



MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

The Who, Why, What, and How!

This booklet talks about why membership is important, who are qualified to be members, how you join, and what it means to be a member.

Introduction:

You have been *exploring* our church, and we have been *enfolding* you into our family. You have learned what it means to be a Christ-follower in our Starting Point Class. Baptism and membership are the final pieces before you take the “*being established*” step. This booklet prepares you for church membership in conjunction with the seminar. Read the booklet and answer the questions on page 19 before the seminar.

Why join the church?

We live the Christian life with other Christians and not alone. The Christian life apart from the church is a foreign idea in the New Testament, because the church is God’s agent of accomplishing his world mission. The church’s formation was on Jesus mind when he devoted much time and energy to his twelve apostles (Matthew 16:18). Jesus confers his authority on the church (Matthew 18:17-20) and intended the world to be filled with local churches (Matthew 28:18-20). It is not surprising, therefore, that the new baptized Christ-followers on the Day of Pentecost became a part of the church (Acts 2:37-41). They committed themselves to the apostle’s teaching (the teaching of the Bible), fellowship (sharing their money with one another), breaking of bread (the Lord’s Table) and prayer (Acts 2:42-47).

The church includes every follower of Jesus around the world throughout church history. A local church is a physical representation of the whole church. Paul addressed the Corinthian believers as a part of the whole church:

“To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours,” (1 Corinthians 1:2).

Like the church in Corinth, our church in Oneonta New York is a visible expression of Christ’s church around the world. Becoming a member of our church tangibly expresses your solidarity with every other follower of Jesus Christ.

Who joins the church?

Qualified persons who join Main Street Baptist Church profess faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Each person publicly expresses their faith in Christ by coming to the waters of baptism. When the people asked Peter what they should do in response to his message on Pentecost, he said, “Repent and be baptized to receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39).” Peter urged the crowd to change their minds about Jesus and to turn away from their sin, receiving God’s forgiveness that only comes through Jesus. It was a decision they must make, and when they did so, “*they were added to the church.*” Have you made this decision and have you publicly expressed your decision by being baptized?¹

How Do I Join?

If you have made that decision and you have been baptized by immersion, *your next step is to meet with the elders, explaining your story and your desire to join the church.* Before you meet with these men, write out your story in two to three paragraphs with this simple three-point outline: “*Before*”, “*During*”, and “*After*”. Describe your life *before* you made the decision; talk about the decision accepting

¹ If you still need to a pastor to baptize you by immersion, we will do a separate study with you. The Starting Point Class also teaches on baptism.

Christ as your savior and the occasion of your baptism (*during*), and how your life changed *afterward*. For some this outline may be difficult, because they are not sure of the actual point of conversion, because it was more of an extended process. What is important however, is for you to explicitly state that you have placed your trust in the Lord Jesus as your Savior and describe what he did for you on the cross and with his resurrection. Be clear on this point. You can also include a scripture that has been helpful to you on your spiritual journey.

Following the membership seminar, contact a pastor to arrange a meeting with the elders. The chair will ask you to tell your story, inquire why you want to join, and if you agree with our covenant and core convictions (usually referred to as our doctrinal statement). Following the interview, the board votes, and publicly welcomes you to the church family in both services. The presiding pastor calls the elders and deacons to the platform first and then asks you to come. Once on the platform, you will face the congregation as the pastor introduces you and then he will ask you to walk past the line of elders and deacons to shake their hands. You will then return to your seat.

What does it mean to be a member of Main Street?

When you join our church, you formally agree to live by our covenant and you embrace our core convictions. The remainder of this booklet explains the covenant and core convictions. The seminar explores the practical implications of living out this covenant and reviews the convictions.

The Covenant

As disciples of Jesus Christ our Lord, we agree to follow him in reverent obedience. We shall love one another, pray for each other, share in one another's joys and support each other in sorrow. Acknowledging that each has received spiritual gifts from God, we shall seek to serve one another accordingly. We shall strive to be responsible members of this church in meeting together, studying the Scriptures, giving, submitting to the leadership, sharing the good news of Christ with others, and giving and praying for the missionaries at home and abroad. We shall make every effort to maintain the unity of the body. We accept responsibility to correct one another and submit to correction. Remembering that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble, we shall do nothing out of ambition or conceit, but shall seek always to consider other's needs. In our daily living we shall seek to so yield to the Spirit that his presence will be manifest in our lives.

