



STEWARDSHIP *policy*

BUT GODLINESS ACTUALLY IS A MEANS OF GREAT
GAIN WHEN ACCOMPANIED BY CONTENTMENT.

1 Timothy 6:6

Spring Creek Bible Church

the purpose OF THIS POLICY

Our desire at SCBC is to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). The purpose of this document is to set forth biblical guidelines for the stewardship of God’s resources entrusted to SCBC.

Money and the use of resources are difficult topics often overlooked or avoided. This booklet addresses these topics from the perspective of guidance for our church. It defines terms, identifies biblical principles, and then uses those principles to lay out specific guidelines that the elders believe are wise for our particular body. It also contains a section of frequently asked questions.

We hope this Stewardship Policy will guide us in our desire to excel still more (1 Thess. 4:1).

“...I WRITE SO THAT YOU WILL KNOW HOW ONE OUGHT TO CONDUCT HIMSELF IN THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD, WHICH IS THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD, THE PILLAR AND SUPPORT OF THE TRUTH.” (1 TIM. 3:15)

introduction

Since the beginning of our serious consideration of expanding our church's facilities, the issue of financial management has been a very important aspect of the elders' deliberations on policy and the philosophical underpinnings of our building program. We have spent many hours discussing this issue and applying biblical principles that relate to it. The following policy is the result of our discussion and study.

This Stewardship Policy has its origin in the elders' consideration of the original Silver Beach Community Church No Debt Policy, which it supersedes. The main issue for our church as we focus on stewardship is the issue of borrowing, with which the bulk of this document is concerned. The stewardship of God-given resources goes hand-in-hand with our ministry philosophy and the interested reader is referred to SCBC's Philosophy of Ministry for more information.

Our goal in having this written policy is to clearly communicate the elders' prayerful conclusions as to the role of stewardship, with a particular focus on borrowing in the corporate life of SCBC. We understand that there are many different approaches to the use of God-given resources; what follows is what we believe is the approach that God has for our body.

We live in a society that is heavily influenced by money and the pursuit of it. As Christians, we are specifically told that we "cannot serve God and wealth" (Luke 16:13). We must guard against seeing increased ministry only in terms of size of facilities, annual revenue, attendance, staff size, or other empirical measurements of success. As we make disciples, our efforts are focused on the hearts of every member of our church, recognizing that facilities are one of many important components of ministry. Our goal is not to increase or serve wealth, but to honor and serve God with the resources we have been given as stewards in order to glorify Him in every aspect of our lives here at SCBC. We do not focus on the temporal "things which are seen" but rather on eternal "things that are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:18). May we excel still more.

While realizing that other churches may handle these matters differently, we desire to do what we believe is the best for Spring Creek Bible Church. We are excited by the blessings that God has given to our church. We desire to be excellent stewards, constantly using the resources that God has given us to glorify Him. This Stewardship Policy is meant to be as clear as possible, while following the ministry philosophy of the church. It contains a brief definition of terms, a list of biblical principles, and particular guidelines based on those principles. In addition, a question-and-answer section addresses common questions which might arise.

definition of terms

Because of the overlapping terminology often used in discussing monetary matters, establishing clear definitions is an important first step in setting financial policy. The following are definitions of common terms as they are used in this policy. Scripture references are given where these words are used with these definitions in the Bible.

Resources: refers to both material and non-material means entrusted to the church by God. It ranges from the time donated by volunteers in service to the church to the monies and physical structures of the church. Biblical stewardship requires we manage all of the resources of the church well.

Stewardship: the management of another's property or resources; involves the careful and responsible management of resources entrusted to one's care.

Loan: giving money or other resources for temporary use on condition that it be returned (possibly with interest) at an agreed time (Deuteronomy 23:19).

Borrow: to receive with the implied or expressed intention of returning the same, either with or without interest (Exodus 22:14, 2 Kings 6:5).

