



TRINITARIAN
CONGREGATIONAL PARISH
OF CASTINE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

MEMBERSHIP BOOKLET III:
OUR FAITH

WELCOME!

We thank you for your interest in the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine, United Church of Christ. This publication is part of a series of booklets designed to help you understand the history, structure, and mission of our church, and to give you some information on how the church functions.

We are providing this resource for our friends and members for several reasons, but one reason stands out as important in our Christian lives together. The fact is, we come together from diverse faith backgrounds and experiences. Unlike previous generations, which may have tended to live their lives in one community and perhaps one church, we seem to be a people who come from away, bringing to this place religious beliefs and practices that were learned and formed in other places and other churches, from a wide variety of denominations and convictions. In many ways, that diversity gives us a richness in the expression of our faith during our walk together in this place. But in other ways, it can cause a certain amount of confusion, as we compare the practices and traditions of this church with those in churches we attended in other places and parts of our lives.

The information in this series of booklets assumes that the reader is considering membership in the church. As such, the booklets are set up in four sections or sessions, corresponding to meetings that we hold as part of the member reception process.

- I. Membership & Church Life**
- II. History, Structure, & Organization**
- III. Faith**
- IV. Bylaws**

During these meetings, candidates for membership can get to know church members and friends, review the material in this booklet, and ask questions about the church and our Christian life together. One note here – we will often use the abbreviation *TCP* to stand for the full name of the church: *Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine*.

Please remember one thing as you review this material: *No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.*

FAITH AND THE CHURCH

As its name implies, the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine descends from the New England Congregationalist tradition, which is primarily an English Puritan form of worship. The Puritan movement was born in England within the Anglican church (the Church of England). Certain members of the church were frustrated with the ties between the Anglican church and the state, which led to the appointment of unqualified bishops and priests along with other kinds of corruption in the church. Worship had also become stale and rote, and reformers sought to “purify” the worship, thus earning the derogatory name of “puritan” from critics. During a period of exile in Switzerland, several church reformers came under the training and influence of John Calvin, another Protestant reformer, and brought many of Calvin’s reforms back to England and later, to the American colonies. Many of these points are carried in this church’s Statement of Faith:

This church acknowledges Jesus Christ as its head and finds its spiritual guidance in God’s will and way as they are revealed to us in the Bible, the natural universe, human history and Jesus Christ. This church recognizes the Bible as the foundation of faith and practice in accordance with the teachings of Jesus Christ. Members have the undisturbed right to follow the way of truth according to the dictates of their own conscience and by the light of the Holy Spirit. No statement of faith shall be used by this church as a test, but only as an expression of the spirit in which we approach God’s truth.

The reader will note the main (one might say, Puritan) points of this statement:

- ⇒ It recognizes Scripture and the Holy Spirit as two ways in which all truth is revealed and received by the believer. At TCP, we also recognize that God’s truth may be revealed through the natural universe, human history, and through Jesus Christ.
- ⇒ This statement stands away from creeds or other promises that the believer must say in order to profess the faith. Creeds, while useful in defining the faith in a few, select phrases, were often

used as tools of power and coercion before the Reformation; therefore reformers sought to establish descriptions of faith (often called “statements of faith”) that were not compulsory – one didn’t face any penalties or punishments if he or she refused to recite them publically.

- ⇒ The doctrine is what we call “Trinitarian,” meaning a belief in one God who is manifested in three distinct “persons:” Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

More information about our faith, or doctrine, can be found in the Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ:

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, God of our Savior Jesus Christ and our God, and to your deeds we testify:

You call the worlds into being, create persons in your own image, and set before each one the ways of life and death.

You seek in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin.

You judge people and nations by your righteous will declared through prophets and apostles.

In Jesus Christ, the man of Nazareth, our crucified and risen Savior, you have come to us and shared our common lot, conquering sin and death and reconciling the world to yourself.

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races.

You call us into your church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be your servants in the service of others, to proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and victory.

You promise to all who trust you forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, your presence in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in your realm which has no end.

Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto you.

Amen.

PURPOSE

The Bylaws of TCP articulate the purpose of the church:

The purpose of this congregation is to bind together followers of Jesus Christ in the public worship of God, and to make the will of God dominant in the lives of people, as that will is set forth in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

WORSHIP

Our regular Sunday worship services follow the Reformed (Protestant) tradition familiar in many New England Congregational churches. These services are considered to be non-liturgical, in that there is no set order of worship or required words or prayers. Still, in our tradition, we follow a fairly standard order of worship most Sunday mornings. Let's describe a typical worship service for you.

GATHERING AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH

The first part of our worship brings us together and helps to focus us in a spirit of worship. This section includes several parts.

