-8; 11:15).

We believe in the Holy Spirit. Who convicts of sin; Who indwells every true believer in Jesus Christ; Who helps them in their weakness and intercedes for them in prayer; and Who empowers them to a fruitful Christian life. (John 16:1-16; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19; 2 Timothy 1:14; Romans 8:26; Galatians 5:22-23).

We believe in the Bible—God's Holy Word, Scripture. We believe God inspired the original writings of the Scripture and those original writings were consequently without error. (Mark 12:36; John 14:26; 16:12-15; Acts 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; 2 Timothy 3:14-16; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

We believe that the Bible is the final authority for all matters of faith, truth, morality, and Christian living. (Isaiah 40:8; Psalm 119:11, 105; Matthew 5:18; 24:35; Romans 15:4).

We believe the Bible teaches that God is the Creator and Sustainer of human life; that God creates each person in His image; and that life is therefore sacred, from conception to natural death.

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We believe that God creates each person as male or female; that these two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the "image of God" in humankind; and that each person's biological gender is an intrinsic, immutable aspect of his or her nature and identity. (Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:7, 21-22; Psalm 139:13-18).

We believe the Bible teaches that God established marriage in the beginning as a lifelong, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman; that He has reserved sexual intimacy as an expression of love and commitment between married couples; and that any intimate expression of sexuality outside of Biblical marriage is sin. (Genesis 2:23-25; Exodus 20:14, 17, 22:19; Leviticus 18:1-20, 22-23; 20:11-21; Matthew 19:4-6; 9; Romans 1:18-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 15-20; 1 Timothy 1:8-11; Jude 7).

We believe in the Gospel—the Good News of Salvation.

That man, created by God, willfully sinned against God and is consequently lost and without hope apart from Jesus Christ. (Isaiah 53:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:23).

That salvation—the forgiveness of sins—is only by grace through the blood of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 26:28; Romans 5:9; Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7).

That one receives salvation by putting faith in Christ, repenting of sin, and confessing Christ, and that the Bible commands every believer in Christ to be baptized by immersion. (Romans 5:1-2; 10:9; Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 2:38; 3:19; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21).

That those who have received salvation through faith in Jesus Christ are sent into the world to proclaim the gospel and to love and serve mankind just as Jesus Himself did. (2 Corinthians 5:11-21; Ephesians 2:10; Matthew 28:18-20; John 20:21).

We believe in the Church of Jesus Christ, founded on the Day of Pentecost, consisting of all Christians everywhere, and organized into local assemblies, called church or fellowship. (Matthew 16:13-18; Acts 2:14-47).

We believe the Bible teaches that every Christian should be an active member of a local church or fellowship. (Hebrews 10:24-25). "For where two or three gathers in my name, there am I with them." Matthew 18:20.

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We can see here according to Jesus that where two or three people come together in the name of Jesus Christ, he promised to be there with them. Therefore, the church of Jesus Christ is not a building but people who often come together in name of Jesus Christ to learn more about him through the Bible, pray, praise, worship God through him, fellowship with one another and love each other as he commanded is a local church.

These local churches are called upon to serve their communities by doing good work in name of Jesus Christ.

We believe that the Elders of the church are the overseers of its affairs and the shepherds of its members; that they are the final interpretive authority of the Bible's meaning and application for the ministry; and that they are responsible for the oversight, instruction, edification, discipline, and restoration of church members. (1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:9; 2:1-15; Hebrews 13:17; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13).

We believe that the Bible instructs Christians to:  
Meet together regularly for fellowship, worship, teaching, and the Lord's Supper. (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:25; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Use our natural abilities and spiritual gifts to serve. (Romans 12; 1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 12:7).

Love one another, bear with one another, accept one another, and forgive one another. (John 13:34-35; John 15:17; 1 John 4:7; Romans 13:8; Ephesians 4:2, 32; Colossians 3:14; Romans 15:7).

Seek unity, agreement, and peace with one another. (Romans 12:16,18; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Philippians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 13:11).

Encourage and build up one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Bear one another's burdens and pray for one another. (Galatians 6:2; James 5:16)

Spur one another to love and good deeds. (Hebrews 10:24).

Submit to the authority of the elders. (Hebrews 13:17).

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Support the ministry financially. (2 Corinthians 8:7; 2 Corinthians 9:7; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

Pursue personal holiness and obedience to God's Word. (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:15).

Strive together to fulfill the Great Commission. (Matthew 28:18-20).

### **FIVE-FOLD MINISTRY**

The concept of the five-fold ministry comes from Ephesians 4:11, "It was he who gave some to be (1) apostles, some to be (2) prophets, some to be (3) evangelists, and some to be (4) pastors and (5) teachers." Primarily as a result of this verse, some believe God has restored, or is restoring, the offices of apostle and prophet in the church today. Ephesians 4:12-13 tells us that the purpose of the five-fold ministry is, "to prepare God's people for service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." So, since the body of Christ is not built up to unity in the faith and has not attained to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, the thinking goes, the offices of apostle and prophet must still be in effect.

However, Ephesians 2:20 informs us that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone." If the apostles and prophets were the foundation of the church, are we still building the foundation? Hebrews 6:1-3 encourages us to move on from the foundation. Although Jesus Christ is most definitely active in the church today, His role as the cornerstone of the church was completed with His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. If the work of the cornerstone is, in that sense, complete, so must the work of the apostles and prophets, who were the foundation, be complete.

What was the role of the apostles and prophets? It was to proclaim God's revelation, to teach the new truth the church would need to grow and thrive. The apostles and prophets completed this mission. How? By giving us the Word of God in written form (the Holy Bible).

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The Word of God is the completed revelation of God. The Bible contains everything the church needs to know, grow, thrive, and fulfill God's mission (2 Timothy 3:15-16). The foundational work of the apostles and prophets is complete. The ongoing work of the apostles and prophets is manifested in the Holy Spirit speaking through and teaching us God's Word. In that sense, the five-fold ministry is still active.

In conclusion, the active manifestation of the fivefold ministry is carried out by the Holy Spirit as he wills and can be seen in operational service in one individual. Apostle Paul exhibited the gifts contained in the fivefold ministry.

