

CHESTNUT MOUNTAIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Exalt, Equip, Engage, Embrace

Becoming a Member

A Five-Part Membership Class

Knowing, Glorifying, and Enjoying God Together



A member of the Presbyterian Church in America
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Welcome

We are so glad you are here. Whether you are exploring the Christian faith for the first time, considering whether Chestnut Mountain Presbyterian Church should become your church home, or simply want to understand more deeply what we believe, this class is for you.

Chestnut Mountain Presbyterian Church has a great history and, we believe, by God’s guidance and blessing, a great future. Started in 1874, the church has known God’s faithful, guiding hand. Now in our third building, CMPC has a vision to **Exalt** God in worship, **Equip** one another in His Word, **Engage** the world in service and witness, and **Embrace** one another in gospel community.

Why an Inquirers’ Class?

This class has two simple aims:

1. To provide an introduction to the beliefs and life of Chestnut Mountain Presbyterian Church; and
2. To prepare you for membership in this congregation.

Our hope is simply that you will come to know Christ and His church more clearly, and then prayerfully decide if God would have you join us.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is organized into five sessions. Each session is meant to be both read and discussed:

- **Read it.** The teaching content is written to be read before or after each class meeting — a handbook you can keep.
- **Discuss it.** Each session ends with a “For the Class” section: questions for reflection, Scripture passages to look up together, and a “Take It Home” application.

- **Mark it up.** Write your questions in the margins. The best discussions begin with honest questions.

Scripture references follow the English Standard Version (ESV), which CMPC uses in preaching and teaching.

THE FIVE SESSIONS

Session 1 — The Gospel & What It Means to Be a Christian

Session 2 — What We Believe: The Word, the Triune God & the Sacraments

Session 3 — What Does It Mean to Be Presbyterian?

Session 4 — What Is a Church? & Why Church Membership Matters

Session 5 — Living as a Member of CMPC

Who We Are

Mission Statement

Chestnut Mountain Presbyterian Church exists to glorify and enjoy God through equipping people to delightfully obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission in Chestnut Mountain and around the world. This mission works itself out in a passion for God and a compassion for His world.

Our Vision

CMPC's vision is to be:

- a church whose worship of God is Christ-centered, gathered by God and enabled by His Spirit to worship Him in the beauty of holiness, so that He is glorified;
- a healthy church whose members love one another, grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by their presence transform the greater Chestnut Mountain area, reaching out in evangelism and word and deed;
- a church whose people are equipped and active in sharing the hope that is within them with the people they meet every day;
- a church that teaches and preaches sound doctrine, to equip and empower our people to pursue holiness
- a reproducing church, planting daughter churches nearby and among the nations;
- a sending church, passionate that the glory of God be exalted in the gladness of the nations;
- a giving church, in which people give generously of themselves and their resources.

*Let the people ... sing for joy; let them shout from the mountaintops.
Let them give glory to the Lord and proclaim His praise.*

— Isaiah 42:11–12

SESSION ONE

The Gospel & What It Means to Be a Christian

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

— John 3:16

THIS SESSION AT A GLANCE

- The heart of the Christian message is the gospel — the good news of what God has done for sinners in Jesus Christ.
- Our deepest problem is sin, which separates us from a holy God and leaves us spiritually dead.
- God’s answer is His Son, Jesus Christ, who died in our place and rose again.
- We receive this gift not by earning it, but through repentance and faith.
- Everyone who trusts Christ is made a brand-new person and given the Holy Spirit.

1. Our Predicament: A Life in Darkness

God’s glory is obvious in the world around us — “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1; see also Romans 1:20). Yet sin clouds our vision, so that we do not recognize God’s hand even in what He has plainly made. We grow comfortable in the darkness; the knowledge of God is repressed, obscured, and replaced. Yet, into that darkness God has spoken. “We have the prophetic word more fully confirmed,” Peter says, “to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19). The claim of the Bible is simple and disturbing: God has spoken, and He

has spoken to people who did not know Him and, left to themselves, do not want to know Him.

2. The Problem Named: Sin

God created us in His image so that we might glorify Him and enjoy fellowship with Him (Genesis 1–2; Micah 6:8). But in the garden, our representative Adam faced a choice: to trust that God had his best interests at heart, or to trust that Satan did. He chose to eat the forbidden fruit and thus sin. He did not trust God’s word, but reached to “be like God.” The result fell on us all. The curse of sin hangs over this broken world. We feel it in our bodies. It taints everything.

- “None is righteous, no, not one” (Romans 3:10).
- “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
- “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Sin defined. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.14) says, “Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.” In other words, sin is both failing to do what God commands and doing what He forbids. At root, sin is what we do when our hearts are not satisfied with God.

