

Membership Course



Welcome to the course! So, you've started coming along to Stony Stratford Community Church, you feel that you want get more involved, but you'd like to find out more about the church. The Membership Course is just the thing for you. Over the short course you can find out about our vision and values, our mission and activities, as well as how to become a member.



Membership is not about getting your laminated membership card, paying your annual subscription and receiving the monthly newsletter by e-mail! It is about becoming part of Christ's body, the church, and as such coming together with other members to worship, pray, study God's Word and discern His leading for the church through the membership meetings. Membership here at Stony Stratford Community Church is proactive, exciting and hands-on!

Why have a course? Because we want to help you to understand how the church operates; why we believe in this model of church "membership" where other denominations do it differently, and the importance of the church members meeting.

You may be familiar with the course, have done parts of it before, or read it though before, but we would encourage you to go through this again. Why? Because it is amazing the way that we see things more clearly or spot things we never realised before when we do it again. It may also be that you have questions that have arisen in your mind and we will do our best to answer these for you.

It is our prayer that as we work through this course together you will feel God's leading in this process, and that the Holy Spirit will reveal more to you about the Father, the Son and Himself as well as the Church and God's plan and purposes for it.

We would encourage you to read though the material before the sessions so that you know what's coming up and so that you have time to formulate any questions you may have.

It will be good to get to know you better through the Belonging, Believing and Becoming course and we hope you enjoy it.

Belonging, Believing and Becoming ... Course Topics:

- Session 1: What is a Christian & why be baptized?
- Session 2: Holy Spirit baptism and His gifts
- Session 3: How should I run my life?
- Session 4: Leadership in the church and the importance of our women.
- Session 5: How does the church run its life?

Understanding bible references

As we go through the course you'll need a bible to look up a variety of bible passages to help you in each section. We would recommend the New International Version (NIV) or New King James Version (NKJV) or the Living Bible. If you usually use the message we'd suggest not using that for this course because of the paraphrase text.

Throughout the course you will see at the end of each section a box called "Growth Point". This is something to reflect upon as you reach the end of each section with a personal challenge for you as well.

You will also notice some light grey boxes where you are invited to write down questions to ask Jacqui, Ross or one of the Elders, or thoughts you may have that you want to ponder as time goes by.

Growth Point

At this point let's just pause to look at a growth point. We have seen what a Christian is. We have identified God's amazing grace and we now know that as a blank canvas, ready for God to paint His plan and purposes on our lives, through the church as our extended family. It would be all too easy to become Grace abusers. What do we mean by this? Because God has forgiven us and will go on forgiving us as we repent of the sin we will still commit in our lives, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking, 'it's ok to commit this sin ... I can come to God afterwards and ask for forgiveness'. Make no mistake. God is aware of our attitudes and motives. This type of attitude is abusing God's grace, cheapening it. For God to give us freedom and forgiveness from our sin, it cost Him His Son's life. So, when we are tempted to sin, let's have that picture of Jesus hanging on the cross in our minds and remember what it cost Him, and then let us turn away from that sin.



Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Session 1: What is a Christian & Why be Baptised?

A Christian is someone who has decided and made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ and asked Him into their lives. For some people this was a specific point in time. For others they cannot name a date and time but know that over period of time they made that commitment. When you make that commitment, something happens. It is what Jesus said needed to happen, in John 3, if anyone was to see the kingdom of heaven.

A new person is born, a child of God, a new son, a new daughter, destined for eternal life. This process required power but it is not yours! You, like any other infant, will have to grow up. This requires your co-operation, but the power for you to grow up is not yours. It's God's power at work within us, who believe.

Our part is to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in allowing our new life to grow at the expense of the old life. We do this by simple, humble, obedience to God in our lives, who loved us and gave himself for us (Titus 2:14).

Everything we do for Him now comes out of a response of love to His grace and mercy. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit have always loved us and always will. It does not depend on what we have done or will do for Them. Our acceptance by the Father has been totally determined by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross!

So, how should we live as Christians? Well, the bible says in Matthew Ch. 7 "by their fruit you shall recognise them". In other words, being a Christian is a proactive life, not an insular one and a Christian should be displaying signs of being a follower of Jesus in the way they live ... their thought, words and actions. Paul calls this the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). Have a read of this passage and ask yourself does my life display these characteristics?

Being a Christian is a huge privilege, open to anyone who will accept their own failings, repent, turn to Jesus and ask Him to forgive them. You see, rightly we don't deserve forgiveness. God is Holy and cannot look upon our sinful lives. But God is also Love and even though He created a perfect sinless world which mankind chose to turn their back on in favour of their own desires, God sent His son, Jesus, to pay the ultimate price for our forgiveness through His death on the cross. This was called God's GRACE, which means getting something we do not deserve.



The old hymn, "Amazing Grace" is well known ...

*"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me...
I once was lost but now am found,
Was blind, but now, I see.*

Now, whether we want to accept it or not, we have to realise that we cannot live our new life that God has given us by ourselves. We were created to have relationship with God. Without that we will find we get into all sorts of

mess and our lives will feel empty and meaningless. Through His amazing Grace, God gives us purpose, fresh hope and vision ... if we let Him!

Read Ephesians Chs. 1 & 2 and think about this Amazing Grace that God showed by sending His son for you!

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So, you have become a Christian. In other words as Jesus says you have been “born again”. You have a new life, the old is gone and the new has come. You’re a clean sheet, a blank canvas ready for your new life to take shape. But you can’t do this by yourself. We were created to be in community with each other, not hermits by ourselves. That’s why God said in Genesis 2:18 that it wasn’t good for Adam to be alone so He made Eve to be His helper. The church is where Christians come together to help each other to worship God and to study His word and be empowered by His Holy Spirit (we’ll look at this in more depth in section 2).

