



Pleasant Chapel
Membership Class
Fall 2023

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Introduction

Pleasant Chapel Membership/Confirmation Class

THANK YOU! Thank you for taking a step of faith. Whether you are confirming your baptism, transferring your membership to Pleasant Chapel, or joining a church for the first time, this is a wonderful marker in your journey of following Jesus Christ. When we consider the timeline of our lives, we find that it is marked by significant points where we see God's grace working on us to take steps which enable us to grow, to come to know him more fully and center our lives more on him. For sure this is a life-long process, a journey of faith, and confirming your faith and/or joining Pleasant Chapel is a part of that process.

It is hoped that as you are considering becoming a part of the Pleasant Chapel family by committing to membership, you will find this information helpful.

You are here at a particular place in your journey where you are given an opportunity to join or commit to Pleasant Chapel. And that is a great thing! God has been working in you and through this church for you to be at this place of growth!!

God's Mission and Our Mission

In order to begin a conversation about church and church membership, let's consider the big picture of God's plan and his will for our lives:

- **God has a plan, a purpose, and a mission – to be our God and for us to be his people.**
- **His mission of redemption is about saving us from our sin and for us to have a relationship with him.**
 - Genesis 17:6-8 (NRSV) ⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you ...; and I will be their God."
 - Jeremiah 32:38 (NRSV) ³⁸ They shall be my people, and I will be their God.
 - Revelation 21:3 (NRSV) ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;
- **Jesus was sent to carry out that mission**
 - Luke 19:10 (NRSV) ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."
- **We are also part of his mission.**
 - John 20:21 (NRSV) ²¹ As the Father has sent me, so I send you.
- **We have been given instruction on what we are to do.**
 - Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV) ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

- **Pleasant Chapel interprets these instructions locally. From our bylaws we state:**
 - Pleasant Chapel Community Church seeks to provide a place where all are welcome to *connect* with God, *explore* faith and *grow* in their relationship with Jesus. We provide opportunities for people to *worship* and *fellowship* with other followers, *support* one another in life, *help* those in our communities who are in need, and *share* the Good News of Jesus with others.

- **Every person in Pleasant Chapel has a part to play in this mission.**
 - Romans 12:4-5 (NRSV) ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, ⁵ so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

The writer of much of our New Testament speaks about the work of the church:

Ephesians 4:12-13 (NRSV) ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

or

Ephesians 4:12-13 (MSG) ¹² to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, ¹³ until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

Our mission, therefore, is God's mission. We are participating in his plan, his purpose, and his mission.

Respond

1. What draws you to this point in your journey? Why do you think membership is important?

2. What are your thoughts regarding Pleasant Chapel's *verbs* in its statement of purpose above (*connect, explore, grow, worship, fellowship, support, help, and share*)? Is it clear and easy to understand?

3. Where do you see yourself *fitting* into that mission statement?

Pleasant Chapel's Purpose

The church is in a process of being a church. And individually, people of the church are in a process as well. You and I, in Pleasant Chapel, are in a process. This process is controlled by God and his grace but also is dependent upon our response to him and to that grace. He has given us freedom to receive and respond or to refuse and reject.

It can be thought of this way: (1) God is at work around you in ways you may not be aware of and even before you are aware of him and his plan, (2) He makes himself known to you and invites you to trust him and his plan for you, (3) He develops a relationship with you where he reveals himself to you and you become changed into the person you are supposed to be.



God is the initiator and controller of the process, but at each stage you have the freedom to respond. He does not force himself upon us. Forced love is really no love at all. God, being love, has given us free will to receive or reject him.



1) As God begins to bring his grace in and around you, you are learning about him, about our sin, about our separation, about his plan to make us right again by him through Jesus.



2) At some point this knowing about comes to a point of commitment. This is the time where you move from merely knowing about to knowing him intimately and personally. God will invite you to trust him, he will ask you to receive him as your Savior, that you realize your personal need for him and for his saving grace. Some call this being “born again” or being “saved”. Sometimes words in religion get used so much, they lose their meaning or they take on a different meaning from what was originally intended or they become associated with a particular group that brings other interpretations of the word. I believe that has happened a bit with words like “born again” or “saved” or “converted”. So I have a new word! The word that depicts the place and time where you became a follower of Christ I will name “REACT.” Each of the letters represent ideas that take place when you are “saved” or “born again”.



R – Receive. You receive the gift that is given to you. God is the initiator and he offers you his gift of forgiveness and mercy and love. The gift, though, needs to be taken or received. It requires an act on your part which is opposite of refusing or simply being indifferent toward him. You are taking, accepting, and receiving what he has offered.

