

More Grace

A five week gathering to find out more about Triangle Grace Church



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An Evangelical Church

Session 1

Triangle Grace Church identifies itself as an “Evangelical” church. The primary description of our ECO denomination is, “A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.”* This week we consider what it means to be “Evangelical.”

Where does the term “Evangelical” come from?

The Greek word found in the New Testament as well as the Greek Old Testament, [euangelion \(εὐαγγέλιον\)](#), combines a prefix which means “good” and a root which means “message.” So when we see the words “good news” or “[gospel](#)” in our English translations, we read of a fundamental aspect of the character of evangelicals, we believe that the message of Jesus Christ is, indeed, authentic, good news for those who take it to heart. And because it is good news, it is our desire to share it with others.

At the beginning of the Reformation in the 1500’s, Martin Luther used the term *evangelichel* congregations to describe churches among whom he ministered. He used this descriptor to highlight the commitment of like-minded churches to ground every aspect of their teaching on the gospel of Jesus Christ. During the revivals of the Great Awakening in the United States in the first half of the 18th century, the evangelical identity incorporated the importance of an authentic personal relationship with Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. The commitment to the biblical Christianity of the Reformers like Luther and the emphasis on a vibrant, ongoing relationship with Christ continue to be hallmarks of evangelical convictions.

The evangelical movement took on new prominence in the 1940’s. In the 19th century critical scholarship increasingly attacked the credibility of the

Bible leading to a liberal form of Christianity which emphasized works of service over basic tenets of orthodox faith set forth by the leaders of the Protestant Reformation. In response to this, 12 booklets were published between 1910-1915 called *The Fundamentals* defending fundamental Christian truths against liberalism and modernism.* Concurrently, a countermovement to liberal Christianity developed that was identified as “Fundamentalism.” Fundamentalism initially was marked out by a robust defense of Christian doctrine, but morphed into a movement characterized by a stridency against modernism leading to an anti-intellectual stance and withdrawal from engagement with culture.

After WWII, many conservative Christians were dissatisfied with fundamentalism because of its reactionary and militant stance. As a result, a new movement of evangelicalism emerged. Leaders such as Billy Graham, Harold J. Ockenga, and Carl F. Henry established evangelical institutions such as the [National Association of Evangelicals \(NAE\)](#), [World Relief, Christianity Today](#), Fuller Theological Seminary, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

What do Evangelical Christians believe?

Emerging out of the liberalism-fundamentalism division at the beginning of the 20th century, evangelicals sought a ‘third way’ to

recover a winsome Christian witness in the world while holding to the essential tenets of biblical Christianity. Thus, evangelicals hold to:

- A high view of scripture affirming its authority in all matters of faith and life and embracing such concepts as inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility when approaching the Bible
- Essential, historic credal beliefs such as those found in the [Apostle's Creed](#) and [Nicene Creed](#)
- Necessity for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ

In contrast to [fundamentalists](#), evangelicals:

- Major on the “majors” so as not to divide or isolate from fellow believers who may hold differing views on secondary issues
- Desire to address the social implications of the gospel without compromising the message of eternal life and salvation through faith in Christ
- Avoid moralistic legalism (extra-biblical do's and don'ts) without neglecting true holiness, Christ-like living, and wholeness of character in the life of the believer
- Avoid anti-intellectualism desiring to engage in conversation with cultural, scientific, and societal issues in order to provide a winsome apologetic for a Christian-worldview addressing such subjects
- Avoid a uniform, literalistic approach to the Bible acknowledging different types of literature/genres in scripture require various approaches for accurate interpretation

Evangelicalism Today

In the latter half of the 20th century a measurable growth occurred in the number of those who identified themselves as evangelicals Christians. Newsweek even declared 1976 to be the “Year of the Evangelical.” This new prominence of the evangelical movement left its mark



From left to right: Carl F. Henry, Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham. Together these men established a new evangelical movement that connected Christians across denominations centered on a commitment to biblical Christianity and desire to make Christ known to the world.

on many aspects of American society and culture including politics. In the midst of this expansion and impact, the media's obsession with partisan politics increasingly characterized evangelical Christians as fundamentalists calling their views extreme.

Evangelicals have always held beliefs which were counter to the prevailing culture of the day as they witnessed to the redemptive activity of a holy God and Jesus Christ who claimed to be “the way, the truth, and the life.” Even so, among evangelicals there has always been a desire to seek the peace of the city, to positively address societal issues of injustice, to embrace the good in scientific advancement, and to partner with those of differing beliefs for the common good of all.

Evangelicals desire to engage in all aspects of culture and society as a witness for Jesus Christ for the benefit of the world in which we live. For some evangelicals this has included advocacy for policy and legislation in local, state, and national contexts. Although evangelicals have found common cause connected to specific issues associated with both major political parties in the United States, evangelicalism as a movement and a body is distinct from and not affiliated with any one political viewpoint.*

Evangelicals are also not affiliated with any one denomination but are represented among

Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, non-denominational churches, and most other Protestant bodies. Common cause is also often found with our Catholic brothers and sisters. There is a focused desire among evangelicals to follow Paul's exhortation to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace," particularly among those who confess Jesus as Lord.

Even more, evangelicals are represented among all ethnicities,

racess, and nations as we work towards the day of Christ's return when people of every nation, tribe, people, and language stand before him in celebration as one people praising him with one accord. Today there are more evangelicals outside of Western nations than there are represented within them.*

Triangle Grace Church is eager to maintain the distinctives of evangelicalism among us as we live our lives out together for Christ. We find great joy in proclaiming

Jesus as Lord of all, exhorting those with whom we have contact to seek out a personal relationship with God through Christ, studying the scriptures believing them to be the very Word of God, encouraging involvement in our local communities of the Triangle region, addressing social needs as we are able, seeking unity across denominational lines, embracing a growing diversity among us, and engaging with the cultural issues of our day advocating for a Christ-centered worldview.

Questions for Reflection

How familiar are you with the terms, *Evangelical* and *Evangelicalism*? Does your understanding of evangelicalism resonate with what is described in this session's materials?

Does your understanding of the Christian Faith resonate with how evangelicalism is described in this session's materials?

What do you find most encouraging about the approach of the evangelical view of faith and life? What are concerns you may have?

What are the challenges and opportunities that are before the evangelical church in the world, in our nation, or in our region?

A Reformed Church

Session 2

A second distinctive which both Triangle Grace Church and ECO embrace is our heritage as a “Reformed” Church. This designation acknowledges a particular theological viewpoint which we believe the Old and New Testaments of the Bible affirm about our basic understanding of God’s work in the world and his relationship to us. Today we explore the doctrines of “Reformed Theology.”

The Church Universal

The New Testament teaches us that it is the unique work of the Holy Spirit that makes the believer alive in Christ and incorporates such individuals into the body of Christ, which is his Church.* The Church is made up of all who profess faith in Jesus Christ no matter what nationality, gender, or station in life.* We express this truth when we publicly affirm the Apostle’s Creed in our worship services saying, “I believe in....the holy catholic church.” The word “catholic” (lower case “c”) does not refer to the Roman Catholic (capital “C”) Church, but means “universal.” In this way we affirm that we believe in the universal community of believers birthed by God himself. In other words, we believe that the church is not something manmade, limited by human distinctions, nor can be claimed to belong to one sect over another. Rather we believe that those who are a part of the “catholic” church belong to the same God, believe in the same truth, and share the same mission in the world.

The Protestant Church

Even though all Christians are part of one universal body, the church has divided into different groups and denominations according to particular theological and organizational beliefs over the centuries. One major division took place in the 16th century with the [Protestant Reformation](#). The word “Protestant” is derived from the word “protestio” used by the reformers at the Diet of Speyers in 1529* in response to religious liberty restrictions forcibly instituted by the Roman Catholic Church. The word means to “witness forth” (pro = forth, testio = witness). The first protestants viewed themselves as witnessing forth to the truth of scripture and the beliefs of the early church.

A summation of protestant theology embraced by the reformers through the transformative period of the 16th and 17th centuries has come to be known as the [5 Solas](#) which include:

Sola Scriptura: Scripture alone is the primary authority for the individual Christian and the Church (as opposed to tradition)

Sola Gratia: God bestows salvation to us by his grace alone (as opposed to the idea that we have some abilities or natural endowments to work out our salvation)

Sola Fide: We receive salvation through faith alone (as opposed to works)

Sola Christus: Christ alone accomplishes salvation for the people of God through his substitutionary atonement (as opposed to the mediation of the Church)

Sola Deo Gloria: To God alone be the glory meaning that salvation is from God alone and has been accomplished for us solely by God.

An additional key protestant belief distinct from Catholic teaching was the concept of the “priesthood of all believers.”* All Christians were understood to serve God as priests rather than a specialized class of clergy.



John Calvin, Swiss Reformer
1509—1564



John Knox, Scottish Reformer
1514—1572

The Emergence of the Reformed Church

Martin Luther has always been the key figure to which historians turn to date the beginning of the Reformation when in 1517 he posted his 95 thesis upon the door of the castle church in Wittenberg, Germany. Still, there were a number of impactful reformers who predated Luther such as Peter Waldo in the 13th century and John Wycliffe and Jan Huss in the 14th century.* Concurrent with the development of protestant churches in Germany under Luther’s leadership, a similar movement was underway in Switzerland led by Swiss reformers [Ulrich Zwingli](#) and [John Calvin](#). Calvin, a French theologian exiled to Germany for his developing beliefs, moved to Geneva, Switzerland by invitation in 1541 after completing his great four volume treatise, “Institutes of Christian Religion.” The theological distinctives taught by Zwingli and Calvin gave birth to what is best known now as “[Reformed Theology](#).” Although most aspects of the Swiss reformers’ theology were congruent with Luther’s approach to the scriptures, the theological understanding and practice of the Lord’s Supper

persisted as a dividing point between these two growing movements.

The influence of the Swiss Reformation spread to the Netherlands, France, Scotland, and England. The Church of England after splitting from the Roman Catholic Church under King Henry VIII adopted Calvin’s reformed theological perspective as reflected in their Thirty-Nine [Articles of Religion](#). The Church of Scotland, in particular, became staunch Calvinists led by able theologians and reformers such as [John Knox](#). The Church of England in conjunction with the Church of Scotland commissioned 121 scholarly clergymen to produce a fundamental standard of faith to guide church teaching and practice which is now known as the [Westminster Confession](#).* This important work continues to be a primary document for reformed churches today.

