

THE MEMBERSHIP MANUAL

2010 Edition

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INTRODUCTION - PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

Thanks for considering membership at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church! We believe God is doing great things here at Christ Lutheran in helping believers and seekers live life as fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. We hope you will join us in this exciting and challenging adventure.

This manual has two purposes:

1. To guide prospective members toward membership in a clear, step-by-step way.
2. To serve as a reference for all members, a reminder of what we're about here at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Thanks to all those who helped prepare this manual. A special thanks to the Christ Evangelical Lutheran Congregation Council and Ministry Leadership Team for their input and oversight.

Note: We have tried to be inclusive in our language; however, if there are examples where "he" or "him" are used, please read them to mean "he or she" or "him or her," etc.

WHY MEMBERSHIP? MEMBERSHIP COUNTS!

You might wonder, "What is the point of formal membership? If I sincerely profess faith in Jesus Christ, why is anything else needed? Isn't it enough just to attend the church without actually becoming a member?" Here are some reasons we feel membership can help us achieve what we desire most as Christians:

1. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: membership brings me into a team of believers on a great mission.

Christ Lutheran Church exists to help believers and seekers live life as fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. We welcome people into a dynamic Christian community where they can connect — with God, with one another, and with opportunities to make a difference in our changing world. Membership is our way of saying, "Count me in. I'm not just a spectator; I'm on the team now. I'm not just a 'church shopper' checking you out; I'm ready to get involved now. I want to work with the rest of you by making the mission of Jesus Christ, my mission, our mission. I want to learn to live life spiritually, as a fully devoted follower of Christ. I want to welcome others into our Christian community. And I want to connect with God, others, and opportunities to make a difference in our world."

2. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: membership commits me to a community of mutually committed people.

Without a high level of care and commitment, you don't experience community. Lukewarm commitments lead to superficial relationships. Since we want to experience deeper relationships, we see membership as a way of defining a deeper level of care and commitment. And here's what we've learned: if we want Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church to be "warm" at the fringe, our commitment and care levels must be "hot" at the core. Membership encourages a "100 degree" commitment for our core, so that a first-time visitor finds a warm, "70 degree" welcome, even on her or his first visit. Membership helps us define what "100 degree" commitment looks like.

3. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: membership helps the community keep expectations clear.

A clearly defined membership helps us to keep clear Biblical expectations of disciples. Membership helps define the expectations we have in this covenant relationship with God. This definition is important in the area of Biblical church discipline: only members receive the pastoral oversight, accountability, and protection associated with church discipline.

4. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: membership affirms that we hold to similar values and beliefs.

Membership helps us to be sure that we hold to the same core of beliefs and are committed to each other's growth in a unified way. It ensures that we corporately build upon a strong, shared foundation of faith, creating a church which truly advances the cause of Jesus Christ. Without defining our core beliefs and values, we could find ourselves "playing from a different sheet of music," or building on different foundations with differing blueprints.

5. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: helps us deal with our financial commitments to responsibly give to support the mission of God's church.

At Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we ask our members to be highly committed financially so that the mission needs of the church are met without having to pressure people or barrage them with emergency appeals. We are often told that people respect us for the serious and yet discreet way we approach this issue. We're all in this together, and we believe God can do great things with people who are learning how to sacrifice and generously give.

6. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: Members understand the importance of discovering their spiritual gifts and the use of their gifts, in the life mission of the church. Each of us has been blessed with a spiritual gift. “As each of you has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God,” (1 Peter 4:10). Becoming a member of the church, a commitment is made to discover and utilize spiritual gifts. At Christ Lutheran, we have a commitment to discover and utilize the spiritual gifts of each member. Here, the members are the staff ... not expecting to be served by the paid staff, but rather, being equipped by the paid staff to serve one another as volunteer staff ... and to reach out to our neighbors. By having a defined membership, we know who is on the team, and we can be sure they find the best "position" on the team—the place where they will be most effective and fulfilled as we work together to reach our team objective. It is our strong belief at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church that God expects each of us to assume personal responsibility for ministry.

7. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: Membership counts you in as a host to newcomers. As a member, you are the face of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church to your coworkers, neighbors, everyone you meet. You are also the face of Christ Lutheran Church to every first-time visitor and newcomer to CLC, and so any guest to the church is your guest. You will want to consider questions like these ... When your guests drive into the parking lot, do they find a convenient space easily, and are they greeted by you with smiles and hellos even before they reach the building? Do your guests need help getting settled or finding where their children go? Are there offers to show guests around our building and to seats available for worship? Do your guests need a smile, a warm hello, some information, or an invitation to join you for lunch to get better acquainted? Would your guest appreciate an invitation to meet you over a cup of coffee during the week?

8. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: Members can participate in the internal affairs and decisions made to further the mission/purpose of the church and in the operations of our community. As a member, you have the right to influence key decisions of the church, most importantly the selection of congregation council candidates. From time to time, meetings or other functions are held which are for members only. These events are usually called to either inform the core of the church of a major concern or to gather needed input.

9. MEMBERSHIP COUNTS: Membership opens the door for different leadership roles. Most of the elected leadership positions in the church require membership as a prerequisite.

BECOMING A MEMBER

There are four concrete steps to become a member at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church:

1. Preparation: We ask that you review this Membership Manual. If you are familiar with basic Christian teachings, we still want you to review the questions in this manual. If you are relatively new to the Christian faith and to the Bible, the study questions will be very helpful for you, and well worth your time. You may wish to complete them alone, or with a friend or group of friends. (If you need assistance with your questions about membership please contact the church staff.) In this step, at your own pace, you learn our philosophy of ministry as outlined in this manual.

2. Connection: We invite you to get connected to other people at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church. You may have already gotten connected to some people through a small group, through volunteering in a ministry, or through some other activity. If you haven't, the office can help you make a good connection, either with a small group, or with a current member who can serve as your host or mentor. We have some of our existing members prepared and available to others in this way — to answer questions, get acquainted, etc.

3. Affirmation: Turn in your *Membership Covenant*, located at the back of this manual. This one-page affirmation lets us know that you wish to be considered a member. You can turn the Covenant in by mail, at the Information Desk on Sundays, by email at clc@heartmindsoul.com or in person to the office manager.

4. Celebration: Celebrate your membership with the CLC community publicly at a Sunday Celebration. A joyful time for all! When we receive your Covenant, we'll be sure you are welcomed publicly at an upcoming Sunday Celebration.

OUR MISSION

A mission/purpose statement does two primary things for the local church:

1. For those disciples in the church, it helps them plan for the future with a specific focus in mind. With a clear sense of mission/purpose, churches can stay out of ruts, avoid stagnation, and grow in vitality and effectiveness. It keeps people in the faith community considering the question, "Why are we here?" — and not just going through the motions. It helps unify the church around a common mission.

2. For those observing the church, a mission statement helps to answer these important questions: "In light of God's purpose for me, is this the church God is calling me to commit myself to and become a member? Is this a church where I can grow spiritually? Is the church welcoming people who are new believers? Would I like to become a member of this faith community?"

We hope the mission statement of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church will fulfill both of these functions. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church exists to help people live life as fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. We welcome people into a dynamic Christian community where they can connect — with God, with one another, and with opportunities to make a difference in our changing world.

