

Peoples Evangelical Congregational Church



Membership Guide

Some sections of this booklet are taken from “Roots, Stems and Flowers,” the CCCC membership guide. The bylaws of Peoples Church are also quoted in this booklet.

Basic Christianity

3 Guiding Principles

1. People are sinful and are deserving of judgment from God, without any hope of salvation in our own strength.
2. Jesus Christ is the answer to the problem of human sin. He lived a perfect life in our place and died for our sins as our substitute.
3. We receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. We must repent of our sins and recognize that Christ died for us and that He rose again. All believers enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Our Statement of Faith (This is also the Statement of Faith of the CCCC)

We believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, to be the only inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God written.

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

We believe in the deity of Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His personal return in power and glory.

We believe that for salvation of the lost and sinful man regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by Whose indwelling power and fullness the Christian is enabled to live a godly life in the present evil world.

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers.

Our Covenant

- Believing that God has called us together and united us in fellowship, we covenant before Him that we shall seek to present the Gospel both here in this community and to the uttermost parts of the earth.
- Under guidance of the Holy Spirit, we uphold the Bible as the infallible Word of God; that its truth, self-evident, is given for instruction, for edification, for the growth and development of the individual and for the church.
- We believe this Word teaches the Divinity of the Triune God. We accept its teachings of the sinfulness of man; of his need of salvation through Jesus Christ. We believe that His death, burial and resurrection free us from the condemnation of our sins, and we are reconciled to a holy God through Christ.
- We believe the church to be the instrumentality, through which God works, by His Holy Spirit, to bring mankind to Himself.
- We therefore covenant together to the end that we may be instrumental in the propagation of the Gospel.

Our Mission

The Mission of Peoples Church is to *love God, love others and make disciples of Christ*. Our goal in striving to accomplish this mission is to bring glory to God.

The Church

Matthew 16:13-18 *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.*

Church: Biblical Definitions and Descriptions

The church is a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ and have received Him as Lord and Savior. *The church is people, not a building.*

1. The church as the “People of God.”
We belong to God.
2. The church as the “Body of Christ.”
We are an extension of Christ in the world, his hands and feet in the world, working in harmony.
3. The church as the “Temple of the Holy Spirit.”
The Spirit resides within each believer but also within the church, guiding us, leading us to accomplish Christ’s mission and making us more like Christ.

The Church is Universal

Believers all over the world and throughout history are all considered part of the universal church. We are connected as brothers and sisters with the same Father.

The Church is Local

The Bible also refers to the local assembly of believers as the “church.” In our case, Peoples Church is our local church (but also part of the larger universal church.)

A Brief History of Peoples Church

In the 1880's a group of 12 Christians, known as the Advent Prayer Band, gathered weekly in their homes praying that "God might bless South Ashburnham." In 1887 the group stated its purpose of starting a church building fund. On March 7, 1889 a church building was dedicated, free of debt. On Sunday, October 12, 1890, the Peoples Evangelical Church was publicly recognized and was considered a Baptist church. The name "Peoples" was adopted to distinguish itself from Ashburnham Community Church. The church was founded for the "people" of South Ashburnham. The church's first pastor was E. L. House.

The church saw continued growth over the years and reached a time of great blessing during the pastorate of Rev. Hugh MacLean, the longest tenured pastor, 1944-1966. Rev. MacLean was succeeded by Rev. Alfred Ham, a beloved man and the second longest tenured pastor who served for approximately 10 years. The current pastor, Dan Allen, has been with the church since Nov. 1, 2004.

Under Rev. MacLean the church searched for a new location and subsequently built and dedicated a new building on October 4, 1959. The previous location was also on S. Main St.

In 1969 the church affiliated with the Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC) which remains the denominational affiliation to this day.

Peoples Church is described as <u>Evangelical</u> and <u>Congregational</u>.

What "Evangelical" means

The term evangelical comes from the Greek word "evangel," which means "good news" or "Gospel." As an evangelical church we believe in the Good News that Jesus Christ has come to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and we desire to share this Good News with the community and the world. Society has added many other meanings and connotations to the term "evangelical," but we adhere to the original, foundational meaning.

See page 4 for a description of *congregationalism*.

Congregationalism

Congregationalism has its roots in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. Those Christians who disagreed with the Catholic Church and wished to reform the Christian faith emphasized the authority of Scripture, salvation by God's grace through faith alone, and the priesthood of all believers. (By priesthood of believers, we mean the belief that we all have access to God through Christ, with no additional "middle men.")

Two Characteristics of Congregationalism

1. Self-Governing: In England during the 1500's and 1600's congregationalism began to take shape as one expression of church government in the Protestant church. The Pilgrims who landed in Plymouth in 1620 were Congregationalists, as were the founders of Massachusetts Bay Colony in Boston. The basic premise behind congregationalism is that each church is self-governing and should make decisions based on the agreement of the congregation in obedience to Christ and Scripture. (The first congregational churches required unanimous decisions by all members of the congregation in order to pass any measures. This is no longer the case in most congregational churches which require a simple majority or 2/3 vote.)