Bound together in a fellowship of faith with all who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, we shall pray and labor for a spirit of unity among all Christians. Believing that our call to be a church is a call to witness to the world, we commit ourselves to the proclamation of the gospel and to the support of our co-laborers everywhere.

Admitting our weaknesses, we recognize that the Christian life is a life of repentance. We confess our need for the Scriptures, for the Holy Spirit, for the encouragement and help of the church family. We commit our lives, and families and our church to Jesus Christ and to the care and mercy of Almighty God.

The Covenant Explained:

Paragraph #1: Privileges & Responsibilities

We agree to love one another: Essential in obeying Christ is to love each other. Other people know that we're followers of Jesus when we show love to each other by doing dirty jobs like washing each other's

feet (John 13:12-17, 34-35). It is not always easy to love others, but if we really love them, we will do what is best for them, helping them however we can (1 John 3:17-18).

We agree to pray for each other: We pray for every Christian (Ephesians 6:18) to know the hope of living with Jesus in heaven forever and that he has God's power to live the Christian life (Ephesians 1:17-19); we pray that he has strong faith (Colossians 4:12), and knows how to apply God's word to his life (Colossians 1:9-12).

We agree to share in each other's joy and support each other in sorrow: We celebrate with other Christians when God brings about good things, but we also cry with them when things aren't going well (1 Corinthians 12:26) and when things get difficult we help them with their difficulties (Galatians 6:1).

We agree to serve each other with our spiritual gifts: Your community group or ministry team can help you discover the special abilities God has given you to serve in the church. We need everybody to serve so that our church can be healthy. (Ephesians 4:11-13). God expects each of us to use our special abilities (Romans 12:4-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 12:7).²

We agree to be responsible in four areas:

- (1) *Faithful attendance:* Commit to attend Sunday services, and faithfully participate in a community group to help you and others stay spiritually strong (Hebrews 10:25).
- (2) *Faithfully telling others about Jesus* in your outpost (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21). An "outpost" is a detachment of troops stationed at a distance from the main force or formation, usually in a remote location.³ Likewise, church members are detachments placed among the twenty-seven thousand non-churched persons living in the ten-mile radius of Oneonta. Your outpost can include your neighbors, workplace, school, or social club.
- (3) *Faithful obedience to those who teach the Bible and help us live the Christian life*—pastors, elders, group leaders, and teachers (1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7, 17). A community group or mentoring relationship is a great place to help you apply God's word to life.
- (4) *Faithful giving of our money* to pay the expenses of our church ministry, to reach out to Oneonta and surrounding towns, and to help our missionaries around the world (Luke 16:10-12). The Old Testament established the practice of a tithe (ten-percent of one's income) to support the services of the tabernacle/temple, Leviticus 27:30. Jesus sees tithing as the starting point of giving, Luke 11:42.

We agree to maintain unity within the body: We are not a loose collection of individuals, but a family (Ephesians 2:19). Unity requires humility, gentleness, and patience with each other (Ephesians 4:2-6). We do not throw a tantrum when we do not get our way, but rather make others' needs a priority (Philippians 2:3-4).

We agree to correct and submit to one another: We must be truthful and honest with each other to grow as a church (Ephesians 4:15, 25). When we see another Christian doing something wrong, we need to speak kindly to him in private about it and be forgiving (Luke 17:3-4). We also must listen to others when they point out our sins, and make the necessary corrections (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:21).

² The S.H.A.P.E. inventory not only helps you identify your spiritual gifts, but it highlights other areas that can help you determine your place of service. We also have a ministry guide to help match your S.H.A.P.E. with a ministry area.

