

TGC COVENANT MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Any discussion about covenant membership must begin with an understanding of what the church is and why it exists. What is it that I am becoming a member of and what is its aim? At the onset of Jesus' public ministry he announced the good news that God's people, for generations, had longed to hear.

A KINGDOM PEOPLE

When Jesus announces in Mark 1:14 that *"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"* The Holy Spirit gives hearing and response to Jesus' announcement and the church is birthed.

Jesus' kingdom announcement *"pulls back the veil on the coming reign of God, thereby revealing the horizon of the world's future."* (Guder)

It's Jesus' announcement of the kingdom that draws our community forward toward the day when God's reign will be fully established on earth again and calls us to enter into the kingdom now as God's kingdom people.

In this way, the church is both a preview of what is to come and an agent of renewal as the eternal kingdom of God is established among us. This kingdom conviction motivates us to be a people who are:

JOINING GOD IN THE RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS.

The prayer of Habakkuk captures our heart's desire as we anticipate the fulfillment of God's kingdom. *"Lord, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, Lord. Repeat them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy."* (Hab. 3:2)

Our heart's motivation is to:

TO SEE THE FAME AND DEEDS OF GOD RENEWED AND KNOWN IN OUR TIME.

Who we seek to be and all we desire to do is in response to Jesus' announcement that the kingdom is at hand and the declaration that our Creator God is making all things new. As the Holy Spirit gives hearing and response at Jesus' announcement we are ourselves enter the process of being made new. Discipleship is the word we use for this process of renewal and formation.

And discipleship is the primary way Jesus has invited us to participate in the kingdom.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

MISSION

Our primary mission as a church is to make disciples of Jesus in order that more and more people may receive and enter into the kingdom of God announced by Jesus.

OUR MISSION IS TO SEE NEW YORKERS TRANSFORMED INTO PASSIONATELY ENGAGED FOLLOWERS OF JESUS.

Contained within this phrase is an important "from - to" imperative. We want to see people who don't know Jesus, transformed in such a way through the life of the Spirit in our church community that they are then sent back into the world to serve as God's ambassadors on redemptive kingdom mission. We've

identified five specific shifts that New Yorkers often make as the Holy Spirit gives hearing and response to Jesus and his kingdom announcement.

A disciple of Jesus in New York is a person who is moving:

1. FROM DEATH TO LIFE

The first shift is about a call to respond to God's invitation to life. This gift of life, accessed by grace, through faith, enables us to be born again. It reorients the story of our lives as we learn to walk in intimacy and union with God.

2. FROM SHAME TO ACCEPTANCE

The good news of what God has done for us does a deep work internally, about how we see ourselves and where our identity is rooted. We are welcomed into God's family, freed from guilt, shame and condemnation. We learn to walk in new covenant life, enjoying our freedom and walking in authority over our old wounds, lies, idols and addictions.

3. FROM SELF TO OTHERS

We are not just reconciled to God, but to each other. This shift calls us to learn to live in vulnerable love and to offer grace and forgiveness for the faults of others. It calls us to find our unique gifts and talents so we can use them on behalf of others, and to be present in each other's lives in ways that reflect God's tangible love for us in Christ.

4. FROM CONSUMERISM TO MISSION

We want to see people understand, live and communicate the gospel to the world. We want to break down the walls between the sacred and the secular and enable people to see their work as both worship and renewal. And we want to help people join God in a larger mission through church planting partnerships around the world.

5. FROM STRIVING TO ABIDING

The central invitation for Jesus is to do life with God; not simply for God. Jesus invites us to abide in his love. It is from this place of acceptance and ease that we are rooted in the true source, receive power for life and ministry and bear the kind of fruit that remains. Our world is discipling us into a culture of death, shame, selfishness, consumerism and striving. As a covenant community we to be disciples of Jesus who thrive in his life, acceptance, community, mission and love.

COVENANT

Covenant membership is a formal joining to God's people in faithfulness to bear witness to Jesus' Lordship at a local and global level. In a world where many seek to remain autonomous and non-committal, covenant membership formally and publicly grafts one into the body of Christ, sealing a commitment to join God in the renewal of all things with and through a local neighborhood congregation.

In a city like New York, membership in a church matters. It matters for the people in the community and it matters for the leaders. It is easy to become surprisingly autonomous in a place like New York. Without knowing it, we can become isolated, caught in the distraction of habits that move us slowly away from the love of God. And our lives can get out of balance, so driven by other competing forces that our walk with God and participation in the life of God's people is pushed to the side.

And it matters for the leaders. With so many people coming and going, it can be hard to know who we are responsible for and how to properly demonstrate God's love and care. Membership enables leaders to respond in covenant faithfulness to those who have committed themselves to a particular community.