What are the Distinctives of Reformed Theology?

In our session on evangelicalism, we noted that evangelicals hold unswervingly to credal statements such as The Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. Such essential tenets of the Christian faith form the basis of reformed theology as well. As we explored the emergence of reformed theology in the preceding section tracing its historical development back to the Reformation, we observed that the reformed theological perspective was also squarely grounded on the Five Solas which diverged from Roman Catholic teaching. There are a number of other ways that reformed theology has been

distinguished from alternative theological positions which we will explore below.

Calvinism Versus Arminianism

A primary distinction of reformed theology is what is sometimes called, the [“Doctrines of Grace”](#) which are captured in Calvin’s Institutes of Christian Religion as well as the Westminster Confession.

Churches who hold to Calvinism	Churches who hold to Arminianism
Presbyterian	Methodist
Congregational	Nazarene
Anglican	Salvation Army
Reformed Baptists	Various Baptist organizations
Christian Reformed Churches	Christian Missionary Alliance
Reformed Church of America	Pentecostal churches

The doctrines of grace first emphasize the **sovereignty of God**. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things. Before his creation he decreed a plan which is unfolding in history to this very day leading to the final consummation of his kingdom. His will is understood as inviolable, his decrees are immutable.

A second conviction of the doctrines of grace is that not only is man sinful, but as Paul writes, “We are dead in our trespasses and sins.”^{*} Because we are dead in our sin, we are unable by any means or manner to respond to God on our own. The language of **“total depravity”** is often used to describe the sorry state in which we find ourselves whereby every aspect of our soul, spirit, body, and mind has been tainted by our sinful nature, so much so that we stand as enemies of a holy and just God unable to do right or good in his eyes.^{*}

This leads to a third affirmation within reformed theology. Since we are dead in our sins, it is **only by his initiative, intervention, and grace** that we can enter into a loving, life-giving relationship with him. Rather than experience the judgment of God because of our rejection of him, he saves us from that judgment restoring us into fellowship with himself by his mercy. The emphasis here is that it is only by his grace that this happens, an unmerited gift to us through the work of Christ on the cross. This is why this set of beliefs is called, the “Doctrines of Grace.”

Fourth, since it is by his grace that any of this can happen, reformed theology teaches that God has to make the first move towards this end. It is not we who reach out to God, but it is he who first extends his love to us through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Without this initial work of the Holy Spirit we cannot believe in Christ, but upon the intervention of the Holy Spirit in our lives we cannot but help embrace the marvelous love offered to us in and through Christ. Sometimes this is called **“irresistible grace,”** holding that God not only saves us, but gives us the faith to believe in Christ and his salvation.

Since such faith is from Christ and his Spirit and not something based simply on human affection or volition, reformed theologians believe this faith will persevere throughout our life and to the end of time assuring us of the eternal inheritance which is to come. This is sometimes called, **“the perseverance of the saints.”**

Finally, reformed theology always highlights the purpose in God’s plan, decrees, and saving work. **It is all for his glory** - not because he must save us, not because God himself is in need of something, but because he desired to extend his grace to us that his character and nature might be manifested to its fullest extent in and through us. Thus, the Westminster Shorter Catechism starts out with the first question, “What is the purpose of mankind?” and follows with the answer, “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

This understanding of scripture espoused by Calvin is often contrasted against both a Pelagianism approach to salvation and an Arminian theological position. [Pelagius](#), a British monk who lived approximately from 355-420 AD, believed that original sin did not taint human nature. Humans, therefore, have free will to follow God to perfection. A millennial later [Jacobus Arminius](#)

(1560-1609), a Dutch reformer who was contemporary of Calvin, argued against certain aspects of Calvinism. Although he agreed with Calvin that men were “dead in their sins and trespasses,” he believed that the Holy Spirit offered to all people a “prevenient grace” which extended to each person the power to exercise free will to accept or reject Christ and the salvation he offered. Thus,

Arminianism stood in contrast to Calvinism in the understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation (Irresistible Grace vs. Prevenient Grace) along with other aspects of Calvin’s approach to reformed theology. Most Methodist churches, Nazarene churches, Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, and some Baptist churches will hold more closely to Arminianism rather than Calvinistic instruction.

Covenant Theology Versus Dispensational Theology

[Dispensationalism](#) is a theological system developed in the 1800’s traced back to John Darby, a Plymouth Brethren Minister born in London who ministered in Ireland. Dispensationalists teach that there are a number of unique dispensations throughout Biblical history in which God worked in different and distinct ways in relationship to his people. In particular, dispensationalists make a strong distinction between Israel and the church. “Classic Dispensationalism” holds that ethnic Israel has been given prophetic promises in the Old Testament of earthly blessings which will be fulfilled and experienced in an end time, future dispensation. The church, however, is understood as a separate creation by God possessing a unique set of promises extended to them by Christ in the New Testament. Dispensationalists believe that though the church and Israel are both saved by Christ alone they will experience the end times in different ways as the church will be swept off the earth and brought to heaven before a seven year tribulation is experienced on earth. This is called the “Rapture.”

Because of this belief in distinct dispensations, classic dispensationalists contend that the teachings of the Old Testament are primarily associated with Israel and only the New Testament has application and authority for those of us who make up the church today.

A final unique aspect of dispensational theology is that dispensationalists approach scripture with a ‘literalistic hermeneutic.’ This means that that each and every part of scripture is to be interpreted consistently in a straight-forward manner avoiding use of metaphor, analogy, types, symbolism, allusion, or other interpretive approaches whenever possible to determine meaning.

Those who approach scripture from a reformed theological perspective disagree with the scriptural assumptions of dispensationalists and rather advocate for “[Covenant Theology](#).”

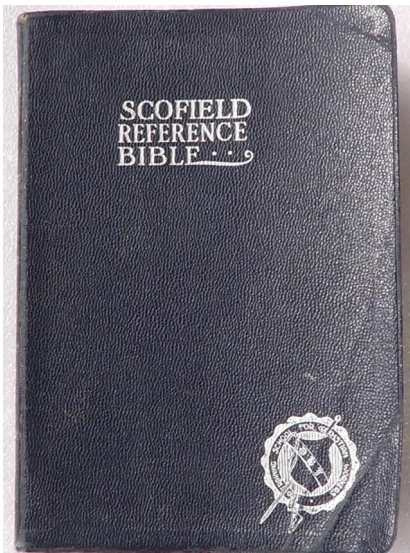
Covenant theologians argue that there

Churches who hold to Covenant Theology

Presbyterian
Methodist
Lutheran
Anglican
Reformed Baptists
Reformed Churches

Churches who hold to Dispensational Theology

Plymouth Brethren
Pentecostal churches
Various Baptist organizations
Calvary Chapel
Various “Bible Churches”
Many non-denominational churches



The Scofield Reference Bible first published in 1909 possessed reference notes by the dispensational theologian Cyrus Scofield. It became influential in advocating for a dispensational theological approach to interpreting scripture in the 20th century.

is only one people of God throughout redemptive history who are called "Israel" in the Old Testament and the "church" in the New. The purpose of this one people has always been the same, to extend the glory of God to the ends of the earth that every tribe, tongue, nation, and race would know and honor Christ. This purpose is worked out in a series of covenants (Abraham, Moses, David, New Covenant) all of which were based in grace and culminated in the person and work of Christ.

Covenant theology believes the promises that Israel were given in the Old Testament were fulfilled in and through Christ. The church is understood as the extension of

faithful Israel as those from other nations are included in the people of God as they receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. Covenant theologians emphasize the unity of scripture contained in the Old and New Testaments believing that it tells one unified, continuous story and all parts of it have relevance and application to our lives.

Finally, whereas classic dispensationalists will argue for a uniformed approach to all scripture in its interpretation, which we call a "literalistic hermeneutic," covenant theologians emphasize the intent of the author acknowledging that different types of literary genres and tools can be used to convey meaning and intent. So one must take into account the chosen genre and approach it appropriately to glean intent and determine meaning.

The term "Classic Dispensationalism" has been used a number of times above, because there are various mediating views between those who hold to dispensational and covenantal theological systems. These include revised dispensationalism, progressive dispensationalism, progressive covenantalism, and new covenant theology. The Scofield Bible, Dwight L. Moody, Dallas Theological Seminary, and a number of other institutions helped popularize dispensational theology in the 20th century.

Although the distinction between those who hold to covenantal/reformed theology and dispensational theology may not be

recognized when first attending a church, they are truly different approaches to understanding the contours of scripture and typically underpin preaching and teaching content. Those who hold to dispensational theology include some Baptists, some independent or non-denominational churches, most Brethren churches, and some Charismatic/Pentecostal churches.

Paedo-Baptism Versus Believer Baptism

The sacrament of baptism has importance for those who embrace reformed theology.*
Most reformed churches (but not all) will not only encourage the baptism of youth and adults who come to faith in Christ (believer baptism), but also the baptism of infants of believing parents (paedo-baptism). This practice emerges from a covenantal understanding of the act of baptism. Those who hold to paedo-baptism teach that oath signs accompanied covenants established by God with his people. These signs represented the content and nature of the covenant. Since God instituted the circumcision of infants who were eight days old as the sign connected with the Mosaic Covenant, baptism is rightly applied to infants as the oath sign of the New Covenant.

From this perspective, the act of

baptizing an infant is not a salvific act as Catholic teaching would hold. It is a sign which holds out the promise of salvation to the child if he or she indeed embraces Christ as his or her Savior at a later point in life. Baptism does serve as an initiation for children into the covenant community enjoying the benefits of that reality as they are faithfully nurtured by their family and mentored by Christian friends. The belief is that God will use such blessings in their lives to bring these little ones to faith in Christ and so fulfill the intent of their baptism.

Those who hold only to believer baptism and do not allow infant baptism would include Baptist churches, Charismatic/Pentecostal churches, and most independent and non-denominational churches.

The Reformed View of Communion

The second sacrament of the church which reformed churches hold a unique position is the Lord's Supper.

The Catholic view of Communion is called "Transubstantiation." Catholics believe that as the celebration of the Lord's Supper occurs, the elements of the bread and cup turn into Christ's actual body and blood of which worshippers partake.

The Lutheran view of Communion is called "Consubstantiation." Lutherans believe that although the elements do not literally turn into Christ's body and blood, Christ body is indeed in and through the elements as they are taken.

