



CHRIST COVENANT CHURCH
A CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNITY

New Member Orientation

Reviewed and Updated 07/17 by Rev. JMT

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The Biblical Concept of Church Membership

People often ask, “Why do you emphasize membership? Where is that in the Bible?” The answer is simple: while the phrase “church membership” is not used explicitly in the Bible, the concept is presupposed on every page. Real community takes real commitment. To be a member of a church is to make a public promise to live according to biblical teachings and to support the mission and ministry of the local church.

We believe that church membership is a biblical concept and an essential part of demonstrating our commitment to one another. If Christ Covenant Church is to be your home church, we hope that you will formalize your membership with us. However, if you decide not to join Christ Covenant Church as a member, you may continue to worship with us, but you will not enjoy all the benefits of membership.

How do I become a member of Christ Covenant Church?

All prospective members must go through a membership orientation prior to joining Christ Covenant Church. This provides an opportunity to learn more about who we are, what we believe, and what we do as a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first step in the membership process is to let one of the elders know that you desire to pursue membership. The next step is to fill out spiritual pilgrimage form that tells us basic info about your life with the Lord. This will help us get to know you better and discern ways you might best participate in the life of the church.

In a presbyterian church it is the responsibility of the Session (a group of elders) to examine and receive all new members, and it is their responsibility to watch over the souls of all the members under the care. (The word *presbyterian* comes from the Greek word for *elder*.)

After you express your desire to place membership and complete the spiritual pilgrimage form you will meet with our elders to share your faith story and express your affirmation of the five membership vows. The vows are designed to help you express your commitment to Christ and your commitment to the Church.

Your Commitment to Christ:

1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?

Your Commitment to His Church:

4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

The five membership vows are taken from the Book of Church Order (57-5). They are based on sound biblical principles and reflect the spirit of the gospel.

Just to be clear: we welcome into our fellowship all who profess faith in Jesus Christ, are willing to be or have been baptized with water in the Name of the triune God, and, promise to enter into a solemn covenant with Christ and His Church.

My Spiritual Pilgrimage

Name

Date

Please check below which statement best describes where you are in your spiritual journey:

- I am confident of my relationship with Christ, having already trusted him as Lord and Savior.
- I am not confident of my relationship with Christ though in the past I think I have sought to trust him as Lord and Savior.
- I have never trusted Christ as my Lord and Savior, but am presently investigating such a relationship.
- I recently prayed and received Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

If you were to join Christ Covenant Church, by what means would you join?

- Profession of faith in Christ (I've never been a member of another church.)
- Reaffirmation of faith in Christ
- By transfer of another church (I am a member in good standing with another church within the last year.)

Please indicate your status regarding baptism:

- I have never been baptized.
- I was baptized as an infant.
- I was baptized as an adult.

I have these questions about Christianity and/or Christ Covenant Church:

Membership Vows

In his book, *The Creed of Presbyterianism*, Dr. Egbert W. Smith writes of the Presbyterian church: “Her door of entrance is as wide as the gates of heaven.” In a large sense, this statement is very true. The requirements for membership in the church are basic and biblical.

Actually, people may become members of the church in three different ways:

- They may be received by the session (the elders) of a particular Presbyterian church on the basis of their transfer by letter from another evangelical church. (An evangelical church is one that requires a profession of faith in the historic Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for membership.) Members who are received from other churches are not baptized again and are not required to make another public profession of faith.
- They may unite with a Presbyterian church by making a restatement or reaffirmation of their faith before the session. Sometimes for reasons of time or circumstance, it is impossible for a person to secure a certificate of membership in order that he may move his membership to a Presbyterian church. Some evangelical churches will not grant certificates of transfer allowing their members to unite with churches of other denominations. In such situations, the person who desires to join the Presbyterian church is asked to re-affirm his faith before the session by answering the same questions asked of those who unite with the church on profession of faith. Such persons, however, are not re-baptized or required to make another profession of faith.
- A new Christian, or a child of the Covenant, becomes a *communicant* member of the church by making a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Those who become communicant members of the church in this way appear before the session and answer satisfactorily five fundamental questions prescribed by the Book of Church Order. If they give evidence of sincerity and earnestness in their faith in Christ, the session votes to admit them to the ordinances of the church and to church membership. They ordinarily then appear before the congregation to repeat their public profession of faith in Christ, usually by answering again the five questions from the Book of Church Order. At that time they also receive Christian baptism, if they have not already been baptized in infancy or childhood.

In whichever of these three ways a person becomes a communicant member of the church, it is assumed that he understands and gives agreement to the five questions in the Book of Church Order. The questions do not constitute an examination of intelligence or learning; they are simply aids to help describe one's Christian experience.

These are the basic vows of church membership, describing what we believe to be necessary in order for a person to be a Christian.

