

# THE CHURCH'S ONE FOUNDATION

NEW MEMBER CLASS



NEW ST PETER'S

.....

*In a city that pursues arrival,  
New St. Peter's exists to make disciples  
by inviting pilgrims and skeptics into  
life on the road with Jesus.*

.....

© 2023 New St. Peter's Presbyterian Church

New St. Peter's Presbyterian Church  
6116 N. Central Expressway, Suite 1060  
Dallas, TX 75206  
[www.newstpeters.org](http://www.newstpeters.org)

## INTRODUCTION

---

Welcome to the New Member Class at New St. Peter's. We are glad you have chosen to explore membership with us. Church membership is a great joy and a weighty responsibility, and our hope for this course is that you would engage with the stories of God's faithfulness to His people—and specifically to these people—in order that you might taste and see that weight of joy which you are considering entering into with us.

We have organized this class into four sections, loosely parallel to four verses from the beloved hymn “The Church's One Foundation” (Samuel J. Stone, 1886), which has informed our liturgy and theology throughout the lifespan of this church. We hope you will see the four sections of this course building on one another from the ground up, providing what we think is an honest picture of who we have been up to this point—faults, failures, joys, and all. However, we hope you will chiefly see that from start to finish, from foundation to cornerstone, the church is built upon Jesus Christ alone. Here is a basic outline of the course...

**I. Foundations:** What is this church built on?

- a. Gospel
- b. Word
- c. Sacrament
- d. Discipline

**II. Confession:** What does this church believe?

- a. Reformation & Tradition

(cont. on page 4)

- b. Creeds, Confessions, Catechisms
- c. Presbyterian Polity
- d. Reformed Catholicity

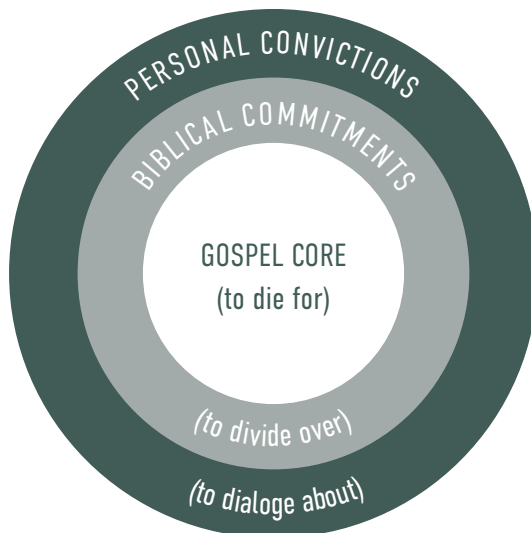
**III. Building:** What is this church's story?

- a. The Presbyterian Church in America
- b. New St. Peter's Presbyterian Church

**IV. Mission:** What is this church called to do?

- a. Mission
- b. Core Values
- c. Philosophy of Ministry

Also, when discussing matters of theology, it is helpful to recognize that some convictions are primary, meaning they are central tenets of the faith that should not be compromised. And others are secondary or tertiary, meaning Christians have understood the Bible's teaching differently and have had differences on matters where there is room for debate. Here's a helpful visual:



# 1

## FOUNDATIONS

*The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord  
She is His new creation by water and the word  
From heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride  
With His own blood He bought her and for her life He died*

---

### *Gospel*

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. The church's one foundation across denominations, borders, time and more is Jesus Christ. Even more specifically Jesus Christ as He is presented in the gospel story—crucified for the sins of His people, dead, buried, and then risen from the grave, ascended in glory, and promising to return at the end of days. The gospel story is so sweeping and so integral to Scripture that we might barely scratch the surface in one brief class. However, for centuries, theologians have looked at the gospel through two primary lenses...

#### I. Redemption Accomplished

*Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-8.* Redemption was really, historically accomplished by Jesus Christ in time and space when He died for our sins, was buried, and rose from the grave.

His coming was the fulfillment of the great narrative of Scripture, which unfolds in four stages:

1. **Creation** (Genesis 1:1)
2. **Fall** (Genesis 3:6-7; Genesis 3:23-24)
3. **Redemption** (2 Corinthians 5:17-18, 21)
4. **Restoration** (Revelation 21:3-4)

## II. Redemption Applied

*Read Romans 8:28-30.* Redemption is also applied in the life of the believer. All that Christ accomplished through His death and resurrection in history is applied to Christians through faith in Him. John Murray, a theology professor says, “Salvation is of the Lord in its application as well as in its conception and accomplishment” (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 1955).

Theologians like Murray have explained this reality through what’s called the “order of salvation,” which includes:

- **Election** (Ephesians 1:3-10)
- **Effectual Calling** (John 6:35-40)
- **Regeneration** (Ezekiel 36:24-27; John 3:1-8)
- **Faith & Repentance** (Ephesians 2:8-9, Acts 11:18)
- **Justification** (Zechariah 3:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- **Adoption** (Galatians 4:4-7)
- **Sanctification** (Titus 2:11-14; Galatians 5:22-24)
- **Glorification** (1 Corinthians 15:50-57)

The “Root” that undergirds all of this is the doctrine of “union with Christ.” It is the thing by which the Holy Spirit applies to us the benefits of this story of redemption. Sinclair Ferguson, a theology

professor, says, “All that Christ has done for me representatively becomes mine actually.” (John 15:1-5, Romans 6:1-11). Through union with Christ, we are called, made alive, and kept by God’s grace, so that there can be no doubt that salvation is from the Lord!