We realize that God uses different kinds of churches to reach and serve different kinds of people, and so we focus our energies to fulfill this mission and purpose to which we feel God has called us. Each phrase in our mission, vision, and purpose statement bears some further consideration.

OUR MISSION/PURPOSE STATEMENT:

The mission of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ and transform all people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Christ Lutheran Church *exists* to:

- **Welcome** people to faith;
- **Equip** people with a faith that works in real life; and
- **Send** us in service into a hostile and hurting world in Jesus' name.

Christ Church is a **Great Commission** community of faith! It is our desire that you find and experience the amazing grace and love of Jesus. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19, is the primary work of this church. The invitation from Christ is to each and everyone in the community. Our mission is to invite people to be followers of Jesus. The Bible describes a follower of Jesus as a disciple. Discipleship is an intentional journey in God's love. The marks of discipleship are like signposts along the way. The invitation is to come grow with us.

The marks of discipleship are:

- **Bible reading daily**
- **Pray daily** growing personal faith through
- **Worship** weekly and daily
- **Giving** with a commitment toward a tithe and
- **Build** community and relationships through **small groups**
- **Serve** at and beyond CELC
- **Grow spiritually**

OUR VISION

If our mission describes what we want to achieve, our vision describes the picture we have of the goal, of what we will look like (hence “vision”) when we are achieving our mission. Here is our vision statement:

- *Our vision is to be a community of believers making and baptizing disciples so that Christ’s forgiveness and healing can be accomplished in the world.*
- *We are a community of believers because God wants us to be something together and represent God with our unified diversity. Our vision is to further God’s Kingdom in our midst.*

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church is a dynamic hub of Christian thought, action, community, and creative arts, dedicated to embracing and transforming our postmodern world with the message and love of Jesus Christ. To achieve this mission and fulfill this vision, we have committed ourselves to four spirit led actions. Our four actions can be summarized as follows:

Connection: To connect increasing numbers of people to lasting, fulfilling, and fruitful involvement in Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Enrichment: To enrich people’s lives and help them grow into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ, through caring relationships, relevant ministries, and meaningful service.

Leadership: To ensure effective leadership for all facets of church life.

Impact: To pioneer proactive Christian engagement with the postmodern world, locally and globally.

THE FIVE PURPOSES OF THE CHURCH

“New Life Comes to Us On Its Way to Someone Else”

There are two great statements of Jesus that summarize the whole of scripture and describe the five purposes of the Church: the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Together, these scripture texts give us the primary purposes that the church is to focus on until Christ returns. The focus and mission of the Church is to witness to the “new life that comes to us through Jesus on its way to someone else.”

Matthew 22: 37-40

37 He said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Matthew 28:19-20

19 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, 20 and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

Purpose 1: Worship - "Love the Lord with all your heart, soul & mind" - The words that best describe this purpose are *exaltation* and *praise*. The church exists to worship God. This purpose comes before service or anything else we do in Jesus name. Worship is how we express our love to God and receive forgiveness and unity through the communion meal. Throughout scripture we are commanded to celebrate God's love by magnifying Jesus and exalting his name. Psalm 34:3 says, "O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together."

Purpose 2: Ministry - Service - "Love your neighbor as yourself" - The words that best describe this purpose are *mercy*, *compassion*, and *justice*. Service is demonstrating God's love to neighbor by meeting needs, seeking justice for the oppressed, and healing hurts in the name of Jesus. The church is to serve neighbors with all kinds of needs: spiritual, emotional, relational, and physical.

Purpose 3: Evangelism - "Go and make disciples" - The words that best describe this purpose are *witness, invitation, hospitality, and share*. It is every disciples responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are instructed to witness or tell the whole world of Christ's coming, (given in each Gospel and the book of Acts as a mandate, as an invitation to all people) for the kingdom to grow. We do not seek growth for our benefit, but because Jesus loves people and wants an eternal relationship with them.

Purpose 4: Fellowship - Baptism

- "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit" - The words that best describe this purpose are *new life* - everlasting relationship, *belonging* - body of Christ, *nurture* - becoming, and *fellowship* - community of believers. Baptism is so important to Jesus that he commanded it be done in the Great Commission. Baptism brings everyone the gift of belonging to the fellowship of Christ's family and makes us members of Christ's body. It is in the fellowship of Jesus that we are nurtured and grow spiritually. Ephesians 2:19 (Living Bible) says, "You are members of God's own family...and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."

Purpose 5: Discipleship -Teaching

- "Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" - The words that best describe this purpose are edify, encourage, educate, equip, and spiritual maturity. This purpose has to do with disciple making and spiritual maturity. A disciple is one who abides in Christ's love. "Discipleship is the process of equipping people to become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions." Discipleship is the process of falling more and more in love with Jesus. Colossians 1:28 says, "We continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ."

CHRIST EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH STATEMENT
on our MISSION, VISION and PURPOSE.

1. **Life to the full:** This phrase comes from the teaching of Jesus, in one of his own "mission statements." He said, "I have come that they might have life, life to the full" (John 10:10). Jesus also said, "As the Father sent me, so I am sending you" (John 20:21), so we believe that our mission as a Christian church should be an extension of his — helping people learn to live in the fullness God intends, a fullness too many of us miss too often. And when we say "helping people," we mean all people, especially people who don't yet have a relationship with God. Just as Jesus focused his attention on the irreligious, we feel a special calling to reach out to people who aren't already involved actively in a local church — and to welcome them in with love and acceptance, wherever they are on their spiritual journey. This high value that we place on welcoming in people who aren't yet committed Christians influences everything we do — the kind of music we use in worship, the kind of language we use in our sermons and literature (carefully translating "religious jargon" into language anyone can understand), the kind of nonjudgmental atmosphere we seek to create and protect, etc.
2. **We welcome people into a dynamic Christian community.** Community is essential to our mission. In fact, you'll often hear us speak of pursuing "mission through community." As we just saw, our desire is to truly welcome all interested people in — wherever they are in their journey toward spiritual commitment. That's important, because one of the ways Jesus said that people will understand who he is and what his message means to them is for people to see how his followers live ... how they love one another, serve one another, work out their differences with one another, and work together with one another. By welcoming people into our community, we let them see our faith in action in our daily lives ... the good and the not-so-good, the successes and failures. We believe that if people see authentic faith lived out by real people in genuine community, the good news of Jesus Christ will shine through.
3. **Where all can connect with God:** There are many ways Christians describe what it means to really connect with God — being converted or "saved" or "born again," coming to Christ, accepting Christ, receiving Christ, becoming a committed Christian, becoming a believer, etc. Behind these descriptions is a real-life experience — of moving into a vital relationship with God, where one is seeking God, and seeking to live in a way that pleases God. For some people, the experience is sudden and dramatic; for others it comes gradually and subtly. Either way, this relationship isn't something we have to earn; the fact is, we can't earn it, because God offers it to us as a free gift of grace and love. That's why Jesus came — to tell us that God loves and accepts us, and to invite us to respond to God in love and commitment and as a result experience "life to the full." Not only that, by sacrificing his life and dying on the cross, he in some divine way paid for all of our wrongs, faults, and failures, opening the door wide for all of us to come to God and experience a new beginning, whatever we've done in the past.

