



CoroUniting
CHURCH COMMUNITY

Membership Course

When I became a Christian I just wanted to get with others who were following Jesus too. I had just been in one church. I knew there were others, and that you had a choice of churches. But I decided one thing: wherever God placed me I would not complain about it. Instead I would get in and play my part and make it what it could become if we all followed Christ together and contributed as the Spirit enabled us. It's been so fulfilling.

It was a milestone in our family's life, so we wanted to celebrate. We bought a milestone in the church's life, the 400th anniversary edition of the King James Bible. A beautiful production.

Because my wife and I are so in love I turned to Solomon's Song. At the top of the page it announced the theme, "Christ and his Church"; next page, "The beauty of the Church".

I had thought the book was about something else, but one thing you have to agree with: if you see the church as Christ sees it, it is beautiful! Lovely! Ravishingly so!

Why? Because Christ has set it apart as his bride and made it beautiful. So, anyone who wants to join the church, however full of faults we find it to be, must start by loving it, because they see with Jesus' eyes.

I came to Coro as a 13 year old. I just stayed on and grew. It was great to have older people investing in my life with the faith they had been given. I found that with the teaching I received and the supportive community around me I could grow as a Christian.

Welcome to the Course

This program will invite you to think about a number of issues involved in following Jesus within the life of his body, the church.

Jot down your thoughts before you come to the session. This could take you an hour or so to do. The session itself should take about 2 hours.

➤ Let's begin by telling each other:

i) how you came to be part of this church

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ii) why you have decided to ask about membership of Coro Uniting.

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Part 1. ABOUT THE CHURCH: What is Membership of the Church?

a) Is church membership “Biblical”?

*(This section is **optional**. The question simply may not be an issue for you. Skip it if it is not.)*

“Let’s get back to the New Testament church,” some people say, “and not talk in these human terms of membership as though we’re some sort of club.”

- What’s your first reaction to that?

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Now consider this: in the New Testament you’ll see many instances of Christians being commended to churches for their care, as they move from one church community to another. An example would be Romans 16:1, “I commend to you our sister Phoebe....” They knew that they belonged to each other.

In fact the New Testament church had such a clear sense of membership that they could discipline and expel people from their community for immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1-8 is a clear example), or for offending against each other (see Matthew 18:15-20).

To belong to Jesus Christ involves a really radical belonging to each other, maybe more deeply than we realise:

- Read Mark 10:28-30.
- Is that what you thought you were getting into when you enquired about church membership? What would you expect to see happening in that kind of church?

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b) Built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ

*(This section also is **optional**. It contains some great thoughts, but you can skip it if you find it too heavy.)*

The following paragraphs are taken from The Basis of Union, the foundation document of the Uniting Church.

- As you read them, mark anything you need to ask about.
- Secondly, put a tick by those statements that really stand out to you as important insights.

“Jesus of Nazareth announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive God’s love. Jesus himself, in his life and death, made the response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign, God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to God on earth, reasserted claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ all people are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth the Spirit that people may trust God as their Father, and acknowledge Jesus as Lord. The whole work of salvation is effected by the sovereign grace of God alone.

“The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church’s call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself. The Church lives between the time of Christ’s death and resurrection and the consummation of all things which Christ will bring; the Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal; here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come. On the way Christ feeds the Church with Word and Sacraments, and it has the gift of the Spirit in order that it may not lose the way.”

- Now note why you have marked or ticked those points and be ready to discuss them.

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c) What kind of Church?

You may be aware of great variety in churches. Even among those churches who can say a hearty “Yes” to everything in the paragraphs above, there is a lot of disagreement as to what we actually mean by the words. Coro Uniting is a member of the Hope Mission Network (at the State level) and the Assembly of Confessing Congregations (at the National level) within the Uniting Church.

These bodies call themselves: Orthodox, Evangelical, Reformed.

- What do these words mean to you? Note your thoughts next to the words below.

Orthodox:

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Evangelical:

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Reformed:

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d) **Our own vision**

It would be good to find some lively people who have been at Coro Uniting for a while. Ask them about the story as they know it. You'll find that previous generations have been influenced by the life of the Holy Spirit in the church. Then they were enriched by deep and consistent teaching, Biblically and theologically, on the great grace of the Triune God who has given himself to us in Christ in whom "all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Worship has generally been rich. People have been expectant. Many have been supported in cross-cultural mission. Get to know some of the history.

If you had a chance to lead this church in some way, think about how you would like the church to live so that we can witness to who God really is.

The way we have set this out at Coro Uniting is in our Church Council's Guiding Principles, prepared in this form in 2010. It would be good, too, to find an elder of the church to ask them about their vision.

- Look through the Guiding Principles and circle the top three principles that you want to be true of the church you are joining.

Coro Uniting Church Council Guiding Principles

A statement of the Church Council to guide our discernment and our planning - August 2010

God is love. We hold strongly to an orthodox Trinitarian Gospel. The great salvation we have received from God conveys the joy of union, intimacy and richness of life that is ours as the Father's children in the Son, by the Holy Spirit. Our unity lies here.

LIVING IN CHRIST:

- We give praise and thanks to the triune God
- We bring people to Christ in newness of life
- We encourage them to grow to maturity in Christ
- We commission them for mission in Christ

LED BY THE SPIRIT:

We are a church which values the preaching of the Word of God and seeks to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. We intend to be constant in prayer and, led by the Spirit, we will:

➤ **Celebrate God's work in the world**

- We will be intentional in seeking to bring people to faith
- We can foster kingdom living in God's world locally and globally
- We will encourage our people to live as 'salt and light' in their daily lives
- We can give people opportunities to share what the Spirit of God is doing in their neighbourhood or work place

➤ **Encourage freedom in worship**

- We value our past and current practice and values in worship, but we are not bound by them
- We will also encourage diversity, openness and adventurous worship

➤ **Develop disciples within an intergenerational community**

- We will nurture prayer and spiritual growth in the ministry team and in the congregation
- We place importance on children, youth and young adults' discipleship
- We seek to support families in discipling their children
- We will explore new ways of living in Christ

➤ **Enhance responsive spiritual leadership**

- Eldership and staff will seek to identify spiritual gifts within the congregation so that they may be nurtured to serve the body of Christ
- We believe that it is important for leadership to encourage and empower others and to be creative and adventurous

➤ **Discern and follow the Spirit's leading**

- We will seek to be empowered by the work of the Spirit and we will continue to seek God's will

And in Christ we will remember that:

- **It is God's church**
- **Salvation comes only through Christ crucified**
- **God is our provider**
- **We are a part of God's global community**
- **We are called to care for God's family**

What do you see happening when these principles are in action in the church?

- My first principle?

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- My second principle?

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- My third principle?

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Part 2: ABOUT MEMBERSHIP: What is Membership of the Church?

a) The basis in Baptism

The Basis of Union declares that “Membership is open to all who are baptised into the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

One minister, explaining the meaning of the sacraments, said, “Each of the sacraments puts the gospel into a single action. This means that if you have understood the sacrament you have understood the gospel.”

- See if you can explain the gospel by saying what baptism means to you.
(if needed, refer to what the Bible says: Romans 6:1-4; Acts 2:38)

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If you have been baptised this will not be repeated. If not, ask about it for yourself.

b) What about Confirmation?

There is a service in the Uniting Church for those who wish to confirm their baptism. It doesn't add to your baptism. Rather it gives people who have been baptised earlier in their lives, maybe when they were infants, the opportunity to confirm their baptism themselves by declaring their faith.

If you have been baptised as an adult we would not normally have a confirmation service.

c) What if I've been a member of another church?

Different churches have different practices. In some you are a member of the whole communion, or the whole denomination of that church rather than the particular congregation. Where your previous church listed you as a member of their congregation, they may be happy to commend you to us by writing to us to that effect. In other cases you can be welcomed into our church by your declaration of your faith in Jesus Christ, and inform your previous church of the step you have taken.

d) So what do I commit myself to in becoming a member?

The real confirmation of your baptism would be in the life of thanksgiving for the grace of God. You could expect that to include the following. Think about what you would say on each:

1. **Personal life with God:** Our life in Christ nurtured by prayer and reading of the Bible.

- What helps you most in your personal life with God?

a) In prayer?

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b) In Bible reading?

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- What would you like to explore in this area?

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2. **Worship:** the church is a worshipping, pastoral community.

- What do you most value about the worship and the community of the church?

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3. **Gifts and ministry in the body of Christ:** every member of the church is gifted by the Spirit to be a vital part of what Christ is doing. Each year we invite the members of the congregation to fill in a rather detailed Time and Talents form.

- What do you see as your gifts for ministry?

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4. **Giving:** We also invite members to give to the mission of the church as God blesses them.

- What principles do you use in deciding what you will give?

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5. **Witness:** We see every member as engaged to confess Christ crucified wherever we are. One way is to say that we are called to be “salt and light” in our daily lives. There are no walls to separate what is Christian witness and what is not: Christ is the Lord of the whole of life for the Christian

- How would you really like your church to help you be salt and light in your life and your work and conversations?

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6. **Discerning God's mission together:** The members meet from time to time to make decisions that set the direction of our mission, and to appoint people to ministries. Here the point of membership and of meetings is that you are committed together in the ministry of Christ, and you seek God's direction together. Maybe you even have your own thoughts on what is involved in how Christians should seek God's direction for the church.

- What thoughts do you have about how Christians should make decisions and how they should seek God's direction?

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- Your turn to ask a question: What questions or issues does all of this raise for you?

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Finally

There are sure to be more questions, but if you are sure you are where Christ wants you and you are confident that you can grow in Him through being a member in this church, may God bless you richly.

May you find Him in a deep and growing relationship with others. May you be ready for others to get the benefit from your membership in the body of Christ, which is Coro Uniting.

You can be a great encouragement to your brothers and sisters and those who are not yet believers.