The heart behind church covenant is love—committed to doing life together, walking in accountability with one another as we seek to become more like Jesus. Whereas membership for many organizations, clubs

and institutions involve consuming and receiving, covenant membership at Trinity Grace functions like a family and is marked by participation and service. Jesus said to his disciples, *“Freely you have received, freely give”* (Matthew 10:8). Covenant members of Trinity Grace identify themselves as a part of a spiritual family that has received God’s grace and endeavors to share that grace with others inside and outside of the church.

Covenant is a term rarely used in 21st century Western culture. We have utilized this term because a.) it is a biblical term and b.) it speaks precisely to the nature of membership at Trinity Grace. A covenant is a formal promise. It seals agreement between two parties (e.g. the blood of Jesus representing the New Covenant or vows and the exchange of rings in marriage). The Scriptures are comprised of covenants that God made with humankind and reveal how we move with God in relationship. We hope you approach our membership as a family bond, making a promise to uphold the local body of Christ and being accountable for your life in Christ.

WHY MEMBERSHIP?

Belonging to a healthy local church is vital for all believers. The letters found in the New Testament are written to local communities of believers who had been joined together by the Gospel of Christ (Romans 16:3-5). The people who made up these communities consistently worshiped together (Hebrews 10:24-25), were accountable to one another (Galatians 6:1), encouraged one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11), served one another (1 Peter 4:10) and contended for the Gospel together using their spiritual gifts and financial means to edify the church and move the mission forward (Philippians 1:5, 27; 1 Corinthians 12).

As we lift the profile of the church member off the pages of the New Testament, we clearly see what church membership comprises. The following are not guidelines we arbitrarily establish and unreasonably hold our people to. Rather, they are the marks of one who has committed his or her life to Christ and to a local expression of his body.

TGC MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIP DEFINED

Covenant Membership at Trinity Grace Church is defined as mutual accountability to a shared:

1. THEOLOGY, 2. PRACTICES, 3. ETHICS AND 4. AUTHORITY.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Membership at Trinity Grace Church is offered to all who:

- Have a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ.
- Have publicly identified with Jesus Christ and His church through baptism.
- Participate in the life of my parish church and the overall mission of Trinity Grace through the development of my spiritual gifts, communal worship with God’s people and personal generosity.
- Submit to mutual accountability to Trinity Grace Church’s theology, practices, ethics and authority.

PART 1 | SHARED THEOLOGY

THE BIBLE

At Trinity Grace Church we believe the Bible (comprised of Protestant Old and New Testaments) to be both true and authoritative. We make this claim because we believe God divinely inspired the original authors through the Holy Spirit to pen them. (See 2 Timothy 3:15-17 and 2 Peter 1:21)

Whereas we expect God to be present with and in us, always revealing, we do not subscribe to notions that God contradicts what the Scriptures have historically penned for us in practice and belief. God never contradicts Himself. Therefore, Scripture serves not only as inspiration into the life of God but also as a guardrail for us to know the will of God and test the veracity of all things.

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

The Apostles' Creed is the foundational creed of Christian churches. It has received this title because of its great antiquity; most of the creed dates from the early 2nd century. The creed was apparently used as a summary of Christian doctrine for baptismal candidates in the churches of Rome. Though many churches and flavors of Christianity throughout the ages have different interpretations of the Bible, and embrace various doctrinal nuances, the essence of what the Scriptures teach is found in the words of the Apostles' Creed. Therefore, we have fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ who profess their faith as follows:

We believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth,

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:

who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell.

The third day He arose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

We believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic (universal) church, the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting.

THE GOSPEL

No one theology can contain the enormity of this word. We find it most useful to articulate the Gospel as both a statement and a story.

THE GOSPEL STATEMENT

The Gospel is the good news that God himself, the Creator, has come to rescue us from sin, and renew all things, in and through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, to establish his Kingdom, through his people, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

- This good news is initiated by God, in grace.
- This good news is substitutionary: Christ has come, lived, died, and risen on our behalf.
- This good news is participatory: We are involved in declaring and joining the work of God in redemptive history as his faithful, fruitful people.
- This good news is news of a Kingdom, not just individual hearts. It is the Lordship of Jesus tangibly worked out across of all of creation.
- This good news is powerful. It wakes people from death to life, promises the presence and power of God in us, and enables us to be a preview community of the work God will do in all creation.

In Colossians 1:15-20 the scriptures say, *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Paul Marshall writes, *The gospel is for all things, and he makes a threefold statement about the Lordship of Christ. Everything was made by and for Jesus Christ. Everything holds together in Jesus Christ. Everything will be reconciled by Jesus Christ. The "everything" that is reconciled is the same everything that was made. The scope of redemption is the same as the scope of creation. The Creator and Redeemer are one and the same. Things in heaven, things in earth, things visible and invisible, dominions, and authorities will be reconciled by the cross of Jesus Christ.*

Abraham Kuyper writes, *There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'*

THE GOSPEL STORY

Alasdair MacIntyre, in *After Virtue*, writes, *"I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"*

CREATION

Before there was anything, there was God. We have only hints and fragments of stories about what was happening in the corridors of eternity past before God chose to reveal himself in creation, so we begin there. God—who is one God yet exists in three persons as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—was living always in community with himself before the creation of anything else including our measurements for time.

