

Inquirer - New Member Class



Hill Country Church (PCA)
Killeen, TX

Hill Country Church (PCA)
Inquirer / New Member Class
- Course Outline -

Introduction

Membership Vow #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?

<i>Living Stones</i>	- Ch 1, God's Sovereign Mercy
WCF 6	- Of the Fall of Man, of Sin, and of the Punishment thereof
WCF 7	- Of God's Covenant with Man

Membership Vow #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?

<i>Living Stones</i>	- Ch 2, True Faith
WCF 8	- Of Christ the Mediator
WCF 14	- Of Saving Faith
WCF 15	- Of Repentance unto Life

Membership Vow #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?

<i>Living Stones</i>	- Chapter 3, The Grace of Godliness
WCF 13	- Of Sanctification
WCF 16	- Of Good Works
WCF 17	- Of the Perseverance of the Saints

Membership Vow #4

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

<i>Living Stones</i>	- Chapter 4, Glorifying God in His Body
WCF 25	- Of the Church
WCF 26	- Of the Communion of Saints
WCF 21	- Of Religious Worship, and the Sabbath Day

Membership Vow #5

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

<i>Living Stones</i>	- Chapter 5, Purity and Peace
WCF 30	- Of Church Censures
WCF 31	- Of Synods and Councils

Other Topics: Predestination/Election, Paedo-baptism, etc.

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“True to the Scriptures, the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.”

PREFACE TO THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER (BCO)

I. THE KING AND HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth, even forever (Isaiah 9:6-7); having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Ephesians 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Ephesians 4:10-13).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Saviour, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor, Minister, Bishop and the only Lawgiver in Zion. It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Ghost.

II. PRELIMINARY PRINCIPLES

The Presbyterian Church in America, in setting forth the form of government founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, reiterates the following great principles which have governed the formation of the plan:

1. God alone is Lord of the conscience and has left it free from any doctrines or commandments of men (a) which are in any respect contrary to the Word of God, or (b) which, in regard to matters of faith and worship, are not governed by the Word of God. Therefore, the rights of private judgment in all matters that respect religion are universal and inalienable. No religious constitution should be supported by the civil power further than may be necessary for protection and security equal and common to all others.

2. In perfect consistency with the above principle, every Christian Church, or union or association of particular churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission into its communion and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government which Christ has appointed. In the exercise of this right it may, notwithstanding, err in making the terms of communion either too lax or too narrow; yet even in this case, it does not infringe upon the liberty or the rights of others, but only makes an improper use of its own.

3. Our blessed Saviour, for the edification of the visible Church, which is His body, has appointed officers not only to preach the Gospel and administer the Sacraments, but also to exercise discipline for the preservation both of truth and duty. It is incumbent upon these officers and upon the whole Church in whose name they act, to censure or cast out the erroneous and scandalous, observing in all cases the rules contained in the Word of God.

4. Godliness is founded on truth. A test of truth is its power to promote holiness according to our Saviour's rule, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20). No opinion can be more pernicious or more absurd than that which brings truth and falsehood upon the same level. On the contrary, there is an inseparable connection between faith and practice, truth and duty. Otherwise it would be of no consequence either to discover truth or to embrace it.

5. While, under the conviction of the above principle, it is necessary to make effective provision that all who are admitted as teachers be sound in the faith, there are truths and forms with respect to which men of good character and principles may differ. In all these it is the duty both of private Christians and societies to exercise mutual forbearance toward each other.

6. Though the character, qualifications and authority of church officers are laid down in the Holy Scriptures, as well as the proper method of officer investiture, the power to elect persons to the exercise of authority in any particular society resides in that society.

7. All church power, whether exercised by the body in general, or by representation, is only ministerial and declarative since the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice. No church judicatory may make laws to bind the conscience. All church courts may err through human frailty, yet it rests upon them to uphold the laws of Scripture though this obligation be lodged with fallible men.

8. Since ecclesiastical discipline must be purely moral or spiritual in its object, and not attended with any civil effects, it can derive no force whatever, but from its own justice, the approbation of an impartial public, and the countenance and blessing of the great Head of the Church.

If the preceding scriptural principles be steadfastly adhered to, the vigor and strictness of government and discipline, applied with pastoral prudence and Christian love, will contribute to the glory and well-being of the Church.