Those within the Baptist tradition hold to a "Memorial" view of Communion. The bread and cup are viewed as symbols employed to remind the church of what Christ

has done on their behalf. No unique physical or spiritual presence of Christ is connected to the elements in anyway. For this reason they choose to use the term "ordinance" rather than "sacrament" to describe this practice.

Reformed churches typically hold to a view which can best be described as "Spiritual Presence." The meal is accompanied by the spiritual presence of Christ himself. Christ is indeed present with his people as they celebrate the Lord's Supper together extending his grace to them, but not in any way that is physical or attached to the specific elements themselves.*

The Reformed Church Today

There are many churches today that identify themselves as a reformed church. Some of them utilize the word "Reformed" in their denominational designation such as the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) and the Reformed Church of America (RCA). Others hold to reformed theological positions without acknowledging it in their public name. For instance, most Congregational churches embrace reformed theology as well as some Baptist churches (disagreeing with their reformed brothers and sisters only over the issue of baptism.) All Presbyterian churches claim allegiance to the reformed theological tradition.

It may be helpful to point out, however, that even though churches may identify themselves as a reformed church, it does not necessarily mean they hold vibrantly to the doctrinal positions discussed above. Historical roots may be celebrated, but

Sacraments of the Catholic Church		Sacraments of Reformed Churches	Churches who call Baptism and Communion "Ordinances"
Baptism	Anointing the Sick		
Confirmation	Holy Orders	Baptism	Baptists
Eucharist	Marriage	Communion	Church of Christ
Confession			Pentecostals

faithful assent to the Five Solas, the Doctrines of Grace, and essential tenets such as those enumerated in the Westminster Confession may no longer be normative. The winsome phrase “reformed and always reforming,” today is now sometimes misapplied. Where once such an exhortation meant that there was an earnest desire to always re-evaluate one’s beliefs and actions in light of the inspired Word

of God, it is now sometimes used to justify a movement away from scriptural truth to embrace values which are more closely associated with the priorities of popular culture than with the Bible.

Triangle Grace Church and ECO are committed to the historic understanding and doctrines of reformed theology as presented above.

Questions for Reflection

What aspects of reformed theology as described above are most important to you? Most encouraging to you? Which doctrines within reformed theology do you appreciate the most?

Do any of the beliefs above leave you scratching your head, confused, or troubled?

Which comparatives above were familiar to you, which were unfamiliar? Which would be helpful to study more deeply?

Have you seen or experienced differences in churches that describe themselves as “Reformed?”

What does it mean to be a reformed church today living our lives out together given the culture in which God has placed us? How does the reformed theological perspective speak into the presented challenges of the world?

A Presbyterian Church

Session 3

A third distinctive of Triangle Grace Church is that it is Presbyterian. We noted last week the emergence of the Presbyterian church in the British Isles connected to the growing movement of reformed theology. Today we continue to trace this story exploring the history of Presbyterianism and highlighting its defining characteristics.

Scottish Roots

[John Knox](#) was born in Edinburgh, Scotland sometime between 1505 and 1514. He studied at St. Andrews University and was ordained as a Catholic priest in 1536. It was in 1543 he acknowledged Christ as his Savior in response to the preaching of Thomas Guillaume, a Catholic, Dominican Friar from whom Knox said, “he had received his first taste of truth.” Building upon this newfound confession he embraced protestant tenets under the influence of a reform-minded preacher and later martyred, [George Wishart](#), whom he served as a bodyguard. Because of religious persecution, Knox was forced to leave Scotland, passed through France, and eventually made his way to Geneva where he engaged with John Calvin.

Upon return to his native country, Knox and other likeminded leaders convinced the government of Scotland to abandon Catholic allegiance to Rome and embrace a reformed theological approach to church belief and structure. Under his leadership the [Scots Confession](#) was produced in 1560 soon followed by the first [Book of Discipline](#) in 1561. The latter work described church [organizational structure](#) introducing such concepts as sessions, synods, and a general assembly to the Church of Scotland. To that presbyteries would be added in coming years to introduce some of the primary leadership bodies of Presbyterian denominations that are maintained to this day.

English Roots

Between 1527 and 1660, England’s religious practice was one of the primary issues of its day. The openness to protestant reforms by King Henry VIII and his son King Edward VI contrasted against the primacy of Catholicism demanded by Queen Mary. This in turn led to the eventual countermovement of the English republic under Oliver Cromwell and later a return of the monarchy with King Charles II each emphasizing different religious passions for their native land. These tumultuous years combined to significantly impact the character and structure of the Church of England.

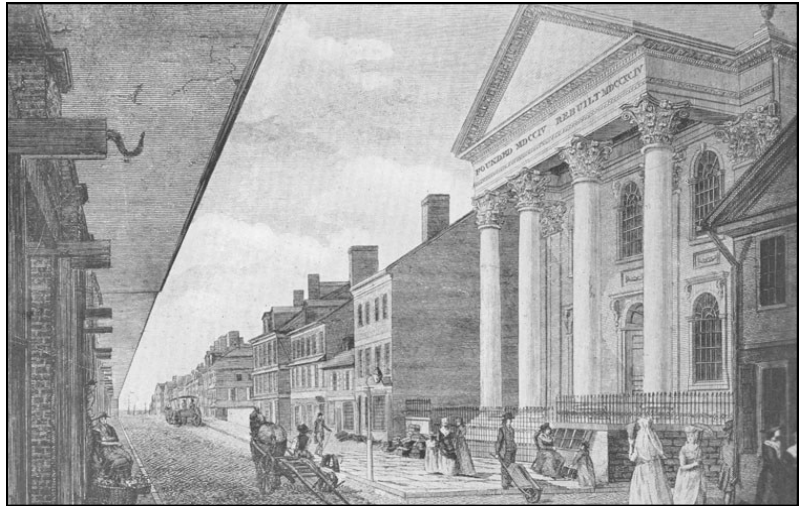
The first English Presbytery dated back to 1572 introducing Presbyterian leadership structures to England. By 1590 there were no less than 500 clergymen within the Church of England who moved toward presbytery governance led by [Thomas Cartwright](#) against the episcopal practices of the Church of England. Upon the writing of the [Westminster Standards](#) of 1643, Presbyterianism was the adopted polity for the Church of England, though there was tangible dissent by those who advocated for independent, congregational church structures of governance. There was hope that a union of the Church of England and Church of Scotland would emerge out of the work at Westminster prepared by clergy from both bodies. However,

upon the [restoration of the monarchy](#) in 1660, the Church of England reinstated an episcopal form of polity which remains to this day. Congregationalists became the main dissenting body in the English landscape later followed by the Methodists moving forward and the Presbyterian movement faded in England.

Early Presbyterianism in America*

Presbyterian churches in America trace their roots to Scottish and Irish Presbyterianism. In 1706 the first presbytery was established at a gathering in Philadelphia moderated by an Irish immigrant minister, [Francis Makemie](#). Four of the original pastors were from Scotland and 3 were Irish. Another was English with ties to New England Puritanism. Although there are Presbyterians churches in New York which trace their history as far back as the mid 1600's to congregations established by New England Puritans, it is to the city of Philadelphia and this initial presbytery meeting most historians turn to speak of the birth of Presbyterianism in America. Because Presbyterians had no standing within the colonies unlike Anglicans and Congregationalists, Philadelphia became the center of growth for this Christian body because of the religious freedom extended to them by William Penn and the Quakers.

The first synod met in 1716 also in Philadelphia comprised of four presbyteries - Philadelphia, New York, New Castle (DE), and Snow Hill (MD).



The original First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, PA on High Street (now Market Street) where the first presbytery meeting in the United States met in 1706 and the first synod in 1716.

Because presbyteries were established first in the colonies - not synods nor the general assembly, they retained significant authority in the developing structures of New World Presbyterianism compared to their Old World counterparts. A prime example of this is the responsibility given to presbyteries to examine and ordain clergy maintained to this day.

As the colonies secured their political independence, the Presbyterian church in the newly birthed nation found greater stability upon which to continue its growth. In 1789, the first General Assembly gathered in Philadelphia which now represented 419 congregations, 177 ministers, 16 presbyteries, and 4 synods one of which now was located in the [Carolinas](#). [John Witherspoon](#) moderated this meeting. He was a Scottish born minister who signed the Declaration of Independence. Witherspoon would go on to become the President of the College of New Jersey later called Princeton University. It was at this time the title, "Presbyterian Church of the United States of America," was adopted (PCUSA).

In 1801, Presbyterians and Congregationalists entered into an agreement called the ["Plan of Union."](#) This effort was to help guide missional efforts in growing territories in continental America. Although their structures of governance differed, their common reformed understanding of faith offered a bond which they hoped would reduce competition between churches and allow for clergy to serve in either body as needs dictated.

THREE PERIODS OF PRESBYTERIAN DIVISION

1740's Old Light / New Light Controversy

Old Lights emphasized credal based faith and a rational approach to theology and faith, while New Lights influenced by the First Great Awakening advocated for personal conversion involving heart and emotion connected to faith.

1840's Old School / New School Controversy

Contemporaneous with the Second Great Awakening in America, The New School emphasized revivalism and cooperation with Congregationalists such as Jonathan Edwards while the Old School centered on confessional faith and traditional Calvinist views exemplified by formulations such as the Westminster Confession.

1920's Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy

Although this controversy stretched across denominational lines, Presbyterians experienced division within their fold as progressive, modernist theologians embraced higher criticism of scripture denying basic tenets of faith while early fundamentalists advocated for historic doctrinal beliefs which the Christian church held for two millennia.

theological bounds. New Light Presbyterians embraced such revivalist impulses while Old Lights argued for the importance of maintaining allegiance to the standards of the Westminster Confession. This was called "subscription." In order to be ordained pastoral candidates had to "subscribe" or confess their unswerving allegiance to the doctrines espoused in the Westminster Standards.

One hundred years later in conjunction with the revivalist movement of the [Second Great Awakening](#), another division over "reformation" emerged. This was called the Old School/ New School Controversy provoked in part by the 1801 Plan of Union with the Congregationalists. The central issue was orthodoxy as Old School proponents criticized the dilution of doctrinal adherence in order to work with the Congregationalists and participate in the evangelistic innovations connected to the Second Great Awakening. A liberalization of theological views advocated by the New School movement came from Yale Divinity School and was represented by revivalists like Charles Finney who questioned

Theological Divisions within American Presbyterianism*

The concept of "reformation" has always been important to American Presbyterians, so much so, that it has led to divisions throughout its history over the last 200 years. Factions of Presbyterians sought reform to more adequately live out their understanding of faith in contrast to a previous generation's stance. For some Presbyterians the idea of reformation has always been seen in light of the original proclamation and documentation of the gospel of Jesus. Whenever the church begins to veer from the teaching of scripture, a reformation is necessary to call the wayward back to its fundamental identity and belief.

