

# *Faith, Membership, and Discipleship:* *What we believe*

## *Community Presbyterian Church Membership Standards*

### *Introduction: Participation and Membership*

***“Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to Me.  
Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest.  
Walk with me and work with me...keep company with me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”***  
Jesus, Matthew 11—*The Message*

Just as Christ Jesus welcomes all, so we at Community Presbyterian Church welcome and invite all to participate in worship, study, fellowship, and prayer and to receive pastoral care. Whether seeker or devout, broken or healed, grieving or rejoicing, all are free to join us in our quest to seek, learn, and enjoy our God and to know the love and support of the church. While participation in any or all of these areas is open to all, without restriction, definition, or limitation,<sup>1</sup> *Active Membership* is more carefully and precisely defined in the Presbyterian Church. Every Christian church is entitled and expected to declare the terms of admission into its communion<sup>2</sup> and describe the nature, content, and look of faith expected of its members. It is therefore crucial that the meaning of faith, discipleship, and membership are clearly defined and understood. In order to help members and those seeking membership to understand what is meant by this term and the special relationship it signifies, we present the following thoughts and invitation.

### *Faith and Active Church Membership*

***“One becomes an active member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ  
and acceptance of his Lordship in all of life”<sup>3</sup>***

The church is God’s creation and work. We believe that the Father, from the creation of the human race, has faithfully, preserved, instructed, multiplied, honoured, adored, and called from death to life, a gathering of faithful people.<sup>4</sup> We affirm that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, making us his new creation, and calling us to be ambassadors of reconciliation<sup>5</sup> and witnesses to the transforming power of Christ’s resurrection. As such, the church exists as the body of Christ,<sup>6</sup> a people of integrity, purity and devotion, born of God and ceaselessly striving to faithfully respond to the faithfulness of our Father in heaven. We are, by God’s gracious work, a people of faith.

Faith in Jesus Christ is the only basis for church membership<sup>7</sup> and thus *Active Membership* means nothing less than genuine, vibrant faith in Christ which accepts and exhibits his Lordship over all of life. By our faith, we are justified, that is declared righteous in His eyes and reconciled to God. Thus, faith provides understanding of God’s nature, will and work, binds us in trusting relationship to the Lord, and defines the shape of our lives. For these reasons, the health of the church and its members is directly tied to the depth, integrity, and truth of the faith they hold and live.

At Community Presbyterian Church we understand faith to be “the sure and certain knowledge of God’s benevolence towards us, which, being founded on the truth of the gracious promise in Christ, is both revealed to our minds and confirmed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> Faith is not an opinion, perspective, or feeling. It is more than mere personal conviction. Faith is the fruit and effect of the Holy Spirit’s work on our lives. Revealing the truth of God to our hearts, the Spirit enables us to see and comprehend God’s will and enables us to wholeheartedly follow and live a life that is pleasing to God. At Community Presbyterian Church faith means understanding, receiving, and appropriately responding to the essential tenets of the Christian faith, that is, the real acts and revealed nature and thus truth of God our Father. These are learned from the Bible’s witness and include<sup>9</sup> our affirmation...

- ❖ *...of the Trinity and God’s existence as one being in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*
- ❖ *...of Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead.*
- ❖ *...that God has, through Christ, called a church into being to do His will and proclaim his nature and work.*
- ❖ *...of the Lordship of Jesus.*
- ❖ *...that salvation is through Christ alone.*
- ❖ *...that we are to live holy lives after the example of Christ.*
- ❖ *...of Jesus Christ’s dual nature, fully God and fully human.*
- ❖ *...that salvation is by grace through faith, not of works.*
- ❖ *...that we are to go into all the world, making disciples of all people and teaching them all that Jesus said and did.*
- ❖ *...that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.*
- ❖ *...of the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and the Son works to effect our salvation.*
- ❖ *...that Jesus will return to gather his church to himself and reign forever over all creation.*
- ❖ *...of the forgiveness of sins through faith in the person and work of Christ.*
- ❖ *...of the Bible’s divine inspiration and authority over all matters of faith and life.*

<sup>1</sup> G-5.0301, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>2</sup> G-1.0302, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>3</sup> G-5.0101, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>4</sup> 3.05, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part I.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.

<sup>6</sup> See Rom. 7:4, 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12, 5:23. See also 5.130, 6.054, 6.186, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the PC (USA) part I and G-1.0100, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the PC (USA) part II.

<sup>7</sup> G-5.0103, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, III.ii.7. See also 5.112, *Book of Confessions*, Constitution of the PC (USA) part I.

<sup>9</sup> This should not be considered an exhaustive list of all that one might include as an “essential tenet.” This simply notes some crucial points of faith that have been held by the church across its whole history, proclaimed in the Scriptures and affirmed in the creeds and confessions of the PC (USA). The Scriptures and *Book of Confessions* provides a fuller and richer understanding of the content, object, and meaning of faith.

# ***Faith as Response***

*Active Membership* is a specific response of faith by which we publicly submit the whole of our lives to the lordship of Christ, entrust the whole of our lives to his mercy and grace, live the whole of our lives in joyous expectant obedience, and give the whole of our lives to the manifestation, exhibition, and expansion of his kingdom. Most practically, *Active Membership* means personal commitment to and sharing in the proclamation of the good news, participation in the life and worship of the church, prayer, study of the Scriptures and faith of the church, and supporting the church through the giving of money, time, support, and service.<sup>10</sup> Faith informs and transforms our lives: knowing and trusting God's will and work we are justified (declared righteous) and living our faith before God and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we are sanctified (made righteous). In faith we turn to God and in the process, turn from all that would keep us from him and his blessings.