The first scene of action God chose to record for us is his calling into existence the natural world brimming with vibrant and innocent beauty, variety and wonder, power, majesty and life. God made the world well, a reflection of his greatness and called it "good."

At the apex of his creation project, God, the spiritual being, created human beings in his image. They bore the mark of their Creator in ways distinct from all other plants, animals, and created things. They were not just natural, but spiritual beings, like God. The first human beings initially enjoyed intimacy with God in his creation. They thrived in deep connection to God and each other. They also lived in inner wholeness without fear, in harmony with the earth God had given them to enjoy, cultivate, and rule over with him.

FALL

However, evil soon entered the story. An angel created by God had rebelled against God because of pride and his desire to be worshipped. For this rebellion he was cast out of Heaven. This fallen angel came to the first humans and tempted them to distrust what God had told them, and to disobey God's command. There was deception and they acted against God's instruction. Just as God had warned them, something terrible happened.

Humanity's rebellion against God brought death into the world, and humanity was tainted. Our disobedience caused separation from God, the source of all life, and the result was death beginning with the first people and passing from them on to all other humans since. Though they lived on physically, they died spiritually and lost their intimate connection to God. Their inner peace was flooded with insecurity and fear, and this bled into broken relationships with each other. Lying, blame-shifting, envy and murder soon followed. There also entered discord between humanity and creation as the ground was cursed. On every level of relationship, God's original design was broken.

REDEMPTION

Yet, immediately God began a work of redemption that would carry history forward. He would not abandon humanity or the rest of his creation to the permeating effects of death and decay. In the initial

stages of working for the redemption of this broken world, God chose a people for himself, forming them into a nation through whom he would bring a restorative and redemptive blessing to the entire world. The nation began with one family, Abraham and Sarah, and grew to their son Isaac, his son Jacob, and Jacob's twelve sons, who became the nation of Israel. God made great promises to Israel: that they would be deeply used to represent and express God's heart and character and redemptive purposes in the world.

For a time Israel became enslaved in Egypt and in their oppression cried out to God. God was moved by the cry of his people and sent them a man whom he used to rescue them. Moses was given power by God to lead the people of Israel in an Exodus out of Egypt and towards the Promised Land where finally this people would be a nation with a home. On the way to their new home God gave his people a Law which represented his commands for their lives with him, with each other, with themselves, and with creation. This formed the culture for God's people and carried the promise that if they kept the commands God would be intimate with them, would lead them, would speak to them, care for them, and use them in his redemptive work in the world. It also carried the warning that if they broke the commands it would be a break with God, a continuation of the separation and death that began in the first sin.

Once in the Promised Land, God greatly blessed the liberated and established Israel, but blessed them directly in connection to their obedience to represent and live out God's character to the other nations. While God's people certainly had moments of shining embodiment of their calling they often wandered, worshipped false gods, adopted corrupt practices, grew deeply selfish, ignored the poor, lacked justice, and forgot their role as God's representatives. They broke God's commands time and time again. God would firmly discipline his people, but he remained merciful and throughout their history sent prophets to remind them of their true identity as God's people. Through the prophets, God ensured his people that in spite of their great rebellion he would still keep his promises. Even when the nation of Israel was broken up and sent into exile as a result of their abandoning God's way there remained a hopeful and faithful few who remembered God's promises and looked forward to their fulfillment when peace and justice and renewed intimacy with God would thrive again. One day God was going to establish a kingdom of deliverance, salvation, righteousness and justice, peace, joy, where God's presence was revealed and enjoyed. It was going to be a kingdom of healing and return from exile, a kingdom without end.

The longings for God's Kingdom and for his redemptive work to continue through Israel were fulfilled in the person of Jesus. Just when it seemed like the promises had failed, Jesus was born according to what was prophesied about the Messiah. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of a virgin, and in Jesus all the majesty of the God of Israel became a human. Unlike any expectations, Jesus came both fully God and fully man. A new Exodus of God's people began in Jesus, but unlike the first Exodus, this new Exodus would move to every nation in the world. Jesus came announcing the arrival of the promised Kingdom of God, the reign of God being actively accomplished over any rival power or evil in the world. At the time Israel was occupied by the world's most powerful military and political force, the Roman Empire. Though a few followers radically trusted and stayed close to Jesus to witness his miraculous life and message, there were even more who rejected him and sought to kill him because his message threatened physical, spiritual, political, and social powers. Jesus described his mission in terms of proclaiming good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, and freedom for those who are oppressed, but he was seen as a threat to those in power.

Yet even as Jesus suffered, was rejected, and betrayed, he never sinned. He never for a moment in thought or action went against the way of God the Father or the Law God had given through Israel. Jesus, God the Son, lived the life that no other person had ever been able to live, a life of complete holiness, a life completely controlled by the Holy Spirit. It was a life that represented what God had desired for humanity from way back in the beginning.