Yet reformation has been introduced by Presbyterians from a different vantage point. Throughout the history

of Presbyterianism there has been authentic concern about dead orthodoxy. Some have asserted that this issue led to a lack of piety, religious affection, and spiritual experience with the living God. Others have believed such consuming adherence to orthodoxy forsook the church's impact on society for good - faith without action is dead.

One of the earliest divisions of American Presbyterianism, the Old Light/New Light Controversy, was associated with the [Great Awakening](#) of the mid-18th century. Exemplified by the English Calvinist and evangelist [George Whitfield](#), the Great Awakening was a pietistic movement which emphasized faith in Christ involving the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer that crossed

doctrines such as original sin. The issue of slavery further contributed to division leading to a Northern Presbyterian Church comprised mostly of New School Presbyterians and a Southern Presbyterian Church made up of mostly Old School Presbyterians.

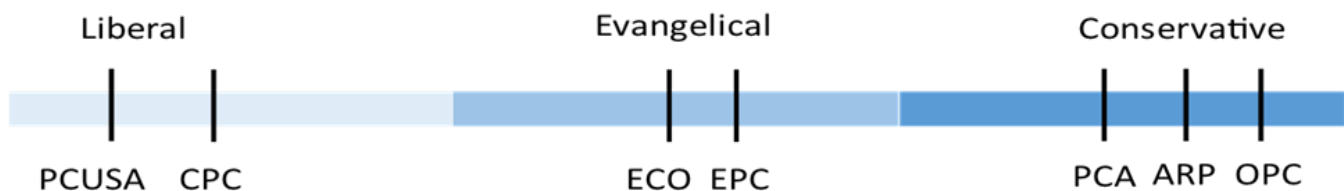
As another century passed, further division emerged among Presbyterians. This time the

modernist controversy confronted the church as “higher criticism” of the Bible took hold in seminary studies. In 1924 the [Auburn Affirmation](#) was signed by over 1,300 PCUSA pastors and elders which sought protection for Presbyterian clergy and theologians to question doctrinal beliefs found in the Westminster Confession as well as scripture itself such as the inerrancy of scripture, the virgin birth, the principal of

substitutionary atonement, and the resurrection of Christ. A new seminary was established called Westminster in Philadelphia whose faculty was composed of former conservative Princeton professors led by J. Gresham Machen and whose mission was to adhere to Presbyterian and Reformed orthodoxy. From this, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) emerged in 1936.

Denominations and Divisions*

The theological divisions discussed above led to multiple denominational divisions among Presbyterians since 1716. Some of these separated and later merged with other Presbyterian entities. Today there are over 30 Presbyterian denominations functioning in the United States. This section offers a brief description of seven of the most prominent Presbyterian denominations. Our denomination, ECO will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this section.



This chart illustrates the general theological position of each of the major Presbyterian denominations described.

Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA)

The PCUSA is a mainline Presbyterian church. It is the largest Presbyterian denomination in America. The designation PCUSA has been used a number of times in the history of American Presbyterianism. It was the name chosen at the first General Assembly in 1789 for synods who gathered and utilized again after the merger of several Northern Presbyterian denominations following the civil war in 1869. Upon the merger of the mainline Presbyterian churches associated more with Northern states (at that time called the United Presbyterian Church - UPCUSA) and the mainline Presbyterian churches associated more with Southern states (at that time called the Presbyterian Church of the United States - PCUS), the current denomination was rebranded PCUSA. The PCUSA has 1.2 million members and 8,800 churches. It is theologically liberal/progressive.

Presbyterian Church of America (PCA)

The PCA was founded in 1973 in response to continued pursuit of a liberalizing theology within the large southern Presbyterian church called the Presbyterian Church of the United States (PCUS). The PCUS dated back to the division from the Northern PCUSA just prior to the civil war. The PCA has approximately 380,000 members as of 2021 with 1,900 churches and is the second largest Presbyterian Church in the United States behind the PCUSA. Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) preceded the founding of the PCA and has always maintained a close relationship with the PCA. The PCA is theologically conservative.

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church divided from a previous iteration of the PCUSA in 1936 in response to the Auburn Affirmation to form its own denomination. J Gresham Machen a professor of theology at Princeton was a foundational leader of this denomination. He also helped to establish Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. The OPC has 31,000 members in 300 congregations. Theologically, the OPC is conservative.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC)

The EPC was founded in 1981 in response to a continuing drift towards liberal theological positions held by the United Presbyterian Church (UPC) which was the northern counterpart of the PCUS dating back to the split prior to the civil war who together would merge to form the current PCUSA in 1983. The EPC is based in Livonia, Michigan and has approximately 120,000 members in 630 churches. It is closest to our own denomination (ECO) in its stance as both an evangelical and reformed Presbyterian church. Its motto is "In Essentials, Unity; In Non-Essentials, Liberty; In All Things, Charity. Truth in Love."

Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC)

There are two Presbyterian denominations who identify themselves as Cumberland Presbyterians, one which utilizes that exact name the Cumberland Presbyterian Church (CPC), and another which is called the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in America (CPCA). Both trace their history back to the Second Great Awakening in the 1800's. Baptist and Methodist frontier churches were growing and there were not enough trained pastors to serve within Presbyterian churches. A Kentucky synod began to ordain clergy who lacked formal training and did not require them to subscribe to Westminster Standards. They were expelled from an earlier iteration of the PCUSA and formed their own denomination (CPC) in 1829. Cumberland College and Seminary in Tennessee is associated with the CPC.

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church of America was a denomination comprised of black Americans following the Civil War who sought the assistance of the CPC to form its own denomination of African-Americans. Memphis Seminary is associated with the CPCA.

The CPC has approximately 65,000 members with 650 churches and the CPCA has 6,500 and 150 churches. Both are theologically liberal and affirm Arminian beliefs.

Korean Presbyterian Churches

There are a number of denominations of Korean Presbyterians in America. The Korean Presbyterian Church Abroad ([KPCA](#)) was founded in 1976 comprised of 3 Presbyteries. The denomination maintains close ties with the PCUSA. It has 55,000 members and 300 churches. The KPCA is theologically liberal. The Korean-American Presbyterian Church ([KAPC](#)), founded at Westminster Seminary in 1978 has 53,000 and 600 churches. Theologically it is evangelical and conservative. The World Korean Presbyterian Church which broke off from the KAPC in 2013 has 300 churches and hold a fundamentalist theological stance.

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church ([ARP](#))

The ARP traces its history back to the Church of Scotland and a group of clergy who refused to express allegiance to the monarchy. A key Scottish leader was Ebenezer Erskine. A college and seminary are named after him in South Carolina that is the central hub for the ARP. The ARP developed separately from the history noted above forming its own Synod in the United States in 1803. It has approximately 22,000 members and 265 churches. The ARP is theologically conservative.

Presbyterians Commonalities

Through our brief survey of Presbyterian history and denominations, we have seen diverse and at times polarizing stances embraced by Presbyterians. We have only scratched the surface of the many tensions that have played out since the 1500's among Presbyterians. There are commonalities, however, between Presbyterians which we should note.

First, there is **a common heritage that traces back to the Protestant Reformation**, and in particular, John Calvin in Switzerland and John Knox in Scotland. A foundation of theological understanding was established by Calvin, and ecclesiological structures and practices were prominently erected by Knox. The

work of both men are important to the identity of Presbyterian denominations.

Second, there has been **an emphasis on the importance of confessions and church standards** throughout all iterations of Presbyterianism. The Westminster Standards has been the primary set of documents by which Presbyterians have identified themselves, even when denominations and movements may not have been in full agreement with every doctrinal assertion contained within them. But beyond the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, various other creeds and confessions have been embraced as central to the identity of Presbyterian

churches. For this reason, Presbyterian churches are sometimes called "Confessional Churches." Even Presbyterian denominations who hold liberal views will express their convictions through new confessional statements which become foundational to their teaching and interpretation of scripture. An example of this was the United Presbyterian [Church Confession](#) of 1967 now affirmed by the PCUSA which has not been embraced by evangelical and conservative Presbyterians.

Third, there is **an ongoing, active commitment to "reformation."** The number of divisions within the story of Presbyterianism in America is a testament to this reality. There is an earnest desire to live life out right before

God, faithful to Christ reforming church practices, teaching, and matters of the heart to please God. Although conservatives and liberals will differ on what is the ruler by which reformation should be measured, there is a shared commitment towards ongoing change for the good.

A Primary Commonality: Presbyterian Polity

The most salient characteristic shared by Presbyterian denominations is their organizational structure which first emerged in Geneva under the leadership of John Calvin, and then found its defining primacy in Scotland through the advocacy of John Knox.

“Presbyterian” comes from the Greek word πρεσβύτερος (presbyteros) which we most often translate as “elder” in scripture. We find this term used over 72 times in the New Testament to describe leaders of the church.* Such leadership is also found throughout the Old Testament as the elders of Israel were called upon to represent the nation before God and to care for his people.* This pattern even extends into the heavenly realms as described in Revelation. Elders are before the throne of God, part of his divine council, overseeing the affairs of the [kingdom of God](#).

Two types of elders are sometimes differentiated within Presbyterianism, teaching elders and ruling elders. Teaching elders are installed pastors who give attention to the Word, sacraments, and prayer. Their primary responsibility is to instruct the church in matters of faith and practice. Ruling elders are church members elected by a congregation for limited terms entrusted with supervisory responsibilities to shepherd the flock. Together the teaching elders and ruling elders serve on what is called the “session” overseeing worship, governance, and

Polity Organization of Presbyterians

Session

Made up lay elders and ordained ministers tasked to care and shepherd individual churches The Session possesses final decision making authority for the local church.

Presbytery

A region of Presbyterian churches for mutual encouragement and accountability. Leadership of Presbyteries is made up of both lay elders and ordain ministers from local churches.

Synod

Two or more Presbyteries who are organized together for mutual encouragement and accountability.

General Assembly

All synods gathered together for national polity decisions. Our denomination, ECO does not have a General Assembly, but refers to our General Assembly as the Synod.

discipline within the church. “Session” comes from the Latin word “sedere” which means “to sit.”