## Word

The church is founded on the truth of the gospel. Its cornerstone is Jesus Christ, and He is revealed to us in His word, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. The church, therefore is a creature of the word. This church believes that “the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. 1). We are built on the word of God.

But what do we mean by “built” on the word? Reformed theology has held to five core tenets to explain the doctrine of Scripture (From Louis Berkof’s *Systematic Theology*, 1932):

- I. **Inspiration:** “The Holy Spirit used the writers [of Scripture] as He Himself had formed them for their task, without in any way suppressing their personality. He qualified them and guided them, and thus inspired the books of Scripture...He illumined their minds, prompted them to write, repressed the influence of sin on their literary activity, and guided them in...the choice of their words and in the expression of their thoughts.”  
(see 2 Peter 1:20-21)
- II. **Authority:** “Scripture has authority in and of itself as the inspired Word of God...the Bible must be believed for its own sake. It is the inspired Word of God and therefore addresses man with divine authority.” (see Psalm 19)

- III. **Necessity:** “Scripture is necessary in virtue of the good pleasure of God to make the Word the seed of the church....The historical character of God’s revelation, the history of redemption, and the redemptive facts...made it necessary to commit God’s special revelation to writing.” (see 1 Corinthians. 15:1-8)
- IV. **Perspicuity (or clarity):** “The knowledge necessary to salvation, though not equally clear on every page of Scripture, is yet conveyed to man throughout the Bible in such a simple and comprehensible form that one who is earnestly seeking salvation can under the guidance of the Holy Spirit...easily obtain the necessary knowledge.” (see 1 Corinthians 2:15)
- V. **Sufficiency:** “The Reformers [denied] that there is alongside of Scripture an unwritten Word of God with equal authority and therefore equally binding on the conscience.”  
(see 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Implicit in the doctrine of inspiration is also the truth that Scripture in *inerrant*, meaning, according to theologian John Frame that “inerrant language makes good on its claims. When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we mean that the Bible makes good on its claims.” (Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 2010).

## *Sacrament*

“The visible church is a fellowship of people called to the state of grace by Word and sacrament,” said Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629). That is, while the church is certainly a creature of the word, God reveals to us in His word that He has not left us without sensible signs called sacraments, through which He calls and sets apart His people for participation with Himself and one another.

Theologian John Calvin defined the sacraments as a “testimony of divine grace toward us confirmed by an outward sign” (*Institutes*, 1559). They are “visible, holy signs and seals instituted by God so that He



might make believers understand more clearly and reassure them of the promises and benefits of the covenant of grace” (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4*, 1901). They are the means by which Christ is present with His people through spiritual communion, and Christ Himself blesses and uses them to nourish and strengthen us in all grace. There are two sacraments in Christ’s church:

**Baptism:** Read *Genesis 17:1-4; Acts 2:38-39; Romans 4:9-12*.

Baptism is the sign and seal of our “ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 94). It is the start of the Christian journey, as it were. Across the church today, there are various views on how and to whom baptism is to be administered. While it is not a requirement for membership that you subscribe to this view, our church practices Covenant Baptism (also called *paedobaptism*), which can be summarized as follows:

#### A SIMPLE WAY TO THINK ABOUT COVENANT BAPTISM

1. **The Bible’s Covenant Theology:** One unified story from OT to NT
2. **God’s Covenant People:** One unified people in OT and NT
3. **The “Newness” of the New Covenant:** New, yet in continuity
4. **The Nature of Covenant Signs and Seals:** Signifying God’s promise and action

For more on the doctrine of Covenant Baptism, see Alex Dean, “Baptism,” 2016

**The Lord’s Supper:** Read *Luke 22:14-20; 1 Corinthians 10:14-17; 11:17-34*. The Lord’s Supper is a sign and seal wherein Christ’s “death is showed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers

of His body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace” (*Westminster Shorter Catechism*, 96). It is the feast along the road of the Christian journey, whereby Christ feeds us on Himself and strengthens us in all grace. Again, there are several views on the nature of the Lord’s Supper. At New St. Peter’s, we believe that Christ is spiritually present with us as we partake at His table. That is, when Christians partake, we “do therein feed upon the body and blood of Christ, not after a corporal and carnal, but in a spiritual manner; yet truly and really, while by faith they receive and apply unto themselves Christ crucified, and all the benefits of His death” (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, 170).



Last Supper (in modern context), Fritz Von Uhde, 1886.

We practice open communion, meaning that all believers in Jesus Christ who are in good standing in His church are invited to come and partake. We invite you to experience the rest He provides at His table.

## *Discipline*

Discipline can sound daunting, but it simply means that Christ rules His church, and that He calls Christians to affiliate with a local church through membership and to submit to His rule through His appointed leaders, chosen by Christ for the care of souls. Every member of New St. Peter's takes the membership vows for the Presbyterian Church in America, found in our denomination's constitution, the *Book of Church Order*. These vows are:

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?

These vows are oriented toward two critical goals: dependence on God and dependence on one another. The first three vows are meant to anchor us to the truth that the ground is level at the foot of the cross; we are all in need of God's mercy and direction. The latter two vows remind us that God has saved us to be part of His people, not merely "lone rangers." They remind us that we have privileges and responsibilities related to membership in the body of Christ, chief among them is submission to one another out of love, and particular submission to the government and discipline of the church.

