

Membership at Christ Community Church, PCA (Presbyterian Church in America): Part 1

Introduction

Thank you for considering membership at Christ Community Church! We hope this process—*2-3 sessions over coffee or meals to be scheduled based on availability and an interview with 2 of our elders*—helps you get to know us as a local church and us get to know you better as a follower of Christ. The process seeks to be relational and offers plenty of opportunities to get your questions answered and concerns addressed before making any commitments to membership. **Taking public vows before God in covenant commitment to membership in a local church is a serious matter that we neither want to rush nor take lightly.** As **Proverbs 20:25** teaches us, “It is a snare to say rashly, “It is holy,” and to reflect only after making vows.”

We confess that we are not going to live up to your expectations despite our best efforts. As a church, we are going to fail you in a host of ways despite our best intentions. All of your needs will NEVER be met here. This is a messy place where we often struggle with hypocrisy, self-righteousness, doubt, fear, anger, love, compassion, etc. Conflict and difficulty will occur; however, if you are willing to join us, then you will discover a family of brothers and sisters in Christ who willingly offer each other the help necessary to be faithful and glorify God in a very broken and fallen world.¹

¹ This paragraph originates with Steve Brown who makes similar comments whenever he welcomes people or invites people to church.

Before We Get Started...

If you are transferring your membership from another church or were a regular attendee for 6 months or longer, we will need to contact your pastor and/or the elders or leaders to ensure that you left well and were in good standing as much as it depended on you with the church before we complete this process. If you are leaving that church under difficult circumstances or under church discipline (which happens at times and does not automatically disqualify you from membership), we still require you to do everything you can to leave that church well and at peace before you begin this process. We will need to confirm this with your previous church if possible. We are willing to walk with you through this process to help bring resolution and glory to God. Ultimately, it is the session's discretion as to whether it would be wise and edifying for you and CCC to pursue membership at this time.²

Questions for Session 1:

1. *If you could change 1 or 2 things about Christ Community Church, what would they be and why? Can you live with them if they don't change?*
2. *Were you a member or regular attendee for 6 months or longer of another local church? What was your reason for leaving? Did you leave well as much as it depended on you? Do you have any issues with us contacting the previous church's leadership?*
3. *What does it mean to you to be a member of a local church?* We just want to know what you understand about church membership so don't worry getting the right answer!
4. *Why is it important to you to become a member of Christ Community Church? How have you grown spiritually in the time that you have been here?* Tell us about your connections and what excites you at CCC.

Notes and Questions:

² See the **Book of Church Order**, II. Preliminary Principles, 2., in the Preface

First Things First: Is Membership in a Local Church Biblical?

Let's start with the question: "*Is membership in a local church biblical?*" This is not a bad question, but the more direct and applicable question is "*Does the bible clearly command membership in a local church?*" The answer in short is "*No, the bible does not explicitly command that believers should join a local church, nor does it prescribe what the membership process should look like.*" The next best question is "*Didn't I become a member of the universal church when I confessed my need for Christ alone through faith alone by grace alone?*" The answer is a resounding "*YES!*" This, then, begs the most pertinent question of all: "*Why then do we have local church membership?*" I am glad you asked!

While the Bible does not directly command believers to join a local church or prescribe what the membership process should look like, many passages clearly show participation in and submission to a local church. The birth of the church proper begins in **Acts 2** with newly-baptized believers from Pentecost devoting "themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" which also included "selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need" and "day by day, attending the temple together." From this example, we infer that participation in a local expression of faith should include:

1. A confession of faith in Christ alone through faith alone by God's grace alone and baptism in response³
2. Devotion to biblical teaching (or the apostles' teaching) which includes the Old Testament as it pointed forward to Christ and the New Testament as it reveals Christ and points forward to his return⁴
3. Regular fellowship to hear the Bible taught, partake of the Lord's Supper, pray, and attend to each other's needs⁵

Throughout the book of Acts, we read about individual churches, with local leadership in various towns such as Jerusalem, Antioch, and Ephesus. The church at Jerusalem in **Acts 6** encountered a problem that required a new leadership position. The diaconate (or deacons) was formed to address physical needs within the church so that the apostles could devote themselves to the ministry of prayer and the word. The position had set qualifications indicating that it was not temporary and would be an ongoing part of the local church. In **Acts 13**, the local leadership of the church at Antioch set Paul and Barnabas apart as missionaries to send them out to preach the

³ This does not prove that baptism is for believers only in response to salvation. The church is just beginning with its first generation in a similar fashion to the formation of Israel in which the first generation experienced circumcision at their current age while the following generations were circumcised on the 8th day. In the same way, Peter declares in **Acts 2:38-39** that this promise signified in baptism is for both the first generation of adults and for subsequent generations of children.