Another formal office within the local church is affirmed in Presbyterian polity, that of “deacon.” Like elders, deacons are mentioned throughout the New Testament and are exemplified in this role best in Acts 6. Deacons are elected officers who are focused on addressing specific ministry needs to tangibly care for the congregation. They typically do not serve on the session nor have voting authority over the life and direction of the church.

Multiple churches are organized into “presbyteries” most often by geographic region. Leadership of presbyteries are selected from among local sessions made up of both teaching and ruling elders from various churches. Presbyteries are invested with the important responsibility of examining and ordaining candidates for pastoral ministry. Local churches are supported by the shepherding care of presbytery leaders offering prayer, counsel, and accountability as warranted.

“Synods” are made up of presbyteries. They are given oversight of broader regional issues, and the “General Assembly” is a gathering of the whole of the denomination, attended by synod, presbytery, and session representatives typically called “Commissioners.” In our denomination, ECO,

there is only one synod, so it is synonymous with the General Assembly of other Presbyterian denominations. Our synod typically meets yearly for mutual edification and bi-yearly to conduct business of the church voting on issues of both theology and polity.

Presbyterian Organization Compared to Episcopal and Congregational Structures

The Presbyterian system of polity described above is a defining aspect of its identity. It is a middle position between two other standard forms of church governance, that of episcopacy which is a top-down approach to church authority centered on individual leaders, and that of congregationalism which is a bottom-up structure centered on the broader local church body.

[Episcopal governance](#) embraces a hierarchal structure of church leadership. It invests bishops with regional authority over local congregations based on the use of the Greek word, ἐπίσκοπος in the New Testament translated as “overseer” or “bishop” from which the English word “episcopal” originates. Bishops are understood to derive their authority from the unbroken succession of the first apostles overseeing local clergy who are identified as elders. Bishops work in conjunction with synods and councils made up of other bishops to determine the direction of churches under their care. The lead clergy member within a local church is given significant authority over the life and practices of the local church as well. Various forms of local leadership support the work of the church under the authority of the primary clergy member and the episcopal hierarchy.

Presbyterians argue that the term ἐπίσκοπος (bishop/overseer) and πρεσβύτερος (elder) are interchangeable in the New Testament, synonyms to describe the same office. They point to early church writings by Clement and the Didache which only spoke of bishops and deacons leaving out elders when addressing church offices, thus, equating overseers/bishops with elders. The council of Acts 15 becomes exemplary of the Presbyterian approach to connectional, authoritative decisions made by a consensus of elders in contrast to rules enacted by a single bishop. Anglican churches, Methodist churches, Episcopal churches, Eastern Orthodox churches, and the Catholic church are led by episcopal governance.

On the other end of the spectrum, [congregational polity](#) argues for the primacy of Christ as the only authority over the local church rejecting any other form of hierarchal control to determine matters of faith and practice. Local elders elected by the congregation are

understood to serve under the authority of Christ to shepherd his flock in agreement with the Presbyterian system. However, Congregationalists believe that no other leadership body outside of local church officers and the congregation itself (who hold their elders accountable) should exercise authority over the local church. Congregationalists do maintain relationships with other like-minded churches seeking to provide mutual encouragement, counsel, and prayer for one another but not in any formal, binding manner that directs theological adherence or polity. The [Cambridge Platform](#) written in the New England colonies in 1648, and the [Savoy Declaration](#) written in England in 1658, were revisions of the governance section of the Westminster Standards to reflect Congregational church polity contrasting the practices of Reformed Congregationalists against those of Presbyterians.

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

1Peter 5:1-3

Congregational churches, Baptist churches, and most independent and non-denominational churches employ congregational polity structures to organize their churches.

The History of ECO

Our denomination is called ECO: [A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians](#). Currently it has approximately 130,000 members, 400 churches organized into 22 presbyteries, and 500 pastors.

The name ECO is not an acronym, so those in ECO typically do not refer to it by individual letters but vocalize it in the same way the standard prefix “eco” (long “ee”) would be pronounced. This reinforces our passion for strengthening the ecosystems of local churches. ECO believes that the church is a living organism that needs life-giving resources to help it grow, thrive, and multiply. ECO is committed to cultivating a healthy, diverse, resource-rich ecosystem where pastors and congregations can flourish.

In the summer of 2010, seven pastors from the Presbyterian Church (USA) spoke of finding new ways to encourage each other in faith, ministry, and mission. They were concerned by the declining membership within their denomination (from four million to two million in 40 years). They worried that growing denominational disputes over theology and bureaucracy stole focus from their pastoral call to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and equip a new generation to lead. These pastors desired to reclaim a sense of covenanted community among leaders from a Presbyterian and reformed heritage, and to find new ways for churches to connect, grow, and multiply.

In January 2011, a letter was sent out to PCUSA pastors around the country asking if others wanted to join in crafting a new way forward. The response was overwhelming: just seven months later, in August 2011, nearly 2,000 men and women gathered in Minneapolis to dream and



pray. This birthed The Fellowship of Presbyterians, a ministry association that sought to equip and connect those in various Presbyterian denominations including the PCUSA. But some pastors and congregations felt God calling them to leave the PCUSA, and many young seminarians were looking for a different context for ordination. As a result, in January 2012, at a conference in Orlando, FL with more than 2,200 in attendance, a new denomination was formed, ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians.*

Theological Standards and Polity of ECO

ECO remains firmly committed to an evangelical and reformed view of faith and scripture. Its primary theological document is called the [Essential Tenets](#) which members (called “Covenant Partners”) assent to as their guiding set of theological convictions. Church officers must affirm their belief in and commitment to the Essential Tenets. ECO maintains a commitment to historic theological [Confessions](#) which include the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Westminster Confession, the Westminster Larger Catechism, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, and the Theological Declaration of Barmen.

The polity of ECO remains Presbyterian. Coming out of the PCUSA, ECO has created a simpler leadership structure with a deep desire to foster mission and ministry by reducing bureaucracy.* The mission statement of ECO reflects this priority, “We desire to build flourishing churches that make disciples of Jesus Christ.”

Shared Values of ECO

There are four shared convictions that guides ECO and reveals our strength. They include:

The Complete Local

The strength of our movement is how we create nimble environments for churches to flourish in their unique Kingdom calling.

Demonstrated by:

- Our efficient structures that maximize each church's identity and effectiveness.
- Our creativity to embolden and develop a variety of distinct missional expressions.
- Our adamant belief that the stronger each church is, the stronger we all are.

A Livable Theology

The strength of our faith is how we live out our Reformed beliefs in a relentlessly contextual way.

Demonstrated by:

- Our zealous view that the sovereignty of God drives our ability to risk.
- Our call to deeply influence culture with the Gospel, not just protect theology.
- Our passion that renewed minds lead people to embody their faith in Jesus every day.

Our Mutual Spurring

The strength of our covenant community is how we challenge one another to constantly transform.

Demonstrated by:

- Our distinct systems that inspire and equip continual advancement.
- Our innovative coaching culture that magnifies the power of relational partnership.

- Our strategic connections with the wider evangelical body to deepen impact here and globally.

Leadership Acceleration

The strength of our influence is how we together create vibrant systems for leader multiplication.

Demonstrated by:

- Our competency-based approach that unleashes the potential of all God's people.
- Our thoughtful attention to help women and men lead and thrive in all phases of life and ministry.
- Our intentional focus to equip congregations to deploy laity in exponential ways.



A flourishing ECO church can consistently name its Flourishing Next Step, which ECO will help cultivate and support through: 1) One-on-one Coaching for assessment & development 2) Peer-based Groups for encouragement & accountability 3) National and Regional Gatherings for synergy & inspiration

Ten Facts about ECO

1. ECO does not hold property in Trust as some denominations do. In other words, property is owned by the local church so as not to leverage it against a local church in matters of faith and practice.
2. “Church” is defined by ECO not only as a gathered body for worship but wherever believers are gathered in the name of Jesus. Church can be lived out in small groups, accountability groups, ministry teams, house churches, and mission teams to name just a few.
3. Members who join ECO churches are called “Covenant Partners” to emphasize the covenanted connection in life and mission with those who are committed to our faith community together.
4. ECO gives flexibility to local congregations to define the number, responsibilities, and terms of leadership roles of elders, deacons, and pastoral positions within the church.
5. ECO pastors are required to be in accountability groups with other ECO pastors.
6. ECO is committed to allowing both men and women to be ordained as pastors and serve as elders, deacons, and in all other church leadership roles.
7. ECO’s National Synod Office is located in Goleta, CA.
8. ECO envisions 1,000 planted, revitalized, and flourishing ECO congregations and micro-expressions by 2030. To make this [vision](#) a reality, ECO is committed to recruit, train, re-train, and deploy 1,000 vocational leaders and 10,000 highly invested lay leaders. In doing so, we see hundreds of thousands of movement-equipped people emerging for daily gospel influence.
9. ECO has recently established its own seminary called, [“The Flourish Institute of Theology.”](#) This organization also offers leadership and theological training courses for laity.
10. ECO has put together a [6-part video series](#) to describe its identity in greater detail.

Questions for Reflection

Did you grow up as a Presbyterian? If not, what did you think of Presbyterians before attending Triangle Grace Church? What has it meant to you to be “Presbyterian?”

Is there anything that surprised you about the backstory of Presbyterianism?

For you, what order of importance would you put Evangelical, Reformed, and Presbyterian? Why?

What aspect of Presbyterianism is most important to you? Least important? Why?

Are there any unique ways that a Presbyterian perspective speaks into our culture for Christ today?

A Church Community of Impact

Session 4

Approximately 15 years ago Triangle Grace Church adopted as its mission statement, “To proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed, so that we and all people will come to trust Him as Lord and Savior, be moved to practice His teaching in every area of life, work together as a community of service, and be a visible sign of God's love.” Today we are reminded of this statement by a shortened version of it in our bulletins, “Love God...Love Others...Serve the World.” This week we consider the character and contours of our local church.

Mission of the Church and A Theology of Ministry

Of course, we should always be hesitant as we frame any mission statement for our church, for such a practice may give the false impression it is up to us to decide what our mission entails. We set aside claims of authority in our personal and corporate lives when we made a confession of faith that “Jesus is Lord.” When we uttered such a statement of submission, we no longer claimed our life as our own, but that it belongs to him because of the debt we owe him and our deep affection and appreciation for what he has done in our lives as Savior and King.