III. THE CONSTITUTION DEFINED

The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America, which is subject to and subordinate to the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the inerrant Word Of God, consists of its doctrinal standards set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and the Book of Church Order, comprising the Form of Government, the Rules of Discipline and the Directory for Worship; all as adopted by the Church.

A Brief History¹

The Presbyterian Church in America has a strong commitment to evangelism, missionary work at home and abroad, and to Christian education. From its inception, the church has determined its purpose to be “faithful to the Scriptures, true to the reformed faith, and obedient to the Great Commission.”

Organized at a constitutional assembly in December 1973, this church was first known as the National Presbyterian Church but changed its name in 1974 to Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). It separated from the Presbyterian Church in the United States (Southern) in opposition to the long-developing theological liberalism which denied the deity of Jesus Christ and the inerrancy and authority of Scripture. Additionally, the PCA held to the traditional position on the role of women in church offices.

In December 1973, delegates, representing some 260 congregations with a combined communicant membership of over 41,000 that had left the PCUS, gathered at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and organized the National Presbyterian Church, which later became the Presbyterian Church in America.

In 1982, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, joined the Presbyterian Church in America. The Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, had been formed in 1965 by a merger of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America, General Synod.

The PCA has made a firm commitment on the doctrinal standards which had been significant in presbyterianism since 1645, namely the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms*. These doctrinal standards express the distinctives of the Calvinistic or Reformed tradition.

Among the distinctive doctrines of the Westminster Standards and of Reformed tradition is the unique authority of the Bible. The reformers based all of their claims on “sola scriptura,” the Scriptures alone. This included the doctrine of their inspiration which is a special act of the Holy Spirit by which He guided the writers of the books of Scriptures (in their original autographs) so that their words should convey the thoughts He wished conveyed, bear a proper relation to the thoughts of other inspired books, and be kept free from error of fact, of doctrine, and of judgment -- all of which were to be an infallible rule of faith and life. Historically, the concept of infallibility has included the idea of inerrancy.

Other distinctives are the doctrines of grace, which depict what God has done for mankind’s salvation: (1) *Total depravity of man*. Man is completely incapable within himself to reach out towards God. Man is totally at enmity with God, cf. Romans 3:10-23. (2) *Unconditional election by the grace of God*. There is absolutely no condition in any person for which God would save him. As a matter of fact, long before man was created, God chose or predestined some to everlasting life. He did this out of His mere good pleasure, cf. Ephesians 1:4 and 5. (3) *Particular atonement*. God in His infinite mercy, in order to accomplish the planned redemption, sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die as a substitute for the sins of a large but specific number of people, cf. Romans 8:29 and 30. (4) *The irresistible grace of God*. This is the effectual work of the Holy Spirit moving upon a particular person whom He has called, applying the work of redemption, cf. John 3:5 and 6. (5) *The perseverance of the saints*. This is that gracious work of God’s sanctification whereby He enables a saved person to persevere to the end. Even though the process of sanctification is not complete in this life, from God’s perspective it is as good as accomplished, cf. Romans 8:30, 38, and 39, and Philippians 1:6.

¹ <https://pcanet.org/about-the-pca-2-3/>

The PCA maintains the historic polity of Presbyterian governance set forth in *The Book of Church Order*, namely rule by presbyters (or elders) and the graded assemblies or courts. These courts are the session, governing the local church; the presbytery, for regional matters; and the general assembly, at the national level. It has taken seriously the position of the parity of elders, making a distinction between the two classes of elders, teaching and ruling. It has self-consciously taken a more democratic position (rule from the grass roots up) on presbyterian governance in contrast to a more prelatical form (rule from the top assemblies down).

The PCA Ministry Buildings in Lawrenceville is the location from which most of the ministries of the denomination are coordinated. These ministries are carried on by four Program committees -- Mission to the World, Mission to North America, Christian Education and Publication, Reformed University Ministries, and one service committee, the Administrative Committee, responsible for the administration of the General Assembly. Additionally, there are five agencies which also minister to the denomination: PCA Foundation, PCA Retirement & Benefits, Inc. (both located in Lawrenceville), Ridge Haven, (the PCA conference center located close to Rosman, North Carolina), Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia, and Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, (the national educational institutions of the PCA).

The PCA is one of the faster growing denominations in the United States, with over 1700 churches and missions throughout the USA and Canada. There were over 335,000 communicant and non-communicant members as of December 2000.