Debt: something owed, obligation, a state of owing. Debt covers a variety of states of indebtedness. For the purposes of this document, we will draw a distinction between secured debt and unsecured debt. Secured debt is indebtedness taken on with the means to repay the amount borrowed at any point. Unsecured debt is indebtedness taken on without the specific means to repay in full the amount borrowed.

Surety: one who has become legally liable for the debt of another; becoming a guarantor for a stranger is particularly warned against in Scripture (Proverbs 20:16; Proverbs 22:26-27).

Default: Default refers to a neglect of duty or being behind in payments. Default here refers to accounts being in arrears due to neglecting to pay what duty demands (Colossians 2:14; Romans 22:26-27).

Interest: A charge for borrowed money, generally a percentage of the amount borrowed (Luke 19:23). Usury, a synonym, has come to mean not only interest, but especially an exorbitant rate of interest (Leviticus 25:36; Proverbs 28:8).

biblical principles

Scripture has much to say about borrowing and debt. Both the Old and New Testament appear to allow borrowing by those in serious need without other recourse. However, Scripture does not condone borrowing in order to purchase unnecessary material goods that cannot be afforded otherwise.

1. Buildings and resources are less important than the heart attitudes behind their use

- We must beware of greed and the love of money (Luke 12:15; Luke 16:13; 1 Timothy 6:10)
- We must cultivate contentment (Philippians 4:11-12)

2. Wisdom and prudence should determine the use of resources given the Church (Matthew 25:27; Luke 16:8-10)

3. Borrowing is allowed in Scripture

- Borrowing is not a sin (Exodus 22:14; 2 Kings 6:5; Matthew 5:42)
Although failing to repay what is owed is clearly shown to be a sin, the act of borrowing itself is never condemned in Scripture.
- Borrowing is primarily done by those in desperate need (Leviticus 25:35; Proverbs 22:7; Nehemiah 5:3)
It is not seen as a financial instrument, but as a last resort for the poor.

4. Default is a sin in Scripture (Exodus 22:14; Psalm 37:12; Romans 13:6)

5. Having a need to borrow should cause careful reflection

The general tenor of borrowing in Scripture should make the believer pause before willfully entering into it.

- In the Old Testament, the lack of borrowing was a sign of God blessing Israel (Deuteronomy 15:6)
- Unsecured debt is portrayed as unwise in Scripture (Proverbs 20:16; Proverbs 22:26)

6. God is able to provide for His people in miraculous and in daily ways (Isaiah 46:9; Psalm 50:10; Matthew 6:30; James 1:17)

7. We must be careful not to presume upon the future (James 4:13-16)

guidelines

FOR SPRING CREEK BIBLE CHURCH

In the light of Scripture's counsel, the elders have set the following guidelines for SCBC:

1. We will be faithful, sensible, trustworthy stewards of God's resources

(Luke 12:42; 1 Corinthians 4:1-2; Titus 1:7).

The biblical concept of stewardship requires that we humbly consider all options for the proper management of the resources entrusted to the church by God (Matthew 25:27). Proper stewardship involves commitment to consistent prayer for direction and enablement (1 Peter 4:7) and guarding our hearts from greed and the love of money (Luke 12:15; 1 Timothy 6:10). We desire to be faithful in every area of body life (Luke 16:10) and will focus on growing hearts over growing buildings (Luke 12:33-34).

We desire to avoid the temptation to limit or alter the preaching of possibly difficult, impacting Scripture out of a conscious or unconscious concern of offending those upon whose regular giving is needed for a monthly obligation to service debt. We aim to protect our ability to boldly preach the whole counsel of God's Word.

2. We will consider borrowing under specific circumstances.

While Scripture does not forbid borrowing (Exodus 22:14; 2 Kings 6:5; Matthew 5:42), it was done only in desperate need (Leviticus 25:35; Nehemiah 5:3). Debt is not justified in Scripture for the purpose of purchasing unnecessary material goods that cannot be afforded otherwise. The general tenor of borrowing in Scripture should cause the believer to pause before entering into it (Proverbs 22:7).

