

**David Ahlgren – Apollos X**  
**SOF #7, The Church**

The EFCA Statement of Faith #7 states, “We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God’s grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.” I will address the elements of this here.

First of all, the true church is not an organization or association of members, but is composed of all those who are reborn from God above – who have been justified by Christ showing God’s grace and mercy, obtained by us by believing and accepting what He has done (faith). In Matthew 16:16 Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This is followed by verse 18 where Jesus then responds, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.” The church is built upon those who have the confession of the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ alone as Acts 4:12 clearly spells out, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Secondly, the true or real church is made into one body by God as Holy Spirit with Christ as our Head. We see that 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 describes the body under Christ which we are made part of by His Spirit. In Ephesians 1:22-23 we hear that “... he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.” We are His body, which means that He as the head guides us and uses us for His glory, purpose, and will on the earth. Furthermore, Ephesians 4:15-16 explains how we are to grow and become equipped in love as that body, and our growth comes from God Himself (Colossians 2:19).

Third, local churches show the true church as a subset of the whole, and so the members of it must be only real believers – reborn from above, not religious adherents to a set of teaching or camaraderie alone. Local churches are mentioned in many places such as in Acts 9:31; 20:28-30; Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 1:2; 16:19; 2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1-2, to include Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Corinth, Thessalonica, Cenchreae, and Aquila and Prisca’s house. The members were

shown to be believers only – not those who just wanted to join the club as it unfortunately occurs in many modern day churches. The first church began in Acts 2:41 and 47 with those who heard the Gospel, were saved, and baptized (as the Great Commission lays out for us). 1 Corinthians 1:2 addresses, “...the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;” this shows only those who have called on Jesus’ name are the church (and saints).

Lastly, the true church expresses the gospel visibly and tangibly through the two ordinances Jesus Christ mandated, namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Baptism is a fact for those in Christ as Romans 6:3-4 and Colossians 2:12 reveal – it shows our death to the old man and new life in Jesus Christ. John and Jesus’ disciples baptized publicly, and the Ethiopian eunuch and Saul seemed to have only one other as witness, but the statement shows identification with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection in all cases. This is a tangible way to reflect God’s inward work of His Spirit who works as the wind blows into one’s reborn life. The Lord’s Supper is a visible means to show the sharing in Christ’s suffering and substitutionary death on our behalf. In Matthew 26:26-29 and 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:23-26, Jesus told us that eating the bread and drinking the wine demonstrate our sharing in and proclaiming the Lord’s death to the world until His return. When we celebrate these ordinances with a heart right toward God by faith, they confirm our standing with God in Christ, and nourish our souls in relationship with God and each other in fellowship. John 6:55-56 says, “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.” This is true nourishment of the soul.

What this statement means to me then is that as a true member of the Body of Christ (which is the true universal church with the gift of faith having grafted me into His body), I can function in the role He has put me. I can serve Him with assurance that the true believers in the local church I attend are also striving to do the same, though there may be those on membership rolls who may not be of the true church. These must also see the gospel lived out by my communicating clearly what baptism and the Lord’s Supper mean, and by growing in sanctification in the grace of God in Christ. Avoiding complacency or witch hunts to root out tares in the God’s wheat field, I can clearly and lovingly speak the truth of the church so the Spirit can draw them as well to Himself; then as many as have been appointed to eternal life will be added to the true church.