⁴ See also **Luke 24:27**, **2 Timothy 3:14-17**, **Hebrews 1:1-2**, **2 Peter 1:16-21**

⁵ See also **Ephesians 4:1-16**, **Galatians 6:1-10**, **Hebrews 10:23-25**, **1 John 3:16-18**

gospel and plant other churches as needed. They return in **Acts 14:27** to share with the local church all that God was doing among the Gentiles, indicating submission to their local leadership as a governing authority. Paul meets with the elders at the church in Ephesus in **Acts 20** to challenge them to protect their local flock from the wolves who come bearing the teeth of false doctrine. These passages show local expressions with local leadership to whom the local flocks submitted in accord with the apostles' teaching. From these passages, we infer:

1. There are local expressions of the church⁶
2. These local expressions have their own leadership with unique qualifications and responsibilities (elders and deacons)⁷
3. An account of the needy was kept⁸
4. Missionaries are to be commissioned by and report to the local sending church
5. The local flock submits to the local leadership as they obey the teaching of Scripture to protect them through discipleship and discipline⁹

Paul's letters to the Corinthians provide many insights regarding local church membership. In the first 6 chapters of **1 Corinthians**, Paul addresses several problems within the church at Corinth. This presupposes an existing set of beliefs and practices, consistent with the apostles' teaching, to which local believers were expected to adhere. **1 Corinthians 5** reveals that the local leaders have the authority to discipline and remove those who are unrepentant in their violation of these accepted beliefs and practices from the regular fellowship of the saints. He also clarifies in **2 Corinthians 2:5-11** the local leadership should lovingly pursue the one excommunicated to reconcile and restore to fellowship if possible.

1 Corinthians 12 and **Romans 12** discuss the use of spiritual gifts through the analogy of the human body with its differing parts working together for the good of the whole. Paul in **1 Corinthians 14** speaks of the gifts being used in a local worship service. The believers vowed to do things decently and in order to edify all present. This means that there had to be an organized local gathering of believers that would engage in worship which revered the Lord and respected those attending who do not understand the gospel of Christ. These local believers had to willingly submit to Paul's apostolic authority and commit to his teaching for the good of the whole and the glory of God as well as the local leadership in administering this authority. From these passages, we infer:

1. Fidelity and submission to beliefs and behaviors related to the apostles' teaching are expected.¹⁰

⁶ See also the various letters of Paul to the various local churches at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and Thessalonica as well as **Revelation 1-3: The Seven Churches**

⁷ See also **1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, 1 Peter 5:2**

⁸ See also **1 Timothy 5:3-16**

⁹ See also **1 Timothy 5:17-20, Hebrews 13:17**

¹⁰ See also **John 15:1-17**

2. Violation of these beliefs and behaviors warrants discipline from local leaders with repentant submission being the means of reconciliation to fellowship with the local church. Unrepentant rebellion leads to excommunication with periodic engagement from local leaders until reconciliation occurs.¹¹
3. Every believer has gifts and a role to play in the local body as determined by the Holy Spirit.¹²
4. Some gifts are to be used in local worship that is to be done decently and in order so that the gospel is clear and edifying to all present for the glory of God.

All of these passages combined portray the local church in the first century and help us understand what it should look like now. These passages clearly show the necessity for local leadership who meet set qualifications. The responsibilities of these leaders are to care for the local flock through the ministry of the Word, the practice of the Lord's Supper and baptism, the provision of a decent and ordered worship service, the care and provision for physical needs, and the practice of discipline when someone conflicts with the apostles' teaching. Believers' responsibilities include participating in a local church by sitting under the teaching of the Word for the purpose of being equipped, using their spiritual gifts where appropriate, giving their resources to meet others' needs and those who lead them in the ministry of the Word, submitting to the local leadership as it is consistent with the Word, and committing to regular gathering for worship. These responsibilities are necessary parts of the ordinary Christian life that God has called us all to lead. We cannot expect to grow into Christian maturity if we neglect the worship of the church.