The appropriate question really

is, what is it that Jesus wants for us? If he is Lord, then what is the mission he has laid out for us to accomplish, and how does he want us to go about it?”

Jesus’ Ministry (John 17)

John 17:20-23 helps to answer these questions. As Jesus finished praying the night before his crucifixion, his thoughts turned to us, “I pray... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” (vs. 20-21) Out of all the things Jesus could have prayed for us at that moment, what was the one thing for which he asked? Unity, oneness, love among

believers. He defines this unity radically by describing it as the same oneness that is shared between the persons of the Trinity: “...may they be one as we are one.” (vs. 22) The same quality of relationship that exists between the Father and the Son is Jesus’ primary desire for us with one another and with him.

Notice what the purpose of this unity is according to Jesus’ prayer, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (vs. 23) How is the church throughout the ages to reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ according to the Master’s plan? It is through a radical love

that exists nowhere else on earth except within the Christian community which God has imbued with his glory, presence, and affection. When we love one another the way Jesus prayed for, and when those who do not know Christ come in contact with this authentic love, there is no other explanation for it except that God is truly present among us. This is our primary means of evangelism.

May they be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:21

A Snap Shot of Unity in Action (Acts 2 and 4)

What does biblical unity look like in real life? The book of Acts captures it. As Luke describes in Acts 4:32, "All the believers were one in heart and mind." Acts 2:42-47 explains this oneness in even greater detail. "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying

the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." An authentic community of believers living out biblical unity will look something like Luke's description of the early church.

- They will be thoroughly grounded in the scriptures. (vs. 42)
- They will be passionate about their worship of God. (vs. 42, 47)
- They will long to be together gathering regularly in one another's homes becoming more and more interdependent upon one another. (vs. 42, 46)

- They will have a heart to meet the physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of one another along with those who do not know Christ. (vs. 45, 4:33)

Luke concludes this description by saying, "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (vs. 47)." Through the unity, oneness, and love exhibited by the early church those who did not know the Lord were being exposed to the transformative reality of the gospel and were coming to faith. Jesus' prayer in John 17 was being answered.

These four components manifested in the life of the early church - discipleship, worship, community, and mission form a fundamental basis upon which to evaluate church health.

All the believers were one in heart and mind.

Acts 4:32

Making it Happen (Ephesians 4, 1Corinthians 12, Romans 12)

How does any church grow into such a community of love and faith? In one sense we can only point to the work of the Holy Spirit. By his presence, the Lord makes us into this new creation, this body of his. That is why Jesus emphasizes the coming of the Spirit (Jn 14 -16) before his prayer in John 17. Indeed, "Apart from me you can do nothing," he says. (Jn 15:5) That is why the coming of the Spirit is recorded by Luke in Acts 2 before the birth of the early church and its arresting example of love and unity as described above.

That is also why Paul indicated that the source of unity is the Holy Spirit when he encourages, "Let us make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Eph 4:3)

Authentic oneness is a miraculous work wrought by the presence of the Spirit of God. This, therefore, drives us to our knees in prayer to ask God to send his Spirit among us to accomplish his work, by his power knowing we cannot accomplish this on our own.

Although this is surely the case, we must also acknowledge the means by which the Spirit has chosen to accomplish his work as stated by Paul in Ephesians 4, "He gave gifts to men" (vs. 8), and "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, 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 until we reach all unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (vs. 11-13) Through the gifts given by the Spirit, the church is offered the tools by which authentic unity can be built. It is a primary responsibility of pastors and leaders to help those within their congregation to identify their gifting and to use these gifts to the fullest extent within the life of the community of faith to reach the kind of body unity for which Jesus prayed.

In the twelfth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he highlights the central role all believers have as part of the body of Christ. It is not only leaders who

are gifted by the Holy Spirit, but each person is called by the Lord and resourced by the Spirit to make a tangible contribution to the life of the church. Paul writes, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." (1Cor 12:7) In writing to this church he highlights miraculous gifts such as healing, spiritual discernment, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. When he writes to the Romans he adds in spiritual gifts such as serving, encouragement, and generosity. (Ro 12:3-8) These lists are exemplary and not exhaustive manifesting ways God may offer his grace to his people to serve one another to build one another up as we are rooted and established in love.

"It was Christ who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, 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 until we reach all unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

Ephesians 4:11-13

Paul's Example (1Thessalonians 2)

How do leaders of the church go about building up the body of Christ in this manner? Paul described how he went about building up an Acts 2/Ephesians 4 kind of community in 1Thessalonians 1-2. He reminds the Thessalonians, "We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel, but our very lives as well because you had become so dear to us." (vs. 8) He says to them, "...we were gentle among you like a mother caring for her little children," and "You are witnesses and so is God of how holy, righteous, and blameless, we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory." (vs. 7, 10-12)

This was Paul's strategy: he moved into an area where a believing

community did not exist, and he poured his life out for them. Not only did he share the propositional truths of the gospel, his very life became a transforming testimony of the power of the gospel. And he passionately loved those God had given him. He loved them with a love like a mother and father has for their children. Through his contagious example as the Thessalonians witnessed his life and teaching, Paul records, "...you received the word of God not as the word of men but as it actually is, the word of God... becoming imitators of God's churches in Judea which are in Christ Jesus..." (vs. 13-14) This, of course, is the same church Luke writes of in Acts 2 which we considered above. Now a church in Thessalonica had sprung up with the same characteristics of

oneness, unity, and love because of the way in which Paul lived out his life in this community. Through Paul's efforts and the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' prayer was answered.

If we are believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are expected to do all we can to fulfill the prayer Jesus cried out to his Father in John 17. Christian leaders must prayerfully and actively live out a winsome example among the church while equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Our church must be grounded in the apostle's teaching, offer passionate, God-centered worship, establish deep friendships with one another, and live out a life of service and mission as we proclaim the gospel. This unity in action produced by the Spirit serves as the basis for effectively and attractively bringing Christ to a world which so desperately needs him.

The History of Triangle Grace Church

Studies begun in the 1960's indicated a need for another Presbyterian church to be located in southwest Durham County, North Carolina. With the development of the Research Triangle Park, the area was sure to grow. In 1966, with the help of Granville Presbytery and the Durham Presbyterian Council, a seven acre tract of land was purchased from the Durham County Board of Education near the intersection of highways 54 and 55. The church was quickly organized and the first service of worship was held on March 5, 1967 at Lowes Grove Elementary School with Dr. I.M. Bagnol conducting the service. Triangle Presbyterian Church was officially recognized by Granville Presbytery on September 10, 1967 with a charter membership of thirty-one.

In May of 1969 the church broke ground for a multipurpose sanctuary/fellowship hall and worshiped in that facility until February 1986. Developers of the Park Forty Office Plaza made a substantial offer to purchase the land and facility, and the property was sold. The congregation utilized the income and bought nearly six acres located four miles west of the old location at the corner of highway 54 and Tudor Place. A new facility containing a sanctuary, fellowship hall, administrative space and educational rooms was built with the proceeds of the sale of the old property. The congregation moved into the facility and held the first worship



service on October 11, 1987. The new facility was dedicated to the glory of God on December 6, 1987 during the 20th anniversary year of the Triangle congregation.

When the congregation took occupancy of the new facility it was totally debt-free. This facility was quickly outgrown and in 1993 the congregation participated in a capital fund campaign which resulted in major additions to the sanctuary and Christian education space. This addition was dedicated to God's service on June 4, 1995. A second expansion began in 2002 adding a Family Life Center, full-size commercial kitchen, a Welcome Center, 5 additional classrooms, 2 offices, and more restrooms. This addition was dedicated to the Glory of God on March 30, 2003. The membership grew to approximately 500 people with over 700 attending worship on Sundays.

In 2016 the church transitioned denominations from the PCUSA into ECO, a Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. This move allowed the congregation to remain faithful to its historic commitment to Jesus Christ and to the holy scriptures which witness to his Lordship. Concurrent to embracing this new denomination, Triangle Presbyterian Church adopted a new name, Triangle Grace Church.

During its 50+ years of ministry, Triangle Presbyterian Church, now Triangle Grace Church, has been served by six senior pastors. Herman J. Womeldorf, the organizing pastor, served from 1967-1972. He was succeeded by Joseph A. Greer during

1973-1976. Al Dimmock served the congregation in 1977-78. Lee Adkins, who retired in December 1986, served Triangle from 1979-1986. Ray Cobb, began his years of service in August of 1987, retiring in 2022 after 34 years of faithful leadership. Kris Perkins, who served 25 years as a pastor at Park Street Church in Boston, MA, became the Senior Pastor in 2022 after co-pastoring with Rev. Cobb for six months. The church has been served by six Associate Pastors as well, David Crow (1994-1995), Steve Braswell (1997-2003), Janise Matyas Smith (2005-2008), and Casey Clark (2009-2016). Currently Jeff Spainhour and Molly Williamson serve as Associate Pastors, Jeff since 2003 and Molly since 2021.

The Ministries of Triangle Grace Church

Acts 2 described four areas of life importance to the body of Christ - discipleship, worship, community, and mission. Each are a priority for Triangle Grace Church.



Discipleship

Triangle Grace Church holds a high view of scripture believing that it is fully sufficient to guide all aspects of our lives in faith and practice. The study of the Bible is central to our corporate life together as we proclaim the Word in worship, study scripture in classes, and apply the counsel of God in small groups and personal devotion. Teaching settings are provided on Sundays mornings and Wednesday evening for all ages centered on understanding scripture.

We encourage everyone to be a part of a small group in which God's Word plays a central role as well. In such settings, accountability and encouragement find their best opportunities to help us grow spiritually and live faithfully in school, work, and at home. Beyond small groups, unique events are held throughout the year to provide additional means of faith development including retreats, conferences, and worship services.

A robust small group experience is offered through the season of Lent called the Lenten Discipleship Initiative. In the summer a children's and adult vacation bible school program is offered. Youth attend summer camps which offer engaging discipleship opportunities.

Community

One of our major priorities is to deepen relationships, friendships, and connection among those who attend Triangle Grace Church. We believe that this is best accomplished by making sure each group of Triangle Grace are intentional about developing relationships with those who are involved. For this reason, we call all of the groups which gather at our church, "Intentional Communities."