4. **Where they can connect with others:** There is no question about it: the Christian life that Jesus exemplified and taught about is not a solo journey. It's all about connecting with other people. On one level, that means connecting deeply with some friends, people you enjoy and trust, people with whom you can take off your mask and really be yourself. On a deeper level, it means going beyond enjoying and accepting one another as we are, to challenging one another to become all we can be. And on an even deeper level, the kind of connection taught in the gospel invites us to connect with people very different from us, people we might not normally choose to associate with. Jesus demonstrated this kind of radical connection by befriending tax collectors, prostitutes, Samaritans, and other people that were considered "outsiders." The early church demonstrated it by living out the radical belief that we all — male or female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, educated or uneducated, extraverted or introverted — are made one in Christ. We want you to experience this kind of connection — the Biblical word for it is "fellowship" — at the deepest levels possible.
5. **Where they can connect with opportunities to make a difference:** To follow Christ always means to be called beyond ourselves, our needs, our interests ... to the needs and interests of others. Again and again you'll hear us remind ourselves that to be a Christian is to be a minister (which simply means a servant — someone who lives for others, not just himself). The New Testament teaches us that we each are given special spiritual gifts which we use to make a difference in a way unique to us individually. One may teach, another comfort and counsel, another lead, another administrate, another help in practical, behind-the-scenes ways, etc. It's our goal for each person at Christ Lutheran Church to discover his or her unique calling and gifts, so each of us can make a difference in our special way. We seek to provide opportunities — from teaching children to working with teens to caring for the elderly, from cutting grass to making coffee to leading Bible studies, from working with the homeless through Bethesda Cares to taking short-term mission trips overseas. It's up to each of us to prayerfully choose which opportunities to take advantage of.
6. **... in our changing world.** We also believe that the work of the church is not just "church work." Church work — the many tasks necessary for a community like Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church to thrive and grow — is important, but the goal of having a vibrant, dynamic church goes beyond us to our impact in our world. We hope that from being with us on Sunday, you'll be more motivated and equipped to serve God from Monday through Saturday on your job, in your neighborhood, etc. The word "changing" in our mission statement is important too — because we believe that we live in exciting, dynamic times. That's why you'll find us excited about the opportunities presented us in the current transition from the modern to the postmodern world ... not frightened or wishing for any "good old days." For us, these times are the most exciting times possible, and we are eager to live for Christ as we lean into the future.

OUR CORE VALUES

CHRIST CHURCH CORE VALUES:

- ◆ *FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST*
- ◆ *PASSION* for the Gospel
- ◆ *RESPECT* for all people
- ◆ *FORGIVENESS*
- ◆ *JUSTICE* for all people
- ◆ *KINDNESS*
- ◆ *HONESTY*
- ◆ *SPIRITUAL GROWTH*
- ◆ *SPIRITUAL GIFTS*
- ◆ *SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES*
- ◆ *COMMUNITY* as a place for growth, belonging, support, and sending
- ◆ *WORSHIP* as a public and powerful meeting of God with other believers and seekers

The wording of these values has changed over time, but the content has remained the same since Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church was a handful of people meeting in a Bethesda Theater.

1. Essential, Biblical Christianity: Not more, not less. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know there is no end to the questions and controversies that a Christian can get caught up in. At CLC, we see these controversies as problematic not only to our mission (we can become distracted by them, or divided by them, and thus miss our mission) but also to our spiritual health (see 2 Timothy 2:23-24). We believe it is our calling to focus on essential, Biblical Christianity. We make it our goal at CLC to be "brilliant in the basics" rather than to major on minor issues. We believe that maturity involves increasing simplicity and humility and practicality, not endless complexity, pride, and abstraction. Over the years, we have come to realize that what matters most is gloriously simple and noncontroversial ... loving God with all our being, loving our neighbors as ourselves. As Jesus said (Luke 10:41-42), we tend to worry about "many things," when few things really matter, and really only one ... just learning to sit quietly, simply, teachably, lovingly at Jesus' feet as humble learners. In short, this value says that we focus on "core Christianity," the beliefs and values that nearly all Christians across the ages have held in common. Those essential truths, made clear in the Bible, are articulated in the "Our Beliefs" section.

2. Mission Through Community: A dynamic balance. We seek a vital balance between mission (doing, what we seek to achieve) and community (being, how we relate to one another). Key to our values is refusing to choose one over the other. We pursue our mission through community, and we experience community as we pursue our mission. This dynamic balance is essential for each part of our mission statement. First, community is essential to the evangelistic dimension of our mission. Seekers need a loving context for the process of spiritual seeking to take place: a community where questions can be asked and answered, doubts expressed, authenticity observed, worship experienced, Christian living demonstrated, answers to prayer and changes in people's lives actually witnessed. Such an atmosphere of grace is the best context for people to experience God, to find the courage and freedom to change and grow, and to find reason to believe. After all, didn't Jesus say that it was our love and unity that would validate his message, and our authenticity as his followers? Second, community is essential to the discipleship dimension of our mission. People will grow into vibrant followers of Christ only in the context of authentic Christian community. How can they be equipped, deployed, and supported for ministry in any other context? How can people become more and more of what God intends them to be unless they are interacting with others: serving and being served, confronting and being confronted, offending and asking for forgiveness and being offended and offering forgiveness, teaching and being taught, giving and receiving, failing and being encouraged and offering encouragement to fellow strugglers? How can people experience the abundant life promised by Christ if they never laugh and cry and work and communicate and forgive and experiment and rest and work together, in the context of community? Clearly, mission and community are friends, not enemies!

3. Innovation and Creativity: Leaning forward into the future. You may have heard about the seven last words of a church: "We've never done it that way before," or "We've always done it that way here." You shouldn't hear (or speak!) those words here at CLC, because we're eager to stay out of those kinds of ruts, to hold traditions in the light of Jesus unfolding mission journey, to remain flexible and ready to change. Jesus said only new, flexible wineskins could hold the new wine of the Spirit, so we are committed to remaining flexible, teachable, not change-averse. Not only that, but we serve a creative God! The splendor and span of his creativity call us to excellence and innovation. We believe that God is

at work in the world and in our lives. We face the future with anticipation, not fear, with confidence, not hesitation, with creativity, not inhibition. We expect to make mistakes, and we try to learn from them. We experiment freely. We look for new ways of doing things, because our mission matters so much. We believe God's work deserves our very best, so "good enough" is never good enough. It's not enough to be contemporary; we need to be anticipatory, leaning forward, riding the crest of the wave, being part of the exciting "new things" that God is doing – things that we are privileged to be part of. True, we are a congregation that welcomes rather than resists change, but we have as our stabilizing guiding principles the mission, vision, values, and beliefs expressed in this document. We hope that one hundred years from now, Christ Lutheran Church will still be steering its course through changing currents guided by these constants.