As we walk through the course, consider these vows. Take them home and talk about them with your family. If you have questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to one of our pastors.

## 2

### CONFESSION

*Elect from ev'ry nation, yet one o'er all the earth  
Her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth  
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food  
And to one hope she presses, with ev'ry grace endued*

---

New St. Peter's is a confessional church, a member of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), a denomination which subscribes to the system of doctrine laid out in the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms*. More broadly, we are a Reformed church, stemming from a particular branch of the Protestant Reformation. And yet, we strive to maintain an appropriate catholicity and participation with Christ's church across the ages. In this section, we will discuss those matters, with a particular view to understanding the historical and theological context for our church's confession.

#### *Creeds & Tradition*

In the church's earliest days, Christian leaders met to formulate creedal statements primarily to defend against false teaching. Ecumenical Creeds in the earliest centuries focused on major Christian doctrines such as the person and work of Jesus and the nature of the Trinity. These Creeds, such as the Apostles Creed which is used in our liturgy, were

preserved and handed down for the teaching and edification of the church and for defending against heresy down through the centuries. Most of the later Confessions and Catechisms of the churches in the time of the Reformation were formulated based on these Creeds, and expounded on various parts of their teaching. Thus, from our earliest days, Christians have been part of a confessing tradition.

Theologian Jaroslav Pelikan says, “Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.”

The word tradition literally means “to hand over”, or “hand down”, from one generation to another. Though it is subordinate to Scripture, it is also an outworking of the Biblical command to “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). So, tradition doesn’t mean, “this is the way we’ve always done it and we can’t ever change it.” It is better defined as theological conviction that finds its way into our confession and practice. In this way, it anchors us to a meaning that was around long before us and will certainly outlive us.

### *Reformation & Confessions*

In 1517, a German Monk named Martin Luther presented his *Ninety-Five Theses*, a series of theological assertions meant to provoke discussion and change in the medieval church. Luther lit the spark that became the flame of the Protestant Reformation, a pivotal moment in church history. The Reformation—led by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others—was, at its core, a movement to recover the centrality of some of the gospel truths outlined in the first section. These core tenets became known as the Five Solas of the Reformation. They are...

***Sola Scriptura:*** The sufficiency and authority of Scripture alone, over against the claims of Rome that Biblical authority was insufficient and needed to be supplemented by the clerics.

***Solus Christus:*** Christ alone is the mediator between God and man, and His sacrifice for sins on the cross is alone sufficient for man's salvation.

***Sola Fide:*** Believers receive the sacrifice of Christ by faith alone, not by works or by any other means.

***Sola Gratia:*** This faith is itself a gift of grace alone. From start to finish, salvation is a work of God's grace, that He alone might be praised.

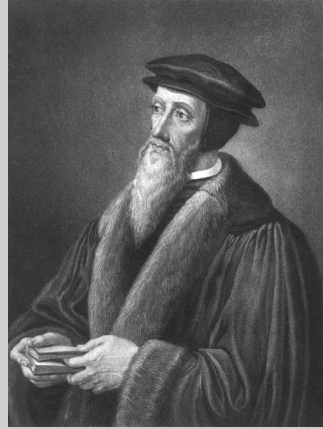
***Soli Dei Gloria:*** All of this resounds to the glory of God alone, and the praise of His glorious grace.

These principles took root in the various Reformed branches of the church coming out of the Protestant Reformation, and they have been handed down in many ways through the Protestant Reformed tradition. From the beginning of the Reformation, Protestants were quite aware of being part of a tradition, and found many benefits in remaining so. Those who threw tradition overboard were viewed as radicals in the church, who ended up taking on anti-traditional “lenses” through which they also read Scripture, of which they often remained functionally unaware...making it that much more unhelpful and even sometimes dangerous.

The PCA's Confession is called the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and it is accompanied by the *Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms*. These documents were formulated by a second generation Reformation movement in the Church of England, and they too sought to recover and explain basic Christian doctrine as taught in the Scriptures. The Westminster Standards, as they are called, come from a particular historical context, which can be summarized like this:

## THE ORIGINS OF THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

- Rise of Roman Catholicism in the west (early to late medieval period)
- The Protestant Reformation
  - ▷ Luther
  - ▷ Sola Scriptura
  - ▷ Calvin
- The English Reformation
  - ▷ Politics
  - ▷ People (Cranmer, Knox & Scots Presbyterians, English Puritans)
  - ▷ Presbyterian Doctrine Codified



While the Westminster Standards are subordinate to Scripture, we believe they represent a robust and accurate summary of what Scripture teaches, and that they are useful in faith & practice. They are the theological lanes which guide our worship, witness, and life together. Some may ask, “Do I need to believe every point of the Westminster Standards to become a member of this church?” By no means. These standards guide our pastors and elders as they teach and lead us, and we use them robustly in discipleship. However, to be a member of this church, the most basic confession you must make is summarized in the Apostles’ Creed:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty, 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 rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the  
Father Almighty;  
from thence He shall come to judge the quick 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.*

\*He descended into judgment and continued in the state of the dead until the third day.

