



New to Hope

An exploration of who we are, what we believe and where we're going.

Hope Church Membership

{Let's begin by looking at some Basic Principles that explain our understanding of church membership.}

Connecting to a Group of People is an Important Step in trusting Christ

When we are connected to Christ, we are necessarily connected to everyone else joined to Him. The question is, are we going to value and nurture those connections, or neglect them? Practically speaking, if we are going to turn from our self-centered lives to fully rest in Christ we will need help. A local faith community is meant to be a place where we can be encouraged as well as encourage others. It is a place where we can be challenged, and challenge one another. It is a place where we can be strengthened as well as work to strengthen one another.

A Church is People Not a Building or a Meeting

The church is a group of people walking together, trusting Jesus. We do things, like worship, serve, celebrate, and learn; but it's our identity as Christians, and not one individual activity, that makes us a church community. Church Membership is not the same as other membership. When we think of membership we think of things like membership to exclusive clubs, or to discount grocery stores, or closed groups of people. Often people think membership means exclusion, but this isn't true of membership in the local church. Membership is open to anyone who trusts in Christ and understands the importance of connecting to his people.

Membership is intended for anyone who has confessed faith in Christ

Sometimes we think that you still need a certain Christian maturity before you can join a church, but this isn't true. People also sometimes think you need to be personally convinced of all the things your church teaches, but this is also untrue. There are many secondary issues that members of Hope Church disagree on, but they are still one family. Membership at Hope Church is opened to anyone who can affirm certain core beliefs which the Universal Church has held for nearly two thousand years.

Membership doesn't need to be a long time thing.

The transient nature of life these days means that people move around a lot. Sometimes people think, "I would join the church, but I'm only going to be here for____." Whether you're in town for a few weeks or a few years there is no reason for you to think that your stay will be too short for you to become a member.

Questions to Ask:

Is there anything in this section that is not clear to you?

Does the explanation of membership make the idea more clear?

What are some of your assumptions about what it means to be a member of a church?

The Process of Becoming a member at Hope Church

Trust in Jesus Christ

*Learn about connecting to Hope Church (everything you need to know is in this booklet)
Meet with our pastor to work through this booklet, or work through this booklet before meeting with one of our leaders.*

Meet with some of the church's Elders to share your faith.

Take your membership vows, and get baptized (if you haven't been)

{There are three parts to this booklet:

Essential Ideas about Faith.

Important things to Know about Hope Church.

Resources to help you grow in faith.}

Essential Ideas about Faith

{In this section we are going to look at ideas that all Christians should hold in common.

You'll notice that this section doesn't go into great detail about everything, but it does try to explain certain parts of our faith that are closed-handed issues at Hope Church (issues that we all agree on). We are going to be looking at two statements of faith which we ask all of our members to affirm. Vows are statements that people use to publicly establish what they believe and how they are willing to act.}

Apostles' Creed

The first statement we will be looking at is called the Apostles' Creed.

The Apostles' Creed dates back as far as 300 AD, though it mirrors similar statements as far back as 170 AD. Here is the whole creed:

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
the Maker of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,*

was crucified, dead, and buried;
He descended into hell.
The third day He arose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Ghost;
the holy catholic church;
the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Now let's try and understand the creed:

{A brief note: The Christian faith that is expressed in this creed is infused with an understanding that there is more to the universe than the stuff we can see through a telescope or measure in a lab. This creed says that we are living in a supernatural world.}

I believe in... "God, the Father Almighty...and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord...[and] in the Holy Ghost"

The first lines of the Apostles' Creed affirms that God exists, but not just as some vague super powered being floating off in the clouds somewhere. We believe in a God who is personal (he has feelings, and desires and a will), he speaks about himself and shows us how we should interact with him.

At Hope Church we hold to a "Trinitarian" View of God. This means that God exists as one God in three distinct persons (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost)

I believe in... "the Maker of heaven and earth"

Here we confess that the universe and everything in it was created by God.

When the creed speaks about heaven it means that God is also the creator of the supernatural and spiritual.

This doesn't mean that he didn't use natural processes to shape the universe, but it means that nothing is unconnected to God, and nothing is too big for God to do.

This line from the creed speaks about our belief in God creating the cosmos, and the next line refers to God restoring the world from the effects of sin--our spiritual corruption.