4. Spiritual Vibrancy: God's Spirit is alive in our experience through vital spiritual disciplines. At CELC, we want to experience spiritual vibrancy in Christ through all the stages of life. We don't believe people learn for a while and then reach some elevated plateau of "maturity" where they coast as "know-it-all" until heaven. We believe every life-stage is filled with special lessons, opportunities, challenges, perspectives ... and so we seek to promote spiritual teachability for everyone, wherever they are in their journey, from the youngest child to the oldest senior citizen. A triangle diagram can be helpful in understanding how spiritual growth occurs through each of life's stages. At the top point of the triangle we have God's Spirit. Without God, nothing happens. At the next point, we have our experience – the ups and downs of life, the joys and disappointments, delights and sufferings, advances and setbacks, hopes and dreams and fears – the real-life context within which God works. At the third point, we have spiritual disciplines – the practices or habits or behaviors that can help us, in the middle of life's experiences, to keep in touch with God's Spirit. Those spiritual disciplines include study of Scripture, prayer, worship, fasting, feasting, fellowship, journaling, silence, service, and more. They are a rich palette which God's Spirit uses to paint our lives with vibrant colors. Clearly, words like *dynamic* and *vibrant* have become important to us. Defined as "pulsing with life and energy," we further specify what we mean by spiritual vibrancy through "the 6 G's," which guide us a spiritually and contribute to the basis of membership at CLC (see Part Two). Vibrant Christians, we believe, enjoy a rich understanding and experience of the **Grace** of God. They pursue spiritual **Growth** through the spiritual disciplines. They support and encourage one another in Small **Groups**, where they exercise their spiritual **Gifts** for mutual edification. They are committed to sacrificial **Giving** through Biblical stewardship, and they seek to live out Christ's **Great Commission** (to help others receive the good news of God's love in Christ) in their daily lives. Where these 6 G's are, we believe, there will be fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

5. Integrity and Authenticity: These are natural result of humility, humor, and humanness. We seek to live without facades and pretense. We know that we all stumble every day in many ways – and we encourage one another to "fall in the light" – to readily admit our mistakes, not to hide or try to cover them up. Sometimes, a sense of humor helps us to avoid taking ourselves and our mistakes so seriously – so we can take the amazing grace of God more seriously. We avoid putting people on pedestals. We avoid being "showy." We want people to be free to be themselves, because that's what we've learned from Jesus Christ.

OUR BELIEFS

The following beliefs are at the heart of all we say and do at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church. We have included references from the Bible if you would like to study the Biblical basis for these beliefs.

1. WE BELIEVE IN THE HISTORIC CHRISTIAN FAITH, REFLECTED IN THESE STATEMENTS:

About God – God is the loving Creator of all that exists, both seen and unseen. God is eternal and completely good, knowing all things, having all power and majesty. God exists as the Trinity, in three persons, yet one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God passionately desires relationship with us and towards this end, continually invites us into a relationship of faith, friendship, learning, and obedience. (Genesis 1:1, John 14:6-9, 15-17, John 16:7-15, Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14, I John 4:9-10)

About Jesus Christ — God expressed himself in human form through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified for the sins of us all, was buried, rose again from the dead, and ascended to heaven. (Colossians 1:13-23, Colossians 2:8-14, I Corinthians 15:3-8, Matthew 22:36-40, John 14:1-3, Hebrews 1:1-3, Acts 10:42-43, I Thessalonians 4:16-17)

About the Holy Spirit — The Holy Spirit, sent from God to live inside all who believe in Jesus Christ, teaches, comforts, and empowers us, giving each follower of diverse gifts, fostering unity, interdependence, productivity, Christ-like character, and love among Christians. (Romans 5:5, Romans 8, I Corinthians 12-14, Galatians 5:16-25, Ephesians 3:16, Ephesians 4:3-4, Ephesians 5:18, John 14:26, John 16:7-14)

About the Bible — We believe that God speaks to us in the Bible, and that it is our privilege to seek to understand God's message and apply it responsibly to our lives. The Bible is our standard and authority in all we say and do. We believe that God's Biblical message ought to be presented in relevant and contemporary ways, free of religious jargon and understandable to the people of our community. (Matthew 5:17-19, 2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:14-17, Hebrews 4:12, 2 Peter 1:16-21, 2 Peter 3:14-18, Psalm 19:7-11, Psalm 119:9-16, Joshua 1:7-8, Acts 17:11)

About Salvation — All people are created with dignity and value in the image of God, to live in a vital relationship with God. However, through our sin (failing to live by God's moral standards), we break our intended relationship with God and we experience the destructive consequences of that broken relationship, spiritually and socially, in this life and beyond. However, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to rescue us from those consequences and to restore our broken relationships with God and others, through Christ's death on the cross, a perfect act of redemption for each of us. Salvation comes to people on the basis of God's grace through their faith in Jesus alone. They receive the free gift of forgiveness and are spiritually reborn through repenting of their sin and believing in Jesus Christ. Good works and a holy life, although totally unable to save anyone, are the natural product of repentant, believing people. (I Peter 2:24, I Peter 3:18, Romans 3:9-28, Romans 6:23, Romans 10:9-10, John 3:16, John 5:24, Ephesians 2:1-10, Titus 3:3-8, James 2:14-26)

2. WE BELIEVE IN TEAMWORK.

We work in lay-led teams, which are in turn governed by a board called the Church Council Leadership Team. We seek to exercise and respond to leadership in a Scriptural manner, and to work in partnership with one another. (Matthew 23:8-11, 18, Matthew 18:15-17, Luke 22:24-27, I Corinthians 16:15-16, I Thessalonians 5:12-13, I Timothy 5:1, 17-23, Hebrews 13:7, 17)

3. WE BELIEVE IN RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP.

We encourage people to handle their finances discreetly, honorably, and responsibly, and to practice regular and generous giving. (Matthew 6:19-21, 24, 33, Malachi 3:10-11, I Corinthians 9:7-14, I Corinthians 16:1-2, 3 John 5-8, 2 Corinthians 9:5-12, Galatians 6:6, I Timothy 5:17-18)

4. WE BELIEVE IN SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY.

We express our strong value of community by seeking to reach out and connect with a diversity of people. We want to be personal and caring in a world that is increasingly fragmented and impersonal. We are not afraid to be vulnerable, human, and honest with each other. We believe our spirituality fulfills rather than denies our humanity, and we believe this approach strengthens community. (John 15:12, Acts 2:42-47, Romans 12:3-18, Galatians 6:1-5, 10, Colossians 4:5-6, 2 Timothy 4:1-5)

5. WE BELIEVE IN UNITY AMONG CHRISTIANS.

CELC recognizes diversity among Christians in nonessential areas. We do not press for uniformity in these areas, but rather encourage people to search the Scriptures, seeking balance, mutual understanding, humility, and love. Additionally, we seek to respect one another's differences without a quarrelsome, arrogant, or divisive spirit, and to return continually to the great commandment, to love God and one another. (I Corinthians 1:10-13, Romans 14:1-15:7, Romans 16:17, 2 Timothy 2:14-17, 23-26, James 3:13-17, Philippians 2:1-5)

OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE GLOBAL CHURCH: BEYOND CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH

We as God's people are to have impact beyond our local faith community. Our mission statement reminds us that we believe God wants us to have a global concern and impact, not only a local one.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church has already done that in a number of ways. We are a congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and participate in local, national, and international mission work of this Church. We support world missionaries all around the world — for example, teaching poor children in Guatemala City Dump through the support of Mi Refugio, and in Africa through our support of the mission of Chikumbuso, Lusaka, Zambia, and planting churches in China, and doing innovative international ministries in many other places too. Here in the states, we support young children and families through Guiding Star Child Development Center, to those battling addictions through support to Nick's Place, ministries to college students, ministries to homeless people through Bethesda Cares, youth work, and a network to encourage the equipping of new pastors and church planters.