Our condition is therefore desperate. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jeremiah 17:9); apart from Christ we are “dead in ... trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). Spiritually dead people have neither the ability nor the desire to reconcile themselves to God (2 Corinthians 5:19). That is our great need: reconciliation we cannot achieve.

Every sin, however small it seems to us, is rebellion against the infinitely holy God and brings upon the sinner His wrath and curse, both in this life and the one to come — making us subject to death and to all miseries, spiritual, temporal, and eternal (WSC 84; WCF 6.6). Sin deserves *eternal* punishment because its guilt is measured not by the act's duration but by the majesty of the One offended: an offense against the infinite and eternal God carries infinite failing, which no finite creature could ever

exhaust — and which is why only the eternal Son, dying in the place of sinners, could bear it fully and say, "It is finished."

3. God's Answer: Jesus Christ

Into that hopeless situation God sent His Son. Fully God and fully man.

His mission was to die: "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). And He did it for sinners while we were still His enemies: "God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

He had to be man, so that in our own nature He could obey the law we had broken and suffer the death we had earned — for the justice that condemned humanity had to be satisfied by a human (Heb 2:14–17). But He had to be God, so that His human nature would not sink under the infinite weight of divine wrath, and so that His obedience and suffering would carry infinite worth — enough to satisfy God's justice not for one sinner only, but for all His people (WLC 38–40).

What the cross accomplished

Substitutionary atonement. Christ bore the wrath of God in our place to set us free. "He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities ... and with His wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5–6).

Justification. This is a legal declaration, a once-for-all verdict: God declares the believing sinner righteous, not on the basis of our record, but on the basis of Christ's righteousness credited to us.

The only way. Jesus is not one way among many. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6; see also Acts 4:11–12).

4. Our Response: Receiving the Gift

"The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). A gift, however, must be received (John 1:11–13). When the Philippian jailer cried, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30–31). That belief has two sides:

1. Repent.

To repent is to admit that I am a sinner (1 John 1:9) and to turn away from sin — to hate it and to seek, by grace, to live in a way that pleases Jesus.

2. Believe.

To believe is to turn to Christ and rest on what He has done, receiving Him as Lord of my life (Matthew 7:21). We cannot earn heaven; we can never be good enough; left to ourselves we have no desire to turn to God. But God has acted on our behalf and calls us to Himself. By faith — itself a gift — we simply receive what He has done (Ephesians 2:1–9).

5. A Brand-New People with an Eternal Hope

Everyone who trusts Christ becomes a genuinely new person. Jesus said, “You must be born again” (John 3:7); Paul says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Consider what is now true of every believer:

- We are saved (Romans 10:9–10).
- We no longer face eternal condemnation — “there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).
- We have received eternal life (John 3:16).
- We are adopted into the family of God (WSC 34).
- We belong to God forever; nothing can separate us from His love (Romans 8:38–39).

And God Himself comes to dwell in us. Before salvation, the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin through the Word (John 16:8). At salvation, He enables us to believe (Ephesians 2:8–9). After salvation, He works in us to make us holy — a lifelong process called sanctification, in which we become more and more like Jesus and sin less and less (Romans 12:1–2). Our part is to grow, as a newborn grows (2 Peter 3:18), using the means God provides: prayer, the Word, worship, fellowship, service, our spiritual gifts, witness, and giving.

Our ultimate hope is not simply that souls go to be with the Lord — though they do — but that Christ's own resurrection is the first fruits of ours: having been united with Him in His death, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His (Rom 6:5; 1 Cor 15:20). When He returns, the trumpet will sound, the graves will give up their dead, and bodies sown in weakness will be raised imperishable and glorious like His (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:42–43; Phil 3:21). And so we will dwell with Him, body and soul, in a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells — where death shall be no more, "neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1–4).

FOR THE CLASS

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

1. In your own words, what is the gospel? If a neighbor asked you to explain it in two minutes, what would you say?
2. Why does the gospel only make sense once we take sin seriously? What happens to the good news if we minimize the bad news?
3. Justification is a once-for-all declaration; sanctification is a lifelong process. Why is it freeing to keep these two straight?
4. How does the hope of future resurrection like Jesus' resurrection give you hope in this life?

Dig into the Word

- › Ephesians 2:1–10 — *trace the movement from "dead" to "alive" to "for good works."* Who does the saving?
- › Isaiah 53:4–6 — *list every phrase that shows Christ taking our place.*
- › Romans 8:1, 38–39 — *what is promised to those "in Christ Jesus"?*

Take It Home

This week, write out your own testimony in a few sentences: what your life was like, how you came to understand the gospel, and what God is doing in you now. Be ready to share it with someone.

