

Membership class #1

Please turn in your notebook to the page, labeled “membership class#1.” The outline for our classes follows the fourth and fifth vows which are taken upon entrance into our membership. You may recall in our North Park Encounter that we looked at the first three vows, vows which I called “Critical Confessions.” Those had to do primarily with what you believe. The last two vows have to do with what you will do. Vow #4 says *I promise to support the church in its worship and work.* That commitment, which we believe is proper for Christians, is what we will cover this evening, beginning with the part about supporting the church in its worship.

There are several things to look at concerning this matter of worship and how we look at it. First, I want you to understand that worship should be seen as being the great purpose of the Christian. When we ask the question of why God has saved us, the Bible points us to our role as worshippers. In John chapter four we read of Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman at the well, and after a short exchange the Lord says this to her. John 4:23 *But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.* Now this is the only time in all the Bible that we read of God seeking anything. And what is it that He seeks? Worshippers! Well there is one other place it says God seeks something. Luke 19:10 *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.* So, apparently the Lord comes to seek the lost in order to turn them into what? Worshippers. We find the same teaching in the Ephesian letter of Paul. There in the first chapter Paul writes about God’s great purpose in his plan of redemption. Three times in that chapter he tells us that it is all to the end that God will be praised by those He redeems for the glory of His grace. This is why the Father sent the Son. This is why Jesus went to the cross. This is why the Spirit comes to live within us. That we might find our purpose in the worship of God. And remember too, what is it that we are going to be doing for all eternity? Huh? When we get a look into heaven, what is everybody there doing? Worshipping the Lord. This is our purpose and eternal occupation.

Then secondly, we must come to see worship as the great challenge of the believer. I wonder if you have ever seen it that way – as a challenge. Let’s imagine that you come to

a worship service at our church and you go home to a spouse who didn't come. And your wife or husband says, "Well, honey, how was worship today?" What do you say to that? How do you answer that? I find it a rather difficult question really. I mean, what do you say? "I dunno, I think God had an off day." But typically, how do most people answer that question? How do they evaluate a worship experience? What is the measure? Most, I think, evaluate it based upon how it makes them feel. We ask, "Did I enjoy it, was I moved by the sermon or the singers?" Basically, we ask, "how did the worship make me feel?" Now, I don't think feelings are irrelevant, but I am going to urge you to change the question and start asking, "How did I do?" Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, complained that the church of his day had a faulty view of worship. He said that for most, going to church was like going to a theatre. We go passively, hoping that we might enjoy the performance but feeling no responsibility in the matter. Kierkegaard said that we view ourselves as the worship audience and the church leaders as the actors performing for us. But, he said, real worship presents a very different picture. He says that properly understood, when we worship, **we** are not the audience, but who is? God is. And, in the worship drama, who are the actors? We are, the worshippers are the actors performing for the Lord and for His pleasure. So, what are the guys on stage? Well, they are the directors and cue-card holders, giving directions to those who are offering their best for God, whose glory and pleasure and blessing are the primary purpose of our worship. This is why I say that worship should be viewed as a challenge. We are commanded and exhorted over and over again, especially in the psalms, to praise the Lord. It is our duty, our responsibility. And if you bring that attitude to church you come with a determination that, no matter how the pastor does, no matter how the musicians do, you will praise the Lord. You say to yourself, "I will bless the Lord, with all that is within me. I will give Him my heart, soul, mind and strength as I praise Him." You don't come in passively, daring the preacher and the singers to thrill you in some way. You come in ready to give it your all and do your best.

So, now that we see worship as our great purpose and our challenge, let's move on to look at the elements of public worship. You can and should worship God in private, but our focus this evening will be on the public worship of God. And there are several elements of worship to look at, the first of which is singing. Hebrews 13:**15** *Through*