These things require significant consideration and commitment from both the leader and the members of the flock locally. In fact, this resembles a marriage relationship in which significant consideration and commitment are required of both spouses to make the marriage work to the glory of God. Just as the marriage covenant helps both parties remain committed to one another during difficult times, so do the membership covenant and vows help the church and its members stay committed to one another when times get hard.

Think about how difficult all of these things are within our culture which struggles with authority, commitment, consumerism, radical individualism, institutional distrust, etc. Given these realities, we think having a process whereby you can consider these concerns (and a few others) in an environment where you can ask questions and wrestle with your conscience and convictions before you commit to being a member of a local church is very important. This is the purpose of CCC's membership process. We also think that you should be able to make public vows of commitment to both Christ and the local church as evidence of considering and then committing to this local church to the glory of God. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 22, paragraphs 3, 6, and 7 helpfully illustrate our understanding of oaths and vows:

¹¹ See also **Matthew 18:15-17**, **1 Timothy 5:20**, and **Titus 3:10-11**

¹² See **1 Peter 4:10-11**

3. *Whosoever takes an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth: neither may any man bind himself by oath to any thing but what is good and just, and what he believes so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform. Yet it is a sin to refuse an oath touching any thing that is good and just, being imposed by lawful authority.*

6. *It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone: and that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith, and conscience of duty, in way of thankfulness for mercy received, or for the obtaining of what we want, whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties: or, to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto.*

7. *No man may vow to do any thing forbidden in the Word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he has no promise of ability from God. In which respects, popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.*

These sections clearly show that our vows are made before and to God and are bound by His word alone and not by the traditions or commands of men outside of or in contradiction to His word. Remembering this is really important as the leadership and circumstances of the church may change, but our vows before God to that local body should remain firm unless He calls us elsewhere to glorify Him.

We do not desire to boost our numbers or have a bunch of names on a roll with no commitment to the communion of saints. We genuinely want you to flourish in worship and the work of the ministry where the Lord has called you to live, work, serve, and play. Please take this process seriously, giving it the necessary time for study and prayer.

Questions for Session 1:

1. *What is your experience with church membership? How many churches have you been a member of?*
2. *Is church membership biblical?*
3. *What is your view of taking a public vow before God?*

Notes and Questions:

Membership at CCC: An Overview

According to the Book of Church Order in the Preface under II. Preliminary Principles, each local church can decide the terms of membership. The section reads: *2. In perfect consistency with the above principle, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ has appointed. In the exercise of this right it may, notwithstanding, err in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet even in this case, it does not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own.*

We do not desire to complicate membership unnecessarily, however, we want to be discerning and not cheapen membership as well as trying to protect you and the church from potential problems that could have been addressed before vows are taken. In order to join Christ Community Church, one must confess and adhere to the essentials of the Christian faith which include:

1. *The Holy Scriptures are true, authoritative, and sufficient for salvation as they reveal the person and work of Jesus Christ.¹³*
2. *The Trinity¹⁴ is one God who is sovereign over all things¹⁵ in three persons, the God the Father¹⁶, Jesus Christ the Son¹⁷ and the Holy Spirit¹⁸, each functioning within their role in the economy of redemption and equal in power and glory.*
3. *Humanity was created by God to be His image bearers¹⁹ but descended into sin and misery justly deserving eternal death in judgment because of Adam's sin rendering all unable to do anything to please God unto salvation apart from union with Christ.²⁰*
4. *Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived perfectly in full humanity while also being God, gave His life on the cross, rose again on the third day, ascended to the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for the saints, and awaits His return to judge the wicked and make all things new.²¹*
5. *Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and is sealed in the Holy Spirit.²²*

¹³ Psalm 19:7-11, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, 2 Peter 1:20-21; WCF 1; WSC Q. 2, 3, 88, 89; The Chicago Statement of Inerrancy (Appendix A)

¹⁴ Genesis 1:26, Psalm 45:6-7, 110:1, Matthew 3:13-17, 28:17-20, 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; WCF 2; WSC Q. 6; The Apostles' Creed