E – Entrust. I like this word a bit more than “believe” or merely mentally agreeing to what Jesus has accomplished. To entrust indicates that you are adjusting your life on what you have mentally or intellectually agreed to. You are acting on that which you say you believe.

A - Acknowledge. You are acknowledging what God says is true. He loves you. He is God and you are not. You are far from him because of sin. You acknowledge that you are kept far from him and that you submit to him and to his plans. If he is God and you are not, you are acknowledging his authority over you.

C – Choose. God simply does not force himself on you. He could, and if he did, there simply would not be the option of refusing! But that is not how he works. He has given us free will to 1) reject, 2) simply not care or be indifferent (which is also rejection), or 3) to choose him. There is choice in this and you have been given the opportunity to choose him.

T -Turn. There is a commitment to turn from the old way which was self-centered and sinful. Repent means to acknowledge there are things about you that are wrong and you choose to turn or change your direction of life and head in the direction of God.

For some the time of REACT is a tremendous life altering experience and for others it is more quiet and subtle. It may be public or it may be private, but for sure it is a personal experience between you and God. I do not believe that at this point in your journey, you understand fully what is going on. But in its simplest form, God made you an offer of forgiveness and of life and you REACTed in a positive way. It marks a key point in your journey when you became free from the chains of a life without him to the life of freedom of becoming his follower.

3) As God works to shape our lives, we learn to hear his voice and obey him. This means he will reveal to us areas in our lives that need to be changed, changed from an old self and into a new self - one that is like Christ. This is a life-long process that promises to be incredibly rewarding. It is what we were created to do – to connect with our God and allow him to show us the person we were created to be. I read once this is how we actually become “you-ier” or the “you” you are supposed to be!



For us, individually it is a journey. A journey that is guided by God’s grace where we take our steps of faith. People can take some of the steps in a different order than others. That depends on each person’s walk.

Let’s review some basic descriptions of other key steps in our faith journey.

Key Steps in the Journey of Faith

BAPTISM



Baptism is an acknowledgement of God’s grace in the person’s life. For Pleasant Chapel, we believe that the chief actor in Baptism is God. It is God who has initiated the relationship by taking the first steps in developing a relationship with himself and the person. He begins his work of grace in and around the person even before that person knows it. It is therefore less about the person’s commitment decision (which is important as well) and more about God. This is one reason we baptize infants. Clearly they have not made a choice regarding God,

but God has. He has initiated the relationship and will work through the person's family and church where they help bring the person along in ways where the person can come to know and connect with God. More on baptism later.

MEMBERSHIP



You are at a point where you are joining Pleasant Chapel (or at least considering joining). Joining a local church is one step in that journey. Joining the church will merge of the process of the church and the process you are going through. Your process becomes intertwined with the process of this local church.

FELLOWSHIP



Our journey is not meant to be taken alone or in vacuum. We are to be in community with other believers. This community includes the local church as well as other followers outside this local church. Fellowship with other followers of Christ includes being with other believers for worship, for mutual support, for encouragement, for learning, for accountability, for love and caring, and for fun!

DISCIPLESHIP



Disciple simply means learner. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means you are in the process of learning about him as well as learning what it means for you to follow. "Follow" will no doubt mean that changes are needed in your life. As you come to know him more deeply, he will reveal areas in your life that need to be changed in order for you to become the best person you can be. This may mean you take on new things such as habits including prayer, and Bible reading, and being kind and patient. Discipleship may also mean you need to rid yourself of things that are negative such as selfishness, pride, greed, etc. These changes are made known by the Holy Spirit as you come to know Jesus through the Bible, through prayer, through the church and through other followers.

SERVICE / MINISTRY

God has given each of us talents, skills, resources, and gifts. Don't freak out, but this is called ministry. We all have a ministry. We are all therefore ministers. Each ministry is unique to the individual. Some have tremendous abilities to work with people. Others are great working with things. Some have the gift of caring deeply for people, some can sing, some can teach, some can coach. Some have money or resources to help others or help fund programs. God intends for you to use what you have in his church for the growth of his kingdom. As you grow in your faith, as you come to know Jesus more fully, he will show you what you possess that can be used. It is a wonderful thing to find how you can contribute to his kingdom by serving him with what you have!



Baptism, trusting Jesus as your savior, and church membership are one-time events. Discipleship, fellowship, and service/ministry are ongoing stages in our faith journey and are often done within the context of the local church (Pleasant Chapel). Within this cycle of living, learning, and doing, our lives are changed, transformed into who we were created to become.