Eventually the plots against Jesus led to his betrayal, arrest, false trial, fierce beating, and tortured death on the Cross. God's great plan to rescue the world through Jesus seemed to have failed. It seemed that finally death and evil had prevailed. However, in the mysterious wisdom of God just the opposite had occurred.

"He did not have to die, but submitted himself to the will of God."

Death is the result of sin because sin is separation from God who is life. Jesus had no sin and therefore owed no death. He did not have to die, but submitted himself to the will of God. His death was able then to stand as a substitute death, an atoning death. God dealt terribly harshly with Jesus allowing human sin

to be put on Jesus as he was dying. Jesus took all of God's anger and punishment for human sin so that all who would believe in him could be counted as clean and utterly forgiven. As he died, Jesus cried out, "My God My God why have You forsaken me," and later, "It is finished." He was abandoned on the Cross, for the first time being separated from his Holy Father, while paying the complete penalty for sin so that any one who trusts in him can have their full record of sins done away with. After Jesus died this death in our place, he was placed in the tomb of a wealthy man.

Three days after his death, Jesus miraculously rose from the grave. Because Jesus had no sin, and owed no death, death could not hold him. The power of God raised him from the dead and in that moment a new world began. Soon after Jesus appeared to all who had been following him before his death and announced that what he had taught them was now moving forward in action.

RENEWAL

Jesus gave those first followers his Holy Spirit and every person since who trusts in his life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins and the creation of a new life within is given the same Spirit. He puts in those who believe in him the life of God. The Holy Spirit, who had previously exerted great influence yet not lived in anyone other than Jesus, began to fill those who believed in Jesus and called him Lord.

This is one of the great miracles of the Gospel of Jesus. There is nothing that any person could do on the strength of his or her own character to live the perfect life that would be required to maintain intimacy with God. There is also no way that a person can live in such a way to remove the effects and result of their sins which make us separated by nature from God and his Kingdom. So God changes our nature. He gives us a gift that no one could possibly earn or possibly deserve—this is God's grace. We are freely given the grace of forgiveness and the grace of power to live like Jesus. God's Holy Spirit awakens to faith and affirms all those who are God's true children in faith. The Holy Spirit empowers us with gifts, convicts, guides, counsels, and leads us into all God inspired truth through a communal life of worship.

The Holy Spirit also forms those who believe in Jesus into the Church, a family of faith that embodies the life, thought, and action of Jesus in the world. It is the same Holy Spirit that propels us into a life of mission that reflects God's character and desires for all of creation. When we trust fully in Jesus life death and resurrection, our relationship with God, each other, our inner self, and the world are healed and restored. We are given a mission to carry that redemption and renewal wherever we go, into all the world.

Those who reject Jesus have no hope of this renewed world. They will suffer an eternal separation from God and his Kingdom because apart from Jesus there is no way to attain God. In the face of this grave reality Jesus followers must engage in a mission of love. This is the mission of the promised Kingdom of deliverance, salvation, righteousness and justice, peace, and joy, where God's presence is revealed and enjoyed and where there is healing and return from exile.

One day Jesus, who ascended to Heaven after giving his followers this mission of taking his Kingdom to the known world, is going to return. When Jesus returns he is going to judge the world, and bring an end to sin, misery, and injustice. God will reclaim this world, renew it, and rule over it forever. There will be no more war, no more death. Those who have trusted Jesus and been filled with God's Spirit will live forever with God in the wholeness and peace of renewed creation. So we are working now to be a true reflection of Jesus and invite many to believe. We are working for the Kingdom that Jesus inaugurated to be moved toward completion, and though God must fully bring that completion, we get to participate by our faith and obedience now.

We value the gospel of Jesus Christ and its transformational power. We believe he has commissioned his church to make disciples of all nations until his return. We believe bringing this message of the good news of Jesus to the world as his "salt and light" is imperative to the mission he called us to in Matthew 28. We adopt his cause to see lost people saved and to see the Kingdom come and his will to be done (John 3:16, Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:22-23).

Perhaps you have been around the church for a period of time and are still asking, "Am I a Christian?," "How do I become a Christian?," "How do I know if I am a Christian?" The good news is that Christianity not about doing/accomplishing anything to earn God's favor. Becoming a Christian is a matter of trusting (faith) and believing that Jesus has done something on your behalf.

We believe the Gospel (“the good news”) of Jesus Christ, our Messiah, is the only hope for humankind. Solely by God’s grace are people transformed from skeptics who do not believe into believers both declared and made righteous. The message of the Gospel is that Christ has done what is necessary to bring us into relationship with God. We believe that the Gospel speaks to the whole person, and can transform anyone anywhere, bringing the healing and restoration needed to advance God’s Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

THE PROCESS OF SALVATION

Salvation is the word we use when we talk about how an individual experiences the transformative power of the gospel. Throughout the scriptures we read that salvation is experienced as a past, present and future reality. In reading God’s Word we understand that salvation is something that has happened, is happening and will happen to those who believe.