SESSION TWO

What We Believe: The Word, the Triune God & the Sacraments

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

— Psalm 46:10

THIS SESSION AT A GLANCE

- The Bible is God’s own Word — inspired, true, and our final authority for what we believe, who we are, and how we live.
- There is one God who exists eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- God is sovereign — He reigns over all things — and this truth is both comforting and humbling.
- Sacraments are visible signs of invisible grace; CMPC observes two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.
- We baptize believers and their children as the sign of God’s covenant, and we come to the Lord’s Table to feed on Christ by faith.

1. The Word of God

Why should I believe the Bible? It is the oldest question in the world — “Did God actually say...?” (Genesis 3:1). We believe the Bible because of what it is and because of who endorsed it. Scripture is “breathed out by God” (2 Timothy 3:16); B. B. Warfield called it “the product of a specifically divine operation.” The phrase “the Lord said” appears hundreds of times in the first five books alone.

Yet God used real human authors. “No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). The writers used their own vocabulary,

experience, and skill — they never ceased to be human — yet they were so carried along by God that what they wrote is the Word of God.

Jesus' own witness. Jesus treated the Scriptures as authoritative (Matthew 4), permanent (“Scripture cannot be broken,” John 10:35), and as finding their fulfillment in Himself (Luke 4:18–21). He also anticipated the New Testament by appointing apostles to bear witness to Him (John 14:26; Acts 1:21–22).

Because God is perfect, His Word is perfect. As originally given, the Bible is inerrant — without error. It is therefore our authority for what we are to believe (faith), what we are to be (character), and what we are to do (practice). As James Boice observed, “Nothing but direct experience will ever ultimately convince anybody that the Bible’s words are the authentic and authoritative words of God.”

A note on translations: CMPC uses the English Standard Version (ESV) in preaching and teaching. Other faithful translations — the NASB, the NIV (1984), the KJV, and NKJV — are good and helpful as well. Paraphrases such as The Message and The Living Bible can aid reading but are less useful for careful study.

2. One Triune God

The Trinity. We believe in one God who exists eternally in three distinct persons — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit — “the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” The Trinity is not a riddle to be solved but a glorious mystery to be adored.

What is God? “God is spirit” (John 4:24). The Westminster Shorter Catechism (Q.4) answers beautifully: “God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”

The sovereignty of God. We believe God is the sovereign King of the universe — He has absolute authority and rule over all His creation. The ultimate question is, “Is God really in charge?” and the answer must be yes or no; there is no middle ground. This truth runs through the entire Bible (begin with Psalm 46:10).

God rules over nature (parting the sea, calming the storm, feeding thousands), over human choices (“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,” Genesis 50:20), and over all of history (the stories of the Old Testament are promised shaped patterns that tell us about Jesus). This can be a hard teaching, because we want to be autonomous. The very temptation in Eden was “to be like God.” Yet the paradox of the gospel is that rebellion against God brings not freedom but slavery to sin, while submission to God sets us free to become who He created us to be.

“If God is sovereign, am I just a puppet?” Scripture holds two truths together: God ordains whatsoever comes to pass, and yet human beings make real choices for which they are truly responsible (see Acts 2:23; Genesis 50:20; Proverbs 16:33). The Westminster Confession puts it carefully: God “ordain[s] whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures.” As J. I. Packer noted, our trouble is usually “a reluctance to recognize the existence of mystery and to let God be wiser than men.” We are commanded to choose, to repent, to believe — and behind it all, God reigns. Both are true, and we rest in Him.

3. The Sacraments

The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines a sacrament as “a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers.” Sacraments are visible signs and seals of an invisible grace - they engage our senses of sight, taste, and touch to help us grasp the gospel. CMPC observes the two sacraments Christ gave: baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Baptism

Baptism is the sign of the covenant. It signifies and seals our being united to Christ and our sharing in the benefits of the covenant of grace. The Greek word can mean sprinkling, pouring, or immersion. Baptism is the sign and seal God places on those who belong to Christ's family. Baptism replaces circumcision, the Old Testament covenant sign that was applied to infants at eight days old and that marked out the members of God’s covenant family.

Although the New Testament gives no direct command to baptize infants, it also never tells us to stop applying the covenant sign to our children; rather, it reinforces that the promise is “to you and to your children” (Acts 2:39). Baptizing a child does not save the child — each child must, when able, personally trust Christ — but it marks the child as belonging to Jesus and welcomes him or her into the church. Covenant baptism also reminds the whole congregation of God’s gracious initiative in salvation, and calls parents and church alike to introduce these little ones to Christ. Because baptism is for the church, we never conduct it without the people of God present.