{We will talk more about sin when we look at the second statement of faith.}

I believe in ... "Jesus Christ"

While we often think the name Jesus Christ is like saying, "John Smith" the name Christ isn't his last name. It's actually a title which speaks about Jesus's role in fixing the world. The title "Christ" was one ancient way of speaking about Jesus being the fulfillment of a promise. A promise made by God that he would clear the world of all the effects of sin. Sin destroys our relationship with God, and twists the way we look and interact with everything in life. Pain, suffering, sickness, emotional conflicts, injustice, and even death are all effects of our sin.

I believe in ..."Jesus Christ...Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary"

One of the most important things to understand about Jesus is that he isn't just like you or me. Even his birth was unique. The Bible says that Jesus' mother Mary was told by an angel that she would bear a child, and her response was to say, "How is that possible!?" because she was still a virgin.

Because of Jesus' special birth he didn't enter the world affected by sin like you and I are. This phrase teaches us that Jesus who is totally God was willing to humble himself and become a man (he didn't stop being God).

I believe Jesus ..."suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;"

This statement gets at the historic reality of the Christian faith. The Bible isn't just a myth, set a long time ago in a galaxy far away. Jesus lived out his life in the first century AD. At that time Pontius Pilate, a Roman official, ruled over Jerusalem (the city where Jesus died).

At first it might seem redundant to say that Jesus was crucified by the Roman leaders, and died, and after his death was buried, but early Christians wanted to make sure that people understood that Jesus wasn't tricking people. He didn't just pass out, or sneak away to show up later. He was really dead. To a follower of Jesus, his death is the most crucial event in the history of the world. The Bible says that at the cross, Jesus, who was born without sin, "became sin" so that we might receive the approval of God that only Jesus had earned.

I believe ... "He descended into hell."

As we said in the beginning, the Apostles' Creed was composed around 300 AD, but that doesn't mean it wasn't refined over time. The phrase we are looking at here didn't become a standard part of the creed until around 500 AD (still a very long time).

While some other Christian traditions might have additional comments to make about this phrase, at its root it is affirming that at the cross Jesus experienced the total effects of what it means to experience hell. He was totally separated from any grace that God gives and totally exposed to God's justice.

This phrase reminds us that Jesus experienced separation from God so that we would not have to.

I believe... "The third day He arose again from the dead"

If the death of Christ is where Jesus deals with sin, his resurrection three days later tells us that even death was not strong enough to capture him. Jesus is seen for several days by many people. In fact, the Apostle Paul points out that Jesus was seen by over 500 people, many of whom were able to be called as witnesses in the first century AD.

I believe... "He ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead."

If we can speak of Jesus coming in the flesh as a situation which shows how humble Jesus is, this phrase speaks of the honor he received after his resurrection. Jesus remained with his disciples for 40 days after his resurrection from the dead, and afterward, rising up through the clouds and out of sight, he ascended back to heaven. When the creed speaks about sitting at the "right hand of the father" it is speaking to the idea that Jesus has received the honor he always had as God, and the honor he has earned in defeating death and sin. These honors give him the right to sit over all of creation and to right the wrongs that have been accumulating in the world since the beginning of sin. This includes judging the lives of those living and those who have already died.

I believe in... "the holy catholic church; the communion of saints"

While it might seem odd to include an institution in the list of essential beliefs of the Christian faith, this line is an important reminder of the way that God works in the world. God established one Church, one group of people that are his. All those who are connected to Jesus through faith are at that time also connected to his people. When we are connected to Christ in God's eyes we are his perfect people, even though we are still affected by our sin. When the creed says that the church is holy it isn't saying that the church is perfect or free from problems, but that in God's eyes we are seen as perfect because of what Christ has done for us. This means that we have a level of access to God that would not be possible without God. It also means that we have a connection with each other that needs to be nurtured.

Originally the word catholic simply referred to the world wide church. Eventually as disagreements entered the church, the term catholic was taken to refer to a specific group of Christians, the Roman Catholic Church. When we use the word catholic we are speaking about the fact that we are connected to all of God's people.

I believe in... "the forgiveness of sins"

Here the creed affirms that through Christ's work we can receive forgiveness for our sins. We don't have to earn our place with God, because our sin prevents us from earning anything. Instead because of God's kindness he forgives our sin.

Finally the creed affirms that just as death couldn't hold Jesus, it cannot hold his people--and though we might die--when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, we will be raised and have life with God forever. We affirm here that Christians will live with God, not just in some spiritual sense, but we will be physically present with God, forever.

Vows of Membership

The second set of statement of faith comes from the Presbyterian Church in America—the group of churches we are connected to. These vows form a framework that set up what it means to practically be connected to other christians in a local church. Taking these vows before the church will officially make you a member at Hope Church. These vows are set up as 5 questions (we will go through them one by one).