Your Commitment to Christ: Vows 1-3

Sin and Its Consequences

The first questions asked of those who seek to become members of a Presbyterian church is: *“Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?”* This question points to the fact of sin and what sin does in the lives of people. For a person to become a member of the church, he should know what sin is, that he himself is a sinner, and that sin leads to spiritual death. No one who thinks himself “good” is approaching religious experience prepared to understand or accept Jesus Christ as Savior in full, Christian sense.

What is sin? It is “self” going against the will and the way of God. God made known His will and His way in His Commandments. When we violate the laws of God we are guilty of sin. “Whosoever committed sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4).

There are two ways of breaking the law: (1) by failing to do what the law requires, and (2) by doing what the law forbids. A man who fails to pay his taxes breaks the law by failing to do what it requires. A man who drives fifty miles an hour in a thirty-mile speed zone breaks the law by doing what it forbids. Men violate God’s law in the same ways. Paul wrote, “For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do” (Romans 7:19).

Whosoever else may be harmed by it, sin is basically an offense against God. When David had committed a grievous evil against Uriah and his wife, Bathsheba, he prayed to God, “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (Psalm 51:4). Sin is so offensive to God that He cannot look on it: “Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity” (Habakkuk 1:13).

Who does sin affect? It touches and damages the life of every person. All who ever lived have sinned except one, and that is Christ himself. The Bible states very clearly that all are sinners and that all have sinned. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8; see also Ecclesiastes 7:20 and Romans 3:23). Not only does the Bible tell us we are sinners, but when we are honest with ourselves, our consciences tell us the same thing.

Where does sin lead? It always leads to death. Death came to our first parents, because of their sin. All of their descendants have been sinners and have deserved death because of their sins. “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”(Romans 5:12; see also Romans 6:23 and Ezekiel 18:4). Spiritual death means being separated from God forever (Isaiah 59:2).

In our own strength there is nothing we can do to overcome the evil effects of sin in our lives. We know what we ought to do, but we find ourselves unable to do it. Paul said, “For I know that in me [that is in my flesh] dwells no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18).

If there is any help for us as sinners, it must come from someone else. Other people cannot help, because they are sinners too. Our help comes only from the Lord. There is nothing we can do about sin, but he has already done all that is necessary. We deserve death, but God takes away our sin and gives us eternal life in its place. “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Who Jesus Is and What He Does

The second question asked of those who would join a Presbyterian church is: *“Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for your salvation as he is offered in the gospel?”* In order for a person to say “yes” to this question, he must know who Jesus is and what he does.

When the Bible refers to Jesus as the Son of God, it clearly means that he is equal with God, that he is God. He said, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). Again he said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). The Bible ascribes to the Lord Jesus qualities, honors, and works that can belong to God alone. The clear estimate of the Scriptures is that Jesus Christ is God.

The Lord Jesus is also human. The Bible represents him as a human being who was born of a woman, who lived a truly human life, and who died a real death. The Scriptures leave no doubt as to the reality of his humanity. As to his nature, our Lord is both God and Man.

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (see Luke 19:10 and Mark 10:45). He could save others because he had no sin of his own for which to answer (see 1 Peter 2:22). He died in the place of sinners to answer for their sins (Romans 5:6,8). He, the Son of God, took the punishment of those who were guilty in order that the guilty might share the reward of the innocent (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Lord Jesus died our death that we might live his life.

When we say the Jesus Christ saves people, we mean that he delivers them from the death and punishment they were to receive because of their sin. Instead of death and punishment, he gives them life and joy. There is a great difference between being saved and being lost (see John 3:36). Those who are saved by Christ have the hope of the resurrection and the hope of heaven (see 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 and John 14:2,3). Those who have not found him have not this hope.

When mealtime comes around, a healthy boy will know that he is hungry. He also knows that his mother loves him, and that she has prepared food for him and the rest of the family. He believes these things, but his belief must go one step more before his hunger can be satisfied and his body can be nourished. He must actually sit down and eat. Believing in Christ for salvation is very much like this. The sinner may believe that he is a lost sinner and that Christ can save him, but before he can be saved, he must accept Christ’s salvation (see Romans 10:9 and John 1:12).

It is so easy to be lost. All that is necessary is to neglect or refuse to accept Christ as Savior (see John 3:18). It is also easy to enter the door leading to salvation. All one must do is to receive deliberately God’s free gift of life (See Ephesians 2:8-9).

We remember always one important fact which must never be overlooked: There is only one way to be saved, for there is none other Name given us but that of the Lord Jesus (see Acts 4:12 and John 14:6).

How a Christian Should Live

The third question asked by those who unite with a Presbyterian church is this: *“Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will live as a follower of Christ?”*

This question indicates that being a Christian makes a difference in the way a person lives. Before a person can faithfully make the promise that the question requires, he must know what the Christian life is and how he can go about living it.