The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament in which, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to Christ’s appointment, His death is proclaimed; and worthy receivers are — not in a physical manner, but by faith — made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

Paul calls us to examine ourselves before we come (1 Corinthians 11:27–28), and we apply that warning in two directions. Vertically, we consider our attitude toward sin and our relationship with Christ — if we treat sin carelessly, we have forgotten that Jesus had to die for it. Horizontally, we consider our relationships with other believers; is there something we must make right first (Matthew 5:23–24)? CMPC practices open communion: the Table is open to all professing Christians who are members in good standing of an evangelical church.

FOR THE CLASS

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

5. Why does it matter for daily life whether we can trust Scripture fully?
6. Where do you feel the tension between God’s sovereignty and human responsibility? Is it comforting, troubling, or both?

7. How does thinking of a sacrament as a “visible word” help you understand baptism and the Lord’s Supper?
8. If you come from a tradition that practices believer’s baptism only, what questions does covenant baptism raise for you?

Dig into the Word

- › 2 Timothy 3:16–17 — *what is Scripture able to do, and for what purpose?*
- › Genesis 50:20 — *how does this verse hold God’s plan and human action together?*
- › Acts 2:38–39 — *to whom is the promise given, and how might that shape our view of baptism?*
- › 1 Corinthians 11:23–29 — *what is the Supper proclaiming, and how should we come to it?*

Take It Home

Pick one doctrine from this session you find hardest, and read the relevant Westminster Shorter Catechism questions (4, 14, 91–97). Bring one question to the next class.

SESSION THREE

What Does It Mean to Be Presbyterian?

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.”

— 1 Peter 5:2

THIS SESSION AT A GLANCE

- “Presbyterian” names how a church is governed — by elders (Greek πρεσβύτερος), working together rather than alone.
- We are Reformed: our theology is shaped by the Word of God and centered on the glory and sovereignty of God.
- We are confessional: the Westminster Standards faithfully summarize what we find taught in Scripture.
- We are covenantal: God works through one people of God across the ages, with His promise “to you and your children.”

1. Reformed: Shaped by the Word, Centered on God

The word “Reformed” describes our theology. To be “reformed according to the Word of God” — to let our thinking, living, and worship be continually reshaped by Scripture rather than by tradition or preference. At the center of that theology is the doctrine of God Himself. R. C. Sproul often noted that the Reformed faith begins with who God is and then carries that vision of God through everything else — how we understand ourselves, salvation, the church, and worship.

This is the same ground we covered in Session 2: the sufficiency and authority of Scripture, the majesty and sovereignty of God, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. The Synod of Dort summarized these gospel truths in five points (sometimes remembered by the word TULIP): the seriousness of our sin, God’s gracious election, the

saving work of Christ, the Spirit's sovereign work in calling us, and God's faithfulness in preserving us to the end. These are not cold abstractions but the warm assurance behind the Heidelberg Catechism's first question, "What is your only comfort in life and in death?" — that "I am not my own, but belong ... to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ."

3. Confessional and Covenantal

Confessional. We do not each decide for ourselves what Scripture teaches in isolation. Together with Presbyterians across the centuries, we hold that the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms faithfully summarize the system of doctrine taught in the Bible. Ligon Duncan reminds us that a confession is simply the church saying clearly and accountably, "This is what we believe the Bible to teach." It guards the gospel and keeps us honest.

Covenantal. Presbyterians read the Bible as one unfolding story of God's covenant of grace — one people of God from Abraham to the present, saved the same way in every age, by grace through faith in the promised Savior. This is why we baptize the children of believers: baptism is the new-covenant sign that corresponds to Old Testament circumcision, given to believers "and to your children" (Acts 2:39). We do not presume the child is already saved; we mark the child as a covenant child who must, in time, personally trust Christ. (Session 2 covers this more fully.)

4. Presbyterian: Government by Elders

Finally we come to the word itself. "Presbyterian" comes from the Greek πρεσβύτερος, which the New Testament translates as "elder." The heart of Presbyterianism is a conviction about how Christ governs His church: not by a single bishop or a lone pastor, and not by the congregation acting alone, but through a plurality of elders who shepherd together, and through the connection of local churches to one another for accountability and cooperation.

This pattern is woven through the New Testament. Paul appointed "elders in every town" (Titus 1:5) and addressed the elders of the church in Ephesus as a group (Acts 20:17). And when a dispute threatened the early church, it was settled not by one man but by "the apostles and the elders"

gathered together at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). From that we get the structure of CMPC and the wider church:

- **The Session** — the elders of the local congregation, who shepherd this church (see Session 5).
- **The Presbytery** — elders from the churches of a region (for us, Georgia Foothills Presbytery), meeting together.
- **The General Assembly** — elders representing the whole denomination (for us, the PCA), meeting yearly.