PRELUDE

As people enter our worship space, the church musician plays music that helps set a worshipful mood and lets people know that we are now gathering for worship.

GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Before we begin worship, we take time to welcome guests and make important announcements for our community life together.

INTERLUDE/ACOLYTE

Following announcements, the church musician plays a short piece of music while our “Acolyte” or worship assistant, lights the candles on the table at the front of the church. This has symbolic meaning. The light represents the Holy Spirit (part of God’s presence) coming among us, and also represents the “Light of Christ” (also part of God’s presence) that helps define who we are. The lighting of candles signals that our time of worship has begun.

CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsively)

Here the pastor asks worshipers to rise as they are able for a responsive “Call to Worship,” which is printed in the Order of Worship. The Call to Worship begins our formal time of worship, together, as a community of faith.

OPENING HYMN

We continue standing as we sing together a hymn, usually taken from one of our two hymnals: The New Century Hymnal or the Pilgrim Hymnal (both published by the Pilgrim Press). The singing of hymns is an ancient Christian tradition, bringing us together to offer praise, thanksgiving, or prayers to God. Theologian Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430 CE) is said to have written **”For he who sings praise, does not only praise, but also praises joyously; he who sings praise, is not only singing, but also loving Him whom he is singing to.”**

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (Unison)

We continue standing as we say together our “Prayer of Invocation,” which is printed in our Order of Worship. The Invocation traditionally calls for the Holy Spirit, the presence of God, to join us in our worship. Following this prayer, we sit.

A TIME WITH ALL GOD’S CHILDREN

In years past, we might have called this part of our worship service a “children’s sermon.” Yes, often this message is aimed at the

young people in our congregation, but the truth is, we all often learn about the basics of our faith during this time together. During these few minutes, the pastor illustrates a concept brought out in Scripture, or tells a story, or explains a tradition. You never exactly know what's going to happen here.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our "Time with all God's Children" ends with a time of prayer, including the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. We print this prayer in our Order of Worship. Here is what we pray together:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

After the Lord's Prayer, we dismiss young people to our church school lessons downstairs. Normally, we run one class of mixed ages, with age-appropriate activities available.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

There's an old Scottish proverb that reads "(Open) Confession is good for the soul." In our tradition, we use confession to remind ourselves of several things:

- We are not perfect. We all make mistakes. Sometimes we do things we know that we shouldn't do, and sometimes we do not do the things that we should do. We admit our imperfection in acts of confession.
- Confessing our imperfections to God is an act of humility. In confession, we acknowledge God's position in our lives, and submit to God's authority over us.
- When we sin, we put ourselves out of balance in our relationship with God. In confessing our sin and asking forgiveness, we are asking to be reconciled with God, to be restored in our relationship.
- In our prayers of confession, we are reassured of God's

forgiveness – God’s acceptance of us just as we are. We are restored in our relationship, and given a new chance, indeed a new life, in which we seek to follow God’s will for us.

Our Prayer of Confession works like this: First, we read together a prayer that is printed in our Order of Worship (it’s different nearly every week). Then there is a time for silent prayer, where we offer our sins to God for forgiveness. And finally, the pastor concludes the prayer with an assurance that we have been forgiven.

GLORIA PATRI

Following our Prayer of Confession, we all stand (as we are able) to sing the *Gloria Patri* (which is Latin for the first words of the song, “Glory be to the Father”). This short song is what we call a “doxology,” which is a short song or saying that offers praise to God. Most of our friends and members know the words and tune to the Gloria Patri, but we print the words in our Order of Worship:

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world
without end. Amen. Amen.

HEARING THE WORD

The second major part of our service involves hearing the Word of God, which we find in Scripture (the Holy Bible.) In our tradition, this is considered to be the most important part of the service. For that reason, the lector, or reader will climb a few stairs to an elevated “pulpit.” This is because we “elevate” the Word of God in our worship.

There are usually four parts to our reading of scripture, which is chosen each week based on a three-year rotating schedule known as the Revised Common Lectionary.

Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures)

First, a passage is read from the Hebrew Scriptures, sometimes known as the Old Testament. There are a wide range of readings from this section of the Bible, including historical stories, the words of prophets, even poems and songs.

Psalm

Next, we will read responsively from the Psalter (Book of Psalms), a collection of 150 ancient songs collected in the Bible. Since we don't have the original music for these songs (and it wouldn't make much sense, as these songs were written in Hebrew), we read them together, sometimes with a sung response. The practice of reading responsively from the Psalms goes way back in our tradition, and helps us to understand how God's people came to understand their relationship with God in ancient times, before the ministry of Jesus.