The book of 1 John calls on Christians to “walk in the light” and “walk in love.” Walking in the light means knowing and following the will of God as it is revealed in the Bible (see Psalm 119:111,130). Walking in love means living a life of love toward God and others. Jesus said that love of God and love of our neighbors is the fulfillment of the law (Matthew 22:36-40).

Now this is not to suggest that we are saved because of the way we live! We are saved by believing in what Christ did for our salvation and receiving Him (Ephesians 2:8-9). But we certainly will live in a different and better way because we are saved. . . because we are Christians.

A Christian is a changed person, and he ought to live a changed life (2 Corinthians 5:17). The same Christ who saves from sin will, by his Spirit, help believers live the kind of lives they ought to live: “As ye therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6). We receive Christ by faith. We must live the Christian life in the same way--faith. This was Paul’s secret of Christian living: “I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me” (Philippians 4:13).

Your Commitment to Christ: Vows 4-5

The Church and Its Work

The fourth question asked prospective Presbyterian church members is: *“Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?”* Before anyone can honestly and intelligently say “yes” to this question, he must know something about the church and its work.

The Bible describes the church as “the body of Christ.” Christ is the Head of the body, and those who believe in him as Lord and Savior are the members of the body. The work of the church is to worship God, to teach and preach the Bible, and to provide fellowship for its members. The church does its work through its teachers, preachers and missionaries; through its services and sacraments; through its organizations and activities; through its schools and colleges; through its boards and agencies; and through its literature.

How can an individual church member support the worship and work of the whole church? One of the most important ways is by attending its services faithfully (Hebrews 10:25). He can share in the work of the church by doing willingly whatever he is asked to do (Colossians 3:23).

Church members support the work of the church by their gifts. We believe that every Christian ought to tithe, to give a tenth of his income to the work of the Lord (Malachi 3:10), according to the grace given to each one (*see Appendix A*). But the most important way a church can support his church is to pray for it. This is something which every member can do (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

The fifth question persons are asked when they become members of a Presbyterian church is this: *“Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?”* In order to answer this question honestly, a person must know several things about the government of the church.

Christ is the Head of the Church. Members of the church look to him alone as the supreme authority. The task of the church, then, is to teach, explain, and enforce the law of Christ as we find it in the Scriptures.

The PCA (of which CCC is a member church) has a constitution, a statement of what we believe the Bible teaches. This constitution has two main parts. The first part is doctrinal: the teaching of the Bible about what we are to believe and how we are to live. This doctrinal part, sometimes called the Confession of Faith, is actually divided into three parts: the Confession of Faith proper, the Larger Catechism, and the Shorter Catechism. But the constitution also has a section on government, expressing what we believe the Bible teaches about how the church should be governed. The divisions of this Book of Church Order are: the Form of Government, Rules of Discipline, and the Directory of Worship.

What does it mean when the church member promises to submit to the government and discipline of the church and to study its purity and peace? It means that he should know and obey the constitution of the church, and that he should honor the officers of the church (elders and deacons) as they teach the Scriptures and enforce the constitution.

Perhaps the Lord Jesus has called you who read these pages into this fellowship. If so, may he, the great and only Head of the Church lead you into ever fuller experiences of his grace and ever increasing usefulness in his kingdom, and to him be the glory.

Expectations of Members

What does it mean to be an active member of Christ Covenant Church? How should you flesh out your promise to support the Church and submit to her officers? Here are a few basic expectations and responsibilities of members:

1. Members of Christ Covenant Church shall devote themselves to both private and public means of grace, including the regular attendance of appointed worship services and fellowship gatherings, missional communities; private and family devotions with Bible reading and prayer; and the showing of hospitality to the saints. (Hebrews 10:21-25; Ephesians 4:11-16)
2. Members of Christ Covenant Church shall devote themselves to the service of their fellow Christians and church members, sharing both material and spiritual blessings with one another.
3. Members of Christ Covenant Church shall, in obedience to the Word of God, practice grace-giving by cheerfully and freely giving of their material increase to the ministry and mission of this church (Matthew 23:23; 1 Corinthians 9:1-14; 16:1; Hebrews 7:1-10). Our tithes, gifts, and offerings are a token of God's gifts to us.
4. Members of Christ Covenant Church shall comport themselves with godly attitude, speech, and conduct toward their fellow church members, being slow to take offense and ready to resolve conflicts according to the instruction of Scripture (Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-20).
5. Above all else, members of Christ Covenant Church shall love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love their neighbor and themselves, and love one another as Christ loved us, not with word only, but with action and sincerity.

Put another way, you only have to be a loving, devout, cross-bearing Christian in order to be a member of Christ Covenant Church. Together, we can put our devotion to Christ into practice.

Appendix A: Why We Worship Like We Do

Every Christian church follows a liturgy—an order of worship or schedule of services—on the Lord’s day. Liturgy is simply the “service of the people.” In an effort to develop a God-glorifying order of worship, we follow a *covenant renewal pattern* of worship that is gospel-shaped, covenant-minded, and God-centered.