SALVATION – PAST TENSE

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul writes, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast* (Eph 2:8-9). In this sense, salvation is something that has already been accomplished for us by God in the past. Past tense salvation is bound up with Jesus’ sacrificial work on the cross. It is a finished work and the gift of God to us.

SALVATION – PRESENT TENSE

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Cor 1:18). Notice the phrase, *to us who are being saved*. In this scripture salvation is revealed as something that is presently taking place. If past salvation has to do with the cross, present salvation is bound up with the risen Jesus and therefore the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible teaches us that God has not abandoned us now that Jesus has returned to the Father. Quite the opposite; the Holy Spirit is God with us by his Spirit; cleansing and transforming us into Christ’s likeness.

SALVATION – FUTURE TENSE

Jesus words recorded in the Gospel of Mathew reveal a final way the individual experiences salvation. *And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved* (Matthew 24:12-13). The past, present and future tense of salvation is one of the great mysteries of the gospel. Our salvation is assured the moment we enter into a genuine relationship with God through faith in Christ. Yet, despite this guarantee, we must go about allowing the Holy Spirit to make us in reality what we know by faith we are — daughters and sons of God. Even as our bodies slowly deteriorate over time, even to the point of death, God’s saving work is being completed within us.

Again, according to the Apostle Paul, *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day* (1 Cor 4:16).

Death has no hold nor victory over us in the end because of the saving work of the Father through the death and resurrection of the Son in the past and the present work of the Holy Spirit within us today.

PART 2 | SHARED PRACTICES

CULTURE AND PRACTICE

The simplest definition of culture is that of “a collective heart.” It’s what we value, love, share, tell stories about, celebrate, welcome others into and what defines our common life. We have identified seven clear cultural values in our church. The invitation is not into a general evangelical church but into one with a specific call, history, vision and life.

Practices are what transforms the culture of our hearts and communities. Our covenant members share together in rhythms of transformative practices that change both our individual and collective culture.

Our expectation is that members find a community and begin to experiment with a shared weekly rhythm of spiritual practice. We believe living out an intentional rule-of-life together over time will increase our awareness of God's presence and form us more and more into the image of our Lord Jesus.

A CULTURE OF PRESENCE

God has always desired that we live in His presence. This is how the scriptures begin and end. God’s plan in redemption was not just to save us from sin, but to save us to himself so that we could have intimate fellowship with him. We are the temple of God, where he chooses to dwell (2 Corinthians 6:16-18) and his tangible presence distinguishes us from everyone else on earth (Exodus 33:15-17).

A CULTURE OF EMPOWERMENT

It has been said that the church is the only institution left in society where all of the other spheres of culture overlap. Our church does not exist for itself, but to equip people with a theological vision to join God in his great redemptive work and then send them into the world to do just that. From fashion to education, marketing to international relations, our people see themselves primarily as agents of God’s Kingdom and work, not just for the bottom line, but for the common good.

A CULTURE OF RENEWAL

We have a conviction that the Creator God is at work to heal and renew the whole world. To follow Jesus and join him in his mission is to become agents of renewal in our neighborhoods, industries and our city as a whole. We have realized the privilege we enjoy—even though most of us would not consider ourselves to be wealthy—and are committed to stewarding our privilege on behalf of others. We work towards establishing justice (Isaiah 58) for the good, true and beautiful in all of life and culture.

A CULTURE OF PURSUIT

God calls us to seek him above all things, and he promises that when we do, we will find him, and he will reward us (Hebrews 11:6). We want to radically seek God’s face, power, promises and glory to see our lives and community marked by the promises and power of God (Hebrews 6:12).

A CULTURE OF GRACE

In a harsh and often unforgiving world, we believe the church should always be the place where people can find grace. One of our greatest pleasures is seeing the resurrection joy on a person’s face as they move from death to life in Jesus, coming out from under a lifetime of shame to embrace their new identity as a member of God’s own household.

We want to be rooted and grounded in the reality and wonder of the grace of God. We believe that this not only changes our standing before God from sinners to sons and daughters, but also changes our hearts to want to do the will of God. This is the promise of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:10-13). Grace also teaches us to be holy, and to live into the fullness of self-controlled, upright and holy lives as a contrast society in our world (Titus 2:11-14).

A CULTURE OF SACRIFICE

The central image of our faith is the cross. Christ giving his life away for others in sacrificial love. We are called to embrace the way of sacrifice. We are called to give of our time, resources, money, skills and talents to see the Kingdom of God advanced here in New York, and to make a clear way for others (Luke 9:23-25).

It's not easy to get to the city, live in the city, or stay in the city. Yet our people are committed to living beyond convenience, to the point of great personal sacrifice, to build a loving community centered on Jesus in New York City no matter what it takes.