These are sometimes called the church’s “courts.” The very first of the historic principles of Presbyterianism is that “God alone is Lord of the conscience”; another insists that all church power is “only ministerial and declarative” — that is, the church does not invent its own authority but only ministers and declares what God has already said in His Word. Elders serve under Christ, the true Head of the church.

5. A Heritage Held with Humility

This way of being the church has a long, rich history. Its principles were recovered at the Reformation — flowing from John Calvin in Geneva to John Knox in Scotland — and carried to America, where Presbyterianism shaped institutions like Princeton. In the twentieth century, when theological liberalism crept into the mainline church, J. Gresham Machen and others stood for the gospel, leading eventually to faithful Presbyterian bodies; our own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America, was formed in 1973. CMPC, planted in 1874, is one congregation in that long line of churches seeking to be Reformed according to the Word of God.

We hold these convictions firmly, because we believe they are biblical. But we hold them with humility and charity. Many faithful Christians who love the same Savior land in different places on church government and baptism. We are Christians first. Being Presbyterian simply describes our settled, joyful conviction about how Christ shepherds and gathers His people — and at CMPC, it is the framework within which we come to know, glorify, and enjoy God together.

FOR THE CLASS

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

9. What is theological triage and why is it important?
10. “Reformed according to the Word of God.” Where might you, like any of us, be tempted to let preference or tradition shape your faith more than Scripture?
11. What is the value of a confession — the church saying together, “This is what we believe the Bible teaches”? What might be lost without one?
12. How is government by a plurality of elders, connected across churches, different from how leadership often works in the wider culture and other churches around us?

Dig into the Word

- › Acts 15:1–35 — *how did the early church settle a dispute, and who was involved?*
- › Titus 1:5–9 — *what does Paul tell Titus to appoint, and what should those men be like?*
- › 1 Peter 5:1–5 — *how are elders to lead, and how are others to respond?*
- › Acts 20:17–28 — *what does Paul charge the Ephesian elders to do, and why?*

Take It Home

Pick one Presbyterian distinctive (Reformed theology, confessions, covenant, or elder government) that is new or unclear to you, and read more this week. Bring one question to a pastor or elder.

SESSION FOUR

What Is a Church? & Why Membership Matters

“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

— 1 Peter 2:9

THIS SESSION AT A GLANCE

- The local church is the people of God, “called out” for His own possession — not a building or a program.
- Every believer belongs to the universal church and is meant to belong, visibly, to a particular local church.
- Membership is the church saying together, “We recognize your faith,” and members committing to one another.
- Membership makes love concrete: it names whom you are responsible to love, serve, and encourage.
- Members take real responsibilities — gathering, guarding the gospel, loving one another, submitting to the elders, reaching the lost.
- Membership is sealed by five solemn vows; church discipline exists to protect and restore, never to punish.

1. The Church Is the People of God

Simply defined, the church is the people of God in every age, gathered under Christ her Head. The church, then, is the people whom God has called out of darkness for His very own — a people among whom we come to know, glorify, and enjoy Him in a unique and greater way. First Peter 2:9–10 captures our whole identity at once:

You are a chosen race ... a people for His own possession (KNOW), that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you (GLORIFY) out of darkness into His marvelous light (ENJOY).

— 1 Peter 2:9

The church is founded on the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture calls Him the Head of the Church, His body; we are members of that body. Notice what this means: a church is not first a place we go but a people to whom we belong. To be “a church” in the New Testament is to be one of its members — read through the book of Acts and you will see real, countable, named people who gathered, prayed, gave, and suffered together.

2. Universal and Visible

We can speak of the church in two ways:

The universal church. This includes all the people of God from every age — from Adam and Eve to the last person born again before Christ returns. “Catholic” in the Apostles’ Creed simply means “universal” in this sense.

The visible church. These are people publicly identifying with local congregations, gathering in particular places.

All believers in Jesus Christ are members of the universal church. But each believer is also meant to identify publicly with a particular, local church. We are not merely called out from the world by God; we are called into union with Jesus Christ and into fellowship with one another. The New Testament knows nothing of a Christian who belongs to Christ but to no church.

3. The Bible’s Rich Images of the Church

Scripture never describes the church with a single picture, because no single picture is large enough. Each image teaches us something we are meant not only to understand but to experience:

- **Body of Christ** — we are interconnected members, each needing the others (1 Corinthians 12).

- **Bride of Christ** — loved, pursued, and cherished by our Lord.
- **Family of God** — brothers and sisters who share an identity, a home, and a Father.
- **Temple / building** — living stones being built together into a dwelling for God by the Spirit.
- **People of God, kingdom, covenant members, pilgrims, new creation, city of God** — each a window onto who we are together.