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 45:5-6, John 17:3, Romans 5:12-21, 8:28-39, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; WCF 3-5; WSC Q. 4-12, 20

¹⁶ Romans 8:15, Galatians 3:23-29, Ephesians 1:3-10

¹⁷ John 1:14-18, 3:16-21, Romans 6:1-11; WCF 8; WSC Q. 21-28

¹⁸ John 14:15-31, 16:4-15, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; WSC Q. 29-30

¹⁹ Genesis 1:26-31; WCF 4; WSC Q. 9-10

²⁰ Psalm 51:3-5, Romans 3:9-31, Ephesians 2:1-3, 1 John 1:10; WCF 6; WSC Q. 14-19, 82-84

²¹ Matthew 1:18-25, Mark 15, Luke 24, John 1:1-18, Acts 1:6-11, Hebrews 2:5-18, 4:15, Revelation 21-22; WCF 8; WSC Q. 21-28

²² John 14:6-7, Ephesians 2:1-10, Colossians 1:15-23; WCF 14-15; WSC Q. 85-87

6. *Salvation is evidenced by life in and the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is reflected in loving the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind (worship) and your neighbor as yourself (mission) as expressed in and through the community of a local church*²³

These essential doctrinal truths (or the apostles' teaching) defined the first church in *Acts 2:42*. These essential doctrinal truths continue to define the church today. While a host of theological and cultural issues merit our discernment and attention, we emphasize majoring on the majors and minoring on the minors. The above doctrinal essentials are the majors. We believe that in the essentials there must be unity; in the non-essentials, there must be liberty; and in all things, charitability, and humility. We will examine each of these throughout the membership process so don't be overwhelmed by the footnotes. The references are to help you in case you have any questions.

We want you to understand our commitments so that you will be able to work with and support those who hold them if you become a member.²⁴ If you have particular concerns with fundamental aspects of our church like music style, preaching, children's ministry, or a cultural position that will detrimentally affect your worship and growth in Christ, then we encourage you **not to join** our church and continue to seek the Lord's guidance as to where you can worship in Spirit and truth and use your gifts to His glory. *We genuinely desire that you would be able to flourish in union with Christ as a result of your church membership whether at Christ Community or at some other Bible-based, God-glorifying church.*

²³ Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 10:25-37, John 14:12-14, 15:1-17, Romans 6:1-14, 8:1-11, Galatians 5:16-26; *WCF* 13, 25, 26; *WSCQ*. 35-36

²⁴ Affirming Reformed convictions is necessary for those who wish to hold an ordained office in the church.

Take a moment to review the five membership questions below, and consider how you would answer each as you begin the membership process. We will return to these along the way and at the end of the process.

Membership Questions

To become a member in any PCA church, you will be asked these five membership vows:

Vows Concerning the Trinity:

- 1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope, except through 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 trust 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?*

Vows Concerning the 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 strive for its purity and peace?*

Questions for Session 1:

- 1. What is your view of God's Word? The Trinity? Creation? The Fall? The Person and Work of Jesus? Salvation? The Christian Life?*
- 2. Are there any doctrinal, theological, and/or biblical issues that are not listed that you think are essential?*

Notes and Questions:

Critical Concept: The Gospel (The Good News)

The Gospel contains the essentials of the Christian faith that must be believed to be a member at Christ Community. Unfortunately, this word has been thrown around so much and used so variably that misunderstandings occur. We need to make sure that our definitions of “gospel” and “Christian” match, given that these terms are critical to becoming a member of our church.

Let’s start with the bad news. Scripture teaches that our first parents, the historical Adam and Eve, abused the freedom of their own wills by eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. This act cast us all, as their children, into an estate of sin and misery. This original sin left us radically depraved with our whole nature corrupted so that we don’t want to nor are able to be in relationship with the Holy God. However, God, in His grace and mercy, did not leave His children in this condition that leads to eternal death. This begins the good news of the gospel! God chose to provide a means of salvation in the person and work of His Son Jesus.

Before we explain the good news (the literal translation of the word “gospel”), let’s look at what the Gospel is NOT. The Gospel is NOT merely a legal or business transaction, a rescue plan, something that we do, the movement from rebel to righteous, related to a single historical moment in time, or the work of Jesus apart from God or the Spirit. Even the oft quoted “Jesus saves sinners” as short hand for the gospel is limited and doesn’t communicate the Gospel’s full beauty. While each of these has elements of truth, they are not the whole truth.