Have you noticed the pie? Pie is a very important part of this process especially at Pleasant Chapel. So be sure to take time out of your journey to make time for a slice of pie!



Some of the steps do follow a particular order, while other steps happen at different stages or do not happen at all. Take a look at some different scenarios of how God works differently in the lives of people. (next page)

Respond

1. Reflect on your REACT time. How and when did God invite you into his life? What was that experience like? If you have not had a time like that, do you feel God is inviting you now?
2. What are your thoughts about Baptism after you read about it above? What (if anything) do you remember or can you describe about your Baptism?
3. After reviewing the chart below, how would you track your faith steps?



Baptism	Learning about God	REACT- Jesus is YOUR Savior	Join Local Church	Learn Worship Fellowship Serve	Become the best version of YOU

REACT- Jesus is YOUR Savior	Join Local Church	Worship Learn Fellowship Serve	Become the best version of YOU

REACT- Jesus is YOUR Savior	Worship Learn Fellowship Serve	Become the best version of YOU
(Baptism and Membership are NOT required)		

Baptized	REACT- Jesus is YOUR Savior	Join Local Church	Confused and unsatisfied. They simply refused to participate.

In a church community and even serving	But ultimately lost. This person never received Jesus as savior. They, therefore reject him.

How do I actually do the Membership Thing?

After completing this course, you will have the opportunity to publically proclaim your faith and join this local church. Consider what happens at this service. Basically, you will be asked some questions where, if you agree, you will proclaim your agreement simply by saying “I do” or “I will”. So relax a bit about this, you are not going to be required to sing your favorite hymn solo or make any sort of speech. You simply will be saying “I will” or “I do” a few times. However, those “I dos” and “I wills” are a tremendous proclamation of faith. Therefore, consider those statements. What is it exactly you will be proclaiming and what does that mean for you?

From our Bylaws the questions new members will be asked to:

- confess Jesus Christ as Savior and put their whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as their Lord;
- profess their agreement and belief in the basic truths of the church;
- commit to God by committing to this local body of fellow followers of Jesus Christ;
- acknowledge they are vital to the overall health of the body;
- pledge their prayers, presence, resources, skills and their service to God through this church;
- submit to the spiritual authority of the local church.

A Little Theology

The words “trust” and “serve” are key words in the first question and are part of the remaining statements. Essentially we are saying that we “trust” what scriptures say about God, about us and our relationship with God, and about his plan for us. Look at what the Bible says about

- 1) **God,**
- 2) **about us, and**
- 3) **about our relationship with him.**

1) About God

- There is only one God (Isaiah 43:10; 44:6, 8; John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 8:5-6; Galatians 4:8-9).
 - **Isaiah 43:10-11 (NRSV)** ¹⁰ You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. ¹¹ I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no savior.
 - **John 17:3 (NRSV)** ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
- God is omniscient or "knows all things" (Acts 15:18; 1 John 3:20).
 - **1 John 3:20 (NRSV)** ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.
- God is omnipotent or "all powerful" (Psalm 115:3; Revelation 19:6).
 - **Psalm 115:3 (NRSV)** ³ Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases.
- God is omnipresent or "present everywhere" (Jeremiah 23:23, 24; Psalm 139).

- **Psalm 139:7-8 (NRSV)** ⁷ Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- God is holy (1 Peter 1:15).
 - **1 Peter 1:15-16 (NRSV)** ¹⁵ Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
- God is love (1 John 4:8).
 - **1 John 4:8 (NRSV)** ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.
- God is the creator of everything that exists (Genesis 1:1; Isaiah 44:24).
 - **Genesis 1:1 (NIV)** ¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
- Jesus Christ is God (John 1:1, 14, 10:30-33, 20:28; Colossians 2:9; Philippians 2:5-8; Hebrews 1:8).
 - **John 1:1-4,14 (NRSV)** ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people... ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.
- Jesus is fully God and fully man (Colossians 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 4:15; 2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - **Colossians 2:9 (NRSV)** ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,
- Jesus is the only way to God the Father (John 14:6; Matthew 11:27; Luke 10:22).
 - **John 14:6 (NRSV)** ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.
- The Holy Spirit is God (John 14:26, Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12; 2 Corinthians 13:14).
 - **John 14:26 (NRSV)** ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

2) About Us

- Humans were created by God in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27).
 - **Genesis 1:26 (NRSV)** ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
- All people have sinned (Romans 3:23, 5:12).
 - **Romans 3:22-23 (NRSV)** ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
- Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:2).
 - **Isaiah 59:2 (NRSV)** ² Rather, your iniquities have been barriers between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

3) about our relationship with him.