A CULTURE OF FAMILY

The primary metaphor the Bible uses to describe the people of God in the New Testament is that of a family. We are not called to see the church as a series of loose connections or a place for individuals to come so their needs can be met. It is essentially about learning to love others as Christ has loved us, (John 13:33-34) and lay our lives down for one another in tangible, compelling ways (1 John 3:14-19). This means we prioritize our life together to support, celebrate, mourn, struggle, love, forgive, and serve one another.

RULE OF LIFE GROUP EXERCISE

1. Come up with a practice that might serve to cultivate each of the seven cultural values in the life of a disciple in community.
2. Look at the practices you've agreed to live out and choose three to implement first.
3. Create a plan of implementation. When will you do each of the practices and how often? What support and structure will help your community succeed in living our the rule of life you've created?

PART 3 | SHARED ETHICS

A DISTINCTIVE WAY

Our family of churches began with a passion to address with our very lives one of the great crises of our time: the gap between belief and behavior well chronicled in North American Christianity; the disturbing phenomena of people who identify with Jesus, but whose lives are largely ignorant of or do not reflect the teaching of Jesus. What we seek is a kind of spiritual awakening, a growing integration of Jesus' way with every aspect of our lives. Religious faith continues to be co-opted by dominant cultural narratives such as individualism and secularism - narratives which tend to marginalize Christian spirituality to an inner-private realm, rarely impinging on the rest of our public, interpersonal life in meaningful ways. David Gushee in *Kingdom Ethics* sums up this crisis well:

"People congratulate themselves that they are forgiven, without repenting; that God is on their side, without their following the way of God as revealed in Jesus; that they are Christians, without it making much difference in their way of life...morality becomes secularized. Jesus gets marginalized or compartmentalized. The church's ethic becomes vague and abstract." (p. 133)

When Christians do focus on ethics, there is another troubling gap. The average Christian's ethical vision rarely wrestles deeply with the teaching and way of *Jesus*, specifically his largest body of teaching: the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7). And yet consider some of Jesus' last words to his disciples:

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20).

Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount with the clearest possible instruction that these teachings are meant to be *done*,

"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven...Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock...And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand" (Mt. 7:19-21, 24-27).

In the book of Acts, the earliest church became quickly known within the Roman Empire as "the Way" because Christians distinctly responded to Jesus' invitation to *do* what he taught them.

JESUS & ETHICS

To participate in covenant with our church is to root your ethical vision and practice in the person and way of Jesus. In order to clearly lay out the ethical vision toward which we invite you, we want to address three issues: 1) how we interpret Jesus teaching 2) four categories of Christian ethics, and 3) a rubric for a distinctive ethic in New York City.

INTERPRETING JESUS: IMPOSSIBLE IDEALS OR TRANSFORMATIVE INITIATIVES?

Many read the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount as *antithesis*. In other words, Jesus' teachings are taken to be a contrast between two ways: traditional righteousness on the one hand and Jesus vision on the other. This dichotomy forces Jesus' sermon into a pattern that quickly seems impractical and unrealistic, functionally abandoned by most American Christians for a more accessible way.

For example, consider Jesus' first major teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Many read it as antithesis (see chart below).

TRADITIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS	JESUS' TEACHING
Matthew 5:21: You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'	Matthew 5:22-26: But I say to you that everyone being angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (Illustrations: So if you are offering your gift at the altar...make friends with your accuser.)

Read in antithesis, we hear Jesus saying essentially "Not only should you refrain from murder, but additionally, don't be angry, don't insult, don't label others as fool". We immediately recoil. We know all too well our own experience of anger and we despair. Of course we'd love a world where people didn't get angry or insult, but that is not our world. We see this teaching as romantic idealism and dismiss ourselves as possible candidates for participation.

But if Jesus teaching is not taken as two-fold contrast but three-fold invitation, a new window opens up for us. What if the 14 major teachings weren't unrealistic ideals meant to make us feel bad, but transformative initiatives that set up the possibility to experience God's in-breaking kingdom and bear witness to his way of deliverance? Consider this same teaching through a three-fold lens:

TRADITIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS	VICIOUS CYCLE	TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE
Matthew 5:21: You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment'	Matthew 5:22-26: But I say to you that everyone being angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. (No imperatives here in the Greek text)	Matthew 5:23-26: So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, <i>leave your gift there...and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then coming, offer your gift. Make friends quickly with your accuser.</i> (Italics mark imperatives)

To covenant with our church is to share a commitment to these transforming initiatives, breaking away from the vicious cycles of violent ethics related to sex, money and power.

For a nice recap of how this Idealist and/or dualistic reading of the Sermon on the Mount began and evolved in church history, see *Kingdom Ethics* (pp. 128-132)

FOUR LEVELS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Before we lay out a rubric for the shared ethical convictions of this covenant, we simply want to identify four levels around which Christians (and all humans, in fact) organize and communicate moral convictions.