Him, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that gives thanks to His name. Look at that for a moment. Our praise is called the fruit of our lips, and is referred to as a sacrifice. As we read the Old Testament, we find that the essence of worshipping God is sacrifice. In the Old Testament that meant bulls and sheep and fruit, but nowadays it means verbal praise. Our singing of praises to God is our sacrifice. Now, in the OT we discover that God has rules for sacrifices. What had to be true of your sacrifice for it to be acceptable to God? Hmm? Well, for one, the sacrifice had to be of the highest quality. God said that his people were to offer him the best. He was not pleased when they brought lame and sick animals to offer. Sacrifices were to be the best one had to offer. And that rule applies to our musical praise as well. We aren't to offer to God songs that we mumble through. When we sing for the Lord, we are to sing as well as we can. And understand please, that this expression of praise is not optional. What do you imagine would be the most frequently mentioned command in the Bible? The most frequent command is "praise." Praise the Lord! It is mentioned so many times in the Psalms. Now, what do you think would be the second most frequent command? Well, that would be "sing." Again, this is because it is found in the Psalms so much. We are commanded to sing to the Lord. It is repeated in the New Testament. Regardless of what many apparently believe, this is not something we are free to opt out of. Now, you may be thinking, "hey, Pastor, you haven't heard me sing." Well, I get ya. It is possible, that your singing is so bad, that it would disrupt the worship of others. So, I will make a deal with you. If I observe the folks around you in church grimacing as we sing. I will give you a free pass on singing. Otherwise, you must respond to God's command to make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Now, it is really amazing how much heat gets generated in churches these days over the choice of music. What are we going to sing? Traditional hymns or contemporary worship songs? Our approach, as you know, is to do both. Some call it a blended worship style. But we just believe that our worship would be poorer if we were lacking in either kind of musical provision. Traditional hymns give us a connectivity to the church of our forefathers that is good. They also give us a rich expression of the great truths of our faith. We will sing traditional hymns. But we also want to take advantage of the abundance of modern worship expressions that are generally easier to sing, more in line

with popular styles of music, and often express Scriptural truth in ways just as powerful as Watts and Wesley ever did. I hope that as you worship with us you will develop an appreciation for both the classic hymns and the modern choruses.

But too I want you to become more intelligent and just more alert and thoughtful about your singing. When we sing together we sing songs of two basic types. And I don't mean traditional and contemporary. I mean priestly and prophetic. As we read the OT we find that there are important differences in the ministry of the priest and that of the prophet. The prophet was a person who would speak to men, on behalf of whom? God. The priest, on the other hand, is a person who speaks to or addresses God, on behalf of whom? Men. The prophet speaks to men, the priest speaks to God. When we sing are we being priests or prophets? Well, that depends on what you are singing. A hymn, in the narrow sense, means a song that is sung to God. When we say, "How Great Thou Art" who are we talking to? To the Lord. And we must remember that as we sing. But all our songs aren't addressed to God. When we sing "Onward Christian Soldiers" who are we singing to? Each other. That is a prophetic hymn. And I urge you to pay attention to what you are singing, and to whom.

Now let's discuss musical styles. Oh my! Here we could have some controversy. What is appropriate musical style for the worship of God? Can you do it with Bach, can you do it with pop? What style of music does God like? Here is what the Bible says about that subject. (silence) That was it. The Scriptures do not say, and we thus assume that God doesn't really care. So when it comes to issue of style, we don't concern ourselves with God's tastes, but we do concern ourselves with the tastes of the worshippers. We want to use styles familiar to and preferred by the folks who worship with us. You see, different cultures have different styles of music. Around here we have some who prefer a classical style, others more folksy, some rather rocky. We intend to offer mostly a combination of pop and Bach because that best represents who we have in our church. Most likely you will hear some music you really like and some maybe you don't. Remember, when you hear something that doesn't appeal to you, somebody else really likes it. I remember one Sunday after our choir had sung a song with a strong country-gospel sound. We don't do that a lot, but this Sunday the choir did it. And one brother came out after church just raving about how great that song was, and we ought to do more like that. Swell! The next

day I get a phone call from someone else, saying, “Pastor, we got to do something about the choir. They just can’t sing that kind of song again!” Brothers and sisters, part of living with each other, is allowing for and enjoying our differences. So, be patient and know that we will be singing something you like soon.

By the way, you will notice that in our services we have lots of congregational singing, singing with all expected to participate. Then too we have some special music, sung by those especially gifted, and maybe by our choir. When we do have special music, that is not a time to be passive about your worship. That is a time to follow along, and affirm what is sung in your own heart. Pray and praise in your heart as the singers sing.