- Jesus died for the sins of each and every person in the world (1 John 2:2; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 1 Peter 2:24).
 - **1 John 2:2 (NRSV)** ² and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.
- Jesus' death was a substitutionary sacrifice. He died and paid the price for our sins so that we might live forever with him. (1 Peter 2:24; Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45).
 - **1 Peter 2:24 (NRSV)** ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.
- Believers are saved by grace; Salvation cannot be earned by human efforts or good works (Ephesians 2:8–9).
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9 (NRSV)** ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.
- Those who reject Jesus Christ will go to hell forever after they die (Revelation 20:11-15, 21:8).
 - **Revelation 20:11-15 (NRSV)** ¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; ¹⁵ and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.
- Those who accept Jesus Christ will live for eternity with him after they die (John 11:25, 26; 2 Corinthians 5:6).
 - **John 11:25-26 (NRSV)** ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
- **End Times**
- Jesus will return to the earth (Acts 1:11).
 - **Acts 1:11 (NRSV)** ¹¹ They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."
- Christians will be raised from the dead when Jesus returns (1 Thessalonians 4:14-17).
 - **1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 (NRSV)** ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.
- God will create a new heaven and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1).
 - **Revelation 21:1 (NRSV)** ¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

In those statements, where you will confirm your agreement and commitment, you are saying you agree with and will therefore conform your life accordingly. In a nutshell:

There is God. He is all powerful, all knowing, and ever present. He created us in his image to share in creation. But sin has caused a brokenness between him and us. You are separated from him because of sin, the sin of all humankind and your personal sins. There is nothing you can do to restore the relationship God intended to have with you because of sin. We need to be saved from the penalty of our sin. We need a Savior. God came to us in human form as Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection provide the only means by which we can be saved. We receive his salvation by trusting in him and the accomplished work of the cross.

Discord
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. After reading a little theology, was there anything new or anything that stuck out?2. Do you have any questions about any of these statements?

Background of the Pleasant Chapel

Pleasant Chapel most recently was a part of the United Methodist Church. Much of our theology and history are connected to the Methodist Tradition. Following is some background on Methodism.

The United Methodist Church is a Methodist denomination that traces its main root back to Reverend John Wesley's evangelical and revival movement in the Anglican Church, and theology is steeped in Wesleyanism. It contains sacramental and evangelical elements. In the United States, it ranks as largest mainline Church, second largest Protestant church (after the Southern Baptist Convention), and third largest Christian Church overall. In 2007, worldwide membership was about 12 million members: 8.0 million in the United States, and 3.5 million in Africa, Asia and Europe. It is a member church of the World Council of Churches, the World Methodist Council, and also other religious associations. It still remains today as the only Christian denomination or body to have congregations in every county or parish in the United States.

Beliefs

The United Methodist Church is seeking to create disciples for Christ through outreach, evangelism, and seeking holiness through the process of sanctification. Focusing on trine worship, United Methodists seek to bring honor to God through following the model of Jesus Christ, made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit. The flame in the church logo symbolizes the work of the Holy Spirit in the world, which is seen in believers through spiritual gifts. The two different parts of the flame represent the predecessor denominations, the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren, and are united at the base which symbolizes the 1968 merger.

Though many United Methodist congregations operate in the evangelical tradition, others are similar to many mainline Protestant denominations. Though United Methodist beliefs have evolved over time, these beliefs can

be traced to the writings of the church's founders, John Wesley and Charles Wesley (Anglican Priests), Philip William Otterbein and Martin Boehm (United Brethren), and Jacob Albright (Evangelical). With the founding of The United Methodist Church in 1968, theologian Albert C. Outler led the team which systematized denominational doctrine. Outler's work was pivotal in the work of union, and is largely considered the first United Methodist theologian.