Growth Point

We have seen what a Christian is. We have identified God’s amazing grace and we now know that as a blank canvas we are ready for God to paint His plan and purposes on for our lives, through the church as our extended family. It would be all too easy to become Grace Abusers. What do we mean by this? Because God has forgiven us and will go on forgiving us as we repent of the sin we will still commit in our lives, we can easily fall into the trap of thinking, ‘it’s ok to commit this sin ... I can come to God afterwards and ask for forgiveness’. Make no mistake. God is aware of our attitudes and motives. This type of attitude is abusing God’s grace, cheapening it. For God to give us freedom and forgiveness from our sin, it cost Him His Son’s life. So, when we are tempted to sin, let’s have that picture of Jesus hanging on the cross in our minds and remember what it cost Him, and then let us ask Him to help us turn away from committing that sin.



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Session 1: What is a Christian & Why be Baptised?



It will not have escaped your notice that the name of this church contains the words Member of the “Baptist” Union. However we are not the only church which engages in this practice of Baptism which can seem strange to some people. Actually virtually all mainstream churches do baptism in one form or another. The practice ranges from a light sprinkling with water to being totally submerged. It is the totally submerged method which we use at our church, although the technical term is “baptism by total immersion”. The reason we believe in total submersion and not sprinkling as some denominations use is because the word “Baptise” comes directly from the Greek word “Baptizo” which means “dip, submerge or immerse”. Jesus was submerged in the Jordan when He was baptised and although Jesus had committed no sin, and therefore technically didn’t need to be baptised, He did it as an example for us to follow. And baptism is a symbolic way of saying we have died to the old life and are raised to a new life in Jesus. When you sink under the water you are saying to those watching, “My old selfish self is being put to death.” When you rise up out of the water you are saying, “Here I am again; risen to a new life, as a new creature, born again by the power of the Spirit, serving my Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ”. Paul describes baptism as being like Jesus’ death and resurrection in which we share. Romans 6:3 & 4.

So being laid backwards, or submerged, is like being laid in a grave, resembling dying to the old way of life and being lifted up again out of the water to our new life in Jesus. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward change. Becoming a Christian is a personal, inward decision. Baptism makes that personal decision public for the church to celebrate.

However, baptism isn’t just that outward sign of an inward change. Something happens at baptism. When Jesus was baptised in Matthew Ch 3 the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a Dove and God spoke from heaven saying “This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.” When you are baptised it is unlikely you will see a Dove land on you, or hear a voice from heaven. But inside of you in some unexplainable way, God blesses you because of your obedience and public declaration of your faith in Him. It is a key point in your Christian life.



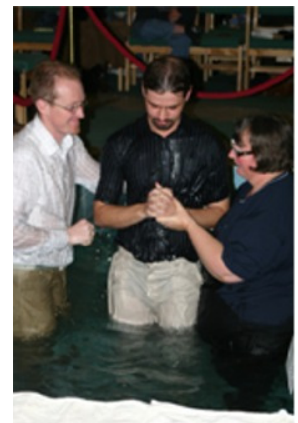
So, what happens in a baptismal service? Well, baptismal services are always occasions of fun, great joy and profound worship. In the centre of our church building is a covered pool called a baptistry. Before a baptism the pool is filled with water and heated until it is warm. During the service the person to be baptised shares their testimony briefly i.e. how He or she met Jesus, what He’s done in their life and what they believe about Him. He or she then proceeds down the steps into the pool, where, usually, two members of the Eldership will be waiting. They take a firm grip on the person and say, “Upon your confession of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord we baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”. The person is then gently, but swiftly,

lowered backwards into the water so that they are totally immersed and disappear. Breathing during this stage by the person is definitely discouraged!! He or she is then quickly pulled back up and is prayed for that the Holy Spirit will continue to fill Him or her. Then they exit the pool and go and get dried off and changed in a side room.

So, why do we practice this? Well, first of all look at Peter's response to the crowd's question on the Day of Pentecost. "Brethren what shall we do?" Acts 2:38. The process was simple ... "Repent and be baptised". In other words, repent (which means make that 180 degree turn away from sin and back to God. It is God saying "come back to me"); make that inward commitment to Jesus Christ, and then declare it publicly through baptism.

Jesus also gave a command to the disciples regarding us. Matthew 28:19. This is why we baptise, because Jesus told us to in this passage which is sometimes called "The Great Commission"!

When should baptism occur? Well, on the Day of Pentecost people believed and were baptised straight away. Some people leave it a long time, which isn't advisable, although when children make a commitment to follow Jesus sometimes we don't recommend baptism straight away because they may not fully understand what they are doing and we wouldn't want them to get baptised very young and then wish they had waited. However, by the time children are around 11 years old they are able to understand and this course helps in that process. The important thing to remember is not to get hung up on age but to simply follow what the early followers of Jesus did in Matthew 3:6 to believe and be baptised.



Sometimes for us it may take a few weeks before we can baptise a new Christian because logistically we have to plan in a service to baptise someone where the church family can come together to celebrate this very special occasion.

Growth Point

For Jesus, His baptism signalled the beginning of His public ministry. Up until that point when we was 30 years old, we only read about His birth and barmitzva aged 12 (when He took a trip to the temple) in the bible. For the other years we no nothing of what He was doing, but we can make a pretty established guess that God was preparing Him for His public ministry.

When you are baptised you may have already been involved in some area of church life and ministry, but likely you may not have. So, before and after your baptism start to pray and ask God what area of ministry He want's you to be involved in. Remember, the Christain life is not a private and secluded one. It should be public and proactive. Here at Stony Stratford Community Church we operate Mission Shaped Communities or MSCs, and these are a



perfect way to meet with other Christians in worship, prayer and studying God's Word as well as getting involved in a public ministry or mission. Why not talk to Jacqui or Ross about this as you pray it through?

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Session 2: Holy Spirit Baptism and His Gifts



The Holy Spirit of Jesus, often displayed graphically as a dove, historically has been much neglected by the church, although, thank God, He has not neglected the Church. In this century, and particularly over the last three decades or so, there has been a much deeper understanding of who He is and what He does. This has had an immense impact on the lives of many Christians.

However He was not invented at the beginning of this century; He has been at work since before time began. He is the third member of the “Trinity” and with the Father and the Son He has always been around - one of the ‘Three who are Three in One’. (A great mystery!). We first read about Him in Genesis 1:2.

