

**Praying in Tongues
as a Non-Denominational Church
Version 2.1
May 20, 2023**

1. We believe the gift of tongues exists and is of some benefit to the church. We do not forbid speaking in tongues,[1] but we affirm that there are greater gifts that should be desired more than tongues.[2]

2. We believe there are two forms or manifestations of tongues represented in Scripture: (a) the supernatural ability to speak or be understood in various real earthly languages not previously known to the speaker [3]; and (b) an unintelligible language referred to as “the tongue of angels”[4] or “groans of the spirit”[5] whereby the one praying is not understood by those who listen without interpretation.[6]

3. We believe that the gift of tongues is not given to every believer[7] and that it is one of the many spiritual gifts that God bestows upon believers, each according to His purposes, for the purpose of building up the church.[8]

At Community Church, we do not endorse the concept of second baptism or that tongues is the necessary evidence of being filled with the Holy Spirit. However, at the same time we welcome as full participants without prejudice those from denominational backgrounds that hold these beliefs at our church. We also

welcome and pursue partnership with other churches who hold such beliefs even while we do not affirm them here. We encourage conversations around the gift of tongues within our church to send us deeper into the Bible, and to help us understand one another better and grow in our faith together as a community within our local church family and among the global universal Church.

4. We believe Scripture evidences three primary contexts in which tongues manifests itself as a spiritual gift: (a) a spontaneous manifestation of the spirit as an authentication of the proclamation of the Gospel into a new cultural or ethnic context; (b) speaking in tongues as public instructional and proclamatory event among the gathered church where tongues are spoken for the edification of the whole church,[9] and which requires interpretation in order for it to edify the church;[10] and (c) praying in tongues as a heavenly prayer language unintelligible to the speaker or those being prayed over[11] where the Spirit's work in us transcends language and intercedes on our behalf.[12] These are not mutually exclusive categories, and they are employed here as a tool for aiding understanding.

5. According to these three contexts, we believe that (a) speaking in tongues as gospel authentication was something that took place primarily in the first century as the early church was being birthed, and continues primarily in contexts where the gospel is crossing ethnic and social boundaries as a miraculous sign that sometimes accompanies the spread of the Gospel and that can authenticate the

veracity of the Gospel in some cases.[13] We also believe that (b) speaking in tongues in corporate worship environments is possible but rare, and commit to following biblical parameters for employing it at Community Church should it arise. (c) As a personal prayer language, however, it is not excluded from the experience of life in community together at Community Church. It is neither encouraged nor discouraged in personal prayer.

6. We believe that praying in tongues continues throughout the Church to this day and offers a way of praying that edifies individuals at the spiritual level even when unintelligible to the speaker or the one being prayed for.[14]

7. We welcome the gift of tongues at Community Church in its appropriate context: (a) corporate instructional speaking in tongues must be accompanied by the interpretation of tongues for it to find a place in a corporate worship context,[15] be it Sunday morning or in a small group, or class. Those speaking in tongues and those interpreting tongues need to be debriefed by the elders at Community Church in order to preserve orderly worship[16] and to safeguard the church[17] – while also not stifling the Spirit from doing unexpected things; Likewise, the message that has been interpreted from tongues also needs to be vetted, in alignment with the principle behind “test the spirits”[18]; (b) we welcome prayer in tongues at a personal level in personal devotions, and in corporate contexts of personal worship and personal intercessory prayer that transcends language and our wisdom to know how to pray.[19]

8. As a non-denominational church, we recognize that there are many who are comfortable with praying in tongues and being prayed over in tongues, among whom this practice is celebrated. We also recognize that there are many who are uncomfortable with being prayed over in tongues, and as one of the more unusual gifts of the spirit, it can be off-putting, even misunderstood, and in extreme cases can be connected with past experiences of spiritual abuse if proper context is not offered, or if it takes place without giving opportunity for understanding and consent.[20]

9. We recognize that praying in tongues over someone can create the perception of a power differential in the relationship where the one praying is seen as having increased spiritual authority based on the manifestation of the spirit through tongues. We are careful not to allow for that perception -- intentionally or unintentionally -- and we withhold from recommending specific courses of action or claiming to speak on behalf of the Lord in unilateral ways. It is our practice to encourage people to seek the Lord for themselves, and to seek the Lord together in community for direction and verification. We are careful not to let our flawed human understanding of such spiritual experiences translate into the perception of direct miraculous speech from God.

10. **At this time, we welcome personal prayer in tongues[21] but we will withhold such prayer over other people unless there is an existing**

relationship that includes the awareness that the one praying sometimes prays in tongues and that it is understood and welcomed by the one being prayed for.

11. The Prayer Team and the Leadership Team will develop a short explanation of prayer in tongues to be made available to anyone upon request, should someone observe this practice at church and have questions about it. At no point will we communicate or imply that speaking in tongues is correlated with spiritual maturity. As with other areas of doctrinal disagreement among bible-believing churches, we encourage conversation and study around the issue of tongues to facilitate mutual understanding among people with different theological backgrounds and experiences.

[1] 1 Cor 14:27

[2] 1 Cor 14:12, 19

[3] Acts 2:4-12

[4] 1 Cor 13:1

[5] Rom 8:26

[6] 1 Cor 14:2

[7] 1 Cor 12:7-11

[8] 1 Cor 12:7; 1 Cor 14:5,26; 1 Cor 14:16-17

[9] 1 Cor 14:27-33

[10] 1 Cor 14:27-28

[11] Acts 2:1-12; Acts 10:44-46

[12] Rom 8:26

[13] 1 Cor 14:22

[14] Rom 8:26

[15] 1 Cor 14:27-28

[16] 1 Cor 14:32

[17] 1 John 4:1; 1 Cor 14:32,33

[18] 1 John 4:1

[19] Rom 8:26

[20] 1 Cor 14:23

[21] 1 Cor 14:39