The basic beliefs of The United Methodist Church include:

- Triune God. God is one God in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost).
- Scripture. The writings in the Old Testament and New Testament are the inspired word of God.
- Sin. While human beings were intended to bear the image of God, all humans are sinners for whom that image is distorted. Sin estranges us from God and corrupts human nature such that we cannot heal or save ourselves.
- Salvation through Jesus Christ. God's redeeming love is active to save sinners through Jesus' incarnate life and teachings, through his atoning death, his resurrection, his sovereign presence through history, and his promised return.
- Sacraments. The UMC recognizes only two sacraments: Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. Other rites such as Confirmation, Ordination, Holy Matrimony, Funerals, and Anointing of the Sick are performed but are not considered sacraments. In Holy Baptism, the Church believes that "Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. It believes that Baptism is a sacrament in which God initiates a covenant with individuals, people become a part of the Church, is not to be repeated, and is a means of grace. The United Methodist Church generally practices Baptism by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion and recognizes Trinitarian formula baptisms from other Christian denominations in good standing. The United Methodist Church affirms the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion, (the bread is an effectual sign of His body crucified on the cross and the cup is an effectual sign of His blood shed for humanity), believes that the celebration is an anamnesis of Jesus' death, believes the sacrament to be a means of grace, and practices open communion.
- Inclusivity. The UMC includes and welcomes people of all races, cultures, and ages.
- Free will. The UMC believes that people, while corrupted by sin, are free to make their own choices because of God's divine grace.
- Grace. The UMC believes that God gives unmerited favor freely to all people, though it may be resisted.¹

Our Wesleyan Heritage

Distinctive Emphases

Wesley and the early Methodists were particularly concerned about inviting people to experience God's grace and to grow in their knowledge and love of God through disciplined Christian living. They placed primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action. This emphasis on what Wesley referred to as "practical divinity" has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today.

The distinctive shape of our theological heritage can be seen not only in this emphasis on Christian living, but also in Wesley's distinctive understanding of God's saving grace. Although Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in salvation by grace, he combined them in a powerful way to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life.

¹ http://www.religionresourcesonline.org/religious-beliefs-wiki/Summary_of_the_Methodist_Church
Pleasant Chapel Membership

Grace

Grace is central to our understanding of Christian faith and life.

Grace can be defined as the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it. We read in the Letter to the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Our Wesleyan heritage is rooted in a deep and profound understanding of God’s grace. This incredible grace flows from God’s great love for us. Did you have to memorize John 3:16 in Sunday school when you were a child? There was a good reason. This one verse summarizes the gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” The ability to call to mind God’s love and God’s gift of Jesus Christ is a rich resource for theology and faith.” [1](#)

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, described God’s grace as threefold:

- prevenient grace
- justifying grace
- sanctifying grace

Prevenient Grace

Wesley understood grace as God’s active presence in our lives. This presence is not dependent on human actions or human response. It is a gift — a gift that is always available, but that can be refused.

God’s grace stirs up within us a desire to know God and empowers us to respond to God’s invitation to be in relationship with God. God’s grace enables us to discern differences between good and evil and makes it possible for us to choose good....

God takes the initiative in relating to humanity. We do not have to beg and plead for God’s love and grace. God actively seeks us!

Justifying Grace

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19). And in his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul wrote: “But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

These verses demonstrate the justifying grace of God. They point to reconciliation, pardon, and restoration. Through the work of God in Christ our sins are forgiven, and our relationship with God is restored. According to John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, the image of God — which has been distorted by sin — is renewed within us through Christ’s death.

Again, this dimension of God’s grace is a gift. God’s grace alone brings us into relationship with God. There are no hoops through which we have to jump in order to please God and to be loved by God. God has acted in Jesus Christ. We need only to respond in faith.

Conversion

This process of salvation involves a change in us that we call conversion. Conversion is a turning around, leaving one orientation for another. It may be sudden and dramatic, or gradual and cumulative. But in any case, it’s a new beginning. Following Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, “You must be born anew” (John 3:7 RSV), we speak of this conversion as rebirth, new life in Christ, or regeneration.

Following Paul and Luther, John Wesley called this process justification. Justification is what happens when Christians abandon all those vain attempts to justify themselves before God, to be seen as “just” in God’s eyes through religious and moral practices. It’s a time when God’s “justifying grace” is experienced and accepted, a time of pardon and forgiveness, of new peace and joy and love. Indeed, we’re justified by God’s grace through faith.