So, who is the Holy Spirit and what does He do? The answers to these two questions are interwoven and far too great to encapsulate in a short course, but we shall give you some pointers to help you on your way.

Have a look at some descriptions the bible gives of the Holy Spirit

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| • Matthew 3:16 | • Isaiah 61:1 | • Hebrews 3:7-11 |
| • Acts 2:2 | • Ephes. 1:13 | • Acts 2:38 |
| • Acts 2:3-4 | • 2 Cor. 1:21 | • Luke 1:35 |
| • John 7:37-39 | • Isaiah 63:14 | |

What happened at Pentecost?

Throughout the whole of the Old Testament and even the beginning of the new, in the gospels, the Holy Spirit was only given to certain people for certain ministries / missions. However, before Jesus went back into heaven He promised His disciples that He would send a Helper who would always be with them ... the Holy Spirit. Some days after Jesus had returned into heaven, on the day of Pentecost (as it is known), the disciples were all gathered together in worship. The bible says that there came a sound like a rushing wind and what looked like tongues of fire came to rest on each of the disciples heads. The disciples were anointed with or baptized in the Holy Spirit. It was this baptism that gave them the passion with which to pursue their ministry but amazingly now, anyone who believes in the name of Jesus, who repents and turns to Jesus, can be baptized with the Holy Spirit. For the disciples, the outward sign of this baptism in the Holy Spirit was that they spoke in “Tongues”. This can sound very strange if we have never heard it before, but it is simply a heavenly language that people use to worship and pray with.



So, it is evident that the Holy Spirit is powerful and life transforming.

Many Christians, throughout the History of the Church, have testified to powerful experiences of the Holy Spirit in their lives. This has led to the belief that we can normally expect the baptism in the Holy Spirit subsequent to our conversion i.e. a more powerful experience of him. Very often when people give their heart to Jesus, they become a Christian, and then at some later point they ask God to fill them with His Holy Spirit. Sometimes there

are obvious signs that this has taken place ... laughing, speaking in tongues, an overwhelming sense of peace etc. If we look in scripture, we see in Acts Chapter 2 when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the disciples started to speak in tongues (a heavenly language). At other times there isn't an obvious outward sign but the person knows God has answered their request.

But there's more! The Holy Spirit will not leave us alone; and if we come before God confessing our sins, turning from them, trusting for forgiveness, committing every area of our lives to Him and believing that He will equip us to do those things He has set aside for us, and then ask Him to fill us, then it is guaranteed that He will.

There are many instances in the scriptures when the Holy Spirit powerfully worked in Christians, they are often described as being "filled with the Holy Spirit". So, when you have asked for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and been prayed with to receive this you will have been baptized in the Holy Spirit. It isn't something which God only gives when He feels you are ready. The Holy Spirit is freely available to all who ask. The new you is pervaded through and through with Jesus' nature, you have His DNA embedded in you! As you yield to His will so the new you will wage war on the old you and you will grow in your relationship with Him.

People have a whole range of different experiences of the filling of the Holy Spirit. He blows where He wills, and works in individuals in the way He chooses. Some seem to experience quantum leaps, some a more gradual and quiet working of the Spirit. However one thing is sure, all who have asked will have been baptised in Him



and are being empowered by him.

You belong to Christ and so you have His Spirit. However, we constantly need to ask for Him to keep on filling us, (Eph.5:18). It is absolutely imperative! We leak! In other words as we live in the World and get worn down by it, so we constantly need to ask the Holy Spirit to top us up again, to fan into flame again the fire which He started within us.

Some long for God to fill them with His Spirit. Some are nervous about it. Some are not so sure they want it. As Nicky Gumbel (who wrote the Alpha course) says in the Alpha course says "Why not ask God to make you thirsty? God takes us as we are. When we thirst and ask, He will give us the free gift of the water of life." Now read Luke 11:5-13 and rejoice and ask and keep on asking. You will receive His Holy Spirit. This is true! It says so in the Bible! Believe and receive!

Believe this also —Ephes.3:20-21 and 2:8-10. God's works require great power. You haven't got it. His Spirit has! The amazing thing is that He wants to channel it through you!

So what are the gifts of the Spirit? 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 tells us what those gifts are ...

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still

another the interpretation of tongues. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.

When we are baptised in the Holy Spirit we don't suddenly get given all these gifts, or if we are given one or two we won't be proficient in using them. It takes time and practice. And that's the great delight. That God love watching and helping us, His children to grow in the gifts He has given us through His Holy Spirit.

Growth Point

History has shown that moving in the gifts of the Holy Spirit is considered by some to be a mark of how spiritual you are, and certainly in America if you couldn't speak in tongues some would even question your faith! **MAKE NO MISTAKE**, this is wrong teaching, and completely incorrect. For some people who move in the Power of the Holy Spirit they feel things, they speak in tongues regularly, they get words and pictures from God etc. For others, they equally move in the power of the Holy Spirit but the outward signs of this are not so apparent; and that is ok. Not everyone falls down under the Power of the Holy Spirit when they're prayed for, not everyone shakes, don't feel like you are missing something. God is sovereign and works in different ways with different people. And beware of just seeking an "experience". Whilst experiences of God are important, many have fallen for experiences they thought were from God but were in fact from the devil.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Session 3: How Should I Run My Life?

HOW DO I RUN MY LIFE?

Let's assume that you have been baptised and have been welcomed into membership. So, how do you run your life as a Christian? What does the bible say?

If you want to grow you need feeding and exercise. But the kind of growth that God wants us to enjoy is of the spiritual kind. Perhaps the simplest way to explain what this means is to say that God wants us to grow up to be like Jesus who was the most spiritual man whoever walked the earth.

Jesus had a body and it must have been a pretty fit with all the walking He did. However, what marked Him out uniquely was His profoundly intimate relationship with His father, His complete dependence on Him and His utter obedience to Him. John 5:19-20 & 30; 8:28-29, 12:47-50

Jesus knew the Father so well and He wants us to do so too, but if we get to know Jesus then we shall certainly get to know the Father. John 14:5-14.



There are six key elements in the Christian life that must all be present and practiced if we are to live and grow as a Christian. These are ...