³ "Outpost" Wikipedia

We agree to consider one another's needs and refrain from conceit: Our concern is that our entire church family be strong and healthy (1 Corinthians 10:24). We serve to meet others' needs as we consider them better than ourselves (Luke 22:25-27; Philippians 2:3-4).

We agree to yield to the Spirit: The Holy Spirit teaches us about Jesus (John 16:13), gives us the right desires (Romans 8:5-8), and enables us to become loving people (Galatians 5:16-25). The Spirit also equips us to speak of Jesus to others (Luke 12:11-12; Acts 4:31).

Paragraph #2: The world-wide Church of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2). Our unity with other Christians is tangibly expressed by working with other gospel preaching churches in Oneonta on joint initiatives, and by partnering with thirty-plus missionaries around the world (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27). Each community group takes a missionary under its wing to help our members have a personal connection. Main Street affiliates with the National Association of Evangelical Churches, and the Venture Church Network of the Northeast. These partnerships affirm our commitment to the larger body of Church. It is wonderful to know that we can serve with them, in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Paragraph #3: Growth Still Needed! When we give our lives to Jesus we turn away from sin (Matthew 4:17), but sinful thoughts, attitudes, and actions are still a part of our lives. As Christians it means stop thinking and doing wrong things and we replace them with right attitudes, thoughts and behaviors (Romans 6; Ephesians 4:17-5:7; Colossians 3:1-17). So we recognize the following:

- (1) *We need the Scriptures*—because God is the author of the scriptures (1 Timothy 3:16-17). The Bible is our teacher and trainer. It also shows us our errors and corrects us when we need it. The Bible makes us ready for service.
- (2) *We need the Holy Spirit*—because the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to be loving people, demonstrating lives of peace and joy, being patient, kind and good toward others, and displaying faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-26).
- (3) *We need each other*—because our own sin will deceive us and others can point out our blind spots and help us to actively love people (Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Participating in a community group and serving on a ministry team are opportunities for others to encourage you and for you to encourage them.
- (4) *We need Christ's and the Father's merciful care* — because both are in charge of our lives and they will never let us down (Joshua 1:9; Hebrews 13:5-6).

Living out the covenant happens in in a community group and on a ministry team. A community group consists of 8-12 persons that meets at least twice a month. We categorize our ministries into eight basic ministry areas⁴.

Our Core Convictions:

Our core convictions are the guardrails on the roadside to keep us from going off the cliff. Throughout history, a constant onslaught of wrong teaching threatens the church. This is why Paul implores Timothy when serving in the Ephesian church to “guard the deposit that was entrusted to him”

⁴ See the ministry guide for more information, and take the S.H.A.P.E. inventory to help you find your place of service.

(2 Timothy 1:14). The church has produced such statements as the “Apostles Creed” as a way of guarding this deposit. Similarly, we have eight core convictions, frequently called our doctrinal statement.

God & God the Father:

We believe in one God, Creator and Ruler of all things, who is all-knowing, all-powerful, ever-present, and changeless in his perfection. He is holy, righteous, faithful, merciful, loving, just and forgiving.

Gen. 1-2; Psalm 139:1-12; Mal. 3:6; James 1:17; Isa. 5:16; 6:3; Lam. 3:22-23; 1 Jn. 4:8; Ps. 130:3-4

The one God exists from all eternity in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in every divine perfection. God the Father, an infinite personal Spirit, is a God of holy love, who hears and answers prayer and mercifully saves all who come to him through faith in Christ his Son.

Deut. 6:4; Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:12; John 4:24; Ps. 90:2; Jer. 33:2-3; Matt. 7:7-11; John 3:16; Rom. 10:9-13.

God, the Son:

We believe in Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God miraculously born of a virgin, true God and true man. We believe in his sinless life and in his miraculous works, demonstrating his power. Jesus died for our sins as an atoning sacrifice, bearing the wrath of God in our place. He was buried and was raised again the third day, the Victor over sin, death and Satan. He was seen by many eyewitnesses, and then ascended into heaven, where he now intercedes for us.

Lk. 1:31-35; Jn. 1:1,14,18; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; Jn. 20:30-31; Rom. 3:25; 1 Pet. 3:18; 1 Cor. 15:3-8; Col. 2:15; Acts 1:3-11; Rom. 8:34.