Apostles are sent ones:

Called by Christ alone

Filled with the Holy Ghost

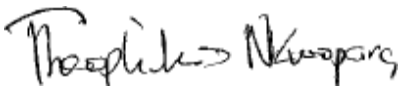
Loving spiritual fathers with spiritual sons and daughters

Builders

Suffers with the people

Rejoices with people

Do not quit or retire from the work until called home



Theo Nkwopara, Ph.D.

Presiding Spiritual Leader/ Office of the Council of Elders

Love Focus International Association

Gracious Father, we pray for the church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.



## **OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS**

The Council of Elders of Love Focus International Association, in its October 2015 meeting, adopted "STATEMENT OF FAITH" as a statement of this body. Authorized its distribution to members and candidates for Credential.

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# VISION & EXPECTATIONS

**Credentialed Ministers  
and Religious Workers/  
Missionaries of  
LOVE FOCUS INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION**

We are an Association of Churches

Ephesians 2:10

"For we are his workmanship, created in  
Christ Jesus to good works, which God  
has before ordained that we should  
walk in them."



God's Work Our Hands



## OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **How do I become a Credentialed Minister?**

First, you need to be a born-again Christian committed to the gospel ministry of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ in words and deed. If that is the case then, subscribe to our Statement of Faith and submit your application. You must complete the reading of LFIA Vision and Expectations for Credentialed Ministers and complete our Credential Application Form where you will provide us with some personal information and your Christian experience testimony of new life in Christ.

#### **What are the Training Requirements to Become Credentialed?**

Love Focus International Association does not require any formal education or training to become a credentialed minister. We believe that credential is an official action to confirm your call to the ministry of the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a divine inspiration from God. Therefore, we only require that you agree to our Statement of Faith and uphold the integrity of the Credential as a Credentialed Christian Minister.

#### **Are you a Church?**

We are an association of churches, Love Focus International Association is an association of Christian Churches that operate to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, sharing the good news of salvation with focus on true love in action. We are registered and incorporated in the State of California as a Nonprofit Religious Corporation pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). Our Articles of Incorporation, Constitution and Bylaws and State laws authorize us to Ordain Christian Ministers.

#### **Is the Ordination by Love Focus International Association Legal & Valid all States?**

Yes, Every Love Focus International Association credential is protected by the religious non-establishment clause of the 1st amendment:

"...Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment or religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

This guarantees the right of any LFIA Ordained Minister to conduct any religious activity legally prescribed for ministers, pastors, members of the clergy, and religious workers; including but not limited to holding services, counseling, performing marriage, and conducting other ministerial services including church administration.



## **OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

#### **When I received my Credential from Love Focus International Association do I Need State registration?**

If your state does not require registration of your ordination before officiating a wedding, then there are no further Registration. If your State does require so, then you must register your Ordination Documents with your county courthouse before performing weddings. However, there are no registration requirements for other religious duties.

#### **Does Love Focus International Association Ordain Women as Ministers?**

Yes, Love Focus International Association ordain women and men called by our Lord Jesus Christ to gospel ministry. The choice of rank or title is a personal choice, and all titles or ranks hold the same legal and spiritual authority.

#### **Does Love Focus International Association Allow Same-Sex Marriage?**

No, Love Focus International Association and its ministers are prohibited from officiating and celebrating gay and same-sex marriages. We believe in marriage as God commanded in the Bible being only between a man and woman. Our faith and our Bylaws only authorize our clergy to recognize and officiate traditional marriages only between a man and woman.

#### **What does the Ordination Package Contain?**

The Ordination Package contains: Certificate of Ordination, Certified Christian Counselor Certificate, Letter of Good Standing with Official Seal, 1 Plastic Professional Minister's License Card, Professional Wedding Ceremony Script, Pre-marital Counseling Completion Certificates and Baptism Certificates.

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### **OFFICE OF THE COUNCIL OF ELDERS**

Love Focus International Association is called and privileged to participate in God's mission to the world, in proclamation and in service. We offer God's salvation to the world through a ministry of word and good work. Worshiping in the Spirit, we baptize people in the name of the Triune God, proclaim the word of God. Repenting and confessing our sin, we receive God's forgiveness. Thus, we live in the world as justified sinners who have been reconciled to God through Christ and who witness to the gospel of Christ through word and deed. The word leads us to service.

For the sake of this mission work and the world that God dearly loves, the Holy Spirit sustains those who are called to Christian ministry so that they remain faithful to the One who calls the church into this work. "Vision and Expectations for Credentialed Ministers in Love Focus International Association" expresses this body's vision for the ministry and the high expectations it places on those who serve in this way. This document outlines the importance of the Christian minister's faithfulness to the confession of faith, leadership through faithful service, holy living and faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It expresses LFIA's expectation that its Christian ministers have a passion for evangelism, ministerial skills that have been refined by Christian life overcoming experience and testimony of personal character and integrity worthy of the office. It also makes clear that ordained ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call of the church rather than an individual right. Finally, it sets forth the marks of healthy leadership that are essential to being a vital body of Christ in mission.

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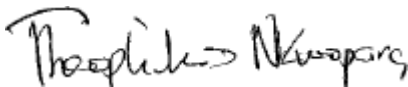
It may seem strange to focus so much of our lives on Jesus Christ, but the wisdom of the gospel applies to everything from the purpose of life to how we approach our work, how we relate to others, even how we take care of our bodies. The teachings of Jesus Christ have more power to bring lasting inner peace, joy and happiness than all the success and pleasure the world can offer.

As ministers of the gospel, while we spread the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to the poor, we coordinate the safe and responsible donation of product or service that could solve a problem, fill a need or enhance the lives of those in need who would otherwise have no access in Africa.

Love Focus International Association missionary work in Africa is focused on sustainable intervention missions. Among other things, we provide sustainable assistance to underserved poor communities in Africa. The Bible instructs us in Galatians 6:2, to carry each other's burdens, so that we can fulfill the law of Christ. It means that true Christianity is demonstrated in giving to those in need most especially the poor.