Worship is storytelling. Our approach to worship enables us to re-tell the Story of God both as Creator of the cosmos and as Redeemer of his church every week.

God the Creator called things that are not as though they were, and those things confess his name night and day; and he consecrated them by the power of his word, and they commune with him; and he commissioned them to perform special tasks and duties for his glory.

God the Redeemer calls sinners to drawn near to his throne of grace, and they confess their sins to him and confess their faith in him; and he consecrates them by the washing of water with the word, and they commune together with him at his table by sharing bread and wine; and he commissions them to be salt and light to the world.

Also, our approach to worship enables us to remember our place in the Story of God every week. The triune God called us out of darkness into light, and we confess our sins; and he consecrates us by means of the gospel and baptism, and we confess “Jesus is Lord”; and we commune with Christ and one another at the Lord’s table, and he commissions us to go shine like stars in the universe.

Covenant Renewal Worship helps us retell the Story of God in six movements that shape our life.

A typical Order of Worship looks like this:

Call to Worship: God Gathers his People

We begin worship with a greeting, scripture reading, and prayer. Everyone is called to worship God in spirit and in truth. Our music is a hybrid of traditional hymns and contemporary songs. Our singing is congregational.

Confession of Sin: God Forgives his People

When we confess our sins the whole church takes a moment to quietly acknowledge sins to the Lord and seek his forgiveness in prayer. The minister reminds us that God forgives our sins and remembers them no more.

Consecration: God Equips his People

We believe God’s word prepares us for life in this world and the world to come. Before the sermon we listen to the public reading of Scripture. The sermon is always based on a text of the Bible and centered on Jesus. The goal of the sermon is to inform our minds, reform our hearts, and transform our lives according to God's word.

Confession of Faith: God Receives his People

After the preaching of God's word we confess our faith in the Lord. The whole church reads a creedal statement either from the scriptures or the historic creeds.

Communion: God Nourishes his People

We partake of the Lord's Supper each and every Lord's day. Communion is a joyful time of fellowship, prayer, and encouragement for all baptized Christians who trust Jesus. After partaking of the supper we offer our gifts and offerings to the Lord. The offerings are used to support our ministers, ministries, and mission in the gospel.

Commission: God Sends his People

Finally, our ministers send out into the world on mission with the blessings of God.

As reflected in our covenant renewal service, worship is responsive. It involves both receiving gifts from God and giving gifts to God.

Note: Due to the cross-cultural mission of our congregation, our worship service is bi-lingual: all scripture readings and prayers are conducted in English and Spanish.

We recommend learning more about covenant renewal worship in *The Lord's Service* by Rev. Jeffrey Meyers, but the main point is summarized here:

The first [element of covenant renewal that calls for explanation] is the common practice of identifying our worship services with the phrase “covenant renewal.” By this we do not mean that our covenant with God has only a set amount of time on it, and that it might expire like a lease if we do not renew it. Our covenant with God is eternal and will not expire. But it is also alive, and is designed to grow and flourish. As sexual communion renews marriage, or as a meal renews the body, so also the worship of God renews our covenant with Him.

The second element of covenant renewal that calls for explanation is the pattern or structure of worship. Our services are “bookended” by the opening and closing. When the minister declares the “call to worship,” the service is convened or established. At the conclusion of the service, when he commissions the congregation by means of the benediction, the people of God are sent out into the world to be salt and light, having been renewed in their walk with God.

The “innards” of the service follow a three-fold structure, which are confession, consecration, and communion. In the Old Testament, there were three distinct kinds of sacrifices—the guilt offering, the ascension offering (often translated as whole burnt offering), and the peace offering.

The guilt offering was intended to address a particular sin on the part of the worshiper. The ascension offering was an offering of “entire dedication.” The whole sacrificed animal ascended to God in the column of smoke as an offering to Him. The peace offering was one which the worshiper was privileged to partake of as a covenant meal.

Whenever those three offerings are mentioned together in the Old Testament, they are listed in that order, which makes good sense. You deal with the guilt first, you dedicate all to God, and then you have communion with God. This is why our covenant renewal services follow the structure they do, absent the sacrificed animals. Jesus Christ died once for all, in order to be the fulfillment of the entire sacrificial system—He was not just the guilt offering. However, we are called to offer ourselves as living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God.

So this is why our worship services, once God is invoked, contain these three elements. First we confess our sins, and receive the assurance of pardon. Second, we dedicate ourselves to God (Scripture reading, sermon, offertory, etc.). And then last, we observe the Lord's Supper. Once that is all done, we receive the benediction, we go out into a lost world that needs to hear about Jesus Christ.