Justification is also a time of repentance — turning away from behaviors rooted in sin and toward actions that express God’s love. In this conversion we can expect to receive assurance of our present salvation through the Holy Spirit “bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16).²

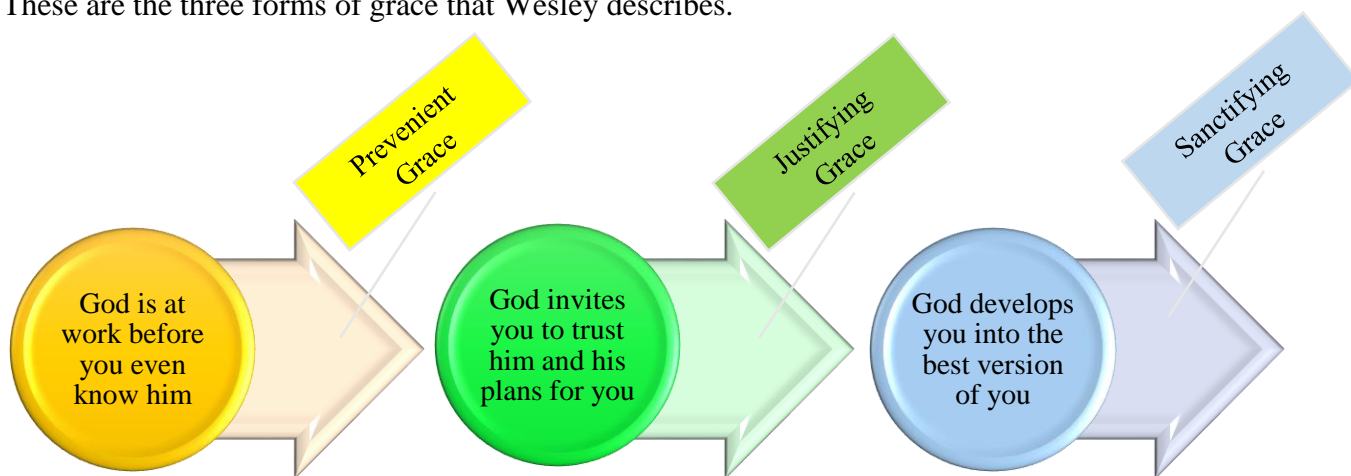
Sanctifying Grace

Salvation is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the ongoing experience of God’s gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be. John Wesley described this dimension of God’s grace as sanctification, or holiness.

Through God’s sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love neighbor. Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God’s will and testify to our union with God.

We’re to press on, with God’s help, in the path of sanctification toward perfection. By perfection, Wesley did not mean that we would not make mistakes or have weaknesses. Rather, he understood it to be a continual process of being made perfect in our love of God and each other and of removing our desire to sin.²

Remember earlier, in our discussion regarding the process of our faith walk, we had the following diagram. These are the three forms of grace that Wesley describes.



² <http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/our-wesleyan-heritage>
Pleasant Chapel Membership

Respond

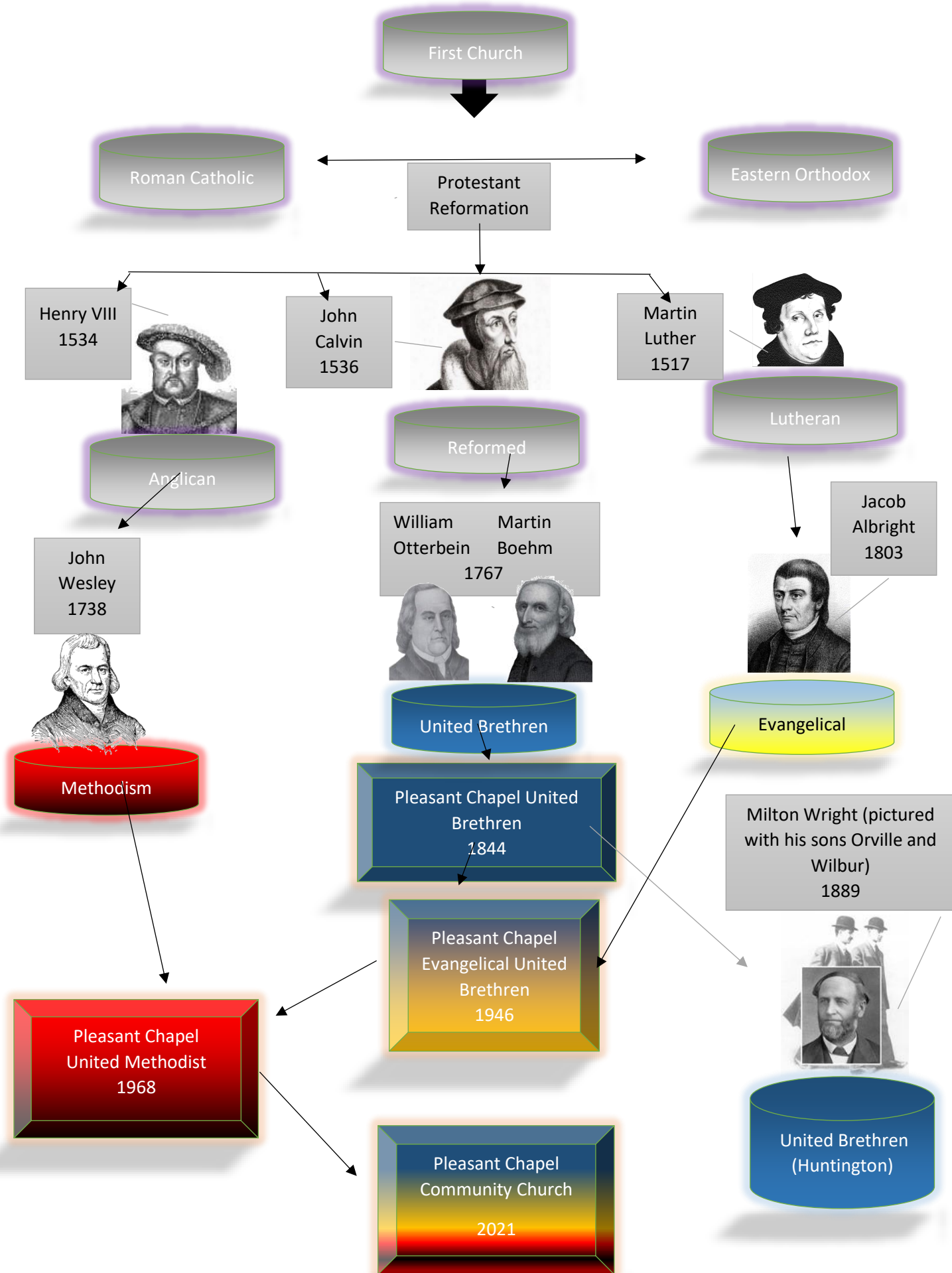
1. That section is a little deeper into theology! But it helps define how our faith tradition is defined and how we then practice that faith. What stood out for you? Did you learn anything new about our church?