Epistle

Following the reading from the Psalms, we read a passage from the Epistles, which is a group of letters and sermons written after the life and ministry of Jesus, and which are found in the New Testament (sometimes called the Christian Scriptures). These letters help us better understand how new Christians lived following the time of Jesus, and what our Christian church came to believe about his life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Congregational Response

After the reading from the Epistles, we take a moment to share a personal prayer, in song, as we reflect on the Word of God.

Gospel

Finally, we read from the Gospel (the four books in the New Testament that tell about the life of Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). Each year we follow one Gospel account closely, rotating between Matthew, Mark, and Luke (we work John's Gospel into specific times of the year).

HYMN

Following the reading of scripture we sing together a song from one of our two hymnals.

SERMON

We continue with the ***Hearing of the Word*** with the Sermon, a talk by the pastor or other worship leader based on the Scripture that we've just heard and studied together. The Sermon is also heard from the pulpit. Usually the "preacher" (one who gives the sermon)

takes some time to analyze one or more of the scripture readings, put it in context, illustrate it with stories, and apply the meaning to our lives today. But sermons can go just about anywhere, and if the Holy Spirit is with us, together we learn about our relationship with God. In other words, the *Gospel is preached*, and we hear the “Good News.”

THE OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS

Usually the shortest part of our worship service, the Offering of our Gifts is where we collect what is offered by our congregation in the form of pledges, special offerings, or simply whatever money they may wish to donate in order to support our work, here in the world, in God’s name. The pastor offers an invitation, collection plates are passed, and then we stand together as we sing this Doxology together:

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**

Following the Doxology, we remain standing as we read together a Prayer of Dedication, which is printed in the Order of Worship. We are then seated.

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER

Our time of prayer together is an important component of our worship experience. It is our time to talk with God, to offer praise and thanksgiving, but also to ask for God’s support, help, and guidance. There are two parts of our time of prayer together:

Pastoral Prayer

First, the pastor (or other worship leader) asks for names of those we might hold up for God’s love and mercy. This is a time when our community draws together to support each other in prayer, but it’s also a time when we might hold up those in trouble around the world. Following this time of common concern, the pastor leads the congregation in what we call “corporate” prayer (prayer coming as one from many hearts).

Following our pastoral prayer is usually a time of silence, when individuals in the congregation can pray for others and for themselves. This is a time to open one's heart to God, sharing one's most intimate fears, troubles, and joys.

GOING FORTH INTO THE WORLD

Our service now draws to an end. But there's an important message here. This is where our worship ends for now, but where our work begins. First, we rise and sing a closing hymn, during which the acolyte comes forward to extinguish the candles, signifying the end of worship. But the acolyte also carries the flame from the candles out of the sanctuary, showing that the Light of Christ goes out into the World. Finally, the worship leader offers a Benediction (a blessing or "sending out"), and we sit to listen to the postlude.

Following the service, we invite everyone downstairs to our vestry for a time of fellowship, coffee, and refreshment.

That's a summary of our worship service. Please know that you are always welcome here.

SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH

Reformed worship recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or communion. This differs from the Roman Catholic Church (from which we descended), which recognizes seven sacraments. We see "sacraments" as outward and visible signs of God's grace, which are acknowledged or commanded in the Holy Scriptures.

Baptism

At the beginning of his adult ministry, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. Through baptism a person is joined with the universal church, the body of Christ. In baptism, God works in us the power of forgiveness, the renewal of the spirit, and the knowledge of the call to be God's people always.

Infants, children, youth and adults may be baptized in our church. For infants and children, as well as for youth and adults who have never been baptized before, baptism marks their acceptance into the care of Christ's church, the sign and seal of God's grace and forgiveness, and the beginning of their Christian faith and life.

Parents, in consultation with the pastor, may choose sponsors or Godparents for infants and young children who are to be baptized. Other candidates for baptism may also be given this opportunity to have sponsors. At the time of the baptismal service, the sponsors, who accompany the candidates and present them for baptism, make promises identical to the promises of the parents concerning their role.

In our church, we baptize by aspersion (sprinkling).

In our tradition, we are baptized only once during our lives. We recognize the Christian baptism of any tradition, so new members in our church need not be re-baptized. If you don't know if you've ever been baptized before (say, as an infant), we can adjust the ceremony to take that doubt into consideration.

Generally, there are three major parts to a baptism ceremony. First, candidates are examined or questioned to determine whether they are freely willing and able to declare their faith in Jesus Christ. Next comes the actual act of baptism, which in our tradition means that the candidates are sprinkled with water by an authorized minister, who says *"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."* Finally, those present offer prayers of thanksgiving and blessing for the person baptized. Since these are public declarations of Christian faith, baptism ceremonies generally take place during regular Sunday worship services, but other arrangements can be made.