[<https://dougwils.com/books/covenant-renewal-2.html>]

God calls his people to assemble together to worship and serve him, to offer spiritual sacrifices and declare his praises, for the praise of his glory, and the good of his people (Rom 12:1-2; Phil 3:3; Heb 10:22-25; 1 Peter 2:5, 9). The true and living God is not a God of confusion but of peace, therefore all things must be done properly and orderly (1 Cor 14:33, 40). It is necessary to worship God on his terms alone for our God is a consuming fire (Heb 10:22-25; 12:28-29).

Appendix B: The Sacraments

The Lord Jesus Christ has given the Church two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are signs and seals of the new covenant which fulfill the signs and seals of the old covenant -- circumcision and Passover (Matthew 28:19; Romans 4:11; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:23-26; Colossians 2:11-12).

These signs of the cross represent Christ and His saving benefits, and they place a visible distinction between those that belong to the Church and to the rest of the world.

Baptism is a rite of initiation which is to be administered once only to any person.

Baptism is a sacrament, wherein the washing with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,(1) doth signify and seal our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord's.(2)

(1) Matt. 28:19. (2) Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27.

Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him;(1) but the infants of such as are members of the visible church are to be baptized.(2)

(1) Acts 8:36-37; 2:38. (2) Acts 2:38-39; Gen. 17:10. Cf. Col. 2:11-12; I Cor. 7:14.

The infants and children of Christian parents may be baptized, provided their parents commit to raise them up in the Lord. Also, adults and adolescents who profess faith in Jesus Christ may be baptized, provided they are not yet baptized. There is one baptism.

The Lord's Supper is a rite of nutrition which to be observed frequently and repeatedly until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth; and the worth receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.(1)

(1) I Cor. 11:23-26; 10:16.

It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body,(1) of their faith to feed upon him,(2) of their repentance,(3) love,(4) and new obedience;(5) lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.(6)

(1) I Cor. 11:28-29. (2) II Cor. 13:5. (3) I Cor. 11:31. (4) I Cor. 10:16-17. (5) I Cor. 5:7-8. (6) I Cor. 11:28-29.

We observe the Lord's every Lord's Day until Christ comes. All baptized Christians, who profess faith in Jesus Christ, may partake of the bread and wine, provided they are not unrepentant of sins, under discipline, or unaware of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Appendix C: Why We Baptize Infants

There is one baptism (Eph 4:5; 1 Cor 12:13), therefore we hold that baptism is to be administered once only to any person, in light of the divine promise and in response to the priority of grace. Any practice which might be interpreted as 'rebaptism' must be avoided.

We hold to *covenant household baptism* according to the doctrine and practice of the apostles. Biblical support for covenant households comes from the OT and the NT:

In the OT (e.g., Noah and his family – Gen 6; Abraham and his household – Gen 17; Moses and his children – Exo 4:24-26).

In the NT (e.g., Cornelius and his household – Acts 10; Lydia and her household – Acts 16; the Jailer and his household – Acts 16; and Crispus and his household – Acts 18; Stephanus and his household – 1 Cor. 1:16). Also, Paul teaches that just as all Israel were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea, so also all Christians are baptized into Christ and his church (1 Cor 10:1-5; 12:13).

Baptism is a sign and seal of the new covenant and should be applied to all the covenant people of God, including new converts, their children, and the children's children.

In *missional situations*, new converts are to be baptized upon profession of faith in Jesus Christ. If a new convert is married, his/her spouse will be encouraged to believe and be baptized. If the new converts have children, they will be encouraged to make disciples of their children by presenting them to the Lord to receive baptism in the name of the triune God and by teaching them to trust and obey Jesus as they grow up in the Lord.

In *ecclesial contexts*, where a Christian family is established in the church, second-generation Christians (and beyond) are encouraged to make disciples of their children by presenting them to the Lord to receive baptism in the name of the triune God and by teaching them to trust and obey Jesus as they grow up in the Lord.

While the Session encourages all Christian parents to present their infants and children for baptism, we acknowledge that God alone is Lord of the conscience.

Since the time of the Reformation, Christian churches have differed and divided over baptismal practices. Christ commands all nations to be baptized, yet when and how a person is baptized is, at times, a matter of conscience for individuals, Christian parents, or the local church.

We acknowledge that there are different opinions on proper baptismal practice. With respect to those differences, we allow for the baptism of the children of Christian parents *or* for the baptism of children and adolescents who profess faith in Jesus Christ. In sum, we accept the baptism, whether of adults, adolescents, children, or infants, as legitimate Christian baptism, only when it is administered with water, in the triune Name of God, in accordance with the gospel of God's grace.

We hold that baptism must be administered to all God's people by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, sooner or later. While we believe sooner is better, we will not make the moment or the method of administration a point of contention among us; nor will we allow it to cause division among the Church which was purchased with the precious blood of Christ. "For by one Spirit we are baptized into one body." (1 Cor 12:12-13)

The Sixty Second Case for Infant Baptism (*From Infant Baptism And the Silence of the New Testament by Bryan Holstrom*)

God made an everlasting covenant with Abraham and commanded him to circumcise every male child in his household, which was to serve as a sign of the covenant between them. (Gen. 17:9-14).