## *Presbyterian Polity*

Broadly speaking, there are three types of church governance, or polity, across Protestant traditions. The hierarchical forms of government seen in anglican and episcopal churches emphasize clerical authority, and decisions are made by the smallest body in a top-down fashion. In congregational forms of government, major decisions in church life are made by the church as a whole. The authority rests in the entire body as an assembly. Further, congregational churches are typically autonomous and not connected to other bodies by ecclesiastical authority.

In presbyterian polity, churches are governed by a plurality of elders who are elected by the congregation. It is a system of oversight that is representative, connectional, and accountable at multiple levels. The three “courts” or levels of governing authority in the Presbyterian Church in America are:

***The Session:*** The group of elders from a particular church who have been called by God and elected by the congregation to exercise oversight over the local church. Their primary responsibilities include shepherding the local flock, oversight of worship, spiritual discipline, and admitting and dismissing members and communicants. At New St. Peter’s, our Session meets at least once per month for prayer and discussion about matters of leadership. Portions of those meetings are open to the congregation, so please contact our pastors if you would like to attend.

***The Presbytery:*** A group of elders from several churches in a region, who are responsible for the examination and ordination of teaching elders within the presbytery's bounds, local and regional missions efforts, and matters of governance pertaining to churches in the region. Our teaching elders (pastors) are members of, and accountable to, the local presbytery, providing a layer of oversight and accountability that is a good gift to them and to the church.

***The General Assembly:*** An assembly of elders from PCA churches around the United States, who gather annually to deliberate on matters pertaining to the whole church. The General Assembly oversees denominational agencies, such as Mission to the World, and is charged with protecting the church from heresy and schism.

Each of these courts are comprised of two classes of elders who have the same authority in the church: teaching elders (pastors ordained by the presbytery) and ruling elders (lay elders ordained by the local Session). While their gifts and function in the church are slightly different, their authority in the church is the same, and this too provides safety and accountability for ministers in Christ's church. Further, the courts of the church are set up to provide safety and protect the rights and privileges of the church's members. Church members always have opportunities to appeal decisions of lower courts to higher courts when they are convinced of the biblical and/or theological truth of a matter. If you have questions about this, we encourage you to speak to one of our pastors.

*Read Acts 14:24-15:35.* Which elements from the outline above can you pick out?

*Read 1 Peter 5:1-5, and Hebrews 13:17.* What are the responsibilities of elders in Christ's church?

### *Reformed Catholicity*

At New St. Peter's, we strive for what has been called "Reformed catholicity," which means we aim to retrieve from the biblical theological

tradition of the church throughout the ages, while we also seek to locate ourselves within the movement of the Reformed and always reforming according to God's word and informed by our commitment to the Westminster Standards.

In their book, *Reformed Catholicity*, Michael Allen and Scott Swain argue for a “ruled” (confessional, creedal) reading of the Bible, what they call a “Reformed catholic” approach to theological interpretation. Their approach is based on two commitments:

1. The church is given authority from God in His word to teach a faith handed down to the community. Though the authority of the church is subordinate to Scripture, the Bible itself teaches the church to practice theological interpretation in a kind of authorized community. This protects the Reformation principle of *Sola Scriptura* from becoming *Solo Scriptura* (Scripture alone and no one else).
2. To “contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) implies there is something the Reformed can learn from the historic church and from other traditions, and ties us to a confessional impulse that is catholic in the sense that it does not cut itself off from the broad tradition of the church.

While Allen & Swain focus primarily on biblical/theological interpretation, they do note that Reformed catholicity must aim at both faith and practice. Our approach aims at both. Practically speaking, what does this mean? It means that we stand firmly on the commitments of our own tradition while walking humbly in communication with the broader catholic (universal) tradition of the church in every age and every place. It means that we seek to walk humbly and not to cut ourselves off from other faithful traditions in Christ's church with whom we might quibble on the finer points of doctrine. Here are some ways we seek to practice a Reformed catholicity, as we walk humbly in our time and place.

Our *worship* is Reformed according to the limiting principles of Scripture and catholic by virtue of our participation in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, with Christ as its head. For example, we regularly confess the Apostles Creed as part of our liturgy.

Our *polity* is distinctively Reformed and Presbyterian, according to the Westminster Standards and the PCA Book of Church Order, but we seek a non-partisan connectionalism with like-minded churches and ministries in our own denomination and beyond.

Our *cultural engagement* is winsomely Reformed, in that we seek to bring the theological truths of Scripture and the Reformed confessions to bear in our context, that our neighbors may be won through the Gospel, by the power of the Holy Spirit. But it is also catholic in that we pursue non-partisan partnerships with gospel-believing churches and socially engaged institutions, for the good of our community (i.e. Thrive and Abide Women's clinics). Further, we seek to retrieve from both the Reformed tradition and from church history those ways of engaging culture handed down to us by our fathers. We don't need to reinvent the wheel, because the church has thought about cultural engagement for thousands of years, and there is much to be gleaned.

Our *theological emphases* are guarded by the Reformed confessions, but seek to retrieve the best of the church's teaching throughout the ages. For example, NSP has regularly been drawn to and informed by the works of the early church fathers known as the Patristics. While we would glimpse their teachings through the lenses of our later Reformed confessions, we believe retrieval is not only possible but beneficial. Further, our liturgy has been informed by the aesthetic beauty and bodily movement involved in other traditions (i.e. Anglican, Lutheran), and thus seeks within the limits of our confession to engage with the liturgy of the church universal.