The Bible clearly states that debt must be repaid completely (Romans 13:6; Exodus 22:14). Default is sin, it is associated with the wicked (Psalm 37:21), and must be avoided. It ruins the church's testimony to those outside.

In wisdom, circumstances that could quickly lead to default should also be avoided. For this reason, unsecured debt will not be entered into by SCBC. Unsecured debt is portrayed as unwise in Scripture (Proverbs 20:16, 22:26). We further believe this is unwise for SCBC regarding the biblical warning against presuming upon the future (James 4:13-16).

Debt could be entertained when done in a context of good stewardship with the ability to completely repay the amount borrowed. One example of such borrowing would be a “bridge” loan, which could be fully secured and allow for a transition from one building to another.

3. We will put our full trust in God’s ability, not man’s.

Scripture is clear that God is able to provide for His people (Isaiah 46:9; Matthew 6:30). His resources are without limit (Psalm 50:10). Though our society has largely used mortgages and borrowing as financial instruments, we will continue to be faithful in using what He has given in fulfilling the ministries of the church (James 1:17). Further, we will strive to be content with the facilities and resources that He has provided (Philippians 4:11-12).

4. We will steward our resources to fulfill the stated mission of the church.

Whether utilizing money, or donated materials, or the time of volunteers, the aim for the body of SCBC is to use all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). The best use of our resources is to use them in line with the stated mission of the church. This mission is fleshed out in the Doctrines and Distinctives of SCBC, and guided by the Philosophy of Ministry. In brief, our aim is to glorify God, through edification and evangelism. The resources that we have been given will be utilized and spent in fulfilling this mission.

frequently asked QUESTIONS

This section will not contain answers to every question and scenario that could arise. However, we have anticipated several likely questions.

1. Why don’t you come right out and say “We won’t borrow”?

We strongly desire to be as God-honoring and biblically sound as possible. Default is clearly labeled a sin in Scripture, and unsecured debt (described as surety for a stranger in Proverbs 20:16) is portrayed as unwise. It is possible that a situation could develop where borrowing which avoids default, surety, and unsecured debt would be the wisest course for our church. In such a scenario, borrowing would be a financial tool to be used in good stewardship.

2. Under what conditions would we as a church get a loan?

The elders may agree to obtain a loan under very limited conditions where there is enough collateral to repay the loan and not have unsecured debt. Sufficient prayer and consideration of other options, as well as identification of a true need would also be vital conditions. In such a case, the elders would have to unanimously agree that borrowing is the wisest course, amidst prayer and counsel. In the light of biblical counsel, we would pursue borrowing when we believe the negative ramifications of not borrowing would exceed those of borrowing.

3. What about using “Bonds” and/or “Pledges”?

A pledge refers to a written promise wherein the church member promises to give a certain amount of dollars within a certain amount of time. In the Bible the word “pledge” refers to something held as security to guarantee fulfillment of an obligation. The elders are not against using pledges and in fact, they can be of some value to help predict the giving spirit of the body. But contrary to current “worldly” advice which says it’s acceptable to use paper pledges as collateral to borrow money, the elders feel that this would put leadership in a precarious position with an individual should they renege their pledge. The main purpose of the elders is spiritual leadership, not financial enforcement.

Bonds are an interest-bearing certificate of indebtedness. They should more accurately be called individual promissory notes. In the past, SCBC has used the issuance of “bonds” to purchase the house next door. The church members agreed to loan the church a certain amount of money at a certain interest rate for a certain number of years. The certain amounts were variable for each participant. Bonds are just another way of borrowing money. Bonds are not giving, but loaning to the church. As believers, Scripture exhorts us to be givers, not loaners (Luke 6:38; Proverbs 19:17; Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Philippians 4:17). Bonds must be seen in light of biblical principles of borrowing, and not as another method of obtaining funds separate from borrowing.

4. Won’t building costs increase faster than our ability to save the money?

They may. Historically, building costs have increased over inflation; however, as of 2006 we are saving above inflationary gains. We realize that wise stewardship could lead to an arrangement where borrowing is considered the best option, and is pleasing to God.