This covenant, which was a covenant of election, finds its fulfillment in the promised seed, Jesus Christ, and continues in force until all those for whom He died are welcomed into His kingdom (Gal. 3:16-4:7; Heb. 6:13-18; 9:15; 1 John 2:25).

With the death and resurrection of Christ, the sign of the covenant was changed to baptism, in order to reflect the reality that a bloody sign (circumcision) was no longer appropriate, now that Christ had shed His blood for the remission of sins (Heb. 9:23-10:14; Matt. 28:19-20).

The New Testament is devoid of any language suggestion that the rules for membership in the church have changed from what had prevailed for two thousand years. On the contrary, because the new covenant era is an era of greater grace, the application of the covenant sign is not longer limited only to males, but now encompasses all the children of believers (Acts 2:38-39).

Because baptism has replaced circumcision as the sign of the covenant, Paul connected the significance of the two rites, and described baptism as the ‘circumcision of Christ’ (Col. 2:11-12).

The household baptismal accounts in Acts demonstrate that the principle of family solidarity that applied in the Old Testament period still holds true in the New Testament era. They also make it highly probable that Acts, contrary to popular opinion, contains explicit accounts of children being baptized (Acts 10:24-48; 16:11-15; 16:25-34).

Paul declared that the children of Christian parents are ‘holy’ (1 Cor. 7:14).

Jesus rebuked His disciples for trying to prevent believers from bringing their infant children to Him in order to receive His blessing. He told them that “of such is the kingdom of God,” and warned that those who reject the reception of little children in His name thereby reject Him (Mark 10:13-16; Matt. 18:1-6).

Recommended Resources:

- *Christian Baptism* by John Murray
- *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, edited by Gregg Strawbridge.
- *Baptism: Three Views*, edited by David F. Wright, with contributions from Sinclair Ferguson (infant baptism), Bruce Ware (believers only baptism), Anthony Lane (dual practice)
- Bryan Chapell, *Why Do We Baptize Infants*

Still have questions: Check out our pastor’s four-part essay on baptism
<https://christcovenantc.wordpress.com/baptism/>

Or watch this video by Dr Richard Pratt <https://vimeo.com/14485026>

Appendix D: Missional Witness

We strive to be a missional church. Some folks think being missional simply means being progressive and culturally-relevant. For our purposes, missional is simply about being shaped by the gospel in order to re-shape the world with the gospel. We are sent out by God to seek and save the lost for the sake of Christ, not seduce them for the sake of church growth.

In an article on the *Missional Church* Tim Keller observes, “In conservative regions, it is still possible to see people profess faith and the church grow without becoming ‘missional.’ Most traditional evangelical churches still can only win people to Christ who are temperamentally traditional and conservative. But this is a ‘shrinking market.’ And eventually evangelical churches ensconced in the declining, remaining enclaves of “Christendom” will have to learn how to become ‘missional’. If it does not do that it will decline or die. We don’t simply need evangelistic churches, but rather ‘missional’ churches.”

A missional church is one where every member is expected to be a witness of Christ with a redemptive message for the culture. So, a missional Christian thinks, lives, and acts like a missionary to his/her community. Our mission is simply to tell the world what we have seen and heard about Jesus Christ. And he is pleased to add saved sinners to churches that devoted to apostolic teaching, the prayers, worship and communion, and the fellowship (Acts 2:41-47).

Again, Tim Keller observes that “A ‘missional’ church is not necessarily one which is doing some kind of specific ‘evangelism’ program (though that is to be recommended). Rather, 1) if its members love and talk positively about the city/neighborhood, 2) if they speak in language that is not filled with pious tribal or technical terms and phrases, nor disdainful and embattled language, 3) if in their Bible study they apply the gospel to the core concerns and stories of the people of the culture, 4) if they are obviously interested in and engaged with the literature and art and thought of the surrounding culture and can discuss it both appreciatively and yet critically, 5) if they exhibit deep concern for the poor and generosity with their money and purity and respect with regard to opposite sex, and show humility toward people of other races and cultures, 6) if they do not bash other Christians and churches—then seekers and non-believing people from the city A) will be invited and B) will come and will stay as they explore spiritual issues. If these marks are not there the church will only be able to include believers or traditional, ‘Christianized’ people.” That’s what we strive to do.

Our mission is to be witnesses of Christ in our corner of the world. Witnessing requires us to take the cross to the culture; it requires us to seek and save the lost where they are. Witnessing requires us to tell the story of the good news of Jesus with our lips and with our lives, with our words and with our works, with our hearts and with our hands. Witnessing requires us to intervene and interfere in the lives of people around us for God’s glory and for their good.

The mission of God originated in eternity past (*before times eternal*) within the Holy Trinity. As the eternal gospel breaks into families, tribes, and nations in real space-time history, the mission of the triune God converges in the life of every sinner who is chosen by grace, and repents their sins, and believes the good news that Jesus is Lord.