#### “Vision and Expectation

Credentialed Minister in Love Focus International Association” is offered to Christian Believers who have proven sound biblical understanding of the Word of God and evidence of genuine Christian lifestyle, their lives of service, their discernment and deliberation. With it we also offer our prayers and our promise to live and serve others together in the peace and unity of Christ anytime and anywhere.



Theo Nkwopara, Ph.D.  
Presiding Spiritual Leader/ Director of Missions  
Love Focus International Association

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*Gracious Father, we pray for the church. Fill it with all truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where in anything it is amiss, reform it; where it is right, strengthen it; where it is in need, provide for it; where it is divided, reunite it; for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.*

## **Vision and Expectations**

### **Credentialed Ministers in Love Focus International Association**

Within the people of God and for the sake of the Gospel ministry entrusted to all believers, God has instituted the office of ministry of Word and Fruits. To carry out this ministry, this association of Christian Churches body credentials and licenses, ordains, and commissions qualified Christians to service anywhere and anytime. A credentialed minister of this body shall be a person whose commitment to Christ, soundness in the faith, aptness to preach, teach, witness, educational qualifications and Christian life experience have been examined and approved by the Council of Elders of Love Focus International Association; who accepts and adheres to the Confession of Faith of this body; who is diligent and faithful in the exercise of the ministry; and whose life and conduct are above reproach.

A minister shall comply with the Constitution and Bylaws of Love Focus International Association **ARTICLE V. STATEMENT OF UNITY AND FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS:** Recognizing the unity of the Church of Christ in all the world, and knowing that we are but one branch of Christ's people; while adhering to our particular faith and order, we extend to all believers the hand of Christian fellowship, upon the basis of those great fundamental truths in which all should agree. With them we confess our belief in one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of grace.

We believe that Jesus came in the flesh, died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.

Affirming now our belief that those who thus hold to these fundamental truths together constitute the one universal Church, the several households of which, though called by different names, are the one body of Christ, and that these members of his body are sacredly bound to keep "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," we declare that we will cooperate with all who hold these truths.

We believe that, beyond these fundamental truths, there can be unity in diversity and diversity in unity in other particulars of faith within the body of Christ. **ARTICLE VI. STATEMENT OF FAITH:** Love Focus International Association has no ecclesiastically binding creed. The following Principles shall apply, while not to be used as a test of Christian cooperation and unity in the overall body of Christ is adopted as a testimony of faith and hope of the resurrection and of the spirit of unity in bond love.

**We believe in:**

One God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him;  
One Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him;  
The Holy Spirit as our Comforter and Guide;  
The Bible as the supreme written authority in matters of faith and practice;  
Liberty of Conscience in all matters of interpretation and worship;

The Six Principles of Hebrews 6:1-2 (Repentance, Faith, Baptism, Laying on of hands, Resurrection, and Judgment) as foundational concepts.

Credentialed ministers of Love Focus International Association are called to the ministry of word and good work. Together with the whole people of God they are part of the ministry of the baptized.

Credentialed ministers are called to be faithful to Jesus Christ, knowledgeable of the word of God and respectful of the people of God and responsive to the needs of a changing world.

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They are called to give leadership to the missions and other ministries of Love Focus International Association.

In this document Love Focus International Association seeks to state its Vision and Expectations for Credentialed Ministers of this body. This document should not be understood as a juridical standard. Neither is it intended to suggest unrealistic or impossible expectations for those who serve on the roster of credentialed ministers. Instead, it seeks to express the high value and importance that the credentialed ministry of word and service has, in the life of Love Focus International Association.

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The Council of Elders of Love Focus International Association, in its October 2016 meeting, adopted “Vision and Expectations for Credentialed Ministers in Love Focus International Association as a statement of this body. Authorized its distribution to members, ministers and candidates for Credential.

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## I. THE CALL TO GOSPEL MINISTRY

*Before almighty God, to whom you must give account, and in the presence of this congregation, I ask: Will you assume this office, believing that this call is God's call to the ministry of word and service?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

Love Focus International Association believes that the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. It is the Spirit that provides the church with those persons who are enabled by God to lead the church in carrying out the ministry and mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This mission body confesses that the office of ordained ministry, “the ministry of teaching the gospel and service, has been instituted by God. Individuals are ordained to the ministry of word and service because they have been called by God. This body believes that the call comes to individuals from God both personally and through the church.

People experience the call to ordained ministry through a variety of ways. Fundamental to each is the personal experience of God's justifying act in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the awareness of the gospel in one's life and the response to that gospel, that led some to seek to serve in the public ministry of the church. This call may include for example, encouraging others in need to be hopeful. The personal assessment of an individual's own interests and abilities and response to the needs of the world is very critical. In whatever way the call to seek credential and membership come to an individual, Love Focus International Association believes that such a sense of call must be tested over a period of time, shaped by serious and prayerful study of the Word of God and finally confirmed. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the church to discern a person's gifts and abilities for ministry.

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Love Focus International Association prepares and approves candidates for the ministry by setting standards, providing individual one-on-one biblical discussions in a variety of ways and settings.

Love Focus International Association therefore understands the call to the ministry to mean that:

- ✓ Credentialed ministers, religious workers and missionaries are called by God through the church, are accountable to the word of God for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- ✓ Credentialed ministers, religious workers and missionaries are called by God through the church and are not self-chosen or self-appointed;
- ✓ Credentialed ministers, religious workers and missionaries are called by God through the church for a ministry of servanthood, and not for the exercise of domination or coercive power; and
- ✓ Ministry is a privilege granted by God through the call in the church (the body of Christ) to serve the people in love anywhere and anytime. Love Focus International Association expects each of its ministers to understand and accept the call to serve the mission's ministry of word and service of good work as a call from God, and to believe that the Holy Spirit sustains and upholds those who are called so that they may fulfill their calling to the ministry. *Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ was lifted high upon the cross so that he might draw the whole world to himself. To those who look upon the cross, grant your wisdom, healing and eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## II. FAITHFULNESS TO THE MISSION

The MISSION in which you are to be credentialed confesses that the holy scriptures are the word of God and are the norm of its faith and life. We accept, teach, and confess the Apostles' confessions are true witnesses and faithful expositions of the holy scriptures.