The Gospel is the power of God for the total salvation of everyone who believes and the restoration of all things on a cosmic scale- as written in **Romans 8**. More fully, God the Creator has acted according to His will to deliver us, His created sons and daughters, from our sins and restore us to Him. He did this by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life on the cross for the sins of his people satisfying His wrath toward sin. Jesus was then raised from the dead to grant us newness of life in the resurrection, ascended to heaven where he continues to intercede for us, and will return again to make all things new and glorious. In summary, you are not being saved FROM God, but you are being saved TO God! He has pursued you in Christ so that you may dwell in and be blessed by His presence for all of eternity!

We enter this beautiful, unfolding, mysterious process by the effectual call of the Holy Spirit that leads us to submit to Jesus Christ as Savior.²⁵ This leads to justification and adoption by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Justification according to **WSC Q. 33** “is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone.”²⁶ **WSC Q. 34** describes adoption as “an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number and have a

²⁵ John 6:44-45, Acts 26:18, 2 Timothy 1:9; WSC Q. 31

²⁶ Romans 5:1-11

right to all the privileges of the sons of God.”²⁷ This grace and faith in the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit are also critical to the process of sanctification. According to **WSC Q. 35**, “sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”²⁸ It is critical to keep in view that salvation is not only about what you don’t do but is more about what you do or how you now live in freedom in Christ.²⁹ Jesus came to grant God’s children life more abundant!³⁰ This glorious salvation includes past, present, and future realities (justification/adoption, sanctification, and glorification). The Gospel brings us all the way home to dwell with and enjoy God for eternity and assures us of God’s love, giving us peace and joy as the Holy Spirit guides us in grace and perseverance.³¹ This is not just good news; it is GREAT news!

While God’s plan of salvation is according to His redemptive will as governed by His sovereignty and providence, humanity is still responsible. The Bible does not present us with an "either/or" proposition regarding the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man in salvation. It teaches "both/and." God is sovereign in our salvation. It is His work. He receives all the glory. Christians are called His "chosen" or "elect." He must draw us to Himself, and He preserves us when we trust Him. Yet, we are also responsible before God for our actions and rebellion. We must turn to Christ, trust Him, follow Him, and persevere through the means of grace that He has provided.

Because humanity is made in God’s image and given the Great Commandment (“Love the Lord your God...and love your neighbor as yourself...”) and the Great Commission (“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...”), God rightly judges our rebellion to our image-bearing and calling. God will bring all things to consummation at the Final Judgment, taking His own to be with Him forever and casting all others into hell forever, thus removing all barriers to His children dwelling with Him in uninhibited glory in the new heavens and the new earth.³² At long last, God’s children will be able to worship in unfettered and unveiled glory!

²⁷ Romans 8:12-17

²⁸ Romans 6, 8:1-11

²⁹ Galatians 5

³⁰ John 10:7-11

³¹ WSC Q. 37

³² 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 20:11-15; Revelation 21:1-8

The Gospel in Trinitarian Key

This table summarizes the distinctions concerning the past, present, and future realities in the Gospel, the roles of each member of the Trinity, and your responses as a result:

The Gospel	God the Father	Jesus the Son	The Holy Spirit	You
<u>Past:</u> <u>Justification /</u> <u>Adoption</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creator -Bestows electing grace according to His will -Sends Jesus the Son to be the mediator of redemption -Adopts us as heirs to all the heavenly gifts and promises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participates in Creation -Lived a perfect life -Bears the sins of the elect past, present, and future and satisfies God's associated wrath -Rises from the dead and justifies the elect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Participates in Creation -Effectually convicts and calls the elect to repent and receive Christ as Savior -Indwells the elect as evidence of justification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Surrender in faith to Christ as Savior knowing that you are helpless to justify yourself because of your sin inherited from Adam and Eve
<u>Present:</u> <u>Sanctification</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In His sovereignty and faithfulness, continues to work all things for His glory and our truest good -Grants what we need to glorify Him 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Applies the resurrection to us so that we may walk in newness of life -Intercedes on our behalf from His ascended position at the right hand of the Father 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Serves as the Helper to convict, guide, teach, reveal gifts, and produce fruit in our lives so as to transform us into Christ's image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, and mind through worship and obedience -Love your neighbor as you love yourself
<u>Future:</u> <u>Glorification</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sends Jesus Christ in the Last Advent to judge and deliver -Dwells at long last with His children without any barrier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Returns to make all things new in judgment and deliverance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Reveals at long last the sons and daughters of glory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Eternal worship and joy of and in the Father without hindrance