Here is the point worth pausing on: these are not images we can live out by ourselves. You cannot be a “body” of one. You cannot experience the safety and intimacy of family in isolation. It is precisely within the life and accountability of a local church that we embody and enjoy what these images promise. To stay on the edges of the church is to miss much of what God has for us.

4. Who Makes Up Chestnut Mountain Presbyterian Church?

CMPC is made up of believers in Jesus Christ who have been baptized (not necessarily by this church), have desired to join, and have taken the membership vows, together with their children. We believe the promise God made is “to you and to your children” (Acts 2:38–39), and so we encourage, though we do not require, parents to have their children baptized.

In short: to ask “What is a church?” is finally to ask “Who are these people, and will I belong among them?”

5. Membership Makes Commitment Clear

When we join a local church, we are choosing to love others with clarity instead of ambiguity, on the basis of commitment instead of convenience. Membership simply puts into words what the New Testament everywhere assumes: that Christians are known by a particular church, accountable to it, and committed to its people. The apostles wrote their letters to specific congregations they knew by name. There is no anonymous, unattached Christianity in the New Testament.

Think of it this way. “Love one another” is a glorious command — but whom, exactly? Membership answers the question. It tells you which believers on the planet you have specifically promised to love, serve, warn, pray for, and encourage. It turns good intentions into a real people in a real place.

6. Why Membership Matters — A Summary

Drawing together the Bible’s teaching, here is why meaningful membership matters:

- **It’s biblical.** Jesus established the local church, and the apostles did all their ministry through it. The Christian life in the New Testament is church life.
- **It clarifies whom you love and serve.** It names the people to whom you owe the “one another” commands of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11–16, 25–32).
- **It clarifies whom you follow.** It tells you which leaders you are called to honor and submit to (Hebrews 13:7, 17) — and it lets those leaders know whose souls they will “give an account” for (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).
- **It lets you embody the biblical images.** Body, family, temple — these are lived out within the accountability of a committed congregation (1 Corinthians 12).
- **It gives structure to the Christian life.** It places our claim to follow Jesus in a real setting where we are actually known and shepherded.
- **It builds a witness.** A committed, loving body of people puts the rule of Christ on display and invites a watching world to something better (John 13:34–35).

7. The Responsibilities of Membership

Membership is not a spectator status. In an individualistic, consumer culture, the idea that members carry real responsibility can come as a surprise — but responsibility and membership go hand in hand. The good

news comes first (we are made new by grace), and our responsibilities flow out of that new identity. Here is what members take up together:

Gather. Do not neglect “to meet together ... but encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:24–25). Lord’s Day worship comes first.

Guard the gospel. Protecting sound doctrine is not the pastors’ job alone. Paul rebuked whole congregations — not just their leaders — for drifting toward “a different gospel” (Galatians 1:6–9). Every member should know the church’s faith well enough to recognize and resist error.

Love one another. “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This love is tangible: bearing burdens (Galatians 6:2), showing hospitality (Romans 12:13), pursuing the wandering, and refusing to be passive about the church’s unity (Ephesians 4:3).

Submit to the elders. Members honor Christ by submitting to the shepherds He has given, who keep watch over their souls (Hebrews 13:17). This is not blind following, but glad trust as the elders teach and lead by the Scriptures.

Reach the lost. The Great Commission belongs to every member, not only to pastors and missionaries (Matthew 28:18–20). As a royal priesthood, we proclaim Christ — in our gathered worship and as we scatter into the week.

Support the church. Members promise to support the church’s worship and work “to the best of their ability” — with their presence, their gifts, their service, and their giving (more on this in Session 5).

8. The Membership Vows

When a person becomes a member of CMPC, he or she answers five questions before God and the congregation. These are not mere formalities; they are vows. The first three concern your faith in Christ; the last two concern your life in the church.

THE FIVE MEMBERSHIP VOWS

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the gospel?
3. Do you 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?
4. Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

9. Membership, Discipline, and Restoration

Because these vows are made to God, we take them seriously — and that is precisely why the church practices loving accountability. When a member drifts away, the pastor and elders (the Session) seek to shepherd that person back into the flock. If, over time, there is no response, a person may eventually be removed from the membership roll. This is done only with great reluctance, and always with the spiritual well-being of the individual at heart.

Far from being harsh, this kind of care is one of the gifts of membership. It means that someone has promised to come after you if you wander, just as you have promised to help carry others. When a member moves away, we do all we can to help them find a faithful local church home where they live. Membership, in other words, is a community that refuses to let anyone quietly disappear.

FOR THE CLASS

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

13. Many people today say they love Jesus but feel no need to belong to a church. How would you respond, kindly and biblically?
14. Does the idea of formally “joining” a church feel natural or strange to you? Where does that reaction come from?
15. Of the responsibilities of membership (gather, guard the gospel, love, submit, reach the lost, support), which comes most easily to you? Which is hardest?
16. Read the five vows slowly. Is there one you would hesitate to make today? Talk honestly about why.