A Bit About Pleasant Chapel

The focus of this place and the intention of what we do is to worship and praise God. We come here to hear and learn about him from the Bible, sing about him and to him in music, and enjoy the rich fellowship of other followers as we journey together.

The current structure was built in 1910 as a United Brethren Church, later to become Evangelical United Brethren, and finally a United Methodist Church. These changes occurred through the years as churches merged or came together in unity in faith and beliefs. Some of the points at which churches divided are interesting and sometimes humorous. Martin Luther was instrumental in the Reformation or when the Protestants (from the word *protest*) began. Luther recognized corruption and false teaching within the church and challenged it. So began the Protestant churches. The Anglican Church, from where John Wesley, the originator of Methodism came, was influenced by Henry VIII who was kicked out of the Roman Catholic Church regarding his desire to divorce his wife. The roots of Pleasant Chapel were with the United Brethren Church where Milton Wright was one of the bishops. A disagreement between bishops resulted in a split to two churches. One later merged with the Evangelicals and then with the Methodists. The other remains United Brethren headquartered in Huntington Indiana. Milton Wright was the father of two sons you may recognize as Orville and Wilbur Wright, the inventors of the airplane.

The United Methodist Church struggled to resolve issues of practice and expectations for the people of the church. It caused great division in the church and hindered the mission of the church. In 2019, the UMC offered local churches an opportunity to disaffiliate with the denomination to pursue ministry independently or with another denomination. Pleasant Chapel unanimously voted to disaffiliate and become PCCC.



Most of what you see in the church is original and has been preserved to maintain the rich heritage of what the founders sought as a means to glorify God in structure and service.

As you come in to the sanctuary, you are drawn in and up. Central to this church is the cross. All of the pews align with the cross indicating that we are focused on Jesus Christ and the accomplished work he did on the cross. Who we pray to, who we sing to, who we talk about and think about is God as he is made known through Jesus Christ. Clearly one of the outstanding features of PC is the stained glass. Much of these windows were designed with meaning that help teach the story of God and his love for people. For example, the large window on the south of the sanctuary is Jesus depicted as the Good Shepherd as found in the stories in John 10 and Psalm 23.

The large window on the east wall is modeled after a painting entitled *The Rock of Ages*. The woman is struggling after being shipwrecked and clings to the cross symbolizing for us that the cross is what we cling to during our lives, including in our storms.

Many of the other windows help tell the stories of the Bible as well as other symbolic things in the building such as Greek letters, candles, and colors. All of these help to create an environment that is special or holy where we can honor God.