# 3

## BUILDING

*Tho' with a scornful wonder the world sees her oppressed  
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed  
Yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up, "How long?"  
And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song*

---

Vincent Van Gogh suffered from depression and other mental health struggles, and was known to experience publicly embarrassing episodes. One such outburst took place in the context of a falling out with a friend and roommate, who left Van Gogh alone in his flat. Despondent and alone, he took a knife and cut off his own ear.

For a while after, Van Gogh spent time in an asylum where he looked for beauty through his art, painting profusely during his stay. Among his works in the Asylum was this self-



Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear,  
Vincent van Gogh, 1889

portrait, wherein Van Gogh depicts his ear bandaged, clearly a nod to the infamous incident. This is an honest and courageous self-portrait which tells the truth about the darkness inside this gifted artist who has given the world such beauty. It takes courage to tell the truth. But truth produces beauty.

For more on this story, see Russ Ramsey, *Rembrandt is in the Wind*, Zondervan, 2022.



New St. Peter's was founded in 2003 as a church plant when a group from Park Cities Presbyterian Church desired to establish a church in East Dallas. From the beginning, we have embraced the story of St. Peter in the Gospels, who, on the night that Jesus was betrayed and handed over to the authorities, denied knowing his Lord, and ultimately was given over to doubt and despair. But Jesus wasn't finished

with him. After He rose from the grave, Jesus restored Peter, reminded him of His love, and commissioned him as a key leader in the mission of His church. How can this be? Because Jesus died as if He were the worst of sinners, the worst of doubters and deniers, we can clutch the hope of His cross and rest in the restoration He provides. The rooster that crowed that night reminded Peter, and reminds us, that it is not *our* faithfulness that we place our hope in. Instead, we hope in Christ and *His* faithfulness to and for us.

Because of that hope, we can be honest about our story. We are an imperfect church that is a member of an imperfect denomination. As you consider joining us, there are some things we think you should know about us, both related to our successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses.

## *The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)*

The first presbytery in the United States was established in 1706, and presbyterians have a rich history and heritage in the American identity, including the establishment of many of the nation's earliest and most prominent theological institutions, missional movements, and more. While the fledgling church in America enjoyed a measure of unity for a time, the mid to late 18th century brought questions to the denomination surrounding revival and evangelistic/missional matters which resulted in a denominational split. About a hundred years later, another denominational split occurred resulting from disagreements about confessional distinctives and denominational cooperation. All of these debates were important in the history of presbyterianism in America because they dealt with issues like faithfulness to the Bible, subscription to a system of doctrine, and more. But perhaps the most significant split in American presbyterianism came in 1861.

You will likely recognize this year as pivotal in American History. At the outset of the Civil War, the presbyterian church also was experiencing division over the church's involvement in public matters. While there is much to be celebrated about the commitment of Southern Presbyterians to the integrity of the Scriptures and the centrality of spiritual matters in the church's mission, it is also true that leaders in the Southern church applied this "spirituality of the church" doctrine in their defense of the institution of slavery. Key leaders in the conservative presbyterian movement in the South, such as J.H. Thornwell, and R.L. Dabney, used biblical and Reformed theology in their justification and defense of the institution, and it is important to remember this part of our story and to lament.

In the 20th century, southern presbyterians also defended (or promoted by silence) segregation right up through the Civil Rights Era, with some key leaders even making biblical cases for segregation (See Sean Michael Lucas, *For a Continuing Church*, 2015). Simultaneously, two things were happening. The southern conservatives in the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) were defending some of the core

tenets of Scripture and maintaining faithfulness to the key truths of the gospel, while also applying some of those same truths to defend wicked institutions, like slavery in the 19th century and segregation in the 20th century. It is important for presbyterians to be honest about this heritage. We can both celebrate doctrinal fidelity and lament our part in the perpetuation of sins like racism. While we have a rich theological and confessional heritage, and while that confessional fidelity has led to the establishment of the PCA, we must also reflect on the ways we have failed to apply the gospel's truth by promoting or defending sinful practices.

How did the rest of the story unfold? In the 1960s and 1970s, theologically conservative presbyterians in the PCUS continued to strive for biblical and doctrinal fidelity. Some of the core doctrines they sought to defend included: the inerrancy of Scripture, the full deity of Christ, the historicity of His miracles, including the Resurrection, and more. These are central tenets of the faith that are worth defending in every age. When it became evident that reform from within was not possible, these southern presbyterians formed a new presbyterian denomination in 1973, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), of which New St. Peter's is joyfully a member congregation.