We expect to see the impact of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church continue to grow as the years progress. We remember that Jesus' "great commission" was global ... "Go into all the world...." What could be more exciting and meaningful than being part of God's team to make a difference in our world — so full of need and promise?

OUR LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY AND STRUCTURE

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church is a lay-ministry, lay-led, staff-directed church.

1. Lay-Powered: Ministry in Christ Lutheran Church is the privilege and responsibility of all members. Members are encouraged to discover their gifts through training, experimentation and involvement, and then to develop and deploy their gifts in fruitful ministry, both within Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church and beyond. Ministry is currently organized in several teams:

A. Teaching Ministries Team: those who lead small groups, serve as discipleship mentors, teach classes in our Christian education ministries, lead Bible studies.

B. Evangelism Team: those who lead mentoring small groups for seekers, orientation for those seeking membership, equipping believers to be spiritual mentors.

C. Worship and Arts Team: those who plan and present quality worship experiences for our people.

D. Youth Ministries Team: those who serve children through teenagers.

E. Service Team: those who serve persons in great need locally, nationally, globally.

F. Business Systems Team: those who attend to all our infrastructure needs, including technology needs.

G. Property Operation Team: those who serve through acquisition, maintenance, improvement, and development of our facilities.

H. Communications Team: those who focus on internal and external communications.

I. Ministry Leadership Team: those who develop and care for the on going spiritual life of the church.

J. Finance Team: those who attend to the raising and wise use of needed funds.

2. Congregation Council-led: We use the term "Ministry Leadership Team" (MLT) to describe the team of people who see to the delivery of mission. They are responsible for training, spiritual growth, and planning with regard to ministry. The church council has the authority under Christ for the direction, doctrine, discipleship, discipline, and governance of the church. Their authority is expressed in servant leadership, not in "lording over" those placed in their charge (I Peter 5:2-3).

A. Direction: The Congregation Council sets the overall philosophy, vision, and direction for the church, in a context of prayer and Scripture (Acts 6:4).

B. Doctrine: The Congregation Council seeks to define and focus what are the major issues or essentials for Christ Evangelical Lutheran to uphold, while avoiding needless controversy over minor issues (Titus 1:9).

C. Discipleship: The Congregation Council oversees the "program" of Christ Lutheran Church, to be sure that we are effectively achieving our mission of discipleship – helping people become "fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:28).

D. Discipline: The Congregation Council intervenes when members of Christ Lutheran Church cause division or refuse to deal with serious issues of sin in their lives (Matthew 18:15-17).

E. Governance: As legal trustees for the church, the Congregation Council oversees legal and financial matters, and sets church management policy. Our legal documents (Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws) detail their governance duties.

Twelve Congregation Council members are elected by the members to serve 3-year renewable, staggered terms, and they serve alongside the Senior Pastor, for whom they provide accountability, guidance, and support. They are elected at the Annual Business Meeting, held on or about the last Sunday in March each year. At this meeting, reports are presented, the year's budget is explained, and an "Annual Report" is presented by the staff and congregation council. Special meetings will be called from time to time as needed. Members should attend all of these meetings. Members should also pray for, encourage, and support our congregation council; someday you may be asked to serve!

3. Staff-Directed: Paid staff members work to implement the church's mission, vision, values, and beliefs, as determined by the Congregation Council. Staff are accountable to one another, the Senior Pastor, and the Congregation Council. Staff members are not hired primarily to do direct ministry themselves, but rather to equip all Christ Lutheran Church members to do the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:11-16).

INTRODUCTION TO THE SIX G'S

The six G's are our attempt to paint in broad strokes a picture of a healthy Christian and a healthy church.

They are:

1. Grace:

The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message about God's grace... God's generous, unearned provision for our need for forgiveness and spiritual rebirth.

2. Growth:

Being a Christian is a lifelong process of learning and growth.

3. Group:

Everybody needs a small group of spiritual friends who help one another along in the journey of discipleship, through all of life's ups and downs.

4. Gifts:

We each are given spiritual gifts that combine with the gifts of others to make miracles happen in our needy world.

5. Great Commission:

Jesus called each of us to be message-bearers, through our lives and our words to bring His good news to others.

6. Giving:

We have received so much — we need to learn to give what we've been given.

The following Bible Study is our introduction to the “6 Gs” for your healthy spiritual growth as a believer and participation in healthy church of Jesus Christ.

1. GRACE THE HEART OF THE GOOD NEWS

"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." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Our Need for Grace

Some people assume that they are not that much worse than anyone else, so they don't need any special help from God. What would you say to these people based on the following verses?

Romans 3:10-18, 23

Galatians 3:22

How do the following passages describe the relief God is more than ready to offer so that we do not have to shy away from being utterly honest about our lost, needy condition?

Matthew 11:28-30

1 John 1:8-9

Sometimes, we are afraid to admit our sinfulness and spiritual need because to do so feels hopeless and helpless. Sometimes, we resist God's grace because of our pride. Ironically, many of us avoid God's grace by becoming "religious;" we try to change our behaviors so we feel and appear better. After reading carefully Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:4-7, and I Peter 5:5b-7, write a letter to yourself explaining why you can't and don't have to earn God's acceptance.

Dear

Our Response to God's Grace

Once we're at that position where we've been honest about our need for God's grace, what does the Bible say is the next step?

John 1:11-12

Acts 16:30-31

Romans 10:9

Galatians 2:16

Describe briefly the time in your life when you took that step. (If you have never taken this step, you can now. Simply pray, admitting to God your need of His grace, trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior.)

Our Response to the Command of Jesus – Baptism

Different churches have different views about how baptism is observed. Here at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we compare baptism to two important experiences familiar to all of us: commencement and marriage. At a commencement ceremony, students usually walk across a stage and receive a diploma. The diploma is a symbol of their learning. Similarly, at a wedding ceremony, a couple stands before a group of witnesses and exchanges rings. The rings are symbols of their commitment.

In baptism, a new believer stands before others and is immersed in or sprinkled with water. The ceremony doesn't make the person a Christian any more than a diploma makes a graduate smart or a ring makes a person in love. Rather, the sacrament is an outward reality full of meaning — expressing a person's faith in Jesus Christ and an inward reality of the reception of God's grace and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. A commencement ceremony suggests a new beginning as an educated person, and a marriage ceremony suggests a new beginning as a married couple. Similarly, baptism assures us of an end to the old "Before Christ" way of life, and the beginning of a new way of life as a believer. Baptism is a sacrament of grace. It is a sacrament because it is the way Jesus gifts grace to the believer. This sacrament is a means of grace, so important that Jesus commanded it be done. (Read Matthew 28)

Read Romans 6:4-14. Based on this passage, what is the meaning behind the sacrament of baptism? And how does baptism relate to God's grace?