***Since, then, we do not have the excuse of ignorance, everything—and I do mean everything—connected with that old way of life has to go. It's rotten through and through. Get rid of it! And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you. What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense... In Christ's body we're all connected to each other, after all.***<sup>11</sup>

At Community Presbyterian Church we hold that faith in Christ and purity of life are the two, necessary, sides of the one act of Christian discipleship. One can not have one without the other.<sup>12</sup> Jesus came that we might have life, and have it abundantly.<sup>13</sup> This means that faith not only receives God's gifts and blessings, it endeavours to throw off all that would limit, deny or annul them whether in ourselves or others. Faith, and thus church membership, is to put off the old and put on the new life God intends and thus, as an act of faith, in obedience and love to God, and in pursuit of that life Christ came to give, we put off our sinful nature seeking to reflect the image of Christ Jesus.

PUT OFF- Marks of the sinful nature<sup>14</sup>:

- Sexual immorality: adultery, impurity, fornication, homosexual behavior, lust, pornography, orgies, prostitution, carousing, lewdness
- Malice: slander, deceit, murder, bitterness, falsehood, dissention, gossip, discord, revenge, hatred, unwholesome talk, coarse joking, obscenity, abusive talk, strife, disobedience to parents, treachery
- Greed: envy, love of money, theft, jealousy, idolatry, covetousness, swindling
- Lack of self-discipline: fits of rage, drunkenness, debauchery, laziness, love of pleasure instead of love of God
- Pride: selfish ambition, arrogance, boasting, conceit
- False spirituality: witchcraft, false teaching, empty religion [astrology, new age, tarot, palm reading, etc.]

PUT ON- Marks of the new life in Christ:

- Sexual purity: fidelity to marital vows between a man and a woman, chastity in singleness
- Love: honesty, peacemaking, speaks truth in love, forgiving, a mastered tongue, self-control, patience, kindness, sincere, impartial, merciful, considerate, forbearing, compassionate, thankful, loyal, gentle
- Humility: regard for authority, submissive
- Freedom from greed: contentment, faithful stewardship, financial/vocational integrity, generosity
- Sound doctrine: passion for godliness, worshipper of the true God, lover of the Truth

Not one of us is free from sin, not one of us perfect<sup>15</sup> and thus we are all ever in need of God's grace and forgiveness which is available to all who confess their sins.<sup>16</sup> We are ever in need also of the loving guidance and support of the church, recognizing that Scripture teaches us to rescue and restore one another in love.<sup>17</sup> Only together, in humility and confession, in the fullness of mutual encouragement and love, growth and prayer, can we grow into the life Christ died to provide.

In keeping with the above understanding of faith, church membership, and response to God's work and call, we invite members of Community Presbyterian Church to join us in the following covenant affirmation. After prayerfully studying the above teachings and standards, we invite you to sign your name below, freshly affirming your faith in our great and wonderful God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and your commitment to know, worship, and proclaim Him as Lord.

### ***Statement of Faith and Intent:***

I believe that Jesus is Lord of heaven and earth and the Savior, Redeemer, and Lord of my life. As a disciple of Jesus Christ I commit myself to the proclamation of the good news, participation in the life and worship of the church, prayer, study of the Scriptures and the faith of the church. I commit to supporting the church through the giving of my money, time, support, service, and leadership. As a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ and as a member of Community Presbyterian Church, I will endeavor to lead a life of faith consistent with the Bible's witness and standards. If my behavior contradicts these standards, I request that my brothers and sisters in Christ exhibit love for me by leading me back to wholeness through the restorative process outlined by Jesus in Matthew 18.15-20.<sup>18</sup> For I willingly reject the marks of the sinful nature and embrace the marks of new life in Christ. Relying on the grace of Christ Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit and the loving support of the congregation of Community Presbyterian Church, I affirm my desire and intention to know, worship, and proclaim Jesus as Lord with and through the whole of my life.

(Print name)

(Sign name)

(Date)

<sup>10</sup> G-5.0102, *Book of Order*, Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA) part II.

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 4.22-25 (*The Message*)

<sup>12</sup> Romans 6.1-23; 1 Corinthians 6.9-11; Galatians 2.20; 5.13-18; Ephesians 4.17-24; Colossians 2.11-12; 3.1-3; Titus 2.11-3.8; 1 Peter 1.13-2.12; 4.1-7

<sup>13</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>14</sup> These are composite lists derived from the following moral/ethical summaries in the New Testament: Mark 7.21-23; Romans 1:26-32; 13.8-14; 1 Corinthians 6.9-11; Galatians 5.16-25; Ephesians 4.22-5.21; Colossians 3.1-17; 1 Timothy 6.3-10; 2 Timothy 3.1-9; Hebrews 12.14-13.6; James 3.14-18; 1 Peter 2.1-3; 4.1-7

<sup>15</sup> Rom. 3:23, 3:10-18; 1 John 1:8-10; Ecclesiastes 7:20.

<sup>16</sup> 1 John 1.5-2.6

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 18:15-20 "If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16 But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."