PARTICULAR JUDGMENTS	A particular judgment is categorized by two features: First no reasons are given for the moral judgment. Second, the judgment applies to one particular case.
RULES	A rule tells us directly what to do or not to do. It applies not just to one immediate case, but to all similar cases. Rules are supported or critiqued by principles.
PRINCIPLES	A principle is more general than a rule; it does not tell us directly and concretely what to do. A principle supports rules — or criticizes them.
BASIC CONVICTIONS	These are rock-bottom theological convictions and our narrative contexts. They are rooted in a basic understanding of the character, activity and will of God. From these convictions arise principles.

Our approach will be to trace out basic convictions in three primary categories we see in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: money, sex, and power. We will then trace out several core principles from those convictions as well as identify simple rules we believe best help us represent these convictions in the context of New York City.

A CULTURE OF “METANOIA”

When Jesus began his public ministry, he announced that the kingdom of God had come near and that the appropriate response to the nearness of this kingdom was “metanoia”, a greek word typically translated as “repentance”.

This culture of repentance is critical for the tone of our ethical commitments. In Kingdom Ethics, David Gushee and Glen Stassen highlight the importance of local churches making as explicit as possible their basic convictions, principles and rules so that they can be effectively tested, evaluated and, where necessary, repented of. In committing to a shared ethic, you are agreeing to adhere to these convictions, principles and rules. But there will be times when you feel tension with a rule or a principle (rarely a conviction). To be in covenant is to be empowered to commit to these practices and thereby evaluate their veracity in community. To be in covenant means to be empowered to dialogue with us about how these principles and rules are reflecting our basic convictions rooted in the teaching of Jesus.

WALKING IN FAITHFULNESS, GENEROSITY AND SERVANTHOOD

Almost all of Jesus 14 teachings in the Sermon on the Mount address the issues of sexuality, money, and power. We believe these categories are a powerful rubric for a distinctive way in New York City. We desire to experience the deliverance of the kingdom of God in these areas and to put on display tangibly what it looks like to walk in the way of Jesus.

It is important for our tone that we seek to define what we are pursuing rather than simply what we are avoiding and therefore we have framed these three categories as a pursuit of 1) faithfulness (relational ethic) 2) generosity (money ethic) 3) servanthood (power ethic).

FROM VICIOUS CYCLES TO TRANSFORMING INITIATIVES

TRADITIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS	VICIOUS CYCLE	TRANSFORMING INITIATIVE
1. You shall not kill	Be angry, or saying, You fool!	Go, be reconciled
2. You shall not commit adultery	Looking with lust is adultery in the heart	Remove the cause of temptation (cf. Mk 9:43-50)
3. Whoever divorces give a certificate	Divorcing involves you in adultery	(Be reconciled: 1 Cor. 7:11)
4. You shall not swear falsely	Swearing by anything involves you in a false claim	Let your yes be yes, and your no be no
5. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth	Retaliating violently or revengefully, by evil means	Turn the other cheek, give your tunic and cloak, go the second mile, give to beggar and borrower
6. Love neighbor and hate enemy	Hating enemies is the same vicious cycle that you see in the Gentiles and tax collectors.	Love enemies, pray for your persecutors; be all-inclusive as your Father in heaven is.
7. When you give alms,	Practicing righteousness for show	But give in secret, and your Father will reward you
8. When you pray,	Practicing righteousness for show	But pray in secret, and your Father will reward you
9. When you pray	Heaping up empty phrases	Therefore pray like this: Our Father...
10. When you fast,	Practicing righteousness for show	But dress with joy, and your Father will reward you
11. Do not pile up treasures on earth	Moth and rust destroy, and thieves enter and steal	But pile up treasures in heaven
12. No one can serve two masters	Serving God and wealth, worrying about food and clothes	But seek first God's reign and God's justice/righteousness
13. Do not judge, lest you be judged	Judging others means you'll be judged by the same measure	First take the log out of your own eye
14. Do not give holy things to dogs, nor pearls to pigs	They will trample them and tear you to pieces	Give your trust in prayer to your Father in heaven

PART 4 | SHARED AUTHORITY

OUR STRUCTURE

Trinity Grace Church is organized like New York City: by neighborhood. This structure anchors our vision of joining God in the renewal of all things very locally, empowering our members to be agents of God's Kingdom in their very own communities. We call these neighborhood churches parishes.

THE PARISH MODEL

A parish is a geographical area of spiritual responsibility.

To be effective in mission, we believe it essential to release authority to each local parish for the purposes of incarnation and contextualization. That said, there are core resources and beliefs that are central to our church as a whole. Think of it like an immediate family with shared DNA among various siblings, each with their own personality.

PASTOR, ELDERS, DEACONS

Each congregation is led by a Parish Pastor who relies on the support of Parish Elders and Deacons. The Elders partner with the Parish Pastor to provide spiritual leadership for the congregation, guard doctrine, raise up and develop leaders, and oversee member discipline.

The Deacons provide pastoral care and are the lead servants within the parish. Each parish may have additional leadership structures to support and care for the congregation as well.