In 2016, at the 44th the General Assembly of the PCA, the church passed a resolution of repentance for its complicity in the sins of racism perpetuated down through our generations. That resolution, in part, reads like this:

*Be it resolved, that the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of corporate and historical sins, including those committed during the Civil Rights era, and continuing racial sins of ourselves and our fathers such as the segregation of worshipers by race; the exclusion of persons from Church membership on the basis of race; the exclusion of churches, or elders, from membership in the Presbyteries on the basis of race; the teaching that the Bible sanctions racial segregation and discourages inter-racial marriage; the participation in and*



*defense of white supremacist organizations; and the failure to live out the gospel imperative that “love does no wrong to a neighbor” (Romans 13:10); and*

*Be it further resolved, that this General Assembly does recognize, confess, condemn and repent of past failures to love brothers and sisters from minority cultures in accordance with what the Gospel requires, as well as failures to lovingly confront our brothers and sisters concerning racial sins and personal bigotry, and failing to “learn to do good, seek justice and correct oppression” (Isaiah 1:17)...*

In some ways, this repentance is still a work in progress, as repentance usually is. But as we noted at the outset, this is a story of God’s generational faithfulness despite man’s radical unfaithfulness, and thus today the PCA is thriving as a theologically conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denomination that seeks to be “Faithful to the Scriptures, True to the Reformed Faith, and Obedient to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).”

Here are a few highlights of the denomination’s agencies and efforts that New St. Peter’s is blessed to participate in:

- ***Mission to the World:*** The global missions organization of the PCA, which serves missionaries in over 100 countries around the world, for the upbuilding of Christ’s church.
- ***Mission to North America:*** The PCA’s national missions organization which supports denominational church planting and church renewal efforts.
- ***The PCA Unity Fund:*** A fund established in 2016 to accelerate the theological training of minorities in the PCA as well as their participation in church leadership.

- ***Covenant College & Seminary:*** The PCA's affiliated higher education institutions, training the next generation of Christians for mission in the world.
- ***Reformed University Fellowship:*** The PCA affiliated ministry to students on college campuses, seeking to reach college students and equip them for a lifetime of service in Jesus' church.
- And more... (for more information about denominational efforts and agencies, visit: [pcanet.org](http://pcanet.org)).

### *New St. Peter's Presbyterian Church*

In the final section of the course, we will unpack the mission and philosophy of ministry for our particular church. But it is important to bear in mind that we too, like our denomination as a whole, are an imperfect people with imperfect stories that Christ is redeeming for His glory. We will mention briefly some of the historic strengths, weaknesses, suffering, and hopes of this particular congregation so that you might have a clear picture of God's faithfulness to us over the years.

***Strengths & Emphases:*** NSP has always emphasized worship and the ordinary means of grace as the thing God uses most prominently for the upbuilding of His people. Here, there are not a lot of bells & whistles, but we do seek to honor Christ through reverent worship and faithful administration of the means of grace (word & sacrament). We have also historically valued what we call "Worship Training," or our children's programs alongside the worship service which seek to teach and train the youngest worshipers to understand their place in the worshiping life of the body. In our very youngest classes, we engage our children, body and soul, in the liturgy of the church, and seek to prepare them to join their parents in worship as soon as possible. Finally, New St. Peter's has a long heritage of community and care. Simply put, these people love each other and they love to show it! We pray you have experienced some of that love during your time with us.

**Weaknesses:** New St. Peter's has struggled a bit with our identity in our community. At times, we have tied that struggle to the lack of a permanent building (we continue to pursue one), but often that has served as an excuse for our struggle to imagine with theological clarity and conviction what outreach to our neighborhoods looks like. We hope you will see in our latest update of the philosophy of ministry (section 4) that we are prayerfully at work to remedy this.

**Sufferings:** For a young church (planted in 2003), New St. Peter's has suffered quite a bit together. We recognize this is the nature of membership in Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:26), and yet it does seem that the Lord has called this congregation particularly to be one that learns how to suffer together. We have endured things like pastoral transitions, broken relationships with ministry partners, and far too many untimely deaths through tragedy in our congregation. It is our hope as a body to continue to learn what it means to rejoice in suffering, as we aim to glorify Christ in that which He calls us to bear together.

**Hopes:** In 2023 (when this material was written) and beyond, we hope to be a church that engages in faithful shepherding and Christian leadership, equipping the saints for the work of ministry, and radical hospitality in our neighborhoods. We also hope to steward the good gifts God has given us, particularly our growing building fund, to locate a permanent home for gathered ministry. But mainly, our hope is to follow Jesus on the road of discipleship, which brings us to a final discussion of our mission and philosophy of ministry.



# 4

## MISSION

*The Church shall never perish. Her dear Lord to defend  
To guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end  
Tho' there be those that hate her and strive to see her fail  
Against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail*

---

We conclude this course with an overview of this church's mission, core values, and philosophy of ministry. All that has come before informs our corporate identity, who believe the Lord has called us to be in our time and place, and how we go about answering that call. This section will help to illuminate some of the ins and outs of ministry here at New St. Peter's. We hope you will find it helpful, and we pray you'll be excited to engage with us in this journey.

### *Mission*

*In a city that pursues arrival, New St. Peter's exists to make disciples by inviting pilgrims and skeptics into life on the road with Jesus.*

Our city's gods (wealth, status, comfort, image) are all oriented toward one goal: arriving at "the good life." And yet throughout church history, Christians have seen themselves as pilgrims, travelers on the road answering Jesus' call to take up their cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23). The good news of the gospel is that even on the road to our final home,

Jesus provides rest through faith in Himself (Matthew 11:28). We invite you to experience the rest Jesus provides on this homeward journey.