Dig into the Word

- › 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 — *why can no member say “I have no need of you”?*
- › Acts 2:42–47 — *what did the first church devote itself to, and what was the result?*
- › Matthew 18:15–20 — *what is the goal of every step Jesus describes?*
- › Hebrews 13:7, 17 — *what do members owe their leaders, and leaders the members?*

Take It Home

Prayerfully read through the five membership vows this week. Write down any question you want to ask a pastor or elder before you would be ready to take them.

SESSION FIVE

Living as a Member of CMPC

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

— Acts 2:42

THIS SESSION AT A GLANCE

- The rhythm of life at CMPC can be captured in four words: Exalt, Equip, Engage, and Embrace.
- Exalt — our worship is ordered around the elements God appoints, and our singing is for the whole congregation, not a performance.
- Equip — we never stop growing; Sunday School each week is our main engine for being taught the Word.
- Engage — every member is gifted to serve, in the church, the community, and among the nations.
- Embrace — deep, gospel-rooted friendships and Community Groups are essential to a fruitful Christian life.

Once we belong to Christ and to His church, how do we live it out together? At CMPC the rhythm of our shared life can be captured in four words. We Exalt God in worship, we Equip one another in His Word, we Engage the world in service and witness, and we Embrace one another in gospel community.

1. Exalt — Gathering for Worship

Worship is the central activity of the church’s life. We gather on the Lord’s Day, morning and evening, to meet with God together (Hebrews 10:25). But why is the service shaped the way it is? Our worship is not built around

what we find clever or entertaining; it is ordered around the things God Himself has appointed.

The PCA's Directory for the Worship of God lists the proper elements of a worship service: the reading of Holy Scripture, the preaching of the Word, prayer, the singing of psalms and hymns, the presentation of our offerings, confessing the faith (as when we recite the Apostles' Creed or a catechism), and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. When you come to CMPC, every part of the service is one of these God-given elements — because He commands and models them in His Word (Nehemiah 8; Luke 4:16–21; Acts 2:42; Colossians 3:16).

A word about music. Few questions stir more opinions than musical style. CMPC takes its cue from a simple biblical conviction: in the gathered church, the congregation is not an audience watching a performance but the choir (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19). All questions of style and preference are radically subordinate to questions of content — the first question of any song is not whether it suits our taste, but whether it faithfully proclaims the gospel and builds up the body. Our accompaniment is meant to support congregational singing, not bury it. A good test is whether you can hear the people around you sing. The gospel, not a musical style, is what unites us, and truth outlasts tunes. A good congregational song is simply one that God's people can sing together, want to sing together, and should sing together. So at CMPC you will hear a blend of time-tested hymns and faithful newer songs, chosen for their truth and singability rather than for being old or new, traditional or contemporary.

Our offerings. Because the presentation of our gifts is itself an element of worship, we also give as an act of worship. The Bible cares less about the amount than the heart — “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:7). You will hear no high-pressure appeals here; we simply make our needs known and invite you to give joyfully, supporting the ministry of the church and the spread of the gospel to the nations. Giving is between you and the Lord, and records are kept confidential (Matthew 6:1–4).

2. Equip — Growing Through the Word

A Christian is never finished growing. Peter urges us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), and Christ gives His church teachers to equip the saints “for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” until we reach maturity (Ephesians 4:11–13). None of us ever graduates from needing to be taught.

Our main weekly engine for this is Sunday School. Classes for every age — from the nursery through high school, and a full range of adult classes — meet each week to study and apply the Scriptures together. We urge every member, young and old, to be in a class; it is one of the simplest and most fruitful habits in the Christian life. Beyond Sunday morning, Wednesday Night Alive (WNA), Men’s and Women’s Fellowships and Bible studies, and other groups offer still more ways to dig into the Word.

3. Engage — Serving and Reaching Out

Every believer is gifted by the Holy Spirit to serve (Romans 12:3–8; 1 Peter 4:10–11). Membership is for loving one another. And there are many ways to serve at CMPC.

Inside the gathered church you can sing in the choir or play in the orchestra, help with hospitality and ushering, or care for children in the nursery. Our deacons lead the church’s Word and Deed ministry, extending Christ’s mercy to people in need. And we engage beyond our walls: CMPC supports missionaries around the world and sends teams on mission journeys, because the Great Commission belongs to every member (Matthew 28:19–20). A word of balance: do not let all your time be consumed by activity inside the church. We are also called to engage our neighbors, schools, and workplaces with the good news of Jesus. Each member is encouraged to identify his or her spiritual gifts and find a fitting place to serve.