Some of these groups are SERVE groups focusing more on serving others. Groups like our facilities team, those who garden together, our hospitality team, and praise band are groups who are focused on a task to accomplish. As these service opportunities are carried out side-by-side, life is shared – praying together, eating together, getting to know one another better.

Similarly, many of the groups within our church are GROW groups focused on spiritual growth such as the Wednesday Night Bible Study, small groups, or Christian Education classes. The identified touch point is studying and conversing about biblical truth. However, as such gatherings occur, relationships develop through shared life.



Our hope is each group that is a part of Triangle Grace Church views themselves as an Intentional Community. Whether a group is a SERVE group or a GROW group, each group commits to fostering deeper friendships through their shared life together.

Throughout the year, Triangle Grace offers churchwide events to extend opportunities for fellowship. Evening dinners, cookouts, afternoon social activities, and retreats are meaningful ways to build relationships within the church. After our worship service, a fellowship time with refreshments is offered in the room across from the sanctuary which has been a recent highlight in our life together.

A very active team giving attention to congregational care ministers compassionately to those involved in our church. This includes a prayer shawl ministry, card writing group, prayer team, care-takers support group, Divorce Care, prayer group, and transportation assistance.

Missions

Triangle Grace Church believes that Jesus' concluding commandment spoken to his first disciples in the gospel of Matthew applies to us as well, "Go into the world and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." (Mat 28:18) To that end supporting world missions is a growing priority of our church. Triangle Grace partners with a number of organizations through prayer and financial gifts in areas of the world which include Haiti, Thailand, Nepal, Kenya, and Lebanon. Many short-term missions trips have been taken by the church members to foster a



world-Christian ethos within our faith community. Our church also supports mission organizations such as [Hope International](#), a gospel-centered microfinance organization and [World Renew](#), a Presbyterian relief agency.

Local commitments also are central to Triangle Grace's mission work. Organizations such as [Open Table Ministries](#), Iglesia [Emanuel Food Pantry](#), Fayetteville Elementary School Partnership, the [Durham Crop Walk](#), and [Housing for New Hope](#) offer compassionate care for those who possess increased burdens in life. TGC supports [Pregnancy Support Services](#) who provide counsel and care for those experiencing unexpected pregnancies. We also offer our facilities to a number of community organizations for the common good of our region. A [Pre-School](#) is hosted by the church during the week which provides outreach opportunities with the local community.

Worship

Worship is the highest priority of our church. It is our goal to glorify God as we gather particularly on Sundays offering him praise and adoration.

Musicians are key to assisting the congregation in our worship of God. We value all genres of music as forms worthy to be used to praise God. Instrumentalists and vocalists comprise a praise band, choir, small orchestra, ensembles, and soloists to lead the church in musical worship. A family praise band made up of children and parents sings monthly, and cantatas are offered by our choir and by our children to the glory of God. Our youth lead in worship in a number of ways throughout the year.



Sermons are geared to be content rich, inspirational, and practical in nature. A goal in our preaching is to gain a greater appreciation for the plan of God and the work of Christ on our behalf. We pray earnestly that what is shared is transformative in the heart by the Holy Spirit leading to greater faith and obedience to Christ.

Prayer is offered corporately and silently during the service. Prayers of adoration punctuate our worship from start to finish. A time of silent confession is offered each week. Following each service opportunity to pray with a church leader is available at the front of the sanctuary.

The church combines both liturgical components and congregational warmth to bring together vertical and horizontal aspects of worship. Liturgical colors are displayed during seasons of liturgical importance as we observe Advent, Lent, and Pentecost. Our Christmas Eve services and Holy Week offer a “higher church” feel. Our practice of communion involves liturgy as well as an intimate community experience as we take the elements together in small groups on the first Sunday of the month. We affirm and welcome the presence of children in our services believing that the best way they can learn to worship God is by watching the example of their parents and the broader church body as a whole. A children’s message during our services is most often tied to the content of the pastor’s sermon later in the service. Alternative opportunities to worship are extended to younger children which run concurrent with our worship services. Nursery care is also available concurrent with our worship services.

Worship services are streamed through Facebook and can be found on the front page of our website.

The Leadership of Triangle Grace Church

Following the model of Presbyterian polity, our local church is elder-led, typically comprised of 12 elders elected by the congregation which form a Session. Pastors are also considered elders and have voting rights among the Session. The Session is assisted by the work of Deacons who give attention to the hands-on needs of ministry within the church. Various other ministry teams involve lay leadership to ensure the mission of the church is carried out. These teams include a local outreach team, a world missions team, a congregational care team, a facilities team, a children’s ministry team, a youth ministry team, an adult education team, and a worship team.

The staff of the church are paid and trained leaders who are entrusted with



oversight of most areas of the church's life working in conjunction with the Session, Deacons, and Ministry Teams to ensure that everyone is moving forward together.

Currently the staff is comprised of:

- A Senior Pastor
- Associate Pastor of Youth and Families
- Associate Pastor of Discipleship
- Director of Children's Ministries
- Director of Music
- Director of Young Adults & Welcome
- Director of Administration and Operations
- Director of Communication
- Director of TGC Nursery School
- Keyboard Accompanist

Triangle Grace Church actively seeks interns from Duke Divinity School, seminaries, and local university campuses who affirm our Essential Tenets and are seeking ministry experience within the local church.



Communications of Triangle Grace Church

The primary means of church communication occurs through an email newsletter sent out each Friday called **TGC E-News**. You can [sign up](#) for E-News by visiting our website. Our [website](#) also provides up-to-date information of ongoing events and activities of the church.

An App called "**Church Center**" is [now available](#) for congregational use which is an exemplary tool offering channels for sign-ups, calendar, giving, church directory, events, and more.

The **Sunday church bulletin** offers concise information about key events, but is not comprehensive in nature. Key announcements about upcoming activities are made during our worship service.

A **children's ministry email newsletter** and a **youth ministry email newsletter** are under development.

A [YouTube channel](#) is available for Triangle Grace which hosts pastor sermons, worship services, and special video presentations.

Triangle Grace Church has a [Facebook](#) page which you can sign up for which provides a link to our streaming services for worship as well as reminders of upcoming activities and pictures of past events.

An **email prayer chain** is active to inform congregants of immediate needs for prayer.

TRIANGLE GRACE CHURCH
E-NEWS

March 24, 2023

HOLY WEEK

HOLY WEEK AT TGC

Holy Week begins next Sunday April 2 which is Palm Sunday. We view our Holy Week experience as a week-long worship service in which the benediction will not be offered until Easter. Each service walks through an important moment in the last week of Jesus' life leading up to the cross and resurrection. We introduce a higher church worship format to create a heightened awareness of the importance of the weeklong remembrance and celebration. After our Palm Sunday service we will hold a communion service on Maundy Thursday to

SUNDAY WORSHIP GUIDE

Dead Bones Live Sermon Series
Title: "Assured"
Preaching: Kris Perkins
Scripture: [Ezekiel 37:14](#)

LDI Groups: 9:00 AM
Service Time/Livestream: 10:15AM
Fellowship time to follow

[Sunday Bulletin](#)
[Children's Bulletin](#)
[Live Stream](#)

GO TO
[Adult Discipleship](#)
[Children & Families](#)
[Community Outreach](#)

Questions for Reflection

How would you describe the theology of ministry which previous churches employed?
How does that compare with the opening sections of what is described above for Triangle Grace?

What do you see as the primary responsibility of a local church like Triangle Grace? How is TGC living up to that, how could the church be strengthened to accomplish this responsibility?

What aspects of Triangle Grace Church do you feel like you know the least about and would like to explore more?

What aspects of the ministry of Triangle Grace Church most excite you?

A Church for You

Session 5

We have thought broadly about Triangle Grace Church the last four weeks exploring its theology, history, mission, polity, and ministries. For our last session, we will talk about Triangle Grace Church and you.

Being a Part of a Church

God has made us to be in a close relationship with himself and a close relationship with each other.

Remember the prayer that Jesus spoke which we considered last week, “May they be one just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they be in us.” * The language Jesus uses here is important identifying God as “Father.” It reminds us not simply of unified relationship, but of familial relationship. In some authentic way those who have accepted Christ as their Savior, those with whom we worship week-to-week, are truly our spiritual and eternal family.

This is not to be taken lightly, we love each other as brothers and sisters walking through life’s challenges together. It is our responsibility to

care for one another, encourage one another, provide for one another, and bear with one another just as any other family is committed to do for one another. We rejoice with those who rejoice, we mourn with those who mourn, we look not to our own interests but to the interest of others before ourselves. That’s what families do.

To live apart from ever-deepening relationships with other Christians is to miss entirely the point of the work Christ has accomplished for us.* His glory is seen and manifested through the kinds of relationship we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ. If you are a Christian, you should be committed in such a way to a local church.

The Biblical Imagery of Church “Membership”

Another way the apostle Paul expresses the intimate relationship Christians have with one another is described by the language of a body as we also noted last week. 1 Corinthians 12 says, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”*

The imagery emphasizes three things about us. First, since we are the body of Christ, it means that his personhood and Spirit dwell in and among us. When we are together, he is there. When we are together, his love is there. John says that “No one has seen God, but when we love one another he lives in us and his love is made complete among us. Jesus called his own body the temple of God.* Similarly we are also called by Paul both the temple built by Jesus* and his body to emphasize the truth that when we are together he dwells among us.*

Secondly, we are called his body to demonstrate that the work we

do is actually the work Christ himself does. Jesus says to his disciples, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”^{*} It is not that they would do such things apart from him, but by him and through him as he continued to dwell with them through his Spirit. We are

in essence his hands and feet in the world today in some real way doing work which is his work.

Finally, the body imagery emphasizes the need and interdependence of those with whom we live our lives out in the local church. Paul writes to the Corinthians, “If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would

the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”^{*} We bring different gifts to our church as enabled by God’s Spirit, each as important as the other, each as necessary for the wellbeing of the body as the other.

ECO Covenant Partners

When people speak of “church membership” it often evokes images connected to joining a parent’s association at school or perhaps a swim club which bring along with it limited responsibilities or certain perks. But from the above section we can see this is not where the concept of “membership” derives as it is applied to the Christian church. Church membership means members (fingers, arms, ears, nose, etc.) of the body of Christ – a metaphorically reality - actual members.