God, the Holy Spirit:

We believe in the Holy Spirit who indwells all who believe. The Holy Spirit opens sinners' hearts so they repent and confess, "Jesus is Lord;" all believers are baptized by one Spirit into one body, Christ's church. The Spirit gifts and empowers Christians for manifold ministries, so that the unity and the diversity of the church are both the work of the one and the same Spirit. The Spirit seals believers for the day of redemption.

Jn. 14:16-17; Rom. 8:9; 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:3-28; Eph. 1:13; 4:30.

The Scriptures:

We believe the Bible to be the Word of God written, completely and verbally inspired by God, inerrant in the original manuscripts, and of supreme authority in the church and the life of the believer in all matters of faith and conduct. The Scriptures lead us to Christ for salvation.

Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4; 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:21; Lk. 24:27, 44; Jn. 6:39, 45-47; 10:35.

Creation and Humanity:

We believe that God created the universe out of nothing by his powerful word. He created Adam and Eve in the image of God as the pinnacle of his creative work. As in the creation account, and as affirmed by Jesus, marriage in God's plan is the union of one man and one woman for life, and children are his gracious gift. God's standard for sexuality is: within marriage, fidelity; outside marriage, abstinence. But man rebelled against his Creator, thus bringing upon himself the just wrath of God. All descendants of Adam are born in sin, with a sinful nature, and need to be saved from sin. God calls all people everywhere to repent and trust in Christ.

Gen. 1:1-2:4; 2:18-25; 3:1-19; Matt. 19:3-6; Heb. 11:3; Ps. 51:5; Eph. 2:3; 5:22-33; Rom. 1:18-3:20; 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; 7:1-7; Heb. 13:4; Acts 17:30.

Salvation:

Salvation, the gift of God, is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith expresses itself through love, and results in a changed life, righteous living, and proper social concern. All who trust Christ will be kept by his power and in his love

forever.

Rom. 1:16-17; Eph. 2:8-10; Gal. 5:6; Tit. 3:5-8; James 2:14-26; Rom. 8:28-39.

The Church:

We believe in the church, created and ruled by Christ. All who believe are members of the church universal. The local church, the local expression of Christ's body, exists to bring glory to God by worshiping him in spirit and in truth, edifying its membership to maturity and ministry, and preaching Christ to the lost. According to the command of Christ there are two gospel ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the immersion of the believer in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit upon confession of faith. The Lord's Supper, the sharing of bread and cup as symbols of his body and blood, is a worshipful proclamation of Christ's death until he returns for his own. We believe each local church is a self-governing body under the authority of Christ and must be free to serve Christ without external compulsion or interference. We also believe in the interdependence of local churches and the mutual submission of believers to each other in love.

Matt. 16:18; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 12:27; Jn. 4:24; Eph. 4:11-13; Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Acts 5:29; 1 Pet. 2:9; Acts 15:1-35; Eph. 5:21

The Return of Christ:

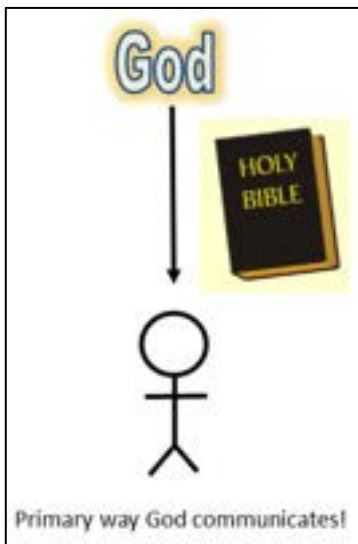
We believe in Christ's personal return in power and glory and in his future kingdom. All people will be raised bodily from the grave, the righteous to the resurrection of life, the unrighteous to the resurrection of wrath. Those saved by Christ will live with God eternally; those who rejected Christ will suffer eternal torment, the consequence of their self-chosen way.

Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 19:11-20:6; Dan. 12:2; John 5:27-29; Rev. 14:9-12; 20:11-15; 21:1-22:6

Five Questions These Convictions Answer

These convictions answer five questions. *First, how do we know about God?* Some say we know

God by bonding with nature. God has revealed himself in creation (Romans 1:20) and each person has an inner awareness of God (Romans 1:21), even having a sense of morality (Romans 2:14-15). There is a difference, however, between knowing God exists and truly knowing God personally! We need more. God spoke to specific persons at specific times and ways, which God has recorded for us in the scriptures. Therefore, we learn about how we can have a relationship with God through Jesus by exposing ourselves to the Bible (2 Timothy 3:15). God has "breathed out all scripture", meaning God is the ultimate author who supernaturally superintended over its writing process (2 Peter 1:20-21). When I come to the Bible, I learn God's will for my life and He censors and corrects me when I get off track. It is the only book that helps me to adequately meet every demand in my service to Christ (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

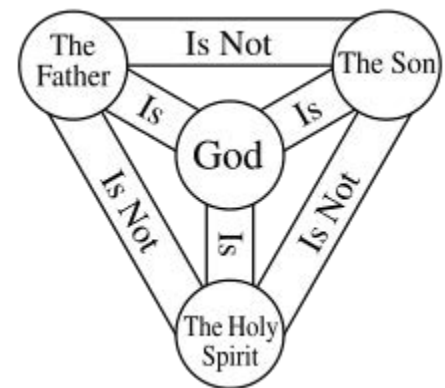


If God is the ultimate author and God can only tell the truth (Titus 1:2; Psalm 12:1), I can be rest assured that the Bible, is completely true in whatever it affirms. It may not speak with precision as a science or history book, but whenever it gives an observation or event, I can count on it being true. Therefore, it is reliable and the Bible becomes my final authority for life and ministry. Jesus tells us that the scriptures cannot be set aside (John 10:35). It has the final say on what constitutes a legitimate marriage, on the proper management of my funds, and on how to love difficult people. If the Bible serves

as this final authority, I must saturate myself with the Bible to let it guide and teach me. Such saturation occurs by faithful attendance to Sunday worship and my community group, and by my habitual reading, studying, memorizing and meditating upon the scriptures.

So if the Bible teaches me about who God is, *what does the Bible teach me about him?* This is our second question. We can all have our own ideas about God, but the Bible gives the answer regarding his nature and being. God has incommunicable attributes (characteristics only attributed to God). God knows all and does not need to investigate to find the answer to anything. He knows what we will say before we even say it (Ps. 139:1-6) and he is present everywhere throughout the created order (Ps. 139:7-10). If God can create the world out of nothing, he is all powerful to accomplish his purpose (Genesis 1-2; Isaiah 55:10-11). God is not a temperamental being, like shifting shadows (James. 1:17). God also has communicable attributes (ones God shares with humanity), however. God is holy (Isaiah 6:3), and he calls us to be holy (1 Peter 1:15-16) God is faithful (Lamentations 3:22-23), and he rewards those who are faithful (Matthew 25:21).

He is One God (Deuteronomy 6:2) and yet three persons (Matthew 28:19). There is no genuine God but Him (Isaiah 44:8), and He is the God of all the earth (Isaiah 54:5). Yet there are three persons, each sharing divine attributes. The word “trinity” came into existence when the Council of Nicene in AD 325 sought to explain the unity and complexity of God.



God the Father does not have a birthday or date of death. He is eternal (Psalm 90:2), but he does not have a body, nor is he “the force.” God is a personal spirit (John 4:24) who responds to our prayers (Jeremiah 2:3) and saves us when we reach out to him (Romans 10:13). He is a perfect Father who meets our needs when we come to him (Matthew 7:11).