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*Will you therefore preach and teach in accordance with the holy scriptures?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

It is essential for a minister to be able to understand and faithfully interpret the Scriptures and the Christian tradition. In this question, Love Focus International Association asks that its ministers assume responsibility for upholding this mission's Code of Conduct through faithful preaching, teaching and good work. All who have been called and who serve as ministers in this body are expected to accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of Love Focus International Association.

The Scriptures revealed God's redemptive actions, including the message of law and gospel, judgment and mercy, "beginning with the Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ".

Credentialed Ministers of this mission are to confess and teach the authoritative and normative character of the Scriptures "as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life" are to be taught as true declarations of the faith of this mission. These confessions are to be acknowledged as true witnesses and faithful expositions of the Holy Scriptures. Love Focus International Association expects that its ministers will teach nothing "that departs from the Scriptures.

### EVANGELICAL

The gospel is the good news that the decisive turning point in human history occurred in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The evangelical witness is that in Christ, God has acted to bring forgiveness to sinners, liberation for the oppressed, reconciliation for the estranged and the promise of salvation. It is the gospel that is the power of God to create and sustain the Church for God's mission in the world.

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Credentialed ministers of this mission are expected to proclaim in word and deed God's saving gospel of justification by grace through faith, and be equipped for their ministry in daily life.

### FAITHFUL

The Scriptures, identify the grounding and goals of the church's hope: Jesus Christ. This Association of Churches expects its ministers to be committed to Jesus who is the Christ, the Savior of the world, the Lord of the church.

### TRANSFORMING

The church's past is characterized not only by the faithful witness of the saints, but by sin, error and the betrayal of its mission. The gospel does not excuse the church of genuine repentance and confession. Renewal and transformation are available according to Romans 12:2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will." Revelation 3:3 "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you." ministers are expected to acknowledge the church's past and present failures and to lead the church in its repentance and renewal.

### PASTORAL

Leadership in the church is to be shaped by Jesus' own ministry of serving. This body, therefore, expects its ministers to resist the temptation to seek power over people whether by force or manipulation and, instead, to lead God's people as servants. Such servant leadership is not one of weakness or timidity, but of strength and boldness.

### UNITY

The church is called to "maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3).

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This body expects its ministers to manifest the unity given to the people of God by leading the body in that common witness to the gospel that expresses the unity the Spirit gives.

Ministers are encouraged to participate in activities, including prayer, worship, fellowship, and to witness to the “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Ephesians 4:5, 6).

### ETHICAL

The church witnesses to the gospel not only in its proclamation but also by how it lives and acts. This body expects its ministers to lead and teach through example by lives that give expression to the gospel. Ministers are called to represent in their personal lives the new life that is given to all Christians through the new birth according to John 1:12 “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.” and to be examples of a life that is consistent with the word of God.

*Almighty God, through your Son Jesus Christ you gave the holy apostles many gifts and commanded them to feed your flock. Inspire all ministers to proclaim your Word diligently and your people to receive it willingly, that finally we may receive the crown of eternal glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

### III. THE MINISTER AS PERSON AND EXAMPLE

*Will you be diligent in your study of the holy scriptures and faithful in your use of the means of grace? Will you pray for God’s people, nourish them with the word, love, good work and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?*

*I will, and I ask God to help me.*

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A minister is called with all Christians to “lead a life worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27). It is Christ’s own self-giving on the cross that is the example of Christian life for all believers.

Because ministers are also recipients of God’s gracious gift in Christ Jesus, they are called to use their gifts and abilities to enable others to understand themselves as recipients of that same grace and to live as God’s people in the world. In their life and conduct ministers are to witness to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ.

Therefore, ministers will seek to use their gifts in lives worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Ministers fulfill the calling of the ministerial office not only by what they do in carrying out certain tasks, but also in who they are. They officially proclaim and witness in their person to the gospel of Christ. Ministerial identity is not one of moral or spiritual perfection. It is, instead, the living out of the good news that one is justified by God’s grace and thus called to live out that grace in daily life. The minister is not simply a professional trained in skills to perform a task, but is one sent by the church to lead the community of faith through the ministry of word and good work. The minister enables and equips others for their lives as Christians and for their ministry in the world by faithful preaching of the word of God, and through the administration of gifts.

“For the **administration** of this service not only supplies the need of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God.” 2 Corinthians 9:12, and by example.

Pastoral and Ministerial identity carries with it expectations and also accountabilities that are determined by the whole church and not simply by a given congregation, institution, or agency served by the minister.

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Love Focus International Association has high expectations for those who serve within the ministry of this body. It does so because it recognizes that when offense is given by a minister, the witness of the gospel may be impaired and the ability to carry out public ministry is threatened.

Yet sin and brokenness are realities in the lives of all people, including those who serve as ministers. It is crucial for us all to remember that repentance and forgiveness are to be daily realities in the life of every Christian. Neither perfection nor self-righteousness is asked of the ministers of this body.

When there is failure in the lives of those who serve in this office, this body seeks to provide counsel and understanding. When there is repentance and forgiveness, this brings joy and rejoicing in the Lord. Indeed, Love Focus International Association believes that God not only calls but sustains those who are set apart for the ministry of word and good work. It is with this recognition that this body can affirm that those who are set apart to the office of word and good work are to seek to embody those characteristics that are consistent with the pastoral and ministerial office.

The minister is to nourish the people of God through the word and good work. In order to do this, the minister needs to develop and nurture a sound knowledge of the Scriptures, both intellectually and devotionally. The minister will seek regular opportunities for personal participation in the means of God's renewing, sustaining, empowering Holy Spirit, both personally and in the practice of ministry.

The minister engages in daily prayer and encourages others in the practice of regular prayer.

There the minister is an integral part of a community of faith in which mutual support is given and in which care, forgiveness, and healing occur.

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The minister supports not only the work of the congregation, but also ministry of Love Focus International Association. This body expects its ministers to work in a collegial relationship with one another and to share in mutual accountability with those in positions of leadership and oversight in this body. Ministers will participate in meeting fellowship occasions for mutual support and enhancement of collegial ministry. The ministers of this body are to seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare for the ministry of the gospel and strive to extend the Kingdom of God in the community.