While these vows are written in a fairly formal way, they are trying to get at a very everyday understanding of what it means to be a Christian. As you think about these, remember that we are talking about your connection to Hope Church, but these vows would apply to any church you might connect with in the future.

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope except for His sovereign mercy?

{Vows one through three have to do with your relationship with God.}

Asking this question first puts all members of the church in a place of being honest about our inability to please God. The Bible says that while the world was created good, things didn't stay this way. We decided that we wanted to be in charge and so we rebelled against God. This rebellion is called sin, and as rebels we say we are sinners. Our sin has the effect of disrupting every part of who we are, as well as damaging every part of God's creation.

Every one of us needs to admit that we cannot please God, on our own, we need to rely on his mercy. When you affirm this vow you are saying that you understand that you are a sinful and broken person who isn't living the way that God made you to live.

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?

The second vow is where you affirm that Christ is the the only way out of the problem you admitted you have in the first vow. Here you affirm that Jesus is your savior and your God, as the Gospel narratives tell you. You also confess that God's acceptance of you comes from him alone.

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 the followers of Christ?

At first this vow seems like a bit of a contradiction. Didn't we just say that it's not our works that please God? So why the inclusion of working(endavoring) to live like a follower of

Jesus. Well if the vow said, "Do you promise that you have the strength to always be a good Christian?" than we would say this is a contradiction, but that's not what is being said. This vow says there is a healthy response to what Jesus has done for us, but the important phrase here is, "in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit"! You don't live the way God wants you to through your willpower and strength, but you do it through the Holy Spirit. He is working in you, giving you the ability to change over time to follow Jesus more and more. This vow says that you want the Holy Spirit to work in you and that you are going to try and work with him to follow Jesus as best you can.

4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

{Vows four through five deal with how we interact with God's people.}

As we've talked before, when we are connected to Christ we are connected to his people, and we are brought together as a people that need each other. We support the church with all the resources that God has given us, our talents, our time and even our finances.

Being a member of a church means that you are willing to actively participate in the life of the church community. When you take this vow you are saying you are willing to roll up your sleeves and support the church.

Talents - Each of us have been given unique talents by God. Where some are weak others are strong, and this means that as a community we are healthier together than alone.

Time - While we are living in a hectic world, we need to realize that God has given you time as a resource and it should be invested with as much thought as you would invest your money. The Christian life often just takes time, time together, time alone with God, and time caring for others.

Finances - The way we spend our money says a lot about what things we value and what things we don't value in life. When you become a member of the Hope Church you are saying that you are going to faithfully support the financial needs of the church. The pattern set down in the Bible is not a forced percentage. A Biblical pattern of giving is regular, generous and sacrificial—whether that means \$10 a week or \$10,000 a year.

When the fourth vow uses the words "worship," it's pointing to the idea that we have been made to be worshippers of God, and as a community we gather to worship God, and praise him for who he is, what he has done and what he is doing. When we talk about the work of the church, we are talking about being active in the rhythms of church life. As a church community, we do things like serve those in need; learn how to more fully rest in Christ; celebrate what God is doing in us and others; and other similar activities. Taking this vow doesn't mean you will promise to be at every event the church holds, but it means that you will seek to invest in the life of the church as best you can in your current situation.

5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to seek its purity and peace?

In this last vow you are agreeing that you are willing to find accountability from our church community. When it speaks of government, we are talking about the elders of the church and other leaders appointed by the elders. While most of the time we use the term discipline

in a negative sense, a better way to understand the idea is to look at what it means to be a disciple, someone who is learning from Jesus.

In life we all need accountability and encouragement at different points, and in different areas. Agreeing to this vow means that you are giving the church the right to speak into your life. When you say that you are going to seek the purity and peace of the church, it means that you aren't going to try and splinter the church through things like gossip, or purposefully contradicting the Bible's teaching. This doesn't mean that you can't disagree on what we call secondary issues or ask questions.

Questions to Ask:

Is there anything in this section that is not clear to you?

Are there certain parts of either the Apostles' Creed, or the Vows of Membership that you have difficulty accepting?

Why do you think Hope Church asks all their members to agree to these two statements of faith?

What were you surprised to hear in this section?