Life in Christ: Your Story

Given that a profession of faith in Christ alone, by faith alone, by God's grace alone is the most important qualification for membership, we want to make sure that we are talking about the same thing. While one can state many ways to follow Christ, here is a simple summary:

The ABCD's of Being a Christian

1. **There is something to Admit.** Christians, empowered by the Holy Spirit, admit that they are weaker, guiltier, and more sinful than they would have ever dared admit by their own strength. Though we were created for relationship with God, our sinful natures and choices separate us from Him. Fundamentally, our lives are self-centered rather than God-centered, rendering us helpless to break this pattern without God's power.
2. **There is something to Believe.** Christians believe that God loves us so much that he sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to become a man and die on the cross as our *substitute* to atone for our sins and satisfy God's wrath. As a result of His perfection and lack of guilt, Jesus was raised from the dead in order to offer us newness of life and the ability to flourish. We also believe that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for us and directing the Holy Spirit to help us as we journey between the now and the not yet. We believe that one day Jesus will return to reveal the sons and daughters of glory and restore all of Creation so that we can dwell with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for eternity in the new heavens and earth.
3. **There is something to Consider.** Christians are not naïve and recognize that following Christ will be costly. Being a Christian involves acknowledging Jesus' authority and lordship in every area of life, welcoming His work to change us from the inside out, and rejoicing to spend time with Him and with followers in the life of the church. This can be a messy and painful process though the results are glorious beyond our imaginations!
4. **There is something to Do.** Christians who have received Christ as Savior and Lord and consciously turn from sin, self-centeredness, and self-righteousness (the Bible calls this turning *repentance*). They trust in Jesus alone for forgiveness and acceptance by God (the Bible calls this trusting *faith*). This repentance and faith result in our becoming ambassadors of reconciliation who confess and profess this hope that is within us in the varying contexts of our lives where the Lord has sovereignly placed us. Our lives should bear tangible fruit because of being granted deliverance from sin and death and given resurrection power in newness of life. Our salvation grants us the ability to be obedient to God's Word which is pleasing to Him. This is NOT legalism. Legalism is the belief that our works can save us. Obedience is a grateful response to our salvation.

Questions for Session 1:

1. *Explain your understanding of the gospel. Who has most influenced your understanding?* Share what you have understood it to be even if it is incomplete.
2. *What is your story of becoming a Christian?* We recognize that some have prodigal-like stories that have distinct moments and others have known they were Christians for most, if not all, of their lives with no exciting moments of revelation. Either way, you should be able to profess knowledge of your own sinful state which separates you from God and from which you cannot save yourself. You should also be able to profess faith alone in Christ alone as Savior by God's grace alone.
3. *How does the gospel affect your life? Do you struggle regularly with particular problems that we could help you with?*
4. *How have you grown spiritually over the last 3-6 months? What has been most beneficial to that growth?*
5. *Explain your view of life in the new heavens and the new earth?.*
6. *Explain your view of final judgment and hell.*

Notes and Questions:

CCC's Story and Commitments

Christ Community Church was started in **October 2000** by people who thought the northwest Atlanta metro area needed a new church—a church that would be known for its love for God and its neighbors. As a result, we are a church driven not by mere programs or activities but by an overarching sense of purpose—a purpose centered on the *Gospel*, the good news of God's salvation in Jesus Christ. We launched our first public worship service at Lewis Elementary School in Kennesaw on **September 16, 2001** and in **2005** moved to Bullard Elementary. In **May 2006**, God provided a great opportunity for a new location in the Kennesaw Community Center. In **August 2008**, God enabled CCC to purchase eight acres of prime property on N. Main Street in Kennesaw across from Kennesaw Elementary and Swift-Cantrell Park. We continue to seek God's direction as to how to best use this property for His glory. Also, after 13 years of faithful ministry to CCC, Lead Pastor Mike Glass resigned effective **December 15, 2013**. Cameron Barham was called and began as pastor **September 2014**. We look forward to how God will use our church for His glory in Cobb County and beyond.

