



What's Next for New Members?

“What's next?” you may be asking. “Now that I'm a member of this congregation, what can I expect? And what is expected of me?”

The fact is, the nature of your membership in this church is very much up to you. Each of us carries out our membership vows in different ways.

However, *as a congregation* we do have some expectations. We have some understandings of what is involved in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. In general, we are guided by these eight commitments. We invite you to make them yours as well.

1. We can come as we are.

We can enter this fellowship without pretense. We are free to leave behind the masks we sometimes wear in other relationships and come with our whole selves—the good and the not-so-good.

We find that here we are accepted as we are, that people know us and love us in spite of our shortcomings. Oh, sometimes there is judgment of one another—but then we try to work it through in love. In this caring circle we sense God's gracious love for us—and empowered by that, we are able to love others. We invite you to come just as you are.

2. We create a fellowship.

Together, by the help of God's Spirit, we are building here a Christian community, a fellowship of believers. Our congregation is one of openness, friendship, and care. We don't always succeed in being the sort of fellowship God intends, but we are growing.

As you will discover, “fellowship” often happens best in small groups where people can become more deeply acquainted. Here we share our joys, our hopes, our hurts. Here we learn the practical lessons of caring for one another. You are invited to find your place among the classes, fellowship groups, service groups, and other organizations in our church. We urge you to become an active participant in at least one of these—for your sake and ours.

3. We continue the journey.

All of us are travelers on the pathway of faith and discipleship. We learn as we go, sometimes progressing, sometimes stalled at a difficult passage, sometimes falling back. But we intend to keep moving, supporting each other on the way.

And what is our objective? To ground our life wholly in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. To put God's reign first in our lives and to do God's will in all things. To follow the living Christ as servants among the people he loves so much. To join in the Spirit's transformation of the world. Will you commit yourself to such a lifelong journey?

The Christian journey is not an easy one. We are strengthened in the following ways.

4. We join in worship and prayer.

The regular, corporate worship of God is the center of our congregation's life. Here we are nourished by God for the life of faith and discipleship. Through praise, confession, and forgiveness, through affirming our faith together, through hearing the biblical story read and listening as our pastor interprets it, through sacraments, through our rededication to Christ as disciples . . . in all these ways we are refreshed and renewed for the journey.

And much the same is true of our personal devotional life. As families, as couples, as co-workers, or alone, we take time for regular Bible reading and prayer. Some of us use devotional guides, such as *The Upper Room* devotional guide. Others organize their devotions around the demanding issues of the day, both personal and societal. What about you? We urge you to establish a pattern of regular worship of God, both with the congregation and individually.

5. We study Christ's way.

Through regular participation in Sunday school, Bible study groups, and other learning opportunities, we are growing in faith and discipleship. Little by little

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we are building a bridge between the Bible and life—from the riches of our heritage to the everyday concerns of family, school, and work, to the tough ethical issues of our time.

The Bible is not always easy to understand, with its language and customs of people long ago. Yet we believe that it holds God's Word for today. In order to discover the Scriptures' meaning, to accept it and apply it, we need to help one another in serious, personal Bible study. We invite you to take part in that.

6. We give to God and to others.

We believe that we are stewards, caretakers of the beautiful gifts God has given. Just think of what has been entrusted to us—this glorious world and its resources, our varied abilities, time and energy to use them, work to do, financial resources, family, friends . . . !

We give thanks for these gifts and use them with care. We choose to invest our time, talent, and treasure in ways that will make a creative difference. We serve in countless ways in both church and community. And when it comes to financial giving, we bring to God our "first fruits," a carefully considered proportion of our income "off the top"—not what is left over. For many of us, the tithe (one-tenth) is the standard for such giving.

You have received much. We invite you to be a steward of these gifts, to be a giver.

7. We invite others to join us.

What we have found in this church is too good to keep to ourselves. Besides, we have been commissioned by the risen Christ: "Go . . . and make disciples." We have a mandate to witness the good news of God's love in Christ and to invite others into the faith community.

In part we do this by our actions, by demonstrating to all how faithful people live. In part we do it with words—telling others of our own faith journey, sharing what this congregation has meant to us, inviting people to visit this church. With some we raise the fundamental question of faith: "Will you ground your life in God as revealed in Jesus Christ? Will you become a part of Christ's Body, the Church?"

What a privilege it is when we bring others into this fellowship of believers! Will you make such witness a part of your life?

8. We go out in ministry.

Our congregation is not an end in itself. All our fellowship, worship, study, and stewardship is in preparation for our work as Christ's disciples in our communities, in the whole world. There Christ is already in ministry and calls us to join him.

Some of our ministry is through simple acts of friendship and care—listening to a neighbor, visiting a sick co-worker, comforting a child. Some is more complex—organizing a community food pantry, joining a minority group's effort to secure adequate housing, speaking up for justice near and far, supporting efforts to bring world peace.

The ministry to which we are called is not necessarily easy. But we are propelled by our own experience of God's love. And we are drawn by a magnificent vision, God's promise of the coming world of righteousness, liberation, peace, and justice. Will you join us in this ministry?

What now?

Our congregation is not yet all God wants it to be. We have a long way to go. Will you help us grow? Will you continue in your own growth? You can do so in these eight ways—

1. By coming just as you are;
2. By helping us create a Christian fellowship;
3. By continuing in your journey of faith and discipleship;
4. By worshiping and praying regularly;
5. By studying Christ's way, relating the Bible to life;
6. By giving to God and others;
7. By inviting others to join in this fellowship;
8. By taking up your ministry in the world.

Gracious God, we are grateful for this congregation of your people and give you thanks for every member. We rejoice especially as new people become part of our fellowship and join in helping us become more faithful in Christ's mission. May your Spirit continue to guide us all into deeper faith and more obedient ministry. In Christ's name. Amen.

Adapted from a tract written by George E. Koehler for Discipleship Resources.