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| 1. Bible Study | 3. Prayer | 5. Service |
| 2. Worship | 4. Fellowship | 6. Giving |

Why do they all have to be present? Because without them we won't be complete and will be lacking some vital parts and because actually they are all linked together and depend on each other. Look at it like a Christmas roast dinner! A Christmas roast dinner is not a roast dinner without roast potatoes, turkey / beef etc, Brussels, stuffing, pigs-in-blankets, etc. In the same way a full and complete Christian life is not full and complete without these five areas. Let's look at them in more detail.

Bible Study



Bearing in mind the source of the Bible, you will understand that we need to come to it very humbly with the prayer, "Please Holy Spirit show me what this means and what you want me to do with it." You will find the Bible encouraging, stimulating, exciting, challenging, awe inspiring, and at times difficult to understand or uncomfortable. This is only to be expected because God has got a big job of work on His hands to change us to be like His Son. Sometimes we need surgery in order

to get rid of those things which stunt our growth. Read Hebrews 4:12.

This process of surgery never stops! Ask any aged Christian. But don't get scared by this. As we grow and develop in Jesus often the surgery is less painful and more like health checks! Hopefully these older Christians will be able to encourage you by testifying to the fact that in all this God has been right to do it and they are glad He has patiently taken so much trouble.

As you ponder these words in Hebrews 4:12 ask Jesus to show you some things He wants to help you cut out. Too many people today are trying to make us believe that we can find the way to a fulfilling life within ourselves. This is a road to failure. This church believes that we must look outside ourselves, to God, in order to find what we really need. That is why the Bible is supremely important; it shows us very clearly and in great detail how we should lead our lives as a response of love to the Father who loved us before we loved him.

The Bible also teaches us so much about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and so as we study it and apply it to our lives we come to appreciate the surpassing worth of knowing Jesus Christ. Read Philippians 3:7-11.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Worship

God wants everything! Some may struggle to accept this, but the reality is He has a right to ask it of us because He has given us everything we have which is good. He gave up His life for us on the cross, and He is a big and wonderful God. The best place for us to be is in giving Him everything we can because He is worth it. This is "Worship".



In Romans 12:1 & 2 the bible teaches that we should be "A living sacrifice". What does that mean to you? If we look at sacrifice in the Old Testament people often sacrificed a lamb to God. That lamb gave its all ... its life! As far as the bible is concerned being a living sacrifice doesn't mean dying, but it does mean sacrificing everything to God, or, dying to our own desires and agendas and will, and giving that over to Him. Now, that is an easy thing to say but a hard thing to put into practice. Nevertheless, that's what God requires of us, and if we do live as living sacrifices it will bring us so much joy and blessing!

So, how do we continually live as living sacrifices? We worship God in our lives. Worship is not just singing in church. It's not just certain Christian music, CDs etc. Our whole lives are an act of worship ... whatever we do we do it as an act of worship to God ... we do it as though we were doing it for Him.

Worship is an expression of wonder, praise and love. How should we love God? Read Deuteronomy 6:1-9 to find out. This is an extremely challenging command. In what ways could you attempt to obey this extremely challenging command?

Write down a list of the things you know about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and what they have done for you. Then start worshipping. You could speak it out loud, kneel, bow down, or sing.....but just ask the Holy Spirit to help you make it come from the heart. God is actively seeking out such people! John 4:23.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Prayer



This is an amazing privilege! Jesus has made it possible for us to come before God and speak to Him directly. (Always bear in mind the immense price that Jesus paid to make it so.) However, it doesn't stop there. We also have the privilege of listening to him. Is it an easy activity?

Read Paul's comment on prayer and be encouraged by it! *Romans 8:26 & 27*.
We have help!

PRAYER IS RELATIONSHIP.

Prayer is not a ritual. Read *Matthew 6:6 & 7* and *Romans 8:15*.

Prayer is also a two way communication with a very BIG GOD. Read *Genesis 1:16*

Sometimes it is helpful to follow a pattern for prayer. If we don't we can easily find ourselves getting caught up in just asking God for things and not taking time to praise and thank Him and to spend time asking Him to forgive us for the things we have done wrong. One such method is an acrostic entitled "ACTS":

A.....Adoration.....Saying "I love you"

C.....Confession.....Saying "I did this. I didn't do that. I'm so sorry".

T.....Thanksgiving.....Saying "Oh Lord I'm so grateful to you".

S.....Supplication.....Saying "Father, if it be your will, please....."

PRAYER IS THROUGH THE SON.

Read *Ephesians 2:16* and *John 15:16*. Here Jesus talks about praying "in my name". This isn't a magical formula which gets us what we always want? But it gives us the authority with which to pray ... Jesus authority. It's a little bit like when you go to buy something or enquire about something and someone says "when you go mention my name". It shows that you come with someone recommendation and credibility. In this case Jesus says we can come before God and pray in His name, giving us that authority.

Read *Luke 11:1-4*. Why do you think that the disciples were keen to learn how to pray?

PRAYER POINTS

Read *Matthew 6:5-15* and *Luke 18:1-14*. Pick out the important aspects of our prayer life. Then read *Mark 14:38*.

Find a quiet place if you can, (although hassle and pressure often prompt the most fervent prayer)! As with your Bible reading, begin with a time and duration you can cope with; but expect it to grow as you get hungrier and hungrier to know God.

And remember, prayer is a two way conversation. Don't end your prayer time when you have finished talking to God ... listen to what He wants to say to you as well.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Fellowship

Whatever your ideas of church were before you became a Christian and whatever they are now, however positive, they will be a pale reflection of the Church that Jesus has in mind and which the bible portrays!

Look up these references to discover some of the pictures used to describe the Church:

1. *Hebrews 2:9-14 & John 1:12*
2. *1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 4:15 ff*
3. *1 Peter 2:4-10*
4. *Ephesians 5:24-28; Revel. 21:1-4&9, 10.*
5. *Ephesians 6:11-13 (Lots of people in armour)*

All of these powerful images portray a group of people closely bonded together by a common purpose, by love, and by a common leader...Jesus.