God the Son is Jesus, “the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). Jesus is truly God and truly human. Jesus is a full-fledged human being by the miraculous virgin birth (Luke 1:34-35), but his humanity does not diminish his divinity (John 1:1-3, 14). The virgin birth united deity and humanity together and erases doubt that sin tainted Jesus’ humanity. Jesus shares all the divine attributes of God, but he voluntarily did not use his attributes at certain points during his earthly life in order to submit to the Father’s will (Phil 2:7). He must be God to bear the penalty of our sins, because only an infinite God could do so, not a finite creature. Yet if Jesus had not been a human being, he could not have died in our place and paid the penalty we deserved. His deity and humanity, furthermore was necessary in order to serve as our mediator (1 Timothy 2:15). He must be fully God to bring us back to God and reveal God most fully to us (John 14:9) and he must be a human being to represent us to God!

While God the Father ordains His saving plan, Jesus is the centerpiece of that plan (Ephesians 1:9). The miracles and teaching of Jesus signify who he is and his message (Luke 4:32; 7:18-21; Acts 2:22). Jesus’ death and resurrection carry out God’s saving plan to the world. In so doing, Jesus met the demands of God’s justice and thereby brought forgiveness (Romans 3:25; 4:7-8), he defeated Satan himself (Heb. 4:15), and overcame sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). Forty-days later, he ascended into heaven, taking his seat in heaven at the Father’s right hand, serving as our High Priest (Acts 1:10-11; 2:33; Romans 8:35). As the God-Man he bridges the chasm between God and man. That is why we

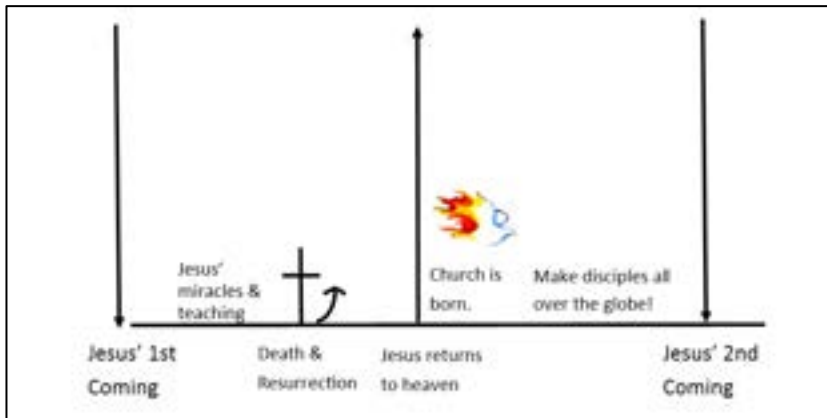
unhesitatingly claim that Jesus is the only One who can save you from your sin (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). There is no other substitute, including Buddha or Mohammad.

The Holy Spirit is equally God, as well. When Peter confronts Ananias for his sin, he makes clear that lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God himself (Acts 5:3-4). The indwelling Spirit in a Christian is the indwelling of God himself (1 Corinthians 3:16). The Spirit applies the cleansing work of Christ and brings about renewal to the Christian's heart (Titus 3:5-6). The Spirit is the agent who stamps God's ownership on one's heart when they believe and guarantees inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14) and baptizes the believer into the body of Christ, gifting them for ministry (1 Corinthians 12:4-13). The Spirit of God moreover is instrumental in a believer's maturity (Romans 8:1-17; Galatians 5:13-25) and empowers him or her for evangelistic ministry and worship (Acts 4:31; Ephesians 5:18-20).

We also must ask a third question, however: *what does it mean to be a human being?* First, every person is a part of God's created order. God created all things to demonstrate his glory, power and honor (Revelation 4:11) as he spoke each part of creation into existence (Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6). Yet humanity is set apart from the rest of the creation as God's image-bearers (Genesis 1:26-28), giving human beings capacity to rule. Adam demonstrated such capacity as he named the animals (Genesis 2:19-20). Yet we were created to love God by obeying him, only needing to know his goodness (Genesis 2:15-17). Each human being is valuable and therefore worthy of respect. Our view of humanity informs our viewpoints on such social issues as abortion, euthanasia, and racism. But it also informs our thoughts on sexuality and marriage.

God created humans for one another, typified in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman. It is a sacred union that expresses covenant love for each other (Hebrews 13:4; Genesis 2:23-25). The genders, male and female, are integral to being created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:27). A marriage relationship between two persons of the same gender is a distorted reflection of what God intended. Moreover, a person wanting to change gender demonstrates a dissatisfaction with the way God has created him or her.