ECO has chosen to employ a different term, “Covenant Partners,” as its primary image to describe its connectional relationship between committed participants in a local church. “Covenant” builds upon the type of devoted relationship God has made with us throughout the scriptures (think of the Abrahamic Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, the New Covenant), and “Partners” emphasizes a unified and collaborative approach in the work to which God has called us. The idea embodied in this language is that those committing to the local church are making a formal, deep commitment to one another to serve side-by-side in relationship with the Lord to carry out God’s redemptive missional plan together.

Covenant Partnership within Triangle Grace Church

Our expectation of those who wish to become a Covenant Partner at Triangle Grace Church is that each would have a heartfelt desire to continue to grow in their relationship with Christ and with those who call Triangle Grace their church family. Covenant Partners also need to be comfortable and in substantial agreement with the Essential Tenets of ECO knowing that they are the standards and teachings to which the church holds.

In the coming weeks a dinner will be held in which elders and staff are invited to gather with you. In that setting, those moving through this process will share about their walk with Christ and how they came to trust in him. At the next Session meeting after that dinner, your name will be presented before the elders

that they may formally affirm your candidacy as a Covenant Partner of the church. Following this we will designate a worship service to receive you as a Covenant Partner of the church. During that service you will be asked five questions which upon your affirmation will lead to your corporate acceptance as Covenant Partners of Triangle Grace Church.

Following this public affirmation, the church will express its commitment to you, the pastor overseeing your reception as a Covenant Partner will pray for you, and the elders of the church will extend the right hand of fellowship to you as representative of the congregation's embrace of you as a Covenant Partner.

The Five Questions asked of New Covenant Partners

Do you acknowledge yourself to be sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving God's displeasure, and without hope except in God's sovereign mercy?

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon Christ alone for your salvation as offered in the Gospel?

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?

Do you promise to serve Christ in the church by supporting and participating in its service to God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?

Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church and promise to further its purity and peace?

Coming to Triangle Grace from Another Church

If you have recently moved to The Triangle region of North Carolina from another area of the state, country, or world, we want to encourage you to find a local church which you can call your home, settle into it, and become members. We truly hope that might be Triangle Grace Church! Even if you think you will only be in the area for a short time, it is a good idea to grow roots quickly and as deeply as possible. Such a commitment will be blessed by God as the church pours into your life and you edify the church with your gifts. It is not a rare occurrence that those who think they are here for only a short time (such as graduate students) end up remaining in the region longer than they anticipated because of the quality of life in the Triangle and the blessing of the church family which they have joined.

If you are considering Triangle Grace Church as your church home after participating in the life of another local church in our area, we hope that you will take time to reflect on this decision in a prayerful manner. Such decisions are difficult ones because it is likely you have many friends at your previous church. You may have also served in leadership roles and your absence from that church will be felt.

Part of the reason for your departure may be some level of dissatisfaction with aspects of the church's community life, teaching, practices, or focus. Another possibility may be that your giftings and passion for service do not match well with the mission and opportunities within your current setting. Others may find that their children have not been able to develop a community of friends within the previous church. Such

issues may very well be valid reasons to seek out a new church family for the sake of your own spiritual health, relational connections, commitment to theological integrity, and sense of calling. If this is the case, interact with the pastors of your previous church as well as pastors from Triangle Grace to enter into a mutual time of discernment together. Sharing such concerns, particularly with leaders from the church which you may be leaving can be difficult, but it is always helpful for those in leadership to hear concerns presented in love so that they can evaluate the health of their church and consider whether corrections or adjustments are needed.

If you were a member of your previous church, it is necessary to transfer your membership from that congregation to Triangle Grace. Once we have received the name of your previous church, we will send a letter to them stating that you have expressed a desire to become a Covenant Partner of Triangle Grace Church. This assists your previous church's efforts to keep accurate records of their church membership.

Joining By Profession of Faith

If you would like to become a Covenant Partner of Triangle Grace Church and have never been a member of a previous church, you will be joining by "profession of faith." This means that your desire to be a Covenant Partner of our church is grounded in a faith in Jesus Christ which has not been publicly acknowledged before a congregation. This extends the opportunity of our church family to be able to rejoice in the work God has done in your life together with you as you join the church. If you have not been baptized, the pastor overseeing your More Grace group will set up the opportunity to do so either in a service prior to your reception as a Covenant Partner or in the service itself just before you join.

Life at Triangle Grace as a Covenant Partners

Formally, becoming a Covenant Partner gives you a voice and vote when we gather for meetings of the congregation to elect church officers and approve certain aspects of the financial commitments of the church. It also opens up the opportunity to serve in formal leadership roles such as elder and deacon in the future.

Beyond these formal functions perhaps even more important is that being a Covenant Partner means you are committing yourself to the well being of our church family, to serve alongside of your brothers and sisters in Christ, praying for one another, caring for one another, and seeking out together God's missional will for our church. Let's consider six ways to do that.



Six Ways to Contribute to the Church

1. Attend Worship
2. Participate in an Intentional Community
3. Use Your Gifts
4. Attend to Household Duties
5. Give Financially
6. Pray for Your Church

Attend Worship

Primary to this commitment and calling is to worship together as the family of God whenever the opportunity arises. Each time you stand next to your brothers and sisters in Christ on Sundays singing together and giving witness to your faith, you are an immeasurable encouragement to those around you. If you are not there sitting side-by-side and standing shoulder-to-shoulder, you are very much missed. Our worship together is the high moment of our community life as we gather to praise our Father in heaven and his Son our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Participate in an Intentional Community

We call all of our groups at Triangle Grace, “Intentional

Communities.” This means whether the group is focused more on discipling and spiritual growth opportunities (like Sunday morning classes or small groups) or if they are shaped to provide service opportunities (like the choir or our local food bank team), they are all also meant to be a primary means in which our hearts are knit together in relationship. Every Covenant Partner should be able to identify at least one intentional community in which they are involved as a way to deepen their friendships with those who are a part of our church family.

Use Your Gifts

We believe that God has uniquely gifted each person who is a part of our church both by natural and spiritual endowment. The reason God has brought you to our church is to help build it up

through the application of such gifts. If you are new to Triangle Grace, you bring fresh eyes and needed talents to edify and strengthen the church in ways previously unseen. Consider how such giftings can best be used in our context. Often a person’s passions for church missional life and their giftings go hand-in-hand.

What is on your heart for Triangle Grace Church and how might you help bring such advancement about through the ways God has uniquely gifted you? Find one particular area of the church connected to your giftings and passions to pour yourself into to develop, strengthen, grow, and bless our church family.

Attend to Household Duties

One way we can view Sundays is like a great weekly Thanksgiving gathering to express our gratitude to God for what he has done for us as his children. Think about what it takes to pull together our Thanksgiving experience each November on Thanksgiving Day. The house is cleaned, the turkey is prepared early and cooked all day, pies are made, tables are brought out of the basement for extra guests, forks and knives and plates and cups and napkins are put at each place setting, and the preparations go on and on.

Of course the clean-up is epic as well! Oh how it takes many hands to make Thanksgiving happen!

Everyone should participate in at least one way to help make our Sunday gatherings happen. It is just what it means to be a part of a family, doing the chores necessary to be able to live life out together. On Sundays there are many needs of which each person should have a sense of responsibility for at least one of them: Our church is better off if each person finds one way to assist in our gatherings each Sunday. This may or may not be associated with what you may consider your spiritual gifting. Regardless, we all need to help out, it's what it means to be a family. See the adjacent blue chart for ideas on how you can serve on Sundays.

Financial Giving

From a financial perspective, Triangle Grace Church operates solely through the monetary gifts given by those who are committed to the missions and ministries of our faith community. Such gifts, however, are not "dues" or "payment for services," but are given as tithes and offerings to God as a tangible manifestation of gratitude for the work he has done in our lives. Tithing was established

TGC Sunday Household Duties

- We need to welcome people well.
- We need to make sure the campus is safe.
- We need to make sure our children are cared for well.
- We need Covenant Partners to bake, set up, and clean up to provide refreshments and fellowship.
- We need vocalists and instrumentalists to provide music to lead our worship.
- We need teachers to disciple both adults and youth in our Sunday classes.
- We need a team of people to set up communion elements and clean up after the service that we may participate in the Lord's Supper together monthly.

by God to help his people acknowledge his ownership and provision of everything they had.* A tithe was 10% of a person's yearly increase and was set aside as an offering holy unto the Lord.*

In the New Testament tithing is affirmed by Jesus.* Paul speaks about giving in 2Corinthians 8:1-15 as he describes the Macedonian church. These Christians gave sacrificially even though they were poor because of their trust in God's continued provision for them. (verses 1-6) Paul encouraged the Corinthians to follow their example and excel in "the grace of giving." (verse 7) Giving is not to be done under compulsion, but out of the overflow of a thankful heart for all God has done for us, and

according to our means. (verses 8-15) Our giving is to be the instrument through which God provides for each member in the body of Christ, "...at the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn your plenty will supply what you need." (Verse 14)

Our church's total budget is over one million dollars which supports staff salaries, ministries, facilities, and external benevolences. Such benevolences given to local and world missions make up approximately 20% of our church budget.

Some wonder if tithing is only meant to be given through the local church. From a biblical

viewpoint, tithing is not a gift to the church, but given to the Lord. From that perspective, the estimate of 10% giving may be partly designated to local church's finances, but may also include charitable giving outside of the local church. Paul also speaks of the spiritual gift of generosity.* Some are called and gifted uniquely to offer above and beyond a tithe to assist kingdom work in the local church and beyond.

The church provides opportunities to give electronically, through the mail, or in person on Sundays. Some also work with investment and

estate planners to include charitable giving to the local church and other organizations as a part of end-of year giving or in their wills making funds available upon death to continue to sustain the work of the church.

Pray for Your Church

Paul writes to Timothy, "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our

Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."* We need to pray for our church, and we need in particular to pray for our church leaders and missionaries. It is by the presence of God's Spirit that any fruit is born, and so we should intercede for our church family that the Lord would be gracious to us by the pouring out of his Spirit. When you gather with others from our church, be sure to take time together to pray, and when you sit alone during times set aside for personal devotions, pray for the wellbeing of Triangle Grace Church.

Questions for Reflection

What is one area of weakness or potential growth for Triangle Grace Church that you may feel called to help address in the future?

What have others affirmed about your presence and leadership? What are natural and spiritual gifts that you have used in the past to serve Christ and his church?

Is there an area of great passion you have for Triangle Grace or the Christian church in general?

What other questions do this session raise for you about becoming a Covenant Partner of Triangle Grace Church?



TRIANGLE GRACE
CHURCH