Christ's church is the only "organization" going anywhere, and the bible talks about it (in Revelation) being Christ's glorious Bride when He comes again. The church as Christ's body is also an extremely profound and challenging image. It led Calvin, a famous theologian to say "Christ is the Church!"



If the Church is Christ here on earth carrying on with His mission, write down some things that Jesus did while He was here on earth in human form and then ask yourself, "Shouldn't the Church be doing that?" Now read *John 14:9-14*. How does this challenge you?

A young Christian was at a barbeque and was asking a wise old Christian why there was such an emphasis placed on belonging to a Church. He felt He ought to be able to manage alone with God. The old woman said nothing but just plucked out of the barbeque a glowing coal and left it on the side. It quickly cooled off and lost its glow. The young Christian got the point.

If we do not identify with a local Church we lose out on various precious things which Jesus, through the other members, wants to give us. Not only that, we lose the opportunity, through Him in us, to use our gifts for the benefit of our brothers and sisters.

Have a read of the following bible passage to see what we stand to lose out on if we do not have fellowship with other Christians: *Romans 12:5,10,15,16; 14:19; 15:7.14 Galatians 5:13;6:2; 1 Thess.4:18;5:11; 1 Peter 4:9,10; 5:5; James 5:9,16; 1 John 1:7.*

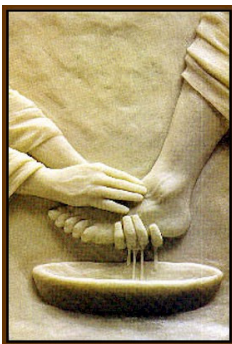
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Service

We need to get straight in our minds why it is we serve. However, perhaps the more important thing to remember is that it is our Lord and Saviour that we seek to serve. Serving Him is an expression of our love for Him. Jesus put it this way in *John 14:15 "If you love me you will keep my commandments."* And He gave us many commandments. Look at *Matthew. 28:18-20* and then read the 11th commandment in *John 13:34.*

Servants of Jesus are basically givers who freely give of themselves in all respects because they have so freely received from Jesus. We give, not to earn His favor, because we are already living in it, but because we love him. Jesus depended for His nourishment on obeying the Father; it is no different for us. Read *John 4:34.*

ARE YOU BEING SERVED?



This is a question which Jesus could be asking of people in the various communities in which we live, work, and play as members of His Church. All Church members, wherever they are, stand at the front line of the Kingdom of God. We are sons and daughters of God, soldiers on watch for the opportunities which He has ready for us to extend the frontiers by serving. Read *Ephesians.2:10.*

Make a list of all the different areas of life in which you operate. We are called to serve in them all, not just in the church building on Sundays.

Think about which areas you feel it would be difficult for you to serve Christ?

We all need to be confident in Christ and who we are in Him i.e. sons of God, believers from whom streams of living water will flow, *John 7:37.* This means that Jesus wants the life giving Spirit to overflow from us!

A Prophecy given for the Church in '97. (An extract)

".....My heart is towards you my children and I desire to make you one; to make you one as I am one with my Son. You will and you must be one, but only as your desires, your personal desires, are burnt up in my love.

Then the unity comes when you are able to be joined together as one and the needs of this one are preferred above the needs of this one, and each of you will prefer the other above yourself; and then the Spirit of Servanthood will come upon this place, and the Spirit of Servanthood will be your mark.

You will go out among this town, this city, as servants, as servant people. You will go with the towel, my children, upon your shoulders. You will go, and you will serve. You will serve out of power, the power of my Spirit, because all your desires have been enmeshed as one with me.....” **Read John 13:1-20**

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

SERVING

By Witnessing. Witnessing means ‘proclaiming Christ and His life in us by the way we act, speak, and think’.

Have a read of *2 Cor.5:11-21* and pick out the motivation for our witness.

A crucial and essential form of witness is found in *John 13:35*. How can we possibly do it? Make a list of the ways in which you feel you are currently witnessing to Jesus; then think of others ways which excite and / or make you a bit nervous.

The 11th Commandment.

John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” has often been called the 11th commandment. It is difficult to work out this command with all 160 of our members and their children. However do not fear, there will be plenty of time in heaven for each of us to obey that command to the full. In the meantime, at Stony Stratford Community Church, we do have a pretty effective system in which you can get started. We have set up groups called Mission Shaped Communities (MSCs) for you to join. These groups have an intentional missional focus. They meet for worship, prayer, ministry, and Bible study on a regular basis, but they are also involved in a missional outreach activity. We believe it is very important for all members to belong to one of these groups. This is the model Jesus used In Luke chapter 10... some learning, then some practical experience, then back for more learning then back out for more practical experience and so on.

Where it is impossible, because of a member’s particularly difficult circumstances i.e. shift work, missionary work in distant lands etc. it is still important that an MSC group assume responsibility to support and pray for them etc.

Jesus belonged to an MSC. It was a pretty dynamic one, although it was not without its problems! Yours won’t be either, but it is in the working through of problems, along with the fun and joy, that we experience the blessings of obedience of No. 11.

By Caring For One Another

The most important arena, but not the only one, in which we can work out the 11th commandment is within our MSC – for one another and those we come into contact with through our missional outreach into the community. However, there are other ways set up to enable us to care for one another.



Jacqui, Ross and the Elders will continue to be available to talk and pray with anyone who has a specific need which cannot be addressed within the MSC. This may require referral to a team of trained counselors. We also have a group of people who have been trained to minister in the power of the Holy Spirit. These will be available to people who would benefit from a more regular session with someone to work through issues. (Contact: Mike Preece of Gilgal House Healing Centre)

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Serving practically

There is a tremendous amount of activity in the life of the Church. The place is cleaned, meals prepared, painting this, repairing that, pruning, weeding, furniture shifting. As well as all that sort of thing members also run the Sunday School (Noah's Ark), youth work (Revived), Mums & Toddlers (Mamites), Drop-In Lunch, Alpha, and other MSCs etc; they preach, lead worship, play instruments, run courses. Virtually everything that goes on in the Church, except major building works is done by willing Church members.