The minister is concerned for the whole person. He or she welcomes and provides pastoral care for all. The minister provides for the care of those troubled with spiritual or emotional problems. This body expects that its ministers will honor and respect privileged communication, not disclose such communication except with the express permission of the person who has confided it or if the person is perceived to intend great harm to self or others.

The minister recognizes the importance of lifelong growth in learning. Such growth is intended to renew, extend, and deepen insight into the Scriptures to enable one to respond to the insights and challenges of the world with greater awareness. In an increasingly complex and educated society, the development of an informed intellect and professional skills is crucial to competent minister. This body expects its ministers to devote regular and disciplined time for personal study, study in the company of others and participation in programs of continuing education and periodic times for extended study. Congregations and other entities of this body are expected to provide the minister with time and, assistance with the financial resources needed for such study.

The minister needs to be an example of self-care, as well as caring for others.

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The significant demands of time and effort within the office of ministry can lead one to neglect proper nutrition, exercise, and time for recreation. The congregation, agency or institution the minister serves, should respect the need for the minister to have adequate time for self-care.

Caring for self also includes seeking counseling and/or medical care when there is evidence of physical or mental illness, substance abuse, eating disorders, or relational problems.

### **HOLY LIVING**

The minister is to be an example of holy living so that the minister's life does not become an impediment to the hearing of the gospel or a scandal to the community of faith. The qualities of such a life include the following:

#### **Integrity and Trustworthiness**

The minister is expected to be honest and forthright in dealings with others while protecting privileged and confidential communications. The minister should strive to develop a public reputation for integrity and to nurture trustworthy personal relationships. Ministers must avoid conduct that is dishonest, deceptive, duplicitous or manipulative of others for personal benefit or gain.

The minister is expected to be fiscally responsible and is to be a faithful steward of time, talents and possessions. The minister is to be an example to the community of generous giving.

#### **Trustworthiness in Relationships**

In all relationships, a minister is expected to honor his or her public promises, bear the burdens of others, and seek to build up the body of Christ.

In public ministry as well as in private life, the minister is expected to develop and nurture appropriate relationships with others, acting in ways that build and sustain trust.

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The minister will respect and nurture friendships. Ministers will support friendships among others and will welcome and nurture friendships for themselves but will avoid compromising the pastoral role in such relationships.

The minister will strive to serve others and nurture trust by enhancing family life.

Within the family, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and mutual care are to be expressed. Children, if any, will be regarded with love, respect and commitment. If possible, it is also expected that ministers maintain responsible relationships with their parents and other immediate relatives.

The minister is expected to respect and support single people, encouraging them in their appropriate and healthy relationships.

This body is committed to the sanctity of marriage. In public ministry as well as in private life, the minister is expected to uphold an understanding of marriage that is biblically informed and consistent with the teachings of this church. In so doing, the minister will respect and support those who are married, recognizing this body's strong continuing support for this holy estate.

Should a minister seek to marry, the counsel and guidance of the Council of Elders is to be sought and the minister shall make the decision known among those he or she serves. A minister who is married is expected to keep his or her marriage inviolate until death, to cultivate love, trust and respect for her or his spouse and to seek marital counseling when it is needed. It is recognized that due to human sin and brokenness, in some cases the marital relationship may have to be dissolved. Should a minister and spouse separate or seek to divorce, the counsel and guidance of the Council of Elders is to be sought. Similarly, should a minister decide to marry following a divorce, the counsel and guidance of the Council of Elders is to be sought.

## TRUSTWORTHINESS IN SEXUAL CONDUCT

The expectations of this body regarding the sexual conduct of its ministers are grounded in the understanding that human sexuality is a gift and trust from God.

Ministers are to live in such a way as to honor this gift and trust.

Ministers are expected to reject sexual promiscuity, the manipulation of others for purposes of sexual gratification and all attempts at sexual seduction and sexual harassment, including taking physical or emotional advantage of others.

Single ministers are expected to live a chaste life, holy in body and spirit, honoring the single life and working for the good of all.

A married minister is expected to live in fidelity to his or her spouse, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste and faithful.

*Almighty God, by our baptism into the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you turn us from the old life of sin. Grant that we who are reborn to new life in him may live in righteousness and holiness all our days, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*

## IV. FAITHFUL WITNESS

Will you give faithful witness to the world, that God's love may be known in all that you do?

I will, and I ask God to help me.

The charge to witness to the world is given to the church today as it was to the apostles of the early church. The content of that witness is God's revelation in Jesus Christ: God's creative self-disclosure as the Word made flesh; Jesus Christ victorious over death for the salvation of God's people; and the promise of everlasting life.

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The testimony of these acts of God's grace and forgiveness is expressed in both word and deed by ministers through compassion, hospitality, patience and forgiveness; through seeking peace and justice for all people; through care for God's creation; and through sharing one's faith through preaching, teaching and personal witness.

This witness is characterized by:

### EVANGELISM

The apostolic witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the church's mission. It is the proclamation of the message of salvation in Jesus Christ and reconciliation with God. This gospel is proclaimed through preaching and good work. Through its ministers, this body affirms the critically important task of communicating this evangelical word to the world.

### COMPASSION

Christians are called by God to participate in compassionate care for those in need. This body expects its ministers to follow the example of Jesus and to lead the body in compassionate care of the suffering.

### HOSPITALITY

Just as Jesus received sinners and ate with them, the body is called to welcome the stranger and to open its life to those who are "outside" and alienated. This body expects its ministers to be models of appropriate hospitality in their personal lives.

### PEACEMAKING

The culmination of God's eschatological salvation will be the overcoming of every enmity and the reconciliation of the whole creation. Yet even in the present time, God's peace is a reality. This body expects its ministers by the grace of God to be witnesses to and instruments of God's peace and reconciliation for the world.

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## JUSTICE

The church is to witness to God's call for justice in every aspect of life, including testimony against injustice and oppression, whether personal or systemic. This body expects its ministers to be committed to justice in the life of this body, in society, and in the world. The minister is expected to oppose all forms of harassment and assault.