On now to the next element of our public worship as we look at prayers. And basically the rule here again is not to be passive about your praying. When someone else is leading the congregation in prayer, that is not the time to plan your lunch. It is time to be engaged with God yourself. And that may mean you are following carefully what is being said, offering your “amen,” telling God you agree with what is said. Or it may mean that you branch out in your praying, and speak to the Lord about other issues too. Understand this reality—the average person thinks four times faster than the average person speaks. That means that when you are listening you have lots of unused brain space, which explains why you can carry on a conversation, listen to the radio and drive your car at the same time. This is why I like to talk fast. It gives you, the listener, less brain power to wander away from me. But if you recognize this about yourself, it means you need to actively focus your mind, focus your thoughts where they ought to be. And so, when we pray, don’t just listen. You be praying.

Then let’s talk about the offering. Why do we take up an offering in the middle of worship? Precisely because the offering is worship. The essence of worship is sacrifice isn’t it? Paul spoke of the giving of his friends in Philippi as being an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to the Lord. That is how we should view our giving. In laying that check in the offering plate we are expressing our love of God, our faith in Him, our devotion to His work. We give with cheer and with gratitude.

Next big element of worship is the reading and preaching of God’s word. I encourage you to make a habit of bringing your own Bible with you when you come to worship. There are several reasons for this. The word of God is given to stimulate us to praise.

Also, by bringing it and using it during worship you will grow in your familiarity with the Bible. You will also be able to read Scripture during the sermon, check on texts that are quoted, make sure the pastor is quoting the word in context. And, in case the sermon turns out to be awful, you can always just read your Bible for half an hour and redeem the time.

When it comes to profiting from sermons the most important rule is again to be an active participant, to engage your mind and heart with what you are hearing. How edified you are by what comes from the pulpit is not simply the responsibility of the preacher. It is yours as well. So, when you listen, really interact with what is being said. Ask yourself as you hear, “is this really Biblical? Does the pastor’s argument make sense? How can I apply this to my life?” Generally you are supplied with an outline to help you follow along and using that and taking notes can be of great value. The benefit of note-taking is not usually in the great stock of notes you can bring home, but in how the taking of notes can aid your concentration.

Those are the major elements of worship, but I close with a quickie look at several others beginning with the prelude. When you are on time to church and you hear our musicians start to play their live prelude, whether it is sung or just instrumental, there is a message we want you to hear in that. It is: *sit down and be quiet*. You may have noticed that we do not have the kind of quiet, peaceful atmosphere prior to worship that some churches have. Our people are talking and busy, and frankly we want it that way. But there is a time when we want to turn attention away from fellowship to worship. The prelude is the signal for that. And if you aren’t there for the prelude then you are late, and tardiness is one of the greatest worship failures there is. You really need to be a few minutes early, especially if you have children that need to be cared for. Getting here 10 minutes before the service means you can speak to a friend, greet a visitor, settle your kids down and calmly prepare to meet with God in worship. Remember: *the Spirit is punctual, but the flesh is late*. That’s not in the Bible, but it should be.

Then there are announcements that we do at our services. Announcements are not really “worship” but they do relate to our life together as the Lord’s body and they are important . We try not to overdo the announcements, so do pay attention. Read your bulletin. Read your FYI. Know what is happening in **your** church.

How about the sacraments? We practice the two Biblical sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptisms are scheduled as needed. The Lord's Supper is normally the first Sunday of each month. God directs us to make special preparation of heart for those times when we gather around his table.

Testimonies and ministry highlights. We believe that God is glorified and His people encouraged to know of what is going on in the hearts and lives of church members and special guests. So, we give time to recognize and celebrate that. Greetings are next. Most of our services offer a special time to greet your neighbors at church. And listen, this is really, really important. Take advantage of that time, but also be on the alert before and after worship to meet those you encounter who you don't know. Graciously find out who they are and show some interest in them. Some of you here came to North Park and just thought we were such a warm and friendly church. Others of you came here and thought us rather cold. Why the difference? It could be a difference in your expectations and your personality. But it often just depends on where you sat. Were the folks around you friendly, or not? Well, realize now that if you have been to church more than two Sundays you are now one of us, and make it a point to be that friendly point of contact for those who are new.