CENTRAL MINISTRIES TEAM

While most of the church staff serves a particular parish, there is also a Central Ministries team that serves as an administrative and communications hub helping to maintain real connection between the various parish churches.

Shared initiatives among Trinity Grace parishes include:

Citywide Worship

A growing movement to unite churches across around a common vision of glorifying God and seeing His Kingdom established in New York City as in Heaven.

The Center for City Renewal

Exists to equip and empower Christian citizens to participate in God's redemptive mission throughout New York City.

City Collective

An emerging global family of churches with a passion to join God in the renewal of our cities. Birthed out of Trinity Grace Church in New York City, City Collective's leading voices are church planting practitioners with a heart to equip others to reach their cities.

APOSTOLIC TEAM

As a whole, the ministry of Trinity Grace Church is resourced and overseen by an Apostolic Team comprised of the Lead Pastor and other members with apostolic gifting. This Team serves as the "highest court" of Trinity Grace whenever an issue cannot be resolved locally. The oversight provided by the Apostolic Team is characterized by the phrase "high accountability; low control." All Parish Pastors are involved with the Apostolic Team in the process of setting strategic direction to ensure local congregations are represented.

A NOTE ON FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The staff and leadership of Trinity Grace Church take stewardship very seriously as well. We strive to meet if not exceed the standards of responsible stewardship set by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability (ECFA).

The planning and execution of our parish budgets is approved by the Parish Elders. Where Parish Elders have not yet been installed, the Apostolic Team serves this function. The Central Ministries budget is overseen by a group of laypersons called the Accountability Board.

Members in good standing may submit a request to review the church's financial statements. The request must be in writing, state the name of the member, the reason for the request, and that the information shall in no way be made public or shared with any other member in a way that will jeopardize the church.

LIVES OF GRACE-FILLED ACCOUNTABILITY

When someone commits to join a local body, that person is willingly submitting himself/herself to the Elders of that local body (Hebrews 13:17) and the community as a whole. From time to time, individual members of a local congregation will find themselves in spiritual tailspins and beginning to embrace lifestyles or false teachings that are harmful to their own spiritual and emotional states, poorly represent Christ and adversely affect his people.

The Scriptures instruct us that when this happens, other members of the body who are spiritual should seek to gently restore that individual (Galatians 6:1). This informal process should happen one to one (Matthew 18:15), and if the person does not listen, then one or two others should be involved in the restoration process (Matthew 18:6). However, when the individual refuses to respond to this informal approach, and continues in sin (public and persistent), a more formal approach to church discipline must be taken. At this point the Elders of the church are given the responsibility to tenderly and lovingly confront that individual and call him or her to repentance. The church member is to be addressed by the Elders to clarify the issue and give appropriate opportunity for repentance.

The goal of church discipline is restoration of the person to fellowship with God and his people. When a person does respond to this process of discipline and repents, he or she is to be embraced again by the body and received into fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). When an individual joins Trinity Grace Church, he or she is agreeing to be held accountable by the body and its leadership. That person does so understanding that persistent and public sin will be graciously confronted. If that sin is not publicly repented of, the individual will be publicly removed from the fellowship of the Church in hopes of bringing eventual repentance and restoration.

MOVING FORWARD

COVENANT MEMBER EXPECTATIONS

In light of our shared theology, practices, ethics and authority, we hold the following seven expectations of all those who become covenant members of Trinity Grace Church (based on our cultural values).

I WILL PURSUE HARD AFTER GOD.

I WILL BE ROOTED IN THE REALITY AND WONDER OF THE GRACE OF GOD.

I WILL PRIORITIZE LIFE TOGETHER AS A MEMBER OF THIS CHURCH FAMILY.

I WILL IDENTIFY, EMPOWER, EQUIP AND RELEASE OTHERS TO THRIVE IN GOD'S UNIQUE CALL ON THEIR LIFE AS I DO IN MY OWN.

I WILL BE AN AGENT OF RENEWAL IN MY CHURCH, NEIGHBORHOOD, VOCATION AND CITY.

I WILL EMBRACE THE WAY OF SACRIFICE.

I WILL SEEK GOD'S TANGIBLE PRESENCE INWARDLY AND AROUND ME.

THE FOLLOWING COMMITMENTS WILL HELP YOU TO LIVE OUT THE EXPECTATIONS LISTED ABOVE:

- Get involved in a community group.
- Identify an opportunity for service in our parish.
- Explore the equipping opportunities currently being offered (discipleship courses, workshops, etc.).
- Commit to regular giving (we recommend that you can set up a recurring giving schedule on the church website if you are so inclined).

REMAINING STEPS IN THE MEMBERSHIP PROCESS

Step 1: Write out your personal testimony in one page (maximum), and read Membership Covenant.

Step 2: Submit your written testimony to your Parish Pastor or leader.

Step 3: Meet with a parish Elder or leader to share your testimony, seek counsel, and pray.

Step 4: Sign the Membership Covenant.

Step 5: Be recognized on a Sunday in our parish as a Covenant Member.