CCC is a member of the **Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)** (www.pcanet.org) which means that we submit to Jesus Christ as King and Head of the Church, God's Word as revealed in the Old and New Testaments, the

doctrinal standards as set forth in the **Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF)**, the **Larger Catechism (WLC)**, and **Shorter Catechism (WSC)**, and governance and worship as defined by the **Book of Church Order (BCO)** as they are in accord with God's Word. In short, we are **Reformed** in doctrine and theology and committed to God's Word as the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him. We are locally members of the **Northwest Georgia Presbytery (NWGP)** (www.nwgp.org) and regularly support other local churches in a variety of ways and attend Presbytery meetings three times a year as part of our connection to the wider church. *You don't have to agree with every Presbyterian distinctive to be a member of our church; however, we want to make sure that you are aware of our distinctives!*

CCC's Governance and Leadership

We believe the Presbyterian form of government biblically expresses church polity in both the OT and NT. In **Exodus 18**, Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, advises him to elect qualified men to representatively serve and govern God's people. Paul calls for a plurality of elders to be elected wherever churches are planted (see **Acts 14:23** and **Titus 1:5**). The goal is for leaders to share the burden of serving and leading God's people and to provide checks and balances to prevent abuses of power. Ultimately, the elders submit to Jesus Christ, the Church's true head, who will hold them accountable for how they led their flocks.³³ As a member, you are to also ultimately submit to Jesus Christ as the true head of the church. *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter 20, paragraph 2 enhances our understanding of a healthy balance concerning submission:

2. God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.

You are never expected to submit where it is contrary to God's Word; however, this presupposes that you are versed in the Scriptures.³³ One of the greatest antidotes for submitting to poisonous leadership is to have a thriving devotional life and to take every opportunity to flourish in the means of grace like the Bereans of **Acts 17:11**. We want you to help us as leaders to be accountable to God's Word.

Another distinctive of the Presbyterian form of church government is that it is connectional. This means that our church expresses its connection to the wider body of Christ through a graded series of church courts. Not only does

³³ Acts 20:28, Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-4

this provide our church leadership with a series of checks and balances, it also gives us concrete opportunities to pray for and support the mission of the church in places beyond our local area. As part of the overall checks and balances, there are 3 courts within the PCA. The first court of appeal for a local issue or concern is the session. If they fail to respond appropriately, then one may appeal to the Presbytery. If that fails, then the General Assembly can be appealed to as a final recourse. The Presbyterian Church's courts in summary are:

Session -The policy elders of a local church (meets monthly).

Presbytery -A representative number of elders from churches of a designated geographical area (meets quarterly).

General Assembly -A representative number of elders from the churches of the entire U.S. and Canada (meets annually).

Members agree to submit to these 3 courts and their associated rulings: the leadership of Christ Community Church (Session), our regional (Northwest Georgia Presbytery), and national governing bodies (General Assembly).

CCC is led by a session of elders who are men qualified according to **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1** and are trained and ordained to provide servant leadership and theological oversight through the following duties according to **BCO 8-3**:

1. *Watch over the flock diligently to protect from corruption of doctrine or morals*
2. *Exercise government and discipline*
3. *Visit the flock, especially the sick*
4. *Instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourners, and guard and nourish the children of the Church*
5. *Serve as an example in zeal for evangelism and making of disciples*
6. *All private Christian duties are to be discharged as an official duty*
7. *Pray for and with the flock seeking the fruit of the preached Word*

The elders also promote and lead CCC's vision and ensure that CCC's ministry is pursued with passion, integrity, and truth.

As a function of shepherding the flock, elders are charged to serve as instruments of grace and guidance. This sometimes requires the process of church discipline.³⁴ When a person strays from Jesus and embraces a lifestyle of **unrepentant sin**, the elders are to go to that person with the goal of helping the individual be **restored to spiritual vitality**. This begins with prayer, always requires patience, sometimes involves pleading and exhortation, and may result in restrictions being placed on the person's spiritual privileges if there is no repentance. Unless the end result

³⁴ Church discipline is detailed in the *BCO, Part II- The Rules of Discipline*.

requires the knowledge of the congregation, privacy is of utmost importance. The general principle here is to treat private sins privately and public sins publically.