One more thing on worship. If you are a parent of young children, it is very important for your children and the rest of the church that you take your role seriously. Your children need you to teach them how to behave in church. That means working with them at home, teaching them there how to act when you are in church and enforcing lessons with real discipline. It is best, until the child is well into or beyond the teen years, to have your child sitting with you in church. If your 10 year old wants to sit with a friend, it probably isn't so they can stimulate each other to love and good deeds and hold each other accountable to take good sermon notes. Keep your child with you or with a trusted friend who will direct them to pay attention and not be a distraction. For the very young we do offer a Jr. Church. From age 4-8 kids have a chance to get used to the adult service by participating only part way through before going off for a lesson designed for their age level. Jr. church is optional, but it is there for you. As is our nursery for those under four. We have a good nursery. It is not mandatory for parents to use it, but most parents will

find it a great blessing, and so will those who come to worship with you. For nursing moms we also offer a cry room where you can see and hear.

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. We have spoken of the worship part of vow #4, now let's look at how the church intends to do its work. Some might hold to the idea that the church does its work by taking a collection in order to hire pastors to do the work of the church. But that is neither efficient, effective or biblical. What is all of those things is doing the work of the church by means of the proper functioning of the body. The church is given many names in the NT, and one of those is "the body of Christ." Several things are communicated in that, but one surely is that we get things done rather like your body gets things done. And that is by each part of the body doing the job for which it was created, and functioning properly within its own realm. In I Corinthians 12 we read this in vs. **7** *But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.* What that means is that every single member of the church has been given by the Lord a spiritual gift to contribute to the good of the whole. Those gifts differ greatly. Just as the parts of your body differ. Our body parts share many things in common, same DNA and all, but their makeup and function varies greatly. And when they work together we can do wonders.

There are two principles set forth in I Corinthians 12 about how the parts of the body are to relate to one another. Principle #1 is that of appreciation. The principle of appreciation Vs. **17-21** *If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 If they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."* Because of our pride we all tend to think that the things we can do well happen to be the really important things. If you have knowledge gifts you will tend to judge everyone by what they know. If your gifts are in service you judge others by how quickly they step up to chip in. If you are an evangelist, then that becomes

for you the keystone of spirituality. And this tendency makes us prone to put down others who are different from us. Most of you understand from your marriage how differences can lead to relational stress. Well, it happens in the church too. So, the apostle reminds the eyes not to put down ears, and ears not to put down noses and noses not to think ill of the hand. Instead, we need to appreciate one another. The eye may be able to see the cookie, but without the hand and the teeth we don't get to enjoy it. Every part has its role. And we need to be especially grateful for those who have the abilities we don't have. The principle of appreciation.

Secondly, the body concept teaches us the principle of coordination. You know what that is – that is the effective working together of body parts. Two equally powerful athletes do not make equally talented athletes. One may have a much great capacity to get his body parts working together toward a goal. Maybe an even better illustration would be that of a football team. One of the things a coach has to do with a football team is make sure that each athlete is operating in the position most suited to his skills. And if you took the greatest team in the world and mixed up their players, moving the offensive linemen to the defensive backfield, and the receivers to the defensive line and putting the QB at linebacker, you would have a team that could easily be beaten. A key to success is having each contributor in the position that maximizes his strengths and minimizes his weaknesses. But the church often does a very poor job of this. Here is how it fails.

Suppose a church has a young man who begins teaching the Jr. High group. And the kids just love him, and they are growing under his ministry. Some of the parents tell him he ought to consider going to seminary and becoming a pastor. So he thinks about that and decides that would be a good idea. So, he goes off to seminary for three years, studies the Bible, studies theology, learns how to preach. Then he takes a job in a church where they expect him to visit all the church families in their home once a quarter. If anyone related to a member is in the hospital he needs to go see them. And every committee of the church will be looking for him to be part. Thus, the man who was such a gifted teacher, who got training to do exactly that, ends up rushing through his preparations because he has so many other things to do. And he never becomes the teacher he might have been.

Another way this happens is that the pastor learns that Joe is retiring as teacher of the young couples class. So pastor gets up on Sunday and announces that Joe is retiring and

they will need somebody else to fill that role. Isn't there someone in the church who could do that? Nobody shows any interest. The next Sunday the pastor gets up and starts singing the blues about the poor young couples group and how they don't have a teacher. He says, "surely, someone here is willing to come help out our poor young couples, and teach that class. Won't you please?!" But still no one steps up. So, the next Sunday the Pastor is getting desperate. This time his voice quivers as he describes the need. Some could actually see a tear in his eye as he pleaded for help with this class. Now, in the congregation you had good ole' Pete. Pete is such a kind-hearted soul, a man with the gift of mercy if ever there was one. And Pete just hates to see the pastor cry, so he raises his hand and volunteers to teach the class. What's the problem? Pete is not a teacher. He is willing, but not gifted. And he takes the class but ends up boring them to tears. We don't want that kind of thing happening here. We want folks serving in the areas of church life for which they are gifted by God. We want the administrators administrating and the teachers teaching and the mercy folks doing the visitations and the evangelists out there witnessing. Each part of the body doing that for which God has gifted it.