2. Committed to a Covenant: Each member of a congregational church was required to adhere to a church covenant, or agreement. This is still the case in most congregational churches.

Not a Democracy

On the surface congregationalism appears to be a simple democracy, but on a deeper level it is a monarchy in which Jesus is the King, and each member must follow the leading of the Spirit in obedience to Christ in every decision. The local church is independent of any human government and answerable to Christ alone, who is the Head of the church.

Summary

Thus, a congregational church will call its own pastors and appoint its own leaders. Each church is responsible for governing itself and administering its own affairs, spiritual, temporal, financial or otherwise. No outside organization dictates policy decisions for the local church.

Congregationalism at Peoples Church: How we are governed. (See bylaws.)

1. The supreme Head of Peoples Church is Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords, our great Savior and Redeemer. Each member is answerable to Christ for every decision and vote.

2. "The governing body of this church shall be the membership assembled in church meeting. The vote of the majority of members present at the meeting shall constitute the action of the church."

3. Although we are a congregational church, each one of us obedient to Christ, we also recognize that God calls leaders to shepherd His flock. At Peoples Church, the following leadership structure is in place:

Pastor: The spiritual leader of the church who serves according the principles set forth in the Bible regarding elders and overseers.

Deacons: The board of deacons serves the purpose of assisting the pastor as spiritual leaders of the church.

Moderator: presides at all business meetings.

Other offices and committees are listed in the bylaws.

The Conservative Congregational Christian Conference (CCCC)

Peoples Church is affiliated with the CCCC. The church and the pastor each pay annual dues to the conference. The CCCC is an affiliation of congregational churches formed in 1945 as a response to many congregational churches and denominations wandering from biblical Christianity. The current name for the conference was adopted in 1948.

Conservative

The term “conservative” refers not to political or social beliefs but to the strict interpretation of biblical truth. The CCCC holds fast to the teaching of the Bible and is theologically conservative.

Congregational

Each church within the CCCC has a congregational form of government, and the conference does not dictate the decisions of the local church.

Christian

The CCCC believes in Christ, is Christ-centered and Christ-honoring, holding to the teachings of the Bible.

Questions about the CCCC

What makes the CCCC distinctive?

The CCCC is distinctive because it emphasizes unity even in the face of differing opinions on some biblical issues. The motto is “Unity in essentials; liberty in non-essentials; in all things charity.”

As an example of this attitude, the CCCC includes churches of many varying views on the issues of baptism, spiritual gifts, ordination of women, predestination, end-times interpretation etc. However, the conference is united regarding the essentials of the faith, such as the truth of Scripture, the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, salvation by God’s grace through faith, and the other tenets listed in the CCCC statement of faith.

Does the CCCC ever involve itself in the affairs of the local church?

If the local church requests assistance from the CCCC, then leaders from the conference will step in to assist. Also if any church or pastor wanders from the true Christian faith, the CCCC reserves the right to intercede and restore the person(s) to biblical truth. To remain a member church of the CCCC we must be in agreement with the CCCC statement of faith.

If we are a congregational church, why should we be affiliated with a conference or denomination?

1. Affiliation with the CCCC allows us to fellowship with other Christian churches. It reminds us that we belong to a larger body of believers, the universal church.
2. Affiliation with the CCCC enables us to encourage or assist other churches and also opens the possibility of being helped by other churches, thus demonstrating unity and bringing glory to Christ.
3. Affiliation with the CCCC gives us accountability should the church or any pastor wander from biblical truth.

Membership

Requirements for Membership at Peoples Church (According to article V:1:B)

“Any person who has been baptized (or has made arrangements for baptism), has been prepared for membership, and has made a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, may, with the approval of the Board of Deacons, be admitted to membership upon a vote of the church body.”

Purpose of Peoples Church

The avowed purpose of the church shall be to worship God, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate the sacraments; to realize Christian fellowship and unity within the church and the church universal; to render loving service towards mankind; and to strive for righteousness, justice, and peace.

Our Mission

The Mission of Peoples Church is to *love God, love others and make disciples of Christ*. Our goal in striving to accomplish this mission is to bring glory to God.

A member of Peoples Church is expected to:

1. Participate in fulfilling the purpose of the Church to the best of his/her ability.
 2. Live a life that is consistent with the Christian life, based on Scripture and Christ's example.
 3. Attend worship services on a regular basis, if physically possible.
 4. Serve God in the church in some way.
 5. Be in agreement with the church's statement of faith and the church's covenant.
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Guidelines for Christian Living

1. Disciplines of the Spirit

- A. Prayer
- B. Bible study
- C. Meeting together
- D. Ordinances: baptism and communion
- E. Giving

2. Gifts of the Spirit

Each Christian receives a spiritual gift which is given for the use of building up the church.

3. Fruit of the Spirit

From Gal. 5:22 – Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.