5. If our facilities were larger, wouldn’t more people attend and they could help pay off the loan?

We believe this is putting the cart before the horse. If our present congregation

gives sacrificially to pay for a larger facility, when more people come, the additional money they give can be used for ministry (i.e. additional staff, missions, programs, etc.), not paying loan payments.

Such thinking may also presume about the future. If our facilities were larger, but more people did not attend, the church may be forced into default, which is sin. Wisdom and following biblical principles currently guides us away from such steps.

6. Won't God provide the money to pay the loan payments if we borrowed?

We certainly trust God for financial provision, just as He provides for us in every way. We trust God to provide for His church at Spring Creek, and He does—in providing facilities to meet in, sound biblical teaching, fellowship, and in His providential care for our lives. God provides our daily bread, and He has told us not to worry about our future.

Faith in God's provision, however, is not the issue with borrowing. The issue is: are we allowed to force God to provide in a particular way? Do we "force God's hand," so to speak, and tell Him that true provision is the provision of a mortgage payment? For that matter, do we dictate that true provision is the provision of a lump sum to build? In following Biblical principles, we do not so dictate God. Rather, in prayer and counsel, we try to wisely and as good stewards use the resources He has given us to minister in exaltation, edification, and evangelism. We faithfully expect God to meet our needs and provide abundantly, without forcing Him to take actions we want.

7. What is wrong with SCBC using the mortgage method to add to our building and property? What is the difference between the Church and an individual regarding having a mortgage?

This question highlights the differences between an individual and a church in obtaining loans. Although borrowing is not sin, it is much more likely to be wise for an individual than a church, for the following reasons:

Individual Home Mortgage

- The mortgagor (individual or couple) enters into the contract after due consideration regarding their future ability to pay off the contract. They typically have control and a good understanding of their financial future and ability to make payments.
- The mortgagor has a vested interest in their property. The property market value, less the mortgage balance, is their investment, and it can be substantial. They have a vested interest to fulfill their obligation, to protect their investment by making payments and maintaining value.
- The home or property is usually readily marketable, giving the mortgagee (the lender) confidence that their investment is secure. Should the mortgagor falter, the property can be sold, and the mortgage paid off.

Church Mortgage

- The church is comprised of its membership, which can either decrease or increase depending on many circumstances. The individuals are not under contract, and are free to leave the membership at any time, with no contractual financial obligation whatsoever.
- The church's ability to meet its payments depends heavily on the stability of its membership, both in number and in financial ability, and the faithful continuance of giving. The individual members have no independent contractual responsibility to repay debt.
- Church property does not have a ready market. If the body fails in their financial obligation to make the payments, the mortgagee might have to repossess. There may be enough to satisfy the mortgagee, but it is uncertain whether there would be much value in excess of the mortgage.
- If a church fails to pay the mortgage, it is sin—and a negative testimony to the community even beyond individual default.

8. Aren't there potentially negative consequences to not borrowing?

Yes there are. We understand that there may be a significant impact in avoiding unsecured debt. From a human perspective, our facilities limit the number of people at any given service. We may not have the ability to increase our Sunday School program. We may need to utilize closed-circuit TV to help with increased numbers at special services, such as Easter and Christmas. We have had to increase the number of services, which has presented logistical and fellowship strains. These sacrifices are acknowledged even as we strive to hold to a wise, biblical approach to stewardship of the resources God has bestowed on our church.

in closing...

We feel strongly that this is the direction God would have our church take and that He will bless and protect us as we follow these guidelines and apply the biblical principles discussed in this material. We encourage each member of the church body to be faithful in prayer and obedient to God in these days. We thank God for the corporate growth He is giving, and joyfully anticipate the increased individual growth that will result from our faithful ministry for years to come.

The SCBC Elders
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Spring Creek Bible Church



567 E. Kellogg Road
Bellingham, WA 98226
360-734-5228
office@scbiblechurch.org
www.scbiblechurch.org