***In Summary:** The old hymn says, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.... Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come. It's grace that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Our Christian life starts with grace — it "saves a wretch like me." And our Christian life ends with grace — it safely "leads me home." Here at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we want to live and work and grow in an environment of "amazing grace."*

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's Statement on Grace:

Grace is God's love in action — first rescuing us, then pouring out His blessings and His Spirit in our lives. His grace is most poignantly and powerfully expressed in Jesus' sacrifice for us. God is lavish with His grace, giving us not only forgiveness but the full standing of a son in ancient Israel — enjoying a special relationship with the Father and destined to enjoy a future inheritance. Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church should always have an atmosphere of grace, and we should be truly gracious people — responding to the abundant, amazing grace of God in Jesus Christ.

2. GROWTH - MATURING AS AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purposes. (Phil. 2:12-13)

Pursuing Growth

In the following verses there are several action verbs that describe how we are to pursue growth. What verbs do you find in each verse?

Ephesians 4:22-24

Ephesians 5:15-17

Colossians 3:12-14

Matthew 7:7-8

Mark 4:9, 23-24

2 Peter 1:3-9

After reading these verses, how important do you think our initiative is in growing as Christians?

GROWTH THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Someone has wisely said that Christian growth is not about "trying" but rather about "training." For example, if you try to run a marathon without training, you will fail, no matter how hard you try. If instead, you train, you will succeed. Spiritual disciplines are ways we train ourselves for spiritual growth. Below you will read a short definition of common spiritual disciplines. After you have read them take a moment to reflect on which ones have already been helpful to you and which ones you would like to develop more fully.

Disciplines of Abstinence - are practices that have to do with saying "no." In order to concentrate on matters of the heart, committed Christians often voluntarily hold themselves back from certain behaviors. They don't do this because they have to; they aren't "stuck" following burdensome rules or taboos. Instead, they joyfully and freely choose for a time to express and intensify their thirst for God by depriving themselves of certain comforts or pleasures in daily life. These disciplines include the following:

Solitude — getting alone for a period of time, without the distractions of other people so we can be with ourselves and with God, who often is heard best in quiet places. Solitude can help us slow down the pace of our lives.

Silence — being quiet for a period of time without the man-made noise or conversation that often distracts us from God's voice. In that silence we can often hear more clearly the voice of God.

Fasting — voluntarily foregoing food or other activity such as radio, TV, or sports, as a way of saying, "God, I want You and Your will even more than my body wants nourishment or entertainment."

Secrecy — purposely doing good, and being careful that others do not notice the good, so as to purify one's desire to live for God's pleasure and glory alone, without concern for the admiration or credit of others.

Sacrifice — willingly giving away possessions or rights, so as to remain less attached to things of this world, and more devoted to God.

Disciplines of Engagement are the positive things for which the disciplines of abstinence make room. If abstinence is like exhaling, engagement is like inhaling. These disciplines nourish and strengthen us spiritually. Without them, people can become highly or hypocritically spiritual, but they cannot become authentic people of God or real followers of Christ. These disciplines include:

Study — giving time to the study of the Bible, to reflect upon its message, and its application to one's life, including the reading of spiritual writers whose works make the Bible's message plain and poignant to us.

Worship — devoting time to pondering God's worth, His greatness and goodness in all dimensions, and then expressing that worthiness sincerely before God.

Celebration — feasting and rejoicing in a pure and sincere way to express the goodness of life and its many pleasures, seeing all good things as gifts from God.

Prayer — devoting time to turning concerns and anxieties into requests to God, as an act of compassion and faith.

Service — freely engaging in humble acts of consideration and kindness to others as opportunities to affirm their dignity and value before God.

Fellowship — devoting oneself to other Christians, recognizing our oneness in Christ, sharing our very selves with one another, and enjoying the mutually enriching Spirit of Christ who expresses himself uniquely in each of us through the diverse gifts he has given us.

Confession — finding the freedom to confess our faults to one another, assuring one another of the mercy of God, and challenging one another to continued growth.

Submission — trusting the Spirit of God to work through a group of wise, trusted Christian mentors to give balance and safe guidance for one's life.

Journal Keeping — keeping a daily written record of private prayer, study, and worship.

1. At different times in our lives, we will make use of different disciplines in this "repertoire." In the space after each description above, write the letters below which apply:

- N = disciplines I have never yet practiced
- P = disciplines I have practiced in the past
- Y = disciplines I am practicing on a regular basis currently
- ? = disciplines I do not understand
- T = new disciplines I would like to try soon

2. List the names of three to five Christians you know and respect. Sometime in the next few days, ask them what spiritual disciplines have helped them most.

Personal comments or reflections after reading the disciplines:

THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PART IN OUR GROWTH PROCESS

According to Jesus in John 16:12-15, what will the Spirit do for us?

What are we supposed to do in relation to the Holy Spirit, according to Galatians 5:16-18, 25?

In summary: Growing Christians are pursuing growth in their own character as well learning to be involved with and care for people around them. They do this with the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. They do their part in cooperating with the Holy Spirit by taking advantage of spiritual disciplines that help them grow.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's Statement on Growth:

When each of us made the commitment to follow Jesus, we admitted that our own way wasn't working well, and we agreed that the way of Jesus was the better way. How do we follow Him, become more like Him, and "work out our salvation with fear and trembling?" The image of a triangle can be helpful. Think of the top angle as representing the Spirit of God alive and at work within us. The second angle could represent the spiritual disciplines which help us hush the clamoring voices of our own egos, desires, and fears, so we can hear and respond to that still, small, transforming voice of the Spirit. The third angle could represent life experiences — the ups, the downs, the joys, the sorrows — experiences which serve as "God's gymnasium" to stretch, challenge, and strengthen us. God's Spirit working through our spiritual disciplines and life's experiences ...those are "good angles" on real spiritual growth.

3. SMALL GROUPS - SAFE COMMUNITIES OF GROWTH FOR EVERYONE

"Two are better than one...." (Ecclesiastes 4:9 ff.)

Here at Christ Lutheran Church, we believe there is a rhythm, a dynamic interplay of two key elements: large group gatherings (such as public worship) and small group gatherings. In the large group, there is proclamation and celebration of the message in word and song: this happens in our Sunday Worship. In the small group, there is application of what we're learning, mutual encouragement and support, fellowship and fun too: this happens in Small Groups that meet on Sundays and between Sundays. In both large and small groups, God's power, God's Word, and God's people come together.

We would like to urge you to be a vital participant in both large- and small-group dimensions of Christian living. (Note: if for some reason, you can not be a regular participant in a Small Group, we would still like you to affiliate with one ... just so there's a group of people you know are there for you when you need them.)

BUILDING AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

The early believers in Jesus did not live their new life alone. They needed each other in many ways.

Describe the lifestyle of the earliest Christians, from Acts 2:42-47.

What other benefits of community life can we learn about from the verses below?

Hebrews 10:23-25

Proverbs 27:17

Love One-Another

Make a list of ways we should treat one another, based on the following verses: John 13:34; Romans 12:10 & 16; Romans 14:13 & 19; Romans 15: 5, 7, & 14; Romans 16:16; I Cor. 11:33, 12:25; Galatians 5:13, 6:2; Ephesians 4:2, 4:25, 5:21; Colossians 3:13; I Thess. 4:18; Hebrews 10:24; James 4:11, 5:9, 16; I Peter 4:9, 5:5.