4. Embrace — Belonging in Gospel Community

The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone. We are a body and a family (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12), and deep, gospel-rooted friendships are essential to fruitfulness, not optional extras.

There is “gospel-plus” community — relationships built on the gospel plus something else, like similar age, life stage, income, or interests. That kind of community is pleasant, but it could exist even if the gospel were not true; people who share a hobby or a season of life naturally gravitate to one another. Then there is “gospel-revealing” community — relationships that would never exist apart from the power of the gospel, knitting together people across generations, backgrounds, and walks of life. It is this second kind that actually puts the gospel on display.

CMPC longs for that. We do not simply want you to find people who are like you; we want you woven into committed, diverse, Christ-centered relationships that show a watching world what Jesus does. And because we really are family, we handle conflict as family: following Jesus’ pattern in Matthew 18:15ff., we go directly and lovingly to one another, and we do not suffer in silence — we speak up, with grace, to a friend, an elder, or a pastor. This is how a body grows healthy and stays together.

Where Do We Go from Here?

This is the rhythm of life at CMPC — to Exalt, Equip, Engage, and Embrace, as we come to know, glorify, and enjoy God together. If, by God’s grace, you are ready to take the five membership vows and join this congregation, we would be honored to walk with you. If you still have questions, that is good and welcome; reach out to Pastor Steven. Whatever your next step, our prayer is the one we began with: that you would, more and more, “discover the joy” of knowing Jesus Christ — and that you would know it not alone, but among His people.

FOR THE CLASS

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

17. Exalt: How does knowing that you are a participant-- part of the choir and not the audience-- change the way you come to worship?

18. Equip: What is one way you could be more intentional about growing in the Word this year? Could a Sunday School class be a next step?
19. Engage: Where might God be calling you to serve — in the church, the community, or among the nations? What gifts has He given you?
20. Embrace: Honestly, is your current Christian community mostly “gospel-plus” (people like you) or “gospel-revealing” (across real differences)? What would deeper friendship look like here?

Dig into the Word

- › Colossians 3:16 — *what are we doing for one another when we sing?*
- › Ephesians 4:11–16 — *how does Christ intend His people to grow up into maturity?*
- › Romans 12:3–13 — *what does Spirit-gifted, genuine love look like in the body?*
- › Acts 2:42–47 — *which of the four E’s do you see in the life of the first church?*

Take It Home

Pick one of the four E’s — Exalt, Equip, Engage, or Embrace — where you sense the most room to grow, and take one concrete step this month: join a class, sign up to serve, or invite someone from your Community Group to a meal.

What's Next?

If I am ready to take the next step at CMPC, what do I do?

How to Become a Member

Becoming a member of CMPC is a joyful and straightforward process:

1. Reach out to Pastor Steven Clark and let him know you are ready to join. A simple email or conversation is all it takes to begin.
2. You will meet with a couple of our elders. This is not an exam to pass but a warm welcome — a chance for them to get to know you, to hear your understanding of the gospel, and to pray with you.
3. You will come before the congregation on a Sunday morning and take the membership vows. These are the five questions every member of a PCA church answers, set forth in the Book of Church Order (BCO 57-5):

THE FIVE MEMBERSHIP VOWS (BCO 57-5)

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

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

4. Grow in your faith! Membership is not a finish line but a starting line. Settle into worship, get into a Sunday School class and a Community Group, find a place to serve, and keep growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

A Word for Those Who Come from a Non-Presbyterian Background

If you come to CMPC convinced of believer's baptism, you can still join here with a clear conscience. There is a wise way to think it through. When considering a church, a good question to ask is not "Is this the church that matches me at every point and every issue?" but "Is this a faithful church — one that preaches the gospel, treasures the Word, rightly guards the Lord's Table, and will genuinely shepherd my soul? Can I joyfully submit to this church?" If you find CMPC to be the most faithful church within reach, then committing to it is far better than lingering on the edges or drifting between congregations.

If you were baptized as a believer, the PCA already regards you as baptized, so nothing stands between you and membership. Our membership vows ask you to confess your sin, rest in Christ, live as His follower, support the church's work, and submit to its government and peace — they do not ask you to affirm infant baptism or Presbyterian government. You would simply want to be candid with the elders about your convictions, hold them without being divisive (that is part of promising to "study the church's purity and peace"), and understand the practical limits: you would never be asked to violate your conscience, but you could not serve as an officer while you differ from the church's confession, and you would want to talk through what baptism will mean for any children God gives you. In other words, keep first things first. Where the gospel is preached and a true church family will love you and

watch over your soul, a settled and charitable difference over baptism is a reason to join thoughtfully, not a reason to stay away.

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Exalt, Equip, Engage, Embrace