Fritz Von Uhde, Difficult Journey, Transition to Bethlehem, 1890

## *Core Values*

### *I. Worship*

The church is an outpost of heaven on earth, and nowhere is this more evident than in its worship. So, even on the road with Jesus, we taste home each Lord's Day in the worship gathering, as we feed on Christ through His preached word, the sacraments, fellowship, and prayer. (Matthew 11:28–29)

## II. Calling

On the road, Jesus has given each of His disciples particular callings, so that as we disperse from one another each week, we do not cease to be the church. Instead, we are sent out into our neighborhoods as ambassadors of truth and love in every sphere of life. (John 20:21)

## III. Suffering

Life on the road with Jesus entails both compassion and courage. We suffer together and rejoice together (1 Corinthians 12:26) with compassion as we experience life in a broken world. We also pray for the courage to embrace the cost of discipleship (Luke 9:57-62) as we proclaim the good news of the kingdom of Christ. (Luke 9:22-23)

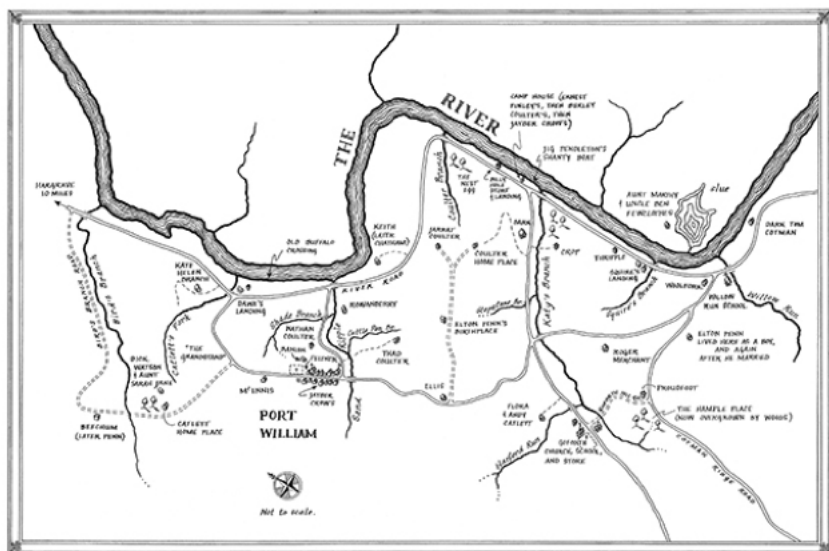
## IV. Membership

To be “membered” is to belong to a people and a place for as long as the Lord in His providence allows. On the road with Jesus, we belong to Him, and we belong to one another, seeking to call one another to the beauty of that belonging, and to the reconciliation that belonging entails. (John 17:20-21)

Author Wendell Berry tells the fictional stories of the “membership” of a small Kentucky town throughout its generations. In his novel, *Hannah Coulter*, an old woman reflects on her life in the community, which she describes as a “membership,” saying:

“This membership had an economic purpose and it had an economic result, but the purpose and result were a lot more than economic...there was no bookkeeping, no accounting, no settling up. What you owed was considered paid when you had done what needed doing. Every account was paid in full by the understanding that when we were needed, we would go, and when we had need

the others, or enough of them, would come...my children were born into that story, and into the membership that the story is about, and into the place that was home to the membership, and home to them too..." (Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 2004 p. 94-95)



Wendell Berry's Port William, by Molly O'Halloran

It is our desire to embody the kind of 'membership' that Berry writes about, that our care for one another might display the beauty of belonging to the family of God, on earth as it is in heaven.

### *Philosophy of Ministry: Church as Institution & Organism*

We invite pilgrims and skeptics on the road with Jesus to experience the regular rhythms of the Christian life. The invitation to follow Jesus is also an invitation to be part of His church in its two modes: as *institution* and *organism*. Reformed theology has long held that the visible church appears in the world in these two modes. As an institution, the church gathers for worship (preaching, sacraments, prayer), and church discipline (both formal and informal). But the journey doesn't end there.



When the church scatters, it appears in the world as an organism—the church members scattered for work, relationships, outreach, and more. We seek to structure our philosophy of ministry around this rhythm (*gathered & scattered*) in the following ways.

### *“Church Gathered”*

#### I. Worship

##### A. *Word* (preached, read, sung, liturgically embodied)

The word of God contained in the Scriptures informs every element of our worship. We preach exegetically from the Scriptures, seeking to bring God’s timeless word to bear in our place and time.

We also emphasize the public reading of Scripture, in line with the long standing practice in the Reformed tradition. In this way, we are shaped and trained by God’s word in a regular cadence.

We sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16) each week, so that we might worship our Lord and declare to one another the glorious truths of the gospel in song.

Finally, we are intentional about how the story of redemption shapes our liturgy. From God’s call to worship, ushering us into His presence through the blood of Jesus, to the benediction and the closing prayer for Jesus’ return, we want to embody and proclaim the story of the gospel. We believe the Lord uses this liturgy to form us according to the ordinary rhythms of grace and to provide fellowship with Jesus as we walk the road of discipleship with Him.

##### B. The *sacraments* (baptism & the Lord’s Supper) are mile markers and rest stops along the road of discipleship. They orient us to our place in God’s family, and they provide us with the nourishment

we need for the journey. Through His ‘visible words,’ Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption found in Him alone. We believe Christ is spiritually present in the sacraments, and so we observe them with reverence and hopeful regularity, knowing He promises to meet us in these ways until He returns.