Important things to Know about Hope Church

There are a number of important secondary (or open-handed) issues that make Hope Church the church it is. Below you will find a number of these issues, which we hold to as a church, but which you can disagree with, and still be a member. Our position is that we would rather have all our members at least know the kind of church we are, rather than not be honest and see people leave frustrated. As a church our primary concern is to be faithful to what God has called us to, and we know that sometimes that means that we will be more progressive than our culture and at other times we will be more conservative. We understand that some of these things might be too difficult for some people to accept.

Church Connections

Hope Church is a Protestant Church. We are part of the Presbyterian Church in America (or PCA) the PCA is part of a larger tradition known as the Reformed and Presbyterian tradition.

To be Protestant means we come out of the Protestant Movement, which was started in Europe by Martin Luther. Luther was trying to repair the Roman Catholic Church, but was expelled because someone of his thinking challenged the established lines of power. This separated the Western Church between Protestants and Catholics.

To be Reformed means that we affirm the reforming of the church that occurred during the Reformation (part of the Protestant Movement), which occurred particularly in Switzerland, France, and England. A simple summary of what it means to be Reformed can be found in

the "5 Solas" (meaning only or alone) of the Reformation. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. And, that the Bible alone, is the source of our faith.

To be Presbyterian means that we believe that each local church should be cared for by a group of leaders, rather than just one person. We call these leaders Elders, and this group a session. We believe churches, like individuals, need accountability. To be Presbyterian also mean that each local church agrees to be held accountable by other churches, we call this regional accountability a Presbytery.

Baptism

Baptism signifies many things. We see it as a washing of our sin, of a dying of our old selfish life and new birth in Christ. In Baptism, God bring us into his community. While some Christians in recent years have become overly focused on how you baptize someone, the Bible doesn't give us an exact pattern of baptism. There is reference to sprinkling, or pouring as well as dunking someone in water, we believe that all are valid baptisms. The main thing that makes a baptism a baptism is that it is done with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At Hope Church we hold to Paedobaptism, meaning that we baptize both new adult Christians as well as their children. While this short booklet can't outline our entire thinking on the matter, here is a short summary of why we do this:

Throughout the Bible, God is focused not primarily on individuals but on families, tribes, and communities. In the Old Testament (OT), God tells Abraham (the father of all God's People in the OT) that God is going to use circumcision as a way of showing who is connected to God. This meant that any man born in Israel, or any man who became a citizen of Israel was expect to received circumcision as a sign of their entrance into God's community. The interesting thing is that while circumcision acted as a symbol of someone's desire to following God, infants were supposed to be circumcised too, even though they had not yet expressed such a desire. As we look at the New Testament (NT), the Apostle Paul makes it clear that baptism has replaced circumcision, and rather than saying it is more exclusive (making children wait till they are old enough to make their own profession), he says that it is more inclusive. Now not just male adults and infants received the sign of entering God's community, but men and women(both as adults and infants) are invited to receive the sign of God's community.

Spiritual Gifts

In the NT we see that Spiritual gifts are given to the church by God for the sake of his glory. Spiritual Gifts are those special activities and skills which the Spirit gives to his people for the sake of building up the church. They are more than just natural talents. While there are many spiritual gifts, some Christians want to focus on a few of the more showy gifts.

The Bible spends less time focusing on specific gifts and more time on the presence of the Spirit. We don't see that every gift is needed in every age, nor do we see that gifts are always permanently given to someone. This means that as a church we don't have to possess certain gifts to prove that the Spirit is present in our lives. Instead our philosophy is that we use what God has given us.

Worship

At Hope Church we try to hold to what is called the Regulative Principle of Worship. This means that we look to God to teach us exactly how He wants to be worshipped. In the Bible, God gives us principles which are meant to shape our worship. He also tells us what type of things we should include in times of worship. We believe that holding to this principle, gives everyone at Hope Church a level of freedom that they wouldn't find if we didn't follow the Regulative Principle of Worship. Instead of the worship agenda being set by the loudest, or the oldest, or the richest, or any other privileged group, it's set by God. He is the only one who has the right to set the agenda for worship.

Gender

At Hope Church we believe that men and women are both created in the image of God. Both are valuable before God, and deserve respect. The Biblical pattern is that men and women are not simply interchangeable, in every situation in life. We can't swap one out for the other and expect to get the same result. Instead we believe that God created men and women to compliment each other. Very often men and women have different skills and perspectives that are needed in the church.

Throughout the history, Christianity's view of gender has often been controversial. In the ancient world, the church taught that women were valuable, and didn't need to be married to find their identity in society. The church also taught that men and women were spiritual heirs, and would inherit God's promises regardless of gender.