This is being generous with our time and energy and we, on the whole, find it to be good fun. Remember, practical service does not equal non-spiritual. Rather the reverse, because the gift to serve comes from the Holy Spirit. See *1 Cor. 12:5*

Luke 6:38 Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

GIVING

It has been said that the last part of a person to be converted is their pocket, but as we have been said the Christian life is all about giving and that includes our wealth, such as it may be. The fact is that Christ invites us into the **adventure** and **joy** of giving with him. We miss out on so much if we do not heed His voice on this matter. Here are some references for you to enjoy:

Motives-

Gratitude - *1 Ch. 29:14;*

Obedience - *2 Cor 9:7; Malachi 3:8-10;*

Love for others - *1 John 3:17; Luke 10:33-35.*

How to give-

Willingly & cheerfully - *Matt 10:8; 2Cor 8:11-12;*

Unostentatiously - *Matt.6:1-4;*

Regularly - *1 Cor 16:2*

Generously-*Ex 36:5; Nu 7:13, 1 Tim 6:18; ...*



The most challenging story of generous giving is found in Luke 21:1-4. What does God judge our giving by?

Jesus said "It is more blessed to give than to receive." One thing is certain, it is impossible to out-give God. This is absolutely true, but it is only found to be so by a cheerful willingness to put it to the test. Read *Malachi 3:10*. (Incidentally this is

the only occasion in scripture where God invites us to test Him out!)

FINANCE IN STONY STRATFORD COMMUNITY CHURCH

Some facts.

- Virtually all our financial needs are met by the church members.
- We do not engage in public fund raising events for ourselves. It's our responsibility to be self funding.
- We give away approx. 20% of our income to support the work of the Home Mission, the Baptist World

Mission, and our own missionaries and their children and some other Christian agencies.

- From time to time we hold special offerings to meet emergency needs which arise.
- The Family Fund is one which is directed to any special needs which arise in the Church family amongst the less well off.

Many of our folk have responded to God's love by tithing their income, i.e. giving to Christ's work by the Church a tenth of what they earn, off the top. God invariably blesses those cheerful givers. Search some out and ask them! You'll be amazed at how God provides!

***"There was a man some thought Him mad,
The more He gave, the more He had."***

John Bunyan

Of course, some find this much easier financially than others. Jesus reminds the well off that much will be expected from those who have much. The early Church was marked by the fact that there were no folk in need because all things were held in common and there was a Great Spirit of generosity among them.

Your friendly tax man

He won't be as generous as Zacchaeus, but if you "**gift aid**" your giving to the Church the Chancellor of the Exchequer has to refund the tax you had to pay on your gross earnings which put the amount you give in your pocket. This has the effect of increasing your giving by approx. 28%. Although we don't insist that you use the gift aid scheme (which is at no cost to yourselves whatsoever), we strongly encourage and advise you to use this to help the church grow and to fulfill its mission of reaching more in our community.

Growth Point

As we have seen, this area of church life is big! So much to take on board, so much to do it may seem. But don't panic! It's about a lifestyle. Depending on your background this may be a big lifestyle change or a smaller one. Either way we don't expect this to be a sudden change. As we grow together as a family and more importantly as we grow in our relationship with God, so He, through His Holy Spirit, will gently be showing us where we need to grow and develop in these areas. This doesn't mean we focus on one and ignore the rest. We work at all of them at the same time but gradually. As someone once said "how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!" It's about a slow process but the important thing is the attitudes of heart, to do all of this with a cheerful and grateful heart.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

Leadership In The Church ... And The Place Of Our Women.

Why does the Church need leaders anyway?

Well, God has always throughout the History of His people graciously raised up leaders for them. (Judges 4:4; Nehemiah; Hebrews 13:7). The Church is a community of disciples whose job it is to make more disciples. Jesus says to us as He did to the twelve disciples, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Also we share in the Great Commission which you will find in Matthew 28:19.



A disciple (which literally means "disciplined ones") is a FOLLOWER, pre-eminently of Jesus, but also of those leaders whom God appoints and anoints with the necessary vision and gifts to help folk in their walk with Christ. Have a look at Ephes.4:11-12. What is the function of leaders described here?

Leaders get the grotty jobs.

Read carefully and prayerfully the story in John 13:1-17 and as you do so keep the following facts in mind.

1. The washing of feet in those days was the most menial of tasks, comparable say, to cleaning toilets for a living.
2. It was so menial that no Jew would consider doing it. It was reserved for Gentile slaves who were considered by Jews to be beneath contempt.
3. The disciples and Jesus were Jews.



Try to put yourself in Peter's place. He, like us, was at times not the brightest spark from the grinder. He did not anywhere near understand what Jesus was about, just like us; although we, from our point of view, bring a lot of knowledge to the story which He did not have. Ask yourself these questions.

- A. Why did Peter react in the way He did?
- B. What was going on when He changed His mind?
- C. Who was it who was washing His feet?

In this story we have demonstrated the fundamental and essential characteristic of a leader. What is it?

Character and Gifting

"Example is not a way to lead; it is the only way." "People catch what you are, not what you say you are"

Anon

Gifting is important, but so is character. Character defects in a leader can undo the work of gifting. Leaders should be women and men who yield themselves totally to the Jesus character forming power of the Holy Spirit in them.

O.K. I'll follow! But how?

Read Hebrews 13:7-17 and ask yourself these questions ...

1. How should we respond to those who teach and lead us?
2. What are the conditions for leaders to be beside themselves with joy?
3. Think of some ways in which you could accelerate your "Leaders" to burn-outs.

Take a look also at 1 Thess. 5:12-15. If Paul is referring to leaders throughout, then you have a number of responsibilities to them. Have a go at listing them.

In 1 Peter 5:1-7 leaders are exhorted to certain attitudes and to avoid others. Can you list what they are?

Women know their place in Stony Stratford Community Church!

For many years, way back into the dim and distant past, the ladies of the church have played major roles in all aspects of its life. They have taken the lead in many areas other than providing refreshments at various functions throughout the year. Our senior Pastor, at the present time, is a lady, Jacqui Green. She became Associate Pastor here in 1984 and was confirmed as senior pastor in 1995.