When infants or young children are baptized, the parents of those children step forward to speak for their children, promising to raise their children as Christians through their life examples and their teaching. These are important promises, made with real intention and the support of the entire church membership, which is declared during the baptism ceremony.

Let's take a look at the questions that are asked of candidates for baptism in our tradition:

Adults and older Children:

Do you desire to be baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

Do you renounce the powers of evil and desire the freedom of new life in Christ?

Do you profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciple, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow in the Christian faith and to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, celebrating Christ's presence and furthering Christ's mission in all the world?

Do you believe in God?

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

Infants and Young Children

For infants and young children, parents (or legal guardians) are asked the same important questions:

Do you desire to have your child baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ?

Will you encourage this child to renounce the powers of evil and to receive the freedom of new life in Christ?

Will you teach this child that he (she) may be led to profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Do you promise, by the grace of God, to be Christ's disciples, to follow in the way of our Savior, to resist oppression and evil, to show love and justice, and to witness to the work and word of Jesus Christ as best you are able?

Do you promise, according to the grace given you, to grow with this child in the Christian faith, to help this child to be a faithful member of the church of Jesus Christ, by celebrating Christ's presence, by furthering Christ's mission in all the world, and by offering the nurture of the Christian church so that she (he) may affirm her (his) baptism?

If you'd like to explore the possibilities of baptism in the Christian faith, feel free to contact the pastor for more information. For more information about baptism in our tradition, visit the United Church of Christ website at:

<http://www.ucc.org/vitality/what-matters/we-are-one-at-baptism-and-at.html>

Communion (The Lord's Supper)

The communion meal recalls the table fellowship Jesus shared with his disciples, and in particular the Last Supper on the night before his death as well as his appearances to the disciples during meals following his resurrection. Throughout its history these Biblical events have been central to the Church's worship life.

In the sacrament of Holy Communion, also called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, meaning "thanksgiving," Christians hear, taste, touch and receive the grace of God revealed through Jesus Christ in a unique way. Communion is:

- a joyous act of thanksgiving for all God has done, is doing, and will do for the redeeming of creation;

- a sacred memorial of the crucified and risen Christ, a living and effective sign of Christ's sacrifice in which Christ is truly and rightly present to those who eat and drink;
- an earnest prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit to unite those who partake with the Risen Christ and with each other, and to restore creation, making all things new;
- an intimate experience of fellowship in which the whole church in every time and place is present and divisions are overcome;
- a hopeful sign of the promised Realm of God marked by justice, love and peace.

In our participation in the sacrament of communion, we are reminded that the invitation and the call to the supper celebrate not only the memory of a meal that is past, but an actual meal with the risen Christ that is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet at which Christ will preside at the end of history.

In our Congregational tradition, we do not celebrate Communion at every Sunday worship service. Instead, Communion is offered as part of our worship together, usually on the first Sunday of every month. On those days, the Service of Communion is incorporated into our regular worship service

Who Can Receive Communion?

In several Christian traditions, certain requirements must be met before a person can participate in the celebration of Communion. In some churches, people must be baptized, or confirmed in the faith, before they can receive. In our tradition, however, the table is open to all who wish to draw closer in their relationship with Jesus Christ.

What is a Communion Service like?

Our typical Service of Communion will look like this:

INVITATION

We begin our service with a short prayer to settle our minds and hearts, and then offer a few words about the logistical arrangements for the service. Then the worship leader will invite the congregation to participate, sometimes offering a symbolic challenge to make

sure that we are prepared to follow Jesus with our hearts. That challenge may sound like this:

All of you who do truly and earnestly repent of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbors, and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking in God's holy ways: draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort.

CONSECRATION

The worship leader will then offer a prayer that asks God to consecrate (bless, sanctify) the elements (in our tradition, bread and grape juice) that will be *symbols* of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the sacramental meal.

THE OFFERING OF THE BREAD AND THE CUP

The worship leader then tells the story of Jesus at the Last Supper he ate with his disciples before his betrayal and arrest. (If you'd like to read the story, you can find it in each of the four gospel accounts: Matthew 26:17 – 30. Mark 14:12 – 31; Luke 22:14 – 20; John 12:1 – 8.) Bread is distributed to the congregation by Deacons, followed by small cups of juice. When all have been served, we eat and drink together, a symbol of our faith as the body of Christ.

After the elements have been distributed and consumed, the worship leader offers a short Prayer of Thanksgiving, and we bring our worship service to a close.

NOTES



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