So, how do we make that happen? Easier said than done. I would love to have a staff person with a big computer, matching up all the church members with the needs. Someday maybe we will have that, but not yet. So, what we do is teach you the principles and then leave it up to you. We are asking you to see to it that your service is in the area of your gifting. I'll say more about that in a moment. But for now let's consider what it is the pastor does in a church body. If every member is supposed to be working, what then is the pastor doing with his time? Ephesians chapter four helps us with that one. It says in **11-12** *And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.* Pastors are concerned to see the body of Christ built up, but notice how they are to go about it. The work of the church, which builds up, according to verse 12 is done by whom? By the saints, or the members of the church. The pastor's job, says verse 12 is to equip the saints for their work. The pastor is a leader-equipper.

Let's see what we can learn about the church by comparing it to a business, say to a local Wal-Mart. There are four key players in the business venture. There is the owner,

the employer or manager, the employee and the customer. In the church business, who is our owner? That's easy. It is God. He calls the shots. We do as He says because it is His church. But now, who is the manager of the church, that is the employer? Well, that would be the leadership, the pastors, and maybe the elders. Who are the employees? (pause) All the church members are employees, assigned to certain tasks for the company. And finally, who are the customers? For the sake of our illustration we will say that the customers are the unchurched. That is not altogether accurate. The church does intend to serve its own membership, but for our discussion we will say the customers are the unchurched folks in the community.

Now then, when you go into Wal-mart and you need help shopping, who is there for you? Is it the manager? No. In a store of any size the average customer does not interface with the manager. He encounters the employees. It is the employees who make the sale. And what does the manager do? The manager is very concerned about customers, but he seeks to serve them by focusing his attention on the employees, hiring them, training them, placing them in the right positions, encouraging them, admonishing them, motivating them, and sometimes firing them. So, you see, in the effective business model the manager focuses on the workers, and that is the way it is in the church too. As I am taught in Ephesian four, I want to be equipping you in your ministry. Practically, here is what that may mean. Let's imagine that Bill calls me up and says, "Pastor, an office-mate of mine is in the hospital. He is pretty bad off and will be in for a week, do you think you can get by to visit him?" Now, I could say, "sure, I'll do that Bill." But if I am thinking like a pastor, I say to him, "Bill, tell you what. Instead of me going to see your friend, how about if you stop by my office this afternoon and I will take a few minutes to help train you to visit your friend in the hospital. I will give you a few pointers and something you can take for your friend to read, and then you can go see your friend. I bet he would rather see you than me, anyway." See the difference there? That is more like business model, but even more importantly, it is more like the Biblical model.

Over my many years as pastor my role has gone through some changes. There was a time when I was out most weeks visiting those who were new to our church. If you have come to our church two or three Sundays I would have called you up to see if you were open to a visit from me, to allow us to get to know each other, and see if I could help you

get settled in our church. So, I may spend my Thursday evening at your house. But after a while in my ministry here I began noticing a disturbing pattern. People would come to our church for several weeks straight, then I would go to visit them in their homes, and.... We never saw them again. Uh-oh. Fact is, I wasn't very good at that kind of visiting. I am just not the kind of guy that makes people feel immediately warm and comfy. That was something I didn't do very well. Sooo, I called on a young couple in our church, Dana and Joy, and asked if they would take over the visitation ministry. I asked them because they, especially Joy, were very gregarious and would do wonderfully at that kind of thing. Sure enough, they took over the ministry. People would come for a while, Dana and Joy would go see them, and they would keep on coming, and I had my Thursday evenings free for something else more in line with who I am.