What started out with One God in Three Persons will end up with One God in Three Persons and a great multitude of people that no one can number, from every nation, from all tribes and people-groups and languages, standing before the throne of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. Worship is the end-goal of the mission of God.

Remember: We’re on a mission from God. So “let us arouse ourselves to the sternest fidelity, laboring to win souls as much as if it all depended wholly upon ourselves, while we fall back in faith upon the glorious fact that everything rests with the eternal God.” (Charles Spurgeon)

Appendix E: Tithes and Offerings

Supporting the worship and mission of the church to the best of your ability is one of the membership vows. While this certainly includes much more than money, it does not include less.

God is sovereign over all things, yet he works through ordinary means to accomplish extraordinary ends. Like other institutions, churches need resources, including money, to carry out their ministry and mission in the world. A glad, generous, grace-giving church is able to do many more things for the glory of God and the good of others than a grumpy, greedy church.

God alone is Lord of the conscience, so we will not require any members to give beyond what they decide to give according to their faith and good conscience. However, we would like to see our members grow in the grace of giving – to make a commitment to give joyfully, intentionally, regularly, and generously as an act of worship.

Statistics show us that most Christians only give 3% or so. Yet we have received much more under the Gospel than our forefathers received under the Law. So we want to urge our members to make every effort to give at least 10% of their income to the Lord. As grace enables them, they may freely give above and beyond that. (Acts 11:29; 2 Corinthians 8:3, 8-9; 1 Timothy 6:17-18; Hebrews 13:5-8)

We want you to think and pray about ways you can faithfully steward what God has given you. Meet needs around you generously as you see needs. Give to specific ministry projects as they arise. Pay your bills and debts. Invest wisely. But, give the first-fruits of your money to the Lord first. As Scripture says,

Proverbs 3:9-10 “Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.”

Malachi 3:10 “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and test me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until there is no more need.”

2 Corinthians 9:7 “Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

When we give in this way, we are trusting and obeying God’s word. We are also reminding ourselves that the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it. Finally, we are demonstrating that we possess our wealth, but it does not possess us.

A Giving Plan:

1. Evaluate your own heart and life with regard to money. What do you most enjoy spending money on? What percentage of your income is going 1) to God’s Kingdom (your church, other Christian ministries), and 2) to help those in need (outside your family)? How close is it to 10% of your income? Read Matthew 6:19-34, 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:6-15. How might you need to adjust your giving in light of gospel virtues, in terms of eternal investments?

Many of us have made poor decisions with our money. Perhaps this is a good time to admit that and get help to get out of debt, start saving for the future and doing whatever possible to live within your means. There are people in our church who would love to help you on this issue. Doing this helps you live in much more freedom. And just think of all the money that you could give to the cause of Christ and the church instead of to credit card companies.

2. Do you have a regular plan for giving? First, decide what percentage of your income you will give to the Lord’s work this year. Then, ask yourself if this is sacrificial and, on the other hand, if this is responsible. Last, whenever money comes in, set aside the Lord’s portion first, with the understanding that it is his, not yours.

3. Prayerfully distribute the money among Christian causes. We hope your church is your primary avenue of spiritual growth, and giving to your home church will be a first priority. But there are other churches, missionaries, and ministries that are worthy of support as well.

4. Evaluate your use of “non-liquid” resources. For example, are you using your car for God’s glory by giving people rides? Are you using your house to God’s glory by inviting people in? Do you have special resources that God has blessed you with? If so, are you generous with those?

A Giving Worksheet

Your income and giving is between you and the Lord. We do not ask or require you to show us the results of this exercise, but it might help you prioritize and set goals according to God’s word.

My annual income is \$_____ A tithe of that take-home income (10%) is
\$_____ My offering beyond the tithe will be \$ _____

You can give weekly or monthly as God’s grace allows. Giving is an act of worship so we encourage you to give on the Lord’s day. Or you may give online as well.

Appendix F: Our Denominational Affiliation: The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)

History – Presbyterianism has a long history in America, dating as far back as the mid-1600's. The first General Assembly for Presbyterians in this country was held in 1788. While there have always been several Presbyterian groups, the largest group split along Northern and Southern lines for political and doctrinal reasons in 1861.

The roots of our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), are found in what was commonly called the Southern Presbyterian Church, officially the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS). In 1973 a group of churches and ministers left the PCUS out of prayerful concern that the old denomination was abandoning its orthodox, evangelical witness—particularly its allegiance to the authority of Scripture.

Today – While the PCA started in the South, it is certainly not an exclusively Southern church. The PCA has grown quickly to include churches all over the United States and Canada. In 1982, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES), a heavily Northeastern and Midwestern body, joined the PCA.

In fact, for many years the PCA has been one of the fastest growing denominations in America, with much of its growth taking place in the Northeast and on the West Coast.