The influence of the PCA extends far beyond the walls of the local church. Mission to the World has 519 career missionaries in almost 60 nations of the world, 169 two-year missionaries, and over 6500 short term missionaries. Because of the unique relationship between Mission to the World with over thirty mission organizations with whom some of our missionaries are working, some consider that the influence is far greater than our size might indicate. Indeed, PCA churches support an additional 690 career missionaries, covering over 130 nations. Further, with more than 100 chaplains in the military, Veterans Administration, prisons, and hospitals, and 45 college and university campus ministers, the Gospel is proclaimed to a rather large audience around the world not reached through usual outreach channels. Because of the emphasis on education, there are many members of the PCA who are teachers and professors at all levels, including a significant number of large universities and theological seminaries.

In this new century, the Presbyterian Church in America continues its commitment to evangelism world-wide and the building up of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Bibliography:

James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Intervarsity Press, IL, 1986

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Morton H. Smith, *How is the Gold Become Dim*, Jackson, MS, 1973

Mission

Hill Country Church (PCA) is a Reformed and Confessional (mission) church which endeavors, by the grace and mercy of God, to proclaim and extol the name of Jesus Christ, our King and Savior, as we nurture and grow faithful disciples and ambassadors of the kingdom of God, in order to expand His rule and reign through the gathering and perfecting of the saints.

Distinctives

Reformed. Historically, the doctrines of the Reformed Faith have been summarized in five sola (“alone” or “only”) statements: (1) Scripture Alone: the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God, given by His inspiration, and are the only rule of faith and life (WCF 1:2); (2) Christ Alone: the Lord Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God and the only Mediator between God and Man, and through whom His people are redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified (WCF 8:1-2); (3) Faith Alone: receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness is the alone instrument of justification, Christ’s righteousness being imputed to those who believe (WCF 11:1-2); (4) Grace Alone: God effectually calls and regenerates those whom He has chosen, not by anything foreseen in them, but by His free and special grace alone (WCF 10:2); (5) God’s Glory Alone: As Creator of all things and Redeemer of the elect, God works all things to the praise and glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy (WCF 5:1).

Confessional. Often, believers will declare their submission to God’s Word in saying, “I have no creed, but the Bible.” However, in practice this usually means, “I have no creed, but the Bible as I interpret it” which makes doctrine both subjective and malleable. As a church and denomination, we believe that the Westminster Standards contain the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures. [The Westminster Standards](#) are comprised of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Westminster Larger Catechism, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism, all of which were written in the 1640s by the Westminster Assembly in England. These three documents, along with the Presbyterian Church in America’s Book of Church Order, comprise the constitution of our church.

Presbyterian. Our church is not independent, but connectional and hierarchical. This means that while our local church, by itself, functions as the body of Christ, we maintain reciprocal accountability (are accountable to and for) the larger Church of our denomination, [the Presbyterian Church in America \(PCA\)](#). “The Church is governed by various courts, in regular gradation, which are all, nevertheless, Presbyteries, as being composed exclusively of presbyters. These courts are church Sessions, Presbyteries, and the General Assembly” (BCO 10:1-2). The church session consists of the pastor and ruling elders of the church (BCO 12:1); in our case, Hill Country Church (PCA) is a “mission” church, and is therefore governed by a provisional session comprised of pastors and elders from the [North Texas Presbytery](#). The presbytery consists of all the teaching elders and churches within its geographical bounds that have been accepted by the presbytery; all teaching elders and representative ruling elders comprise the court of the presbytery (BCO 13:1-2). The General Assembly is the highest court of the church and represents in one body all the churches of the denomination; all teaching elders and representative ruling elders comprise the court of the General Assembly (BCO 14:1).

Worship. In the public and corporate worship of our church we hold to the regulative principle of worship and emphasize the ordinary means of grace. The regulative principle of worship refers to the distinctive of the Reformed tradition wherein the corporate worship of God is conducted according to the Word of God. Specifically, this means that we seek to worship God only in the ways that He has prescribed or commanded us to worship Him in the Scripture (Deut 12:32; Exo 20: 4-6; Matt 15:7-9; Col 2:20-23; WCF 21:1). The ordinary means of grace refers to those things which Christ ordinarily uses to communicate the benefits of redemption to His people: the reading and preaching of God’s word, the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, and prayer (WSC 88).

MINISTER (TEACHING ELDER) VOWS

Questions for Ordination & Installation of Ministers (BCO 21:5)

(For an assistant minister, only questions 1-7 shall be used)

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will on your own initiative, make known to your Presbytery the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of Biblical polity?
4. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
5. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?
6. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace and unity of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
7. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?
8. Are you now willing to take the charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to discharge to it the duties of a pastor?