Not every pastor is going to be the same in what he is good at, and what he emphasizes. For me, I believe my gifts are in teaching and administration. So, that is what I do the most of – preparing for lessons and sermons, and providing the big-picture oversight for our ministries. I don't do a lot of evangelism, although I do some. I don't do a ton of counseling, but I do some. I don't always see everybody in the hospital. That is not what being a pastor is all about. Listen, if I am in the hospital, there are lots of folks I would rather have see me, than me. That's just not something I am great at, so I limit it. If somebody is in a long time, or in with something very serious I'll show up. And do so gladly. I am reluctant to say it that way however, because sometimes I get by to see patients who grow worried when I come in that there is something the doctor didn't tell them. “Uh-oh, the pastor is here, am I dying?” My point is that my emphasis needs to be on the teaching, leading, equipping work that God has given me to do.

So, let's talk about spiritual gifts. The Bible says you have one. And you are responsible to use it for our good. Ephesians 4:**15-16** *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.* Did you hear that? The body grows by the proper working of each individual part. Every part of the body has a job. Every member is a minister. You need an answer to the question, “What is your ministry?” To help you plug in to a ministry in

and through our church we are asking you to fill out for us the Gifts and Service Inventory which in the pocket of your notebook. On one side you have the member data sheet, which you need to fill in, but on the other side is the gifts inventory. Notice what it is asking for. We want you to check those areas of service which you believe fit your gifts and your opportunities. Notice, there are two wrong ways to do this. Wrong way #1 is to check every box. That may tell us you are willing, but it doesn't give us any information about where to try and use you. Then wrong way #2 is to check nothing. That certainly won't help either. Take some time with that document. Be thoughtful and prayerful as you fill it out. Some of you may be wondering how you know what your spiritual gift is. That can be complex but usually is quite simple. Just ask yourself what it is you are good at. Also, what do you enjoy? Normally we enjoy the things we are good at. And if you don't know if you are good at something find an honest friend to give you a critique. Ask your spouse or parents where they could see you serving most effectively. And then if you are still in doubt, try something and see if it works for you.

We turn next to look at the activities of the church, and I will begin with our goal. Our mission statement says that our purpose is "to make disciples of Jesus who worship God passionately, connect with each other in caring community and impact the world by word and deed." ® Within that, there are three words we want you to remember. Worship, Connect, Impact. ® Say that with me and we can even use hand motions to remember it. Worship speaks to our vertical relationship with God. Connection speaks to our horizontal relationship to brothers and sisters in the body. Impact speaks to our place in the broader society. Let's look at each of these individually.

We begin with worship and I know we have already looked at this area but it is important that you understand that what we mean by "worship" includes the entirety of our relationship with God. John Piper says the fuel of worship is truth, and so a critical aspect of being worshippers is to be learners. And learning takes place in many places and many ways in our church calendar. There is teaching in the worship services and in the small groups. Learning is the primary purpose behind our Sunday School program and our discipleship ministry and our library and cd ministries. The church is more than a school, but a school for disciples it most certainly must be.

The second aspect of our mission is connection with each other in caring community. Some call this fellowship – or “mutually encouraging support.” The church is called in Scripture a family and we are to relate to each other on that basis. Much of what we do is simply designed to draw believers together and create contexts for real fellowship to occur, for friendships to be built. There is a little, but only a little fellowship around our worship times. There is some more in our Sunday Schools. But fellowship is the primary purpose in our care groups, or small home groups. These groups we believe are very important for your spiritual growth and for the health of our body. When we break down into groups of 4-14 we find ourselves in a context conducive to going deeper in our relationships, a context which allows us to really know each other and support one another. I hope each of you will take opportunity to be a part of a care group. We have groups of all kinds. Men’s groups, ladies groups, singles groups, mixed groups. Some emphasize study more, others accountability, others prayer. And they meet at all different times in the week. If you indicate a desire to join a group, I will do my best to find the group most suited to your interests. In addition to our small-group program we have a variety of other fellowship events. Our ladies meetings, men’s breakfasts, men’s and women’s retreats and several other events are designed primarily for fellowship.

The third dimension of our mission is outreach. We exist to be a blessing to those not yet a part of us and we do that in a two ways and three ways. The two ways are: by word and by deed. The three ways are by proclamation, invitation and compassion. Those are your three sub-points. Proclamation is there because we believe the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We declare it from our pulpit, and our website and our Sunday School, but we also want every Christian to know how to winsomely share the gospel with a non-believing friend. As a result, we offer training in evangelism regularly in our church calendar. That’s proclamation.