The PCA has one of the most notable church-planting track-records of any contemporary denomination.

The Southwest Church Planting Network has planted over 50 churches in the United States and another 50 churches overseas since 1990 in Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona. (see plantchurch.org)

Reformed University Fellowship is gaining momentum as a campus ministry. This began in 1973 with one campus. It chugged along, mostly adding campuses here and there in the south and southeast. As of 2011, there are over 130 RUF chapters, all run by ordained PCA campus ministers. These are found in Washington, California, Boise State, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Minnesota, Michigan and even in Mexico City and Athens. (see ruf.org)

Presbyterian Organization and Government

1. Presbyterian churches are governed by groups of men commonly called elders. (The Greek word for elder is *presbyteros*.) Ordinarily, “elder” refers to laymen who are called to share in the governing of the church; these men are often called “ruling elders.” Ordained ministers are also considered elders, and in the PCA are often called “teaching elders.” Basically, all ministers are elders, but not all elders are ministers. (We at Christ Covenant Church use the term “pastor” or “minister” to refer to what the PCA calls “teaching elders.”)

2. When Presbyterians use the word “church,” we often mean more than just the local congregation. The church exists in concentric circles of accountability, and the governing councils are historically known in Presbyterianism as the “courts” of the church.

A local church body is governed by its minister(s) and elders; this council is called the session. At the present time Christ Covenant Church has one teaching elder, and one ruling elder, although we look forward to equipping and ordaining other men for the office of elder.

The regional church is also governed by its ministers and elders; this council is known as the presbytery. We are a part of the North Texas Presbytery. We meet together four times a year, and you are welcome to attend our meetings.

The highest church council for the entire PCA also consists of ministers and elders; this is called the General Assembly. It meets once a year in June in various locations. (see pcaac.org)

3. The job of the ministers and elders is essentially pastoral; they are to shepherd and lead the flock. The minister and elders are to receive, guide, direct, and guard (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:1-3); to teach and exhort (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9); and to correct (Titus 1:9; Acts 20:30-31). Ministers especially carry out this pastoral duty by devoting themselves to the public preaching and teaching of the Word of God. However, the other elders also teach the people, primarily in classes, small groups, and in personal conversation.

The pastoral duty of the pastors and elders, of course, includes dealing with sheep who go astray. As individuals and as a group, ministers and elders have a responsibility to instruct and warn believers who are falling into false doctrine or unbiblical patterns of behavior.

As a group, the members of church courts may exercise formal discipline over church members under their oversight. If necessary, they may impose the following formal censures: admonition (a formal warning to repent), suspension from the sacraments, suspension or removal from office (for ministers, elders, and deacons), and excommunication (the solemn removal of a person from membership in Christ's Church). In all cases, strict controls are to be followed, and the goal is always for the wayward sheep to be welcomed back into the fold with celebration.

Ministers and elders are also to equip believers for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12) and oversee the various ministries of the church (1 Timothy 3:5; 5:7). This does not mean that the ministers and elders "run" the church, in the sense of micro-managing its day-to-day operations and ministries. To do this would not only distract them from their unique responsibilities, it would rob the men and women of the church of their opportunity to use their God-given abilities in ministry. Yet the ministers and elders do have a responsibility to ensure that the ministries are faithful to the theological vision of the church.

4. In addition to ministers and elders, PCA churches typically have one other "office," that of deacon. The primary ministry of the deacons is to assist the ministers and elders in various ways, including the oversight of ministries of mercy to the poor and needy. We believe the call of the deacon is a call to service and not rule. So, the office of deacon is an office of service. The deacon is called to serve the church in the areas of mercy ministry, benevolence, property, finance and missions both local and global.

5. Important Note : When considering these Reformed & Presbyterian distinctives, please remember the following: No one is required to agree with every jot and tittle of Reformed doctrine in order to be a member of a PCA church. (You don't have to be a Presbyterian to be a member of a Reformed and Presbyterian church!).

We do require elders to take a vow subscribing to the Westminster standards as containing the "system of doctrine" taught in Scripture. Leaders of other ministries, such as children's classes, missional community groups, worship teams, et al are expected to understand our distinctives, to work with those of us who hold Reformed views, and not to undermine the distinctives of the church.

But all that is required for church membership is that one be a Christian. If you can make a credible profession of your faith in Jesus Christ, and if you are baptized or are willing to be baptized, then you are welcome to become a member of Christ Covenant Church.

Other Affiliations

At Christ Covenant Church, we believe it's important and valuable to be a part of other groups of people who are like-minded and we will seek to do so as long as that doesn't take away from our focus in our community and our vows and obligations to our denomination. We are connected to Reformed Theological Seminary (Dallas), listed as members of the Gospel Coalition (another group that focuses more on conferences and resources), and strive to maintain good relationships with other Christian churches and pastors in our area.