Why would it be difficult or impossible to fulfill the biblical commands to love one another if we only attended Sunday Worship and social activities, without having any close, more in-depth network of relationships?

In summary: It's great to be part of a large group of scores or hundreds or even thousands of believers, worshipping God and learning together. But it's also essential to go deep with a few people, for support, accountability, mutual challenge and encouragement.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's Statement on Small Groups:

At Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we believe we can grow best when involved in groups, both large and small. In the large group of our Sunday Worship, we come together to learn and worship God as a church. In small groups we hold each other accountable, encourage each other, and help each other as we pray, study Scripture, build close relationships, and serve God together. We want everyone to know that they have a few close friends with whom they can share anything, friends who believe in them, friends whom they could call in the middle of the night, and friends who can count on them in the same ways. Small groups can foster those kinds of Christian friendships which in turn foster discipleship, and so for us they are the mainstream of church life between Sundays.

4. GIFTS – GOD GIVEN ABILITIES USED FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The New Testament teaches that we all are given spiritual gifts — special abilities — to be used in loving and serving God and others. In fact, that's a key to our mission: equipping, deploying, and supporting people to use their gifts to further God's work in our "church, communities, and world."

Take a look at what the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:14-26. As you read this passage, which insights strike you most, and why?

What do you think are some practical reasons God designed the church like this?

Are you putting your gifts to practice in some tangible ministry? If yes, where? If no, where might you get involved?

What spiritual gifts do you think you may have? You will find sample lists of gifts in I Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4.

Where do you see a need for more or better workers in our church?

Here's a matching game. Try to match each gift with one or more areas of service:

teaching – helping others learn	Work with children
encouraging – cheering others on	Small Group Leader
serving – helping others practically	Set Up/Take Down
mercy – loving the unlovely	Short Term Missions
prophecy – helping people hear from God	Inviting Friends to Church
evangelism – helping seekers find God	Reaching out to Newcomers
administration – mobilizing people	Visiting a sick person
leadership – getting a following	Planning a special event
creative gifts – music, art, drama, etc.	Grounds, maintenance

In Summary: At Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we don't see the staff as performers and the members as the audience. Instead, we see staff as coaches, and the members as the players, and the audience — the thousands of uncommitted people around us who need to hear God's message and receive God's love. It's people like you who "do ministry" at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, according to the gifts God has given you. Your greatest fulfillment in life will come as you discover and use your gifts in God's service, for God's people, to God's glory.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's Statement on Gifts

When we become Christians, we are each given one or more spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit. Some of us may be called to lead, to serve, to teach, or to evangelize. Each of us has something unique to contribute, and no one is more important than another. It is by combining all the gifts of all the members that we function and grow as a church. It is important that each of us gets involved in those areas of ministry where we can use our gifts. We want Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church to be a place where people are encouraged to discover and use their spiritual gifts. We believe that every member is truly a minister.

5. GREAT COMMISSION - PARTICIPATING IN THE GREATEST MISSION ON EARTH

When Jesus left the earth, after his death and resurrection, he had these parting words for his followers: "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)

Jesus wrote no books, started no schools, established no headquarters, and left no legacy — other than a band of his followers, charged with this commission and filled with his Spirit. What an awesome responsibility! You and I know Christ today because Christians through the centuries have taken Jesus' words seriously. Now it's up to us. If we Christians today drop the baton, if we fail to spread the message and help others join as disciples, then generations in the future — not to mention our own searching friends and neighbors — will miss out on the good news. We have a job to do!

But let's face it: just about everybody is suspicious of people who try to push their religion on them. The harder you push, the harder people slam the door in your face! How then can we get the message through to people? Jesus gave us the secret: before they will hear what we say, people must see what we do.

Earning the Right to be Heard

Here's what Jesus said it would take to gain a hearing for his message: You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

What are some examples of good works that others could see in your life?

A Message of Reconciliation

What is our message about? Read Galatians 3:26-29 and Ephesians 2:11-22. How would you summarize these passages in a sentence or two?

How large is God's plan and who is at the center of God's plan for reconciliation according to Colossians 1:19-20?

But before person-to-person reconciliation can happen, the Bible teaches that there has to be reconciliation between people and God. Each person has estranged himself from God and without God's invitation and pursuit, would stay in that posture of rejection towards God. How does Paul communicate this need for reconciliation with God in Romans 3:9-12?

Making Friends With Uncommitted People.

The whole ministry and example of Jesus was about making friends with "sinners." After reading Luke 19:10, Mark 2:15-17 and Luke 5:27-32, paraphrase in your own words how Jesus summarized His own ministry.

How does Paul summarize a Christian's responsibility in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21? How does Peter explain responsibility in I Peter 3:15-16:

If someone asked you how to become a Christian, or if they asked you to explain your faith in a brief, simple way, would you be ready? Explain:

Respecting And Loving Our Neighbor

Unfortunately, if we aren't careful, our desire to help others come to know Christ can make us pushy or preachy; it can make us feel smug, or superior, or elite - the very opposite of the attitude of Christ himself. To protect us from this sort of spiritual snobbery, Jesus told us to treat each person with respect, and to love each person without judgment, just as he or she is.

Read Matthew 25:31-46. Then list below as many examples as you can of the modern day "least of these."

***In Summary:** Some people become spiritual excluders: they create little "holy huddles" and busy themselves only with people who are already "spiritual." They speak religious jargon and develop an elitist attitude that shuts people out. Other people become spiritual avoiders: they avoid talking about their faith with anyone, for fear of being called a fanatic. They keep their spiritual side strictly to themselves, for fear of rejection. Their silence also shuts people out. But some people become spiritual includers: first, they show their faith in good deeds, and then they share their faith in clear, understandable words. In this way they include people and have the opportunity to help them find a vital relationship with God. At Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we want to help people become spiritual includers.*

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's Statement on the Great Commission

Following Jesus Christ means carrying out His desire to give every person the opportunity to hear and respond to the message of God's love. Since Christ ascended to heaven, we are the body of Christ in the world now — we are His hands and feet and smile — to take His message of love to the world. This is a matter of both word and deed; we must both communicate with words and demonstrate with action and quality of life the reality of God. Our words are important: they should be clear, relevant, honest, and true. But they will not convince, Jesus said, unless our lives are full of good deeds, and unless our relationships with one another are full of love: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.... By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Matthew 5:16, John 13:35). We want to see every member of Christ Evangelical Lutheran clearly and passionately, yet gently and respectfully, communicate and demonstrate God's love. That's our great mission!

6. GIVING - OUR REASONABLE RESPONSE TO OUR GRACIOUS GOD

Imagine God calling together a group of people and asking them this question: "How would you advise me on financing my work in your world?"

What advice would you give? It takes money to keep a church going and growing — money to pay rents and mortgages, money for paper and postage, money for computers and copiers, money for salaries and charities. A church that doesn't care enough to give probably won't go very far ... and you'll probably agree, that's how it should be. Generosity, sacrifice, commitment, caring ... they all show themselves in how we manage our money.