C. *Prayer*. The Scriptures commend public prayer for all people (1 Timothy 2), and particular prayer for the household of faith by the elders (James 5). Prayer is also meant to be a regular rhythm in the life of the gathered church, and we want to express this in several ways through our weekly worship (i.e. intercessory prayer, elder prayer, etc.).

## II. Discipleship

### A. Christian education

- Our *School of Life & Doctrine (SOLD)* provides regular Christian education for all ages. Classes are aimed at teaching and training for life on the road with Jesus.
- *Children* (ages 0-11): Our weekly children’s classes use Session-approved curriculum and committed children’s volunteers to come alongside parents in teaching and training their children. Children will receive take-home materials for parents to engage throughout the week.
- *Youth* (ages 12-18): Youth ministry is a particular and strategic area in God’s Kingdom. Students are finding their place in the larger world, rapidly gaining more responsibility and independence, and are beginning to taste doubts, deep pain, and their own sin in a larger way than ever before. Therefore, youth ministry at New St. Peter’s exists to make disciples by inviting students into life on the road with Jesus. Together we feast on God’s Word, on good food, and on quality time spent together. In our dedicated teaching times the youth at

New St. Peter's work through the topics of Basic Bible (Old and New Testament), Apologetics, Spiritual Disciplines, and Christian History.

- *Adults (ages 18+)*: Our adult classes are taught by pastors, elders, and other approved church members, and they are aimed at training and equipping for life on the road with Jesus. Categories taught will include:
- *Faith & Work* (Reformed doctrine of vocation)
- *Biblical Theology*
- *Systematic & Historical Theology*
- *Practical Theology*

### III. Diaconal & Mercy Ministry

The deacons (elected and ordained officers) are tasked with developing “the grace of liberality in the members of the church” (among other things). Our diaconate leads the way in Mercy ministries through the collection and distribution of Alms, and through engaging the hands and feet of the church members in mercy ministries church-wide or in parishes

#### *“Church Scattered”*

### I. Parish Ministry

When we “scatter” from worship, we do not cease to be the church. Instead, we appear in the world as an organism, the church members sent out in their various callings, vocations, and stations in life. Because we live in a city that includes many diverse and geographically distinct neighborhoods, we seek to bring the

truths of the gospel and our calling as a church to bear in our neighborhoods, or “parishes.”



New St. Peter's Parish Map

Each parish is overseen by an elder, who provides equipping, training, and pastoral care in that particular parish. His primary focus is to train Neighborhood Group leaders in the parish to provide care and outreach opportunities for their small groups.

## II. Neighborhood Groups

Each parish is constituted by several “neighborhood groups.” They are called this to emphasize geographical locality and intentional outreach to neighbors in a particular place. These groups have a clear threefold purpose: prayer, fellowship, and local outreach/mercy ministry. For example, an East Richardson neighborhood

group might seek ways to serve the community through volunteer efforts at Berkner High School. Our staff and deacons help to be a catalyst for these local outreach and mercy efforts.

We encourage you to get connected to a neighborhood group in your parish, as these are the “frontline” groups for care and outreach. They are vital to the ministry of New St. Peter’s. If you need help connecting, please reach out to our staff.

### III. Calling/Vocation

To emphasize the core value of “calling,” we invest in equipping in the area of vocational theology, training Christians how to think biblically and theologically about their callings. We do this through Christian education, personal discipleship, and men’s & women’s ministry.

#### A. Men’s & Women’s Ministry

As we ‘scatter’ each week, we need companions on the journey, reminding us of our particular callings and helping us to conform more and more to the image of Jesus on the road with Him. In our culture, Men’s & Women’s ministry is integral in this pursuit. Men & Women need to be encouraged and built up in their particular calling as men & women, husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, singles, and more. Our Men’s & Women’s ministries emphasize this reality through Bible Studies, small groups, prayer and fellowship. For more information visit [newstpeters.org](http://newstpeters.org)

#### B. Women’s Leadership Team

The Women’s Ministry of New St. Peter’s seeks the development and utilization of women’s gifts for the good of the church in every area of service that Scripture allows.

The ministry is led by the Women's Leadership Team, a group of non-ordained leaders who are nominated from the congregation and appointed by the Session. These women direct, organize, and equip for women's ministry efforts in several ways, but primarily through involvement in women's ministry committees that give oversight to areas such as women's Bible studies, events, care and counsel, and more.

If you would like more information about how to get involved in the women's ministry, you can email [wlt@newstpeters.org](mailto:wlt@newstpeters.org).

## CONCLUSION

---

So, what now? We invite you to seek out our elders, pastors, deacons, staff, and women's leadership team with any questions you may have. They are here to walk with you as you consider the weighty gift of church membership.

Here is an outline of the process for membership at New St. Peter's:

- Attend the New Member Class.
- Fill out a new member questionnaire, provided online.
- Indicate to the staff (a pastor or the director of operations) if you intend to join the church.
- A "commission" of elders will be established to get to know you, hear your story, and answer any questions you may have. This interview must take place before new member joining.
- After your new member interview, we will host a joining Sunday, when you will stand before the congregation and take the vows listed on page 11, and the congregation will likewise make promises to you.
- It's time to party...we usually go out to lunch with new members on joining Sunday!

Questions? Contact one of our pastors.

## NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



Blank lined paper for writing.



**NEW ST PETER'S**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH