



TRINITARIAN
CONGREGATIONAL PARISH
OF CASTINE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

MEMBERSHIP BOOKLET I:
MEMBERSHIP AND CHURCH LIFE

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.*

MEMBERSHIP & CHURCH LIFE

Belonging to a church is an important decision in the faith life of an individual. Membership signifies an acknowledgement, or *confession* of faith on the part of the believer and a *commitment* to the work of the church in the community and the world. When a person becomes a member of a Christian church, it really means that the person is willing to stand up and say “I am a Christian,” and is willing to back up that statement with specific promises to work, worship, and support the mission of the church.

We note here that there are two levels of membership at the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine. *Full membership* indicates that church membership is held exclusively in the Castine church. *Associate Membership* indicates that the member continues to hold membership in another church and/or holds to another denominational preference (*Bylaws, IV.B – C*).

Candidates for membership in the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine are received into membership by the congregation during a regularly scheduled worship service (*Bylaws, IV.A*). Members are presented to the congregation in one of the following ways:

- on presentation of satisfactory letters of transfer from other churches; or
- if letters are not available, by reaffirmation of faith on the recommendation of the Diaconate; or
- on confession of faith and baptism (if not previously baptized)

Here are some notes on the various paths to membership.

Letter of Transfer

If you are already a member of a Christian church, you can ask that church to “transfer” your membership to the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine. In most cases, your church will gladly prepare a letter acknowledging your transfer. Letters can

be hand delivered by the transferring member, sent to the church at the address on the back of this booklet, or sent electronically. A membership transfer assumes that the member has been baptized into the Christian faith.

Reaffirmation of Faith

If you are already a member of a Christian church, but you cannot get a letter of transfer (your church may have ceased its ministries, for example), you may “reaffirm” your baptism at a service of worship. In reaffirming your baptism, you respond to the questions of baptism without receiving the water of the sacrament. Please ask the pastor for a copy of this ceremony, including the questions you will be asked in your affirmation.

The Reaffirmation of Faith process is also used to accept *confirmands* (youth completing their confirmation training) into full church membership.

Confession of Faith and Baptism

If you have never been baptized, you may come into membership through the process of Confession of Faith and Baptism. This is a full ceremony where you will be asked to affirm the basic tenets of our faith, followed by a ceremony where you will be symbolically washed of your sins in the manner in which Jesus was baptized. Please ask the pastor for information and material that can lead to your confession and baptism as a Christian.

Please note – we do not “re-baptize” Christians who come to us from other denominations or churches. Your one and only baptism, done before God and witnesses, is your initiation into the church universal. We recognize the power of that baptism and your standing as a Christian, regardless of where that baptism was performed.

A Note about Friends

The Bylaws of TCP allow a third category of participation in the work of the church known as *Friends of the Congregation*.

Friends are persons who provide one or more forms of support of and for the congregation's mission, but who, for personal or other affiliation reasons, choose not to become voting members. TCP welcomes the participation of friends in activities under its auspices including our worship services (*Bylaws, IV.D*)

The Member Reception Process

Once we have met with you to figure out what you need to do to become a member (see above), we will initiate the following process:

- Candidates for membership in the church simply make themselves known to the pastor, who determines which path to membership is needed, and provides information and assistance.
- Using this booklet as our guide, we will set up one or more meetings where we go over the history, structure, and theology (faith) of the church.
- We will schedule a date where we will receive you into membership as part of the church's worship service. If possible, this will be a Sunday where communion is served.
- During worship, we will call you forward to be received into membership. There will be a short ceremony where you will affirm your desire to join the church, and the congregation will receive you into membership. If necessary, this ceremony may include baptism or confession of faith.
- You will receive a certificate of membership.

What Does Membership Mean?

For You --

As a member of the church, you are recognizing your call to be a disciple of Jesus. "God calls us into God's church to accept the cost and joy of discipleship, to be God's 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" (*UCC Statement of Faith*).

At the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine, we see our Christian commitment in a particular way. Members pledge themselves:

1. To attend worship services regularly as conditions permit;
2. To observe the Church's sacraments;
3. To strive to live a Christian life;
4. To share in the life and work of the congregation;
5. To contribute to the congregation's support and benevolence; and
6. To contribute to the well-being of the membership and the community generally.

Let's note here that these are pretty significant promises, and most people take them very seriously. But we hope that you also see that these promises do not try to define or restrict who you are or what you believe. We feel strongly at TCP that we are a church filled with Christians who think very earnestly about how they can follow Jesus with their lives. And so there is room here for Democrats and Republicans, for liberal thinkers and conservatives, for people from all walks of life and all levels of the socio-economic scale. We come together as Christians to praise God and seek God's will for us. But we know that there are many ways that we can be disciples together.

For Us –

Of course, membership in a church is a two-way street. During the reception of new members into our church, church members will state their commitment to living and working together as a community of faith:

We welcome you with joy into the common life of this church. We promise you our friendship and prayers as we share the hopes and labors of the church of Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit may we continue to grow

together in God's knowledge and love and be witness to our risen Savior.

All members (full and associate) have the right to vote in all meetings of the full church.

Terminating Membership

Your membership in the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine is a life membership unless you request otherwise. We will transfer your membership to another church on your request. We will also terminate your membership if you provide a written notice of your withdrawal to the Administrative Chair of the congregation. Your membership may also be terminated by a two-thirds majority vote of the congregation (*Bylaws, IV.G*).

Our church bylaws call on the Administrative Chair of the congregation to review and update the membership list of the church annually, working with the Chair of the Board of Deacons, the Financial Chair, and the Pastor. Members who have neither contributed to the support of the church nor attended services for more than a year may be removed to *inactive status* upon approval of the Church Council. A reasonable attempt to reach such persons must be made. A list of such persons shall be included in the Annual Report of the congregation prior to the Annual Meeting (*Bylaws, IV.H*). Inactive membership can be restored upon the affirmation of the church. And no, we will not give or sell your membership information to anyone without your permission.

Church Life and Activities

Worship

We meet every Sunday for worship at 9:30 am| throughout the year.

Worship services usually last one hour, but occasionally run over just a bit. Following worship, there is fellowship time in the church vestry.

Special Services

The church maintains a calendar of special worship services throughout the year, including Christmas Eve, Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Easter Sunrise, and Good Friday. Special Ecumenical Services are also held in the community, combining Christian congregations and ministers for services of worship and remembrance.

Christian Education

Programs for Christian Education include our Sunday School (when children are part of our congregation) and other educational opportunities for adults. Other Christian Education programs are considered as resources and participation permit. Confirmation classes will be organized for youth if participation warrants. The pastor is available to mentor scouts (boy scouts and girl scouts) pursuing religious awards through those programs.

Weddings and Funerals

The Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine makes its facilities and pastor available for weddings and funerals for church members and their immediate families. Further assistance at these events may be available through the church, including ushers, pall bearers and fellowship gatherings. A fee may be imposed for this service, and there may be certain restrictions placed on the services we can provide. Please contact the pastor or any Deacon for information regarding how we can help you.

The church is also available for funerals and weddings of persons who are not associated with the church. A fee may be imposed for this service, and there may be certain restrictions placed on the services we can provide. Please consult with the pastor or any Deacon for information.

Dr. Mary Cushman Circle

Members of the Dr. Mary Cushman Circle come together to use their diverse skill, creativity, and volunteer time to help raise support for the wider mission of people in need in our region, the nation, and the world. Members offer hospitality and friendship to church and community members in times of need; members provide educational programs of interest to the community; and members organize two annual church fairs that provide the source of funding for our mission giving.

Membership in the Circle is open to any person who supports its purpose, and members may join at any time of year.

Castine Prayer Shawl Ministry

The Shawl Knitting Ministry began in February 2004 as an ecumenical program. Members meet at the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine. The group knits and crochets shawls for people of all walks and ages who could use comfort, support, and prayers. Recipients of shawls include women, men, babies, and children, and shawls are given to those who are sick, shut-ins, those who are lonely, nursing home residents, cancer patients, hurricane victims, widows and widowers, and to new mothers to wrap around their babies and themselves.

Each completed shawl is blessed by the ministry as it is dedicated to its recipient, with each person present touching the shawl as the blessing is read. A printed copy of the blessing is included with the shawl gift, signed by all those present. Over the history of the ministry, shawls have been presented near and far, delivered locally and shipped across the country. To date, more than a thousand shawls have been presented.

The Shawl Knitting Ministry is supported through donations and gifts, including gifts of knitting materials and supplies. But the real support for the ministry comes from its members, who with joy and love use their gifts and their time to offer blessings to others in the moments of their lives where blessings are most needed.

<http://www.tcpoc.org/prayer-shawl-ministry.html>

Mission and Outreach

Through special projects such as No Neighbor Left Behind and the Castine Interfaith Fuel Fund, we work together in the name of Jesus Christ to reach out to neighbors who struggle to procure the necessities of life: food, shelter, clothing, heat, and transportation. Working with other churches and organizations on the Blue Hill peninsula, we look to serve each other with generosity and love, hope and faith.

STEWARDSHIP

No church can survive without the financial support of its members and friends. At the Trinitarian Congregational Parish of Castine, financial support comes in several forms:

- **Offerings and gifts.** Each week during worship the church receives offerings and gifts from worshippers.
- **Pledges.** Members and Friends are welcomed and encouraged to consider planning their financial support to the church in the form of an annual pledge, which is usually accepted in fall of each year for the next year. There is no requirement for pledging or for tithing, but some stewardship information is usually presented prior to the annual pledge drive. The majority of TCP's annual income is derived from pledges.
- **Special Funds.** Although we keep the number of special funds small, there are opportunities for giving to the church for specific purposes. We are able to accept gifts dedicated to the memory of or in honor of individuals, and for special projects, such as our Stained Glass Window Project.
- **Fellowship Activities.** There is no shortage of special fellowship activities held by the church. You may have heard of a few: the *Harvest Supper*, the *Summer Concert*

Series, the Salmon Dinner, our Wicked Good Suppahs, the Great Ladle Event, or Bastille Day French Toast Breakfast to mention a few.

- **Planned Giving** : For more on Planned Giving, go to our Stewardship and Planned Giving page: <http://www.tcpoc.org/planned-giving.html>