If you decide to come into membership of the church then it is important that you understand that we are a church which places no restrictions on the ministry of our women. The issue will not be up for negotiation, but we do want you to understand why we take this position. So we ask you to work through the following material in the hope that it will clarify our thinking to you.

What does the Bible say?

This is a very important question for us because we take the Bible very seriously and use it as the ultimate reference point for our knowledge of God, Jesus, The Holy Spirit, ourselves, God's purposes for us, and how He wants us to live our lives. Read Tim 3:16,17. if you are in any doubt about this.

The position of women in the church is still undoubtedly a burning issue for many Christians who all take the same stance on scripture as we do. How can this be?

1. There is undoubtedly tension and apparent inconsistencies within scripture on this and other issues.
2. If we take 1 Tim 3:16 seriously they must be reconcilable.
3. If they appear to be irreconcilable then we must assume that we are missing something.
4. What we are missing may be a more general principle than is evident from a straightforward reading of the word.
5. There are general themes running through scripture which will not be so clearly evident in specific texts but which nevertheless may be applicable.

Here is a general principle which has a bearing on this issue. The fall had a profound effect on the whole of creation, including our relationships. Christ came to undo all the works of the evil one, notably the effects of the fall. His purpose was to bring liberty to the sons of God.

In Jesus' day women were considered to be no more than chattels. It was considered offensive to be seen talking to any woman, including your wife, in public. Women were in general oppressed by males and were certainly not worth teaching. However, Jesus was subversive in this respect. Look at John 4:1-26; 11:17ff; Matt.9:20-22; 15:21ff; Mark12:41-44; Luke10:38ff.

To help you as you work these things out in your own mind have a go at these tasks ...

TASK 1: Look through the section on the Gifts of the Spirit and see if you can detect anything which biases them to the male sex.

TASK 2: How would you sum up Jesus' attitude to women?

TASK 3: Arrange these texts in order of weight as you see them. 1Cor.11:5-10 &11-12; 14:34-35; 1Tim.2:9-14; Gal. 3:26-29. Whatever one you have chosen as having the greater weight and expressing the higher principle then you must fit the others into it.

TASK 4: Why do you think Jesus chose 12 men? Were there no women disciples?

Useful Facts

- Paul's attitude to Priscilla Acts18.
- Men only? Col.3:16
- In the Greek what is translated as "woman" can just as well mean "wife".
- Similarly the word translated "he" in Greek is an inclusive word meaning both men and women.
- There is no doubt that Christianity allowed women to enter into a much greater freedom than had hitherto been the case. This led to abuse and over the top behavior in worship which took the focus away from its proper subject. Paul wrote to address this for the Ephesians.
- These things and many others which there is not time to address here, help us to understand how to approach scriptures.

We, at Stony Stratford Community Church place the greatest weight on Gal.3:26-29. This removes the painful distinctions between different races, sexes, and social classes. In each pair the first regarded the second with the greatest disdain. Christ came to remove those barriers and heal the rifts. See 2Cor. 5:11-21, Col. 3:11.

There are numerous examples of women exercising leadership and ministries in the bible: Judges 4:5; Exodus 15:20-21; Titus 2:3-5; Rom. 16:12; Rom. 16:7 (This last one is a matter of debate amongst scholars. Junias is taken by some to be a woman's name. Hence a woman was named as an apostle. Some disagree.)

We feel that the greater weight of the message of the Bible is that the Gospel frees women into every aspect of Christian ministry. The Baptist Union takes this stance also.

Lots Has Been Written

This is a big subject, about which much has been written, and we are conscious that full justice has nowhere near been done to it. However, we hope that you have been able to see that it is a matter which requires some

thought. We believe that our approach and conclusions are Biblical and certainly our experience in the Church fully justify them.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

How Does The Church Run Its Life?

The Church Vision

"We believe that God wants to continue to build us into a loving family, anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit and reaching out in Jesus' name to the surrounding community and to all nations".

The Mission Statement

"To know Jesus as Lord and Saviour and to make Him known".

The Budget

This is an expression of those aspects of the vision which involve finance. Somewhere in the region of £142,000 is disbursed each year under a variety of headings from mission to paper clips.

Church structure



The individual components have emerged from different groupings within the Church; namely the Elders, the Ministry Team Leaders and the Church Meeting which here at Stony Stratford Community Church we call "Open Church". We'll have a brief look at each of these groupings later. However, before we do that we need to understand that each one of them has the same overriding purpose which shapes everything they do, say and think! At least, even if at times we stray somewhat from it, it is certainly their heart's

desire to conform to that purpose.

The overriding purpose is that which should govern the lives of all Christians, whether in groups or as individuals, namely to do the will of Jesus so that we may glorify Him.

He is the head of the Church. He gave himself for the Church. He loves the Church and knows what is best for the Church, and so the Church seeks to do His will. *Ephes. 1:22,23; 2:10; 3:10; 5:25,26.*

Of course, we shall, as a group and as individuals, be well placed to find out His will as we apply ourselves to worship, prayer, the bible, fellowshiping with each other, and serving.

Our focus is Christ (*Heb. 12:2*). He is not meant to be just an optical focus. How can He be? He's invisible. He is to be the focal point of our whole being! *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart.....!"*

You may remember that we need a great deal of help with this and that is why each of the groupings should always pray that the Holy Spirit of Jesus will guide them.

The Church Meeting – "Open Church"

Here at Stony Stratford Community Church we used to operate the traditional model of church meeting, where only members were present. However, we recognize that the church has many people who have not yet come into membership but are on that journey and contribute equally in time, gifts, finances etc to the church. We therefore feel it is only right that they too come to these meetings so that they can put their thoughts and comments into the discussions that take place so that members and non-members are aware of how each other

feel and what they feel God is saying to them about the issues we face as the body of Christ. However, because of Charity Law, which informs our church constitution, at this moment in time only Members may vote on matters. To reflect this change in model we now call our Church Meetings “Open Church”.