Some of us would like to give, but our finances are in such a mess we need some help in money management, debt reduction, etc., so we can begin. Some of us don't like the subject of giving because, frankly, we've become more materialistic than we're even aware of. Jesus said it pretty straight: "You can't serve God and money." So this sixth "G" is an important one indeed.

At Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, we ask our members to be committed financially so that God's mission needs are met without having to pressure people or barrage them with emergency appeals. We are often told that people respect us for the serious and yet discreet way we approach this issue. We're all in this together, and we believe God can do great things with people who are learning how to give.

Historical Precedent

What percentage is common to the following biblical stories of giving?

Genesis 14:18-20

Leviticus 27:30,32

Malachi 3:8-10

Do you think it is a good idea for Christians to voluntarily adopt this same historic standard for giving — often called a tithe? Why or why not?

Stewardship of our Resources

What percentage of our worldly goods belongs to the Lord, according to Luke 14:33? And what is your reaction to these words of Jesus?

Jesus loved to tell stories about people handling money. Sometimes, as in Luke 16:10-13, he gave the moral of the story. Put that moral in your own words:

In Luke 12:13-21 we have the story of a prosperous person assuming he is master of his possessions and the course of his life. But he is called a fool for thinking of himself the master of it all and not a steward with a rich heart toward God. What are the implications of these verses on your own life and possessions?

From Consumer to Generous Giver

Our whole economy seems to be built on the premise that we need more and more goods. Every hour, advertisers tell us we need to buy more products, more toys, and more "essentials."

How does this message contrast with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-21, 24-34

We tend to think of getting as a benefit and giving as a loss. But there are great gains and benefits to giving, according to Paul in the following passage. List the benefits you see there.

2 Corinthians 9:6-14

Savings and Debt

Why is the ant a good model of proper money management according to Proverbs 6:6-11?

In the passage above, why is failure to save like being a sluggard or like setting yourself up for robbery?

What does the writer of Proverbs say about "get rich quick" schemes in Proverbs 28:20?

In Proverbs 21:25-26, 22:7, and 22:26-27, what do you learn about debt and money management?

Why do you think the Scriptures elevate practices such as saving and avoiding debt to a spiritual level rather than just a simple monetary one?

Attitudes toward Money and Giving What additional lessons about giving can be gleaned from the following passages?
1 Timothy 6:8-10, 17-19

1 Corinthians 16:1-2

Luke 6:38

In summary: Mature Believers give...

GRATEFULLY... They know Christ has given all to them, and they know Christ owns all they have anyway. They are so grateful for his provision that they give as a way of saying "Thank you!"

SACRIFICIALLY... They learn to "give until it hurts" and then give a little more ... until it feels good!

PROPORTIONALLY... They try to give as high a percentage of their income as possible, recognizing the tithe (10%) as a long-established benchmark which may well be exceeded as they prosper.

REGULARLY...As resources flow in, they offer the "first-fruits" back to God, desiring to honor God.

LOCALLY...Knowing that they claim this church as their spiritual home, they support the ministries from which they derive benefit.

GENEROUSLY...As they are able, they contribute to the cause of Christ at a community and global level with the possessions and money that God has entrusted to them.

CHEERFULLY...They give their offering as unto God willingly, and not under compulsion, but with joyful worship as their resources flow out to serve others. Knowing that God gives so extravagantly to us and will provide for us, they seek to follow His example and want to give willingly.

EXPECTANTLY...Counting on God's promise of provision, they anticipate seeing God work in their own lives—including financially—as they give.

Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's Statement on Giving

"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," Jesus said. God does not want something of us: what he wants is us — he wants our hearts! If we place our treasure in His hands, our hearts will follow. In the Old Testament, the Law required a tithe, the first ten percent of the people's earnings. When Jesus bled and died for us, we were freed from the Law, which, many believe, includes being freed from the old tithe rule. But does this mean we are freed to give less? Somehow, giving less than the old Law required seems inconsistent with the blood price Jesus paid for our salvation. In this area of giving, God uniquely invites us to test Him and see if He will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have room enough for it. Since God ultimately owns everything, it only makes sense for us to give generously, even sacrificially, of our time, talent, and treasure ... as a way of surrendering our very hearts to Him in love and gratitude.

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH **MEMBERSHIP COVENANT**

Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized, and being in agreement with Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church's statements, strategy, and structure, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit in a unity of mission and ministry with the Christ Church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

1. I will protect the unity of Jesus Church

- ...by acting in love toward other members
- ...by refusing to gossip
- ...by supporting the leaders

- ◆ “So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of our fellowship together.” (Romans 4:19 Phillips)
- ◆ “Have a sincere love for other believers, love one another earnestly with all your heart.” (1Peter 1:22 TEV)
- ◆ “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.” (Ephesians 4:29)
- ◆ “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you.” (Hebrews 13:17)

2. I will share the responsibility of my church

- ...by praying for its growth
- ...by inviting the unchurched to attend and be disciplined in the love of Jesus
- ...by warmly welcoming those who visit
- ...by using my gifts, talents, and abilities in service to Jesus Christ through Christ Church

- ◆ To the church – “...We always thank God for you and pray for you constantly.” (1 Thessalonians 1:1-2)
- ◆ “The Master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes, urge the people there to come so my house will be full’ (Luke 14:23 NCV)
- ◆ “So, warmly welcome each other into the church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you: then God will be glorified.” (Romans 15:7)

3. I will serve the ministry of my church

- ...by discovering my gifts and talents
- ...by being equipped to serve
- ...by developing a servant's heart

- ◆ “Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you” (1Peter 4:10 Phillips).
- ◆ “God gave...some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” (Ephesians 4:11-12)
- ◆ “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who...took on the very nature of a servant” (Philippians 2:3-4,7)

4. I will support the testimony of my church

- ...by attending faithfully
- ...by living a godly life
- ...by giving regularly

- ◆ “Let us not give up meeting together...but let us encourage one another”(Hebrews 10:25).
- ◆ “Whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Philippians 1:27 Phillips).
- ◆ “A tenth of (all your) produce...is the Lord’s, and is holy.” (Leviticus 27:30 NCV)

MEMBER COVENANT FORM

Statement of Commitment: I hereby affirm that I have read the Membership Manual. I commit myself to the mission, vision, values, and beliefs of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, specifically, to live in grace, grow as a believer, share in group life, serve with my gifts, practice committed giving, and help fulfill the Great Commission. I now desire to be received as a member. I also authorize the church to store and use the information I've provided below.

Signature of Prospective Member (s)

Date

I, _____, after interviewing the above applicant, do hereby recommend him/her to become a member of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church and to receive all the rights and responsibilities that come with full membership in the local church.

Signature of Current Member (Host/Sponsor)

Date

Last Name _____ First Name _____

Address _____

Phone (H) _____ (Cell) _____ (W) _____

Email
Address _____

Occupation _____

Marital Status _____ If married, spouse's name _____

First attended Christ Lutheran Church: _____

Now I serve in the following ministry areas:

I believe my spiritual gifts are:

My Small Group is _____

Leader _____

Mentor _____

Received at Sunday Celebration (Date) _____