Despite our status as image-bearers, we have a severe problem. This leads us to our fourth question: *What is the problem and what is the solution?* We often think that people are relatively good, but the Bible gives a much bleaker picture! As the early days of history unfold in Genesis 3, the human race fell into sin by the first couple's disobedience, eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So every person is born into sin and under the curse of death (Romans 5:12-19), each with a natural propensity to do wrong (Psalm 51:5). The solution is not to better ourselves by trying to keep religious rules (going to church or helping the poor), but in faith to receive the gift of God that comes through Jesus (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation is God's work from beginning to end. Our previous discussion about Jesus makes clear that Jesus is the only one who can satisfy God's wrath in his atoning death on the cross (Romans 3:22-30).



This brings us to the final question. *What is our life course?* We will answer this question by pointing out two things. First, notice where our lives intersect with God's story. Having received Christ in faith, we are saved from our sin and forgiven by Christ's crucifixion and resurrection (Acts 16:31). In faith, however, we wait for the salvation of our souls (1 Peter 1:8-9) when Jesus returns (Acts 1:10-11; 1

Thessalonians 4:13-18). At that time, God will resurrect Christian and non-Christian. The Christian receives a transformed body and lives with God and Christ in heaven forever (Revelation 21:1-22:6), while the non-believer faces the eternal consequences of their choices (Revelation 20:11-15; 21:8). Therefore, the destination of our life course is heaven with a resurrected body, spending eternity with Christ!

In the meantime, we live by faith, but we do not travel on this course of faith alone. This brings up the second point. We live our lives in community, the church. The church was born when the Spirit was poured out on the one-hundred and twenty believers and three thousand repented and believed (Acts 2). The church consists of those who give their allegiance to Christ who gather and serve together in local congregations (1 Corinthians 1:2). We strengthen one another in our faith in Christ as we exercise our spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:11-13). As we see people baptized, we rejoice as they express their allegiance to Christ and we renew our vows to Christ as we partake of the Lord's Table on a regular basis.

As a local church in Oneonta, we are a self-governing church, under the authority of Christ (Colossians 1:18), managed by the under-shepherds, the pastors and elders. Do not view our self-governance as isolation. In recognition that we are a part of the larger body of Christ, we cooperate with churches in the advancement of the gospel of Jesus (1 Peter 2:9). Jesus has built the church and it is here to stay (Matthew 16:18). Therefore, we travel this life course together as a local church, investing in each other's lives.

Next Steps

Complete the enfoldment step by ...

1. Taking the next scheduled seminar.
2. Preparing your story and meeting with the elders.



Begin the establishment step by ...

3. Joining the adult Sunday school class, a community group or small group.
4. Identifying your outpost and look for opportunities to share your faith in that outpost.
5. Determining your spiritual S.H.A.P.E. by taking the inventory and reading the ministry guide. Your group leader, an elder, or a pastor can help steer you in the right direction.

Review Questions about Joining & the Covenant (pages 1-4)

1. What is the prerequisite for joining the church?
2. How does baptism relate to this prerequisite?
3. When you tell your story to the elders, what should you clearly state?
4. The second paragraph of the covenant lists several things church members agree to do. How does a member practically carry these things out?
5. In the covenant we agree to be responsible in four areas. What are they?

Review Questions about the Core Convictions: (pages 4-9)

6. Why is the Bible so important to the Christian and to our church?
7. God has incommunicable and communicable attributes. What do we mean by this distinction?
8. What is the trinity?
9. Why was it necessary for Jesus to be truly God and truly man to die for our sins?
10. What role does the Holy Spirit play in a Christian's life?
11. What does it mean for God to create us in his image and likeness?
12. Why are we unable to save ourselves from our sin?
13. What are the distinct eternal destinies for believers and non-believers when Jesus returns?
14. How does our church govern itself?
15. Write down what questions you have on our core convictions (our doctrinal statement) on pages 8-11. We will discuss these during the seminar.