Open Church is a gathering of the church members and non-members which meets approximately every two months or so to make decisions, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, on a whole range of issues which express and affect the life of the Church. The meeting itself has the ultimate authority in the Church and arrives at decisions by prayer, by thought, exercising the gifts of the Spirit, by discussion, and by waiting on the Lord etc. Open Church whilst it appears democratic is not in actual fact; in reality it is a Christocracy – a community in which Christ rules and where His will and agenda are sought and in which every member and non-member has the right and the duty to participate, not least by prayer. We, during discussions, endeavor to express our opinions, our ideas, our leadings, in an atmosphere of integrity and love, asking the Holy Spirit to enhance the fruit of self-control in us.

The 11th commandment should reign supreme, but it has to be acknowledged that it needs the “mighty power” of the Holy Spirit to enable us to do this. Imagine what power would be required to do this in the House of Commons! Yet God is well on the way to accomplishing this in Open Church.

Have a look at *Acts 6:1-6; 14:27-28 with 15:1-6 & 15:22-23*. These passages describe something like Church Meetings. Can you identify the problem, the solutions, how they were arrived at, and who made the decisions?

All members should attend the meetings or if they are unable to do so, for a good reason, they should ensure that their apology is sent. This latter, seemingly minor thing is in fact a very important way of expressing the 11th commandment. Non-members are also strongly encouraged to attend because we want them to be a part of the church’s life, although because they are not yet members this is not a mandatory requirement.

Here’s an example of how a major issue is dealt with. A presentation is made of the matter, often, but not exclusively, by an Elder, member, non-member, or a ministry team leader. Those present ask questions in order to clarify the issue and then further discussion is held over to subsequent meetings. In the meantime members and non-members are expected to discuss the matter amongst themselves. Sometimes there are matters which arise that are confidential to the church membership and therefore such items will not be discussed with non-members present and subsequent to meetings, during discussions about the said subject confidentiality should be observed.

At the next meeting the item is discussed and prayed over with the aim of coming to a consensus in which the whole meeting can say, “Yes, let’s do that!” This is not as easy as it sounds, but our experience is that it has often been reached in the end. The process involves a great deal of humble listening to each other, always thinking highly of one another, submitting to one another, building each other up, putting the other’s interest above our own, eschewing hidden agendas, walking in the light with each other, encouraging one another, being open to correction offered in love etc.

The Chairman’s task is to give everyone the opportunity to contribute. Sometimes consensus takes more than one meeting to emerge, but that’s O.K. because we will most certainly have learned a lot in the process. When,

in the Open Church meeting's opinion, the discussion has been exhausted, a vote by members only will be called and we look for a consensus. Where consensus is not achieved the church allows a vote by numbers and we look for an overwhelming majority i.e., if 90% agree the proposal will be adopted. But our main aim is to seek consensus and that should be achievable as we listen to what God is saying through each of us. The benefit of all this is that the vast majority of members should **own** the decision made and **all** members be bound by it. This is why it is so important that you attend and contribute. You may on occasion find yourself in the minority, but you may be in the right, and if you are, a spirit guided meeting will realize that!

Open Church has, of course, the power to delegate to any individual or group any of its functions it wishes. After all, that's why we have leaders!

There may be times when a matter arises that need to be resolved at one meeting ... i.e. not discussed at one meeting and then carried on to subsequent gatherings. In such circumstances a paper is produced and distributed before the meeting, in good time, so all can be aware of the facts prior to attending the meeting to aid in a swifter decision. Where more time is requested by the meeting a "special" meeting may be called to quickly answer the matter in hand as soon as possible.

Ministry Teams

This is one of the group to which the members meeting has delegated a number of important functions; notably building maintenance & safety, building development, worship and creativity, children's work, youth work, welcome, hospitality, communications, elderly folk, pastoral work, local mission, oversees mission, prayer, and housekeeping. They are accountable to the church meeting but they diligently and quietly get on with the day-to-day running of the church behind the scenes. Their duties are often onerous and capable men and women are required to fulfill the roles. These ministry teams are appointed by the church meeting.

Take a look again at Acts 6:1-6 and also 1 Timothy 3.

Ministry team leaders and team members work very hard to the effective running of the church and we are all grateful for all their hard work and efforts. However, the ministry teams shouldn't be confused with the 'prayer ministry team' which is a part of the pastoral care of the church and operates in and outside of church services."

The Elders

In the N.T. they are also called "overseers" or "leaders". Within the elders there are two who have the role of Senior Minister and Associate Minister. Have a look at the following bible passages and note down the functions of elders:

1Tim. 5:17; 1Tim. 3:2&5; Acts 20:28-31; Titus1:9; 1Pet.5:1-4; Jas.5:14.

What are their qualifications?

Titus 1:6-9; 1Tim.3:1-7

What attitude should members have to their Elders?

Heb.13:17; 1Thess.5:12; Heb.13:7.

The Elders have the major responsibility of the oversight and direction of the Church. They are accountable in the first place to God and then to the Church Meeting.

Who'd Be A Baptist

We are a Baptist Church. Do not be afraid! Baptists have a good and honorable History. We have a lot for which to thank our forebears in the faith. The excellent booklet which bears the above title will inspire you.

Growth Point

As a prospective member one of the things we ask is that people get involved ... remember what we said about the Christian life being proactive! There are lots of ways you can engage that can utilise your skills to help the church, as well as getting involved in one of our Mission Shaped Communities. One things we want to try and make sure is that church doesn't become your life, i.e. you are so busy with church you have no time for family and friends. Having said that, it is important to remember that we are set apart and called out from being "in" the world so there should be a distinction and as Christians and members of God's church, we should want to be about His business. And being about His business means being part of the church meeting and taking an active role in discerning what He wants us to do as His church.

Use this space to write any note or questions you may have.

So There You Go!

So there you go. You have completed the new member's course. We hope you have enjoyed going through the material and that you have learnt something from it.

However, it's one thing to read about what it means to be a member of Stony Stratford Community Church. But nothing beats the experience. We'd love to have you on board with us, working towards building God's Kingdom, reaching out into the community and bringing Hope to those who have none. In short, being a member of Stony Stratford Community Church means you are about Kingdom Purpose!

God bless you.