## STEWARDSHIP OF THE EARTH

The people of God are called to the care and redemption of all that God has made. This body expects that its ministers will be exemplary stewards of the earth's resources, and that they will lead this body in the stewardship of God's creation.

*Almighty God, by grace alone you call us and accept us in your service. Strengthen us by your Spirit, and make us worthy of your call, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

## CONCLUSION

Love Focus International Association affirms that the Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming and sanctifying activity in the world

This body expects its ministers to honor and equip the believer for their ministry in the world. Such a ministry involves giving leadership in the church's witness to the world.

Exhibiting awareness of the global challenges of a multicultural, diverse society and enabling the members of this body through the faithful teaching and preaching of the word of God and the administration of this service.

At the same time, the ministers of this body can know that they are regarded as servants of Christ and messengers of the good news of God's salvation in Christ. As such they are honored for the ministry they bring to this body.

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We pray for the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to those who serve this body in the ministry of word and good work.

## Code of Conduct

Romans 12:2,

Colossians 3:12-17

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing, you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Meaning: That your way of thinking and doing things should not be like the worldly people. The worldly standard of behavior should not be your standard of behavior as a Christian.

**As regards to your relationship with other people, you should**

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

**Above all these**

Put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. True love must be expressed in action, doing something good to best interest of others.

**Let peace of Christ rein and rule your heart**

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. In prayer, ask our Lord Jesus Christ to let peace rule your heart.

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly**

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and

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admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Study to know and understand the word of God, the bible so that you may put it into practice.

### Whatever you do, by word or in action

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

*Heavenly Father, Almighty and merciful God, you built your church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and you instituted the office of the ministry of word and good work so that the apostolic and prophetic work might continue through the ages. Grant that those who are ministers may carry out ministry faithfully in the power of your Holy Spirit; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen!*

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## THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST IS NOT CONFINED IN THE LOCAL CHURCH BUILDING OR AT ANY OTHER PLACE OF WORSHIP

John 4:19-24

“Sir,” the woman said, “I can see that you are a prophet.

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.”

“Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Where you go to worship God whether in the local church or at any other place is not important. What is important is according to Jesus: “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

### What is the idea of worshipping God “in spirit and truth”?

**Answer:** The idea of worshipping God “in spirit and truth” comes from Jesus’ conversation with the woman at the well in John 4:6-30. In the conversation, the woman was discussing places of worship with Jesus, saying that the Jews worshipped at Jerusalem, while the Samaritans worshipped at Mount Gerizim. Jesus had just revealed that He knew about her many husbands, as well as the fact that the current man she lived with was not her husband. This made her uncomfortable, so she attempted to divert His attention from her personal life to matters of religion. Jesus refused to be distracted from His lesson on true worship and got to the heart of the matter:



“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

The overall lesson about worshipping the Lord in spirit and truth is that worship of God is not to be confined to a single geographical location or necessarily regulated by the temporary provisions of Old Testament law. With the coming of Christ, the separation between Jew and Gentile was no longer relevant, nor was the centrality of the temple in worship. With the coming of Christ, all of God’s children gained equal access to God through Him. Worship became a matter of the heart, not external actions, and directed by truth rather than ceremony.

In **Deuteronomy 6:4**, Moses sets down for the Israelites how they are to love their God: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Our worship of God is directed by our love for Him; as we love, so we worship. Because the idea of “might” in Hebrew indicates totality, Jesus expanded this expression to “mind” and “strength” (**Mark 12:30**; **Luke 10:27**). To worship God in spirit and truth necessarily involves loving Him with heart, soul, mind and strength.

True worship must be “in spirit,” that is, engaging the whole heart. Unless there’s a real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit. At the same time, worship must be “in truth,” that is, properly informed. Unless we have knowledge of the God we worship, there is no worship in truth. Both are necessary for satisfying and God-honoring worship. Spirit without truth leads to a shallow, overly emotional experience that could be compared to a high. As soon as the emotion is over, when the fervor cools, so does the worship. Truth without spirit can result in a dry, passionless encounter that can easily lead to a form of joyless legalism. The best combination of both aspects of worship results in a joyous appreciation of God informed by Scripture. The more we know about God, the more we appreciate Him. The more we appreciate, the deeper our worship. The deeper our worship, the more God is glorified.

Worshipping God therefore, should not be a routine or legalist in nature performed as part of a regular procedure rather than for a special reason: “the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

This body expects its ministers to worship God according to (John 4:23)

### IS CHRISTIAN REQUIRED TO PAY TITHES?

Does the Bible tell us to pay at least 10 percent of our incomes to the church? This body examines the biblical evidence.

#### Abraham and Jacob

The first biblical mention of tithing is in Genesis 14. After four Mesopotamian kings had taken Lot captive, Abraham attacked them and recovered all the booty. After his victory, the king of Sodom came out to meet him, and so did Melchizedek, a priest of God. Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and then Abraham “gave him a tenth of everything” (Genesis 14:20).

The text does not tell us whether Abraham had ever tithed before, or ever tithed afterwards. Perhaps it was a custom of his culture. Abraham was generous, and gave the rest of his booty to the king of Sodom (verses 23-24). Abraham kept all of God’s laws that were relevant in his day (Genesis 26:5), but Genesis does not tell us whether tithing was a law in Abraham’s day. Many of God’s decrees and requirements were built around the nation of Israel and the Levitical priesthood and tabernacle. Abraham could not have kept such decrees and laws. He may have tithed regularly, but we cannot prove it.

The next mention of tithing is in Genesis 28:20-22. Jacob had a miraculous dream at Bethel. In the morning, Jacob vowed to tithe if God helped him during his journey. He was trying to make a bargain with God. He wanted special help, and in return for that help, he was willing to worship God, and to tithe as a part of that worship.

Tithing may have been part of the common worship practices of that time and culture, or it may have been an extra-special vow for those who desperately desired divine help.