While we need the perspectives of both men and women to be a healthy church, we believe that the Bible teaches that men have been given the responsibility to lead both the home and the church, when possible. This means that the Elders and Deacons of Hope Church are men. This doesn't mean that we will make any man an elder, and ignore the wisdom and spiritual maturity of the women in our church. We need the gifts of all our members men and women, both young and old, to be a healthy community.

God's sovereignty overcomes our brokenness

At Hope Church we speak of a lot of God's sovereignty. This means that we are convinced that the Bible teaches that every part of who we are is affected by sin. This means we are totally dependent on God for our salvation. He sought us, he cares for us and he keeps us.

Sex and Identity

We believe that sex is an important part of what it means to be human. Sex is a gift from God. It is an amazing symbol of how we need other people. We reject the idea that sex can just be a "physical thing". Sex unites a man and woman in body and soul. Because of this sex

outside of a marriage commitment can be damaging, and it can lead to major emotional scars.

Leadership There are two offices in the Presbyterian church, Elders, and Deacons. Elders are the spiritual leaders of the church, and responsible for the spiritual health of the church community. In the PCA we have two types of Elders (Teaching, and Ruling). Teaching Elders, also called pastors, are elders whose primary energy goes into preaching and teaching in the church, very often Teaching Elders are paid by the church so that they can focus all their attention on ministry. At Hope Church we have one teaching Elder, Pastor Scott Davis. Ruling Elders are elders who focus primarily on caring for the church, they do this through prayer, encouragement, accountability, teaching, etc.

Deacons are leaders who help oversee mercy ministry and the stewardship of a church's property.

Our DNA

{The DNA of Hope Church is the way that we talk about what we value and what we hope to be as a church community.}

Formed by the Gospel (Romans 8:1-6, Ephesians 2:4-9)

Deep in our gut we all understand that things are not the way that they should be. Everything in our life is affected by what the Bible calls sin, a state of brokenness. The Gospel (which means "good news" in Greek) says that God cares about our broken lives and our broken world, and through Jesus, he makes things right.

Jesus lived a life that was not broken by sin, and at the cross, he paid the cost for fixing our brokenness. When we embrace this good news, and rely on Jesus's work (instead of our own) it frees us to interact with God and everything else in a new way.

Gathered into a family (Ephesians 2:11-14, 1 Peter 2:9-17, Ephesians 4:12-16)

When we embrace the Gospel we are formed into a new community, a new family created by the Gospel. People in this community share their lives, they pray, serve, eat, learn and worship together (to name a few things). This community is a safe place where we can care for each other, and encourage each other not to repeat the same mistakes over and over again. This community also gives other people a glimpse of what it might look like for them to reconnect with God. Of course we admit that a family of broken people will have many problems, but as we live in this imperfect community we are given the opportunity to express the same type of grace and forgiveness towards others that God has shown towards us.

Freed to be different (Ephesians 2:10, Col 3:1-14)

When we accept Jesus's work we are given a totally new identity. This new identity frees us from judging ourselves, or others based on the things we have done (or not done) with our lives.

In this new Identity we can learn to be different people than we once were, and we can be gracious and respectful of people that we once had rejected. With this new identity we can ask God to work in our lives, while at the same time understanding that our identity has nothing to do with our performance.

Sent on Mission (Matthew 28: Ephesians 4:28, James 2:14-26)

Not only does God repair broken people, and draw people together as a community, he urges them to move forward his restoring grace into every area of life.

God's plan is to restore our world, rather than to abandon it, and He has made us partners with him in this work of restoration. Just as the Father sent Jesus, we have been sent to restore all things to God through Christ. The need for restoration is all around us, in every career and calling. As we open our eyes to the challenges around us, we imagine how things might be different if they were to experience God's grace, and we work to see that grace extend more and more.

Called to serve (Matthew 25:34-40, Deuteronomy 10:17-18)

As we start to realize how much God has given us, we begin to focus on ourselves less, and focus more on the needs of others. We begin to give our time and our talents and our resources to other people. We begin to love people the way that God loved us. We look for opportunities to practice generosity. And as we begin to focus on giving rather than taking, we see how generosity is God's plan for all of us. It causes us to see our dependance on God, and allows us to give and care for others even though we still have needs of our own.

Questions to Ask:

Is there anything in this section that is not clear to you?

What were you surprised to hear in this section?

Was there anything that made you so frustrated that it would prevent you become a member?

Why do you think it is important for Hope Church to be honest about their beliefs?

Are there any questions that you have because of what you read above?