Questions for Installation (BCO 21-9)

1. Are you now willing to take charge of this congregation as their pastor, agreeable to your declaration in accepting its call?
2. Do you conscientiously believe and declare, as far as you know your own heart, that, in taking upon you this charge, you are influenced by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God and the good of the Church?
3. Do you solemnly promise that, by the assistance of the grace of God, you will endeavor faithfully to discharge all the duties of a pastor to this congregation, and will be careful to maintain a deportment in all respects becoming a minister of the Gospel of Christ, agreeable to your ordination engagements?

Questions to Congregation upon the ordination and installation of Ministers (BCO 21:6)

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?
2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him in the due exercise of discipline?
3. Do you promise to encourage him in his labors, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and spiritual edification?
4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?

RULING ELDER & DEACON VOWS

Questions for Ordination & Installation of Elders/Deacons (BCO 24:6)

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?

Question to Congregation upon the ordination and installation of Elders/Deacons (BCO 24:6)

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder (or deacon), and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

MEMBERSHIP VOWS (BCO 57:5)²

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?

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

1. Profession (testimony) of faith marked by knowledge and piety (WCF 25:2; BCO 57:3).
2. Christian baptism: Trinitarian, with water, by an ordained minister (WCF 28:1-2; BCO 57:3).
3. Make a public profession of faith through interview with session and affirming the five vows of membership before the congregation (BCO 57:5).

² See also: Peter M. Dietsch, *Living Stones: Why Church Membership Matters* (Lawrenceville, Georgia: Christian Education and Publications, 2010).

MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS

A. Endeavor to grow in one's faith and live as becomes a follower of Christ (Membership Vow #3)

- (1) Routine worship and fellowship with believers, centered upon our commitment to Christ, "spurring one another on to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24-25; Acts 2:42-47).
- (2) Regular partaking of communion, signifying the ongoing acceptance of God's love, grace, forgiveness and strength, and celebrating our spiritual union with Christ and His Body, the Church (1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Acts 2:42, 46).
- (3) Routine time in corporate, family, and private study of Scripture and worship (Colossians 4:2; Acts 17:11; Mark 1:35; Psalm 119:97; Ephesians 5:18-21; Colossians 3:16).

Read Scripture

Obey God's Commands
Tremble at God's Threatenings
Embrace God's Promises

Pray

Adoration
Confession
Thanksgiving
Supplication

Sing

Psalms
Hymns
Spiritual Songs

- (4) Obedience to the teachings of Scripture, submission to its authority, and affirmation of its inerrancy (2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 8:31).

B. Support the Church's worship and work (Membership Vow #4)

- (1) Faithful participation in worship (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25).
- (2) Serving others through the discovery and use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:3-8; Luke 22:24-30).
- (3) Loving the children of our church through assisting their parents in the Christian nurture of their children, and assisting (where appropriate) with children's Sunday School and periodic nursery care (Judges 2:10-12; Matthew 19:13-15; 28:18-20).
- (4) Routine prayer on behalf of the church's health and growth (Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:1-31).
- (5) Sharing my faith with unbelievers in love and with a conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit, leaving the results to God (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Colossians 4:3-6).
- (6) Inviting unbelievers and unchurched to attend church with me. (1 Corinthians 14:22-28)
- (7) Warmly welcoming those who attend (James 2:1-13).
- (8) Regular financial giving in acknowledgment that God is the true owner of all that I have been given to steward for Him (2 Corinthians 9:7-15).

C. Submit to the Church government and strive for the purity and peace of the Church (Membership Vow #5)

- (1) Obeying, and submitting to, the pastor and elders of the church, while praying for their spiritual protection and doctrinal soundness (Hebrews 13:16-18; 1 Timothy 4:16).
- (2) Receiving the word of truth from the pastor with meekness and love, submitting to his (along with the session's) admonitions and due exercise of discipline (Hebrews 12:11-14; Matthew 18:15-20).
- (3) Acting in love toward other members, bearing with and forgiving other people as I desire them to bear with and forgive me (John 13:34-35; Colossians 3:12-14).
- (4) Refusing to gossip and refusing to listen to gossip, slander, or malicious talk (Colossians 3:8; Matthew 18:15-35, 6:14-15, 5:23-24).