Biblical commands about tithing are generally about grain, wine and oil. A different system of giving was required for some animals. In the last plague on Egypt, God killed the firstborn male of every animal and human, but he spared the Israelites and their animals. Therefore, God claimed ownership of every Israelite firstborn and firstling male animal (Exodus 13:2; Numbers 3:13).

This applied not only to the generation that left Egypt, but every future generation as well. Firstlings of clean animals were to be given to the priests and sacrificed (Numbers 18:15-17); priests and people ate them during the festivals (Deuteronomy 15:19-20; 12:6, 17; 14:23). Unclean animals and humans were to be redeemed (Exodus 13:12-15; 34:19-20). This continued to be the law in Nehemiah's day (Nehemiah 10:36) and in Jesus' day (Luke 2:23).

The people also gave first fruits of their harvest (Exodus 23:19; 34:26; Leviticus 2:14), but these first fruits do not seem to be a fixed percentage.

### Tithes

Tithing was required on flocks: "every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod"<sup>3</sup>(Leviticus 27:32). Was this in addition to the firstlings, or was it instead of firstlings? We do not know exactly how these laws would be administered. It is not necessary for us to take a position on these details.

"A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord" (Leviticus 27:30). The tithes and first fruits belonged to God, and he assigned the Levites to receive them on his behalf (Numbers 18:12-13, 21, 24). They could keep 90 percent of what they were given, but had to give 10 percent as an offering (verses 26-32).

Tithing was done in the days of Hezekiah (2 Chr. 31:5-6), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 10:35-39; 12:44) and Jesus (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). In Malachi's day, tithing was required (Malachi 3:8-10), and physical blessings were promised for obedience, just as physical blessings were promised for obedience to the old covenant.

### **Additional tithes**

God gave the tithes to the Levites, but the people could eat their tithes during festivals (Deuteronomy 12:5-7, 17-19; 14:23). Some have concluded that Deuteronomy is talking about an additional tithe, a festival tithe. It is possible to have two tithes, but it is not possible to have two sets of firstborn animals. The firstlings were holy to the Lord, and given to the Levites (Numbers 18:15-17), but Deuteronomy 15:19-20 says that they were eaten by the people. Apparently, the firstlings were shared between the original owners and the Levites. It is possible that the same is true of the tithe.

The people needed a tithe for the festivals, since the festivals constituted about 5 percent of the year, plus travel time. During sabbatical years, farmers would not have their regular income, so they may not have been able to go to every festival in every year. Or perhaps they saved the festival tithe from year to year. At the end of every three years of farming, the Israelites were to set aside a tithe for the Levites, resident aliens, orphans and widows (Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 26:12-15). It is not clear whether this was an alternative use of a previous tithe, or an additional tithe.

### **Tithing in the new covenant**

Now let us consider whether tithing is required in the new covenant. Tithing is mentioned only three or four times in the New Testament. Jesus acknowledged that the Pharisees were very careful about tithing (Luke 18:12), and he said that they should not leave it undone (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). Tithing, like other old covenant rules and rituals, was a law at the time Jesus spoke.

Jesus criticized the Pharisees not for tithing, but for treating tithing as more important than mercy, love, justice and faithfulness.

The only other New Testament mention of tithing is in Hebrews. The fact that Abraham was blessed by and gave tithes to Melchizedek illustrates the superiority of Melchizedek and Jesus Christ over the Levitical priesthood ([Hebrews 7:1-10](#)). The passage then goes on to note that “when the priesthood is changed, the law must be changed also” (verse 12).

There was a change of the priesthood from the Levites to Jesus Christ, and this implies a change in the law that assigned the Levites to be priests. How much has been changed? Hebrews says that the old covenant is obsolete. The package of laws that commanded tithes to be given to the Levites is obsolete.

Christians should honor God by voluntarily returning some of the blessings he gives them — this is still a valid principle. The only place that a percentage is required is within the old covenant. There is good *precedent* for tithing before Sinai, but no proof that it was *required*.

### Responding to the better covenant

Under the old covenant, tithing was required for the support of the old covenant ministers. The Israelites were required to give 10 percent — and their blessing was only a physical one! Christians in the new covenant have much better blessings — spiritual ones. How much more willingly ought we to give in thankfulness for the eternal blessings we have in Christ Jesus?

The Israelites were commanded to give 10 percent under a covenant that could not make them perfect ([Hebrews 7:19](#); [9:9](#)). How much more joyfully should we give to God under the new covenant? We have the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which *does* cleanse our conscience (9:14). Therefore, tithing is not a requirement to make us perfect. It is not right for ministers to use tithe to intimidate Christians.

Many people give less to the church than they spend on luxury items. Some people cannot give very much, but many people could if they wanted to. God calls on us to examine ourselves, to examine our priorities, and to be generous.

The old covenant gave us condemnation; the new covenant gives us justification and peace with God. How much more should we be willing to give freely and generously so God's work can be done in the world — to proclaim the gospel, to declare the new covenant ministry that gives us true life, and gives that message of life to others?

People who entrust their lives to Jesus Christ do not worry about tithing. People who are being transformed by Christ to be more like Christ are *generous*. They want to give as much as possible to support the gospel and to support the poor. Christians should give generously — but giving is a *result* of their relationship with God, not a way to earn it. We are given grace through *faith*, not through tithing.

Some people act as if Christ liberates us from the law and then required us to pay tithe to the church. That is false — Christ liberates us so that we can be free to serve him *more*, as loving children and not merely as slaves. He frees us so we can have faith instead of selfishness.

When it comes to money, the real question is: Is our heart in the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are we putting our money where our heart is? We can tell where our heart is by seeing where we are putting our money. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," Jesus said ([Matthew 6:21](#)).

### **Needs in the new covenant ministry**

In the new covenant church, there are financial needs — to support the poor, and to support the gospel by supporting those who preach it. Christians are obligated to give financial support for these needs. Let's see how Paul explained this obligation in his second letter to the Corinthians.

Paul describes himself as a minister of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6), which has much greater glory than the old (verse 8). Because of what Christ did for him in the new covenant, Christ's love compelled Paul to preach the gospel, the message of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

Paul exhorted the Corinthians "not to receive God's grace in vain" (6:1). How were they in danger of doing this? Paul had gone out of his way to serve them, but they were withholding their affections from him (6:3-12). He asked them for a fair exchange, for them to open their hearts to him (6:13).