Invitation is there because we believe God has given us something special in Jesus and the church and we want others to join with us. And it is amazing really, how a simple invitation to church has been so often used by God to radically change people’s lives. You invite, they come, the gospel does its work. So be looking for opportunities just to say to some you know, “hey, I enjoy the church I am a part of. Would you be interested in coming with me and seeing what you think?” That simple, inoffensive question can

open some very wonderful doors. In addition, we hope to create special opportunities thru non-threatening, appealing events, for you to invite someone to church. Invitation.

Thirdly there is compassion. We are to demonstrate the caring heart of our God, by what we do. This takes many forms for us. Things like our recent compassion day wherein we show God's kindness and love in practical ways. The ministry of our Mercy team, helping needy people in our community with gifts and leading us in projects to bless entire neighborhoods. As a church, we are unashamedly pro-life as well and we support the outreach of the Pregnancy Care center which is there for women with crisis pregnancies. The biggest recipient of church support is our daughter church on the North Side of Pittsburgh, New Hope CC and its affiliate ministry New Hope for neighborhood development. These are just some of the ways – and there are many – that we are reaching out with compassion to our community.

So, there you have it. Six letters to remember. WCI stands for? Worship, Connect, Impact. This is our mission. This is what we are about. And how are we going to make our impact? Thru PIC – proclamation, invitation, compassion. Put that all together it tells you what we are asking you to do as North Park member. We are asking you to vigorously pursue an intimate walk with God, learning more of who He is and responding to Him in passionate worship. Yes, that does mean that you will be regular at our services. Then it means that you will seek to connect with others in the body of Christ, developing friends, joining a small group if that is possible. And finally, it means that you will look to have an impact beyond our walls by speaking the gospel, inviting others in and showing mercy in practical ways.

Our next point on the outline is the commitment of the church. And there are several things to discuss under this heading. Let's look first at the vows of membership. When you join our church we ask that you sign the membership covenant which you can find in your notebook. The first part of the covenant contains the vows that we have been going over. These you will not only affirm with a signature but with a public affirmation during a morning worship service. On the bottom portion of your membership covenant you will find what we call the "Participation Pledge." That pledge says, In order that I might grow to full maturity in Christ and that I might be a responsible church member at North Park, I will diligently seek active participation in the life and work of the church. Though I

realize I cannot and should not be involved in every activity of the church, I do purpose to be regular in my attendance at congregational worship and at least one other nurture or service program of the church. In addition to this, I will seek to participate in other church activities when not hindered by sufficient reasons. I do understand the danger of becoming a “Sunday morning church member” only and purpose not to be such myself.

Okay, what is this all about and why do we have it? Well, for one we believe that the participation pledge serves to better explain the vows. In the basic vows you pledge to support the church in its worship and work. Your elders have decided to plainly indicate what we believe minimum support ought to be. Secondly, we believe the pledge will serve to encourage folks to take their membership vows seriously. We believe that membership in the church is a valuable and important thing and ought to be taken quite seriously. Thirdly, the participation pledge serves to validate one’s membership privileges. As a member of the church you have certain voting powers that we see as unfitting someone who is not really taking part in the ministry. And finally, I should note that the pledge is not an absolute requirement. It is possible to be a member without signing it. Some people have a signing phobia, and even though they won’t sign, they do intend to do what the pledge says. That’s fine. We’re not after a signature, we are after commitment. Then too, some folks sincerely believe they cannot and should not do the two meetings called for. If that is you, simply meet with us to explain why your circumstances warrant making you an exception. But, understand, that we are saying this – our default expectation is that you will do something else besides morning worship. At least one other thing. It could be a small group, working with student ministry, singing in the choir, Sunday school – whatever.

You know, I am in sort of an awkward position to be the one calling you to commitment to the Lord’s church since the church is my career and in advancing one you advance the other. But I know this – I loved the church long before it was my career. When I got out of college I told my pastor that my goal in life was to do all I can to build up another church like the ones I had been a part of. I praise God that I have had that opportunity. And I will gladly call you to be committed to the church of Christ, because Jesus Himself was committed to the point of dying for His church. So, I am simply calling you to be committed to what Jesus is committed to. A man named Timothy

Dwight, president of Yale and a revival preacher wrote these words in a hymn, *“I love thy kingdom Lord. The house of thine abode, the church our blessed redeemer saved with his own precious blood. For her my tears shall fall, for her my prayers ascend, to her my cares and toils be given, till toils and cares shall end.” Amen and amen.*