The levels of censure progress as follows if the one being disciplined refuses to repent and be reconciled:

Admonishment- an official exhortation to repentance from the Word

Suspension from the Lord's Supper

Excommunication— removal from the membership of the church

Removal from office for elders or deacons (defrocking)

Keep in mind that the goal is **restoration of relationships**—with God and/or other believers—through repentance, forgiveness, and restitution (when appropriate). In this way, the glory of God and peace and the purity of the church are maintained.

CCC also has a board of deacons consisting of men qualified according to **1 Timothy 3**, who are trained and ordained to serve the Church's practical ministry of the church through the following duties in **BCO 9-2**:

- 1. Minister to those in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress*
- 2. Develop the grace of liberality (or generous giving) in the members of the Church, to develop effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and distribute those gifts as require*
- 3. Care for the property of the congregation including the upkeep of the physical structures*

Elders at CCC

Cameron Barham, Teaching Elder (Lead Pastor), cameron@christcommunitycobb.org: **Office Availability:** Mon-Thurs; **Flexible Availability:** Mon-Thurs evenings and on Sat and Sun; *Not available on Fridays*

Tim Falkins, Ruling Elder, tim.falkins@gmail.com

Phillip Lucas, Ruling Elder, phillip.lucas@gmail.com

Marc Start, Ruling Elder, mstart99@gmail.com

Jonathan Stuckert, Ruling Elder, jonathanstuckert@yahoo.com

Bill Tippins, Ruling Elder, btippins@bellsouth.net

Paul Wagoner, Ruling Elder, dpwagoner@gmail.com

Deacons at CCC

Jack Lane, Chairman of the Deacons, jtlanejr@yahoo.com

Chris Byerly, Deacon, cmbyerly2024@gmail.com

Jared Eubanks, Deacon, jared.eubanks@gmail.com

Matthew Howe, Deacon, matthew.r.howe@gmail.com

John Huff, Deacon, john.huff@cobbk12.org

Chad Whetzell, Deacon, chad.whetzell@icloud.com

Larry Wells, Deacon Emeritus, l.wells12@gmail.com

Dan Widner, Deacon, danwidner@gmail.com

Staff at CCC

Josh Cuthbertson, Worship Director, josh@christcommunitycobb.org: **Office Availability:** Mon-Thurs; *Not available on Saturdays*

Bonnie Lane, Ministry Assistant and Children's Director, bonnie@christcommunitycobb.org: **Office Availability:** Mon- Thurs; *Not available on Fridays*

Emilie Schelling, Infants and Toddlers Director, emschelling@gmail.com

Matthew O'Sullivan, Youth Director, mbosullivan8@gmail.com

Robby Baxter, Director of Assimilation, robby@christcommunitycobb.org: **Office Availability:** Mon-Thurs; **Flexible Availability:** Mon-Thurs evenings and on Sat and Sun; *Not available on Fridays*

Questions for Session 1:

1. *What is your experience with Reformed Theology? Presbyterianism? PCA? Do you have any concerns with any of these?*
2. *What has been your experience with church government? Which one are you most comfortable with?*
3. *Do you have any problems with any of the current leaders or staff members? If so, how can we help with restoration?*
4. *Are you willing to submit to the current leaders to care for you and your family in accord with God's word and glory?*

Notes and Questions:

LOOKING AT MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Please check below which statements best describe where you are in your spiritual pilgrimage:

- 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, although 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.
- To the best of my knowledge, I have recently prayed to trust Christ as my Lord and Savior.

If you were to join Christ Community Church, by which means would you join?

- I have not joined a church since recently receiving Christ (within the last year), and I am joining Christ Community Church by profession of my faith in Christ.
- I am a member in good standing of another church, and I wish to join Christ Community Church by transferring my membership.
- I am a member under discipline or have not left another church well and will need to work on the reconciliation process with the help of the leadership of Christ Community Church before transferring my membership.
- Neither of the first three statements are true of me, and I would like to join Christ Community Church by reaffirming my faith in Christ.

Please indicate your status regarding baptism:

- I have never been baptized.
- I was baptized as an infant.
- I was baptized as a child/youth.
- I was baptized as an adult.