Paul told the Corinthians that they had a duty to give something in response to what they had been given. This response comes in terms of morality (6:14-7:1), which the Corinthians had done (7:8-13), and in terms of affection, which the Corinthians had also done (7:2-7), and in financial generosity, which Paul addresses in chapter 8. This is the way in which the Corinthians had closed their hearts to Paul and withheld their affections.

Paul cited the example of the Macedonian churches, who had given generously, even to the point of self-sacrifice (8:1-5). The example is powerful; the implications are strong that the Corinthians needed to respond to Paul's sacrifices by making sacrifices themselves. But Paul did not make a command (8:8). Instead, he asked first for a turning of the heart. He wanted the Corinthians to give themselves to the Lord first, and then to support Paul. He wanted their gift to be done in sincere love, not from compulsion (8:5, 8). Paul reminded them that Christ had become poor for their sakes; the implication is that the Corinthians should make financial sacrifices in return.

But then Paul reminded the Corinthians that they could not give more than they had (8:12). Nor did they have to impoverish themselves to enrich others; Paul was only aiming for equity (8:13-14).

Paul again expressed confidence in their willingness to give, and added the peer pressure of the Macedonian example and the boasting he had done in Macedonia about the generosity of the Corinthians (8:24-9:5).

Paul again noted that the offering must be done willingly, not from compulsion or given grudgingly (9:5, 7). He reminded them that God rewards generosity (9:6-11) and that a good example causes people to praise God and puts the gospel in a favorable setting (9:12-14).

This was a collection for the poor in Judea. But Paul said nothing about tithing. Rather, he appealed to the new covenant environment: Christ had made many sacrifices for them, so they ought to be willing to make a few sacrifices to help one another.

In asking for this offering, Paul was also making a financial sacrifice. He had a right to receive financial support himself, but instead of that, he was asking that the offering be given to others. Paul had not asked for *any* financial support from Corinth (11:7-11; 12:13-16). Instead, he had been supported by Macedonians (11:9). Paul had a right to be supported by the Corinthians, but he did not use it (1 Corinthians 9:3-15). This passage tells us more about our Christian duty to give financial support to the gospel. Workers should be able to receive benefits of their work (9:7). The old covenant even made provision for oxen to be given benefits of their work (9:9).

Throughout his appeal, Paul does not cite any laws of tithing. He says that priests received benefits from their work in the temple (9:13), but he does not cite any percentage. Their example is cited in the same way as the example of soldiers, vineyard workers, herdsmen, oxen, plowers and threshers. It is simply a general principle. As Jesus said, "The worker deserves his wages" (Luke 10:7).



Paul cited the oxen and wages scriptures again in 1 Timothy 5:17-18. Elders, especially those who preach and teach, should be honored financially as well as with respect.

Jesus also commanded, “those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:14). This implies that those who *believe* should provide a living for some who preach. There is a financial duty, and there is a promised reward for generosity (though that reward may not necessarily be physical or financial).

### **A need to be generous**

Christians have received riches of God’s grace, and are to respond with generosity and giving. Christians are called to a life of service, sharing and stewardship. We have an obligation to do good. When we give ourselves to the Lord, we will give generously.

Jesus often taught about money. “Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me,” said Jesus to a rich man (Luke 18:22). He said the same thing to his disciples (12:33). The new covenant demands all that we have, and that is fair, since Jesus gave all he had for us. He praised a widow who put two coins into the temple treasury, because she gave “all she had” (21:4).

Wealth is often an enemy of faith. It can “choke” people and cause them to be spiritually unfruitful (8:14). “Woe to you who are rich,” Jesus warned (6:24). He warned us about the dangers of greed (12:15) and warned about the danger of storing up wealth for self without being “rich toward God” (12:16-21). When we use wealth to help others, we gain “treasure in heaven” (12:33). This helps us have our heart in heavenly things instead of earthly, temporary things (12:34).

## Conclusion

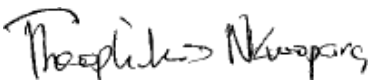
Christians need to give, to share their resources and blessings with others. They have a duty to support the preaching of the gospel, to give financial support to their spiritual leaders, and the church needs this support. If disciples of Jesus Christ can give, but do not, they are falling short. The old covenant required 10 percent. The new covenant does not specify a percentage, nor do we.

However, the new covenant admonishes people to give what they can. For some people, 10 percent may be too much. But some will be able to give more, and some are doing so. Christians should examine their own circumstances and the better blessings they have been given in the new covenant through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ for us and the gift of the Holy Spirit to us. Contributions should be given to the church for its collective work of preaching the gospel and the expenses involved in the local ministry and congregational needs.

Likewise, the new covenant does not specify any particular percentage for assisting the poor. Instead, it asks for equity — and we certainly have room for improvement in this.

The old covenant required simple percentages. Everyone knew how much was required. The new covenant has no set percentages. Instead, it requires more soul-searching, more training for the conscience, more selfless love for others, more faith, more voluntary sacrifice and less compulsion. It tests our values, what we treasure most, and where our hearts are.

May God our heavenly Father richly bless you and your ministry to His own glory and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior Amen.



Theo Nkwopara, Ph.D.

Presiding Spiritual Leader/ Director of Missions  
Love Focus International Association

# APPENDIX

# Credential Certificate



THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT AFTER A SATISFACTORY RELATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE AND PROOF OF THE CALL TO THE MINISTRY AS A RELIGIOUS WORKER, WE PUBLICLY LICENSE BROTHER

**JOHN DOE**

TO THE GOSPEL MINISTRY

*We hereby recommend him in such office to all the Christian churches and to Christians everywhere, as long as the present unity of the Spirit exists and while he maintains a Godly life, and a Scriptural standard of teaching and practice of love in action.*

*This thirty first day of August, twenty, twenty-four*

*Witnessed by Corporate Seal of Love Focus International Association and our signatures.*

LFIA Presiding Spiritual Leader

LFIA General Secretary