Our service style may be described as “traditional” in the sense that our order of worship is closely modeled to the same style that has been done for decades. Music style and worship style is simply a matter of preference. We enjoy connecting with our rich heritage of believers that sang the same songs and worshipped the same way we do. There are times where we stand, times where we sit, times where we read together, times to sing, times to pray, and times to listen. And times we simply mess up and stand or sit at the wrong time. No biggy! Hopefully your bulletin will help you follow along to what we are doing.

Regardless of the style of worship, it is our desire to create a space and time that helps people connect with God.

It is our hope and prayer that anyone who comes to Pleasant Chapel will feel Christ’s life-changing power, hear God’s Word, and see real purpose and meaning for their lives as well as for the lives of all people.

The general message is one that is about Truth, a Truth that originates with God yet has such great relevance for our lives today.

We believe it is our responsibility to provide the opportunity where God will change us, and change the world through us. We hope you will feel welcome in joining us to do just that.

Hopefully, as you worked through this and talked with fellow followers, you have gained some information about our faith and about our history. This is not about providing all the answers. In fact, hopefully you have a lot more questions! That is how this is supposed to work. Our journey is about seeking – seeking answers to questions and seeking how we fit into God’s great story.

Thank you for responding to God’s nudging in your life to consider your steps in your faith journey.

God Bless You!

Respond

1. What do you feel is most unique about Pleasant Chapel that you like the most?

2. Why is Pleasant Chapel the right *fit* for you?

3. Do you see any advantages/disadvantages of the tremendously large connected network of UMC churches?

Appendix

FAQs about Baptism, Membership, and Salvation (from the United Methodist Tradition)

Q: What does United Methodism fundamentally believe about baptism?

A: Baptism is a sacrament. In a sacrament, God uses common elements -- in this case, water -- as means or vehicles of divine grace. Baptism is administered by the church as the Body of Christ. It is the act of God through the grace of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Q: May we have our baby dedicated instead of baptized?

A: No. The theological understandings of the two services are very different. Dedication is a human act -- something we pledge or give to God. Baptism is a divine act, a pledge and gift God gives to us. Baptism of infants includes the reaffirmation of the vows of the baptismal covenant by parents, sponsors, and the congregation; but chiefly it celebrates what God is doing and will do in the life of the infant.

Q: Isn't it better to wait until they are older and let our children decide for themselves whether or not they want to be baptized?

A: No. We no more wait for our children to decide about being in the family of God than we wait for them to decide if they would like to be a part of our human family. As parents, we make many decisions -- in matters of health, safety, education, for example -- for our children. Of course, they may later reject what we have done for them. But this possibility does not relieve us of the responsibility to do all that we can for them spiritually, as we do in other aspects of their lives.

Q: Is sprinkling the only way that United Methodists baptize?

A: No, our church has always offered to people being baptized and to the parents of infants the choice of sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.

Q: May I be baptized again if I feel the need?

A: No, baptism is an act of God, and God does it right the first time. Our side of the covenant relationship with God will need recommitment and reaffirmation, but God always remains faithful to the divine side.

Q: Should every baby be baptized?

A: No, the baptism of a baby assumes that the child will be nurtured and formed in the faith at home and at church.

Q: Does baptism make me a member of the church?

A: Yes, baptism is the act of initiation and incorporation into the universal church of Jesus Christ, The United Methodist Church, and the local congregation, as our ritual makes very clear.

Q: Is there more than one category of church membership, according to *By Water and the Spirit*?

A: Yes, all people who are baptized become baptized members. Those who are baptized at an age at which they are capable of professing their faith must do so and become professing members as well (they cannot choose to be baptized members only). Those baptized as infants or young children do not become professing members until they are able to profess their own faith.

Q: Why does The United Methodist Church so understand baptism, membership, and salvation?

A: United Methodism stands in the historic heritage of the Christian faith through the ages and, specifically, in the legacy of John Wesley. Wesley was an Anglican priest. As a result, United Methodism has inherited a "high" understanding of the church, the sacraments, and other aspects of worship. Wesley was also an evangelical revivalist. As a result, United Methodism emphasizes the necessity of conversion, personal relationship with Christ, and witnessing to others. Neither of these aspects alone represents who we are. As United Methodists, we hold the two together in our baptismal theology and practice and in our broader understanding of how God works in our lives for salvation.³

³ (adapted from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/faqs-about-baptism-membership-and-salvation>)
Pleasant Chapel Membership

Pleasant Chapel Community Church Bylaws

Article 1.

Section 1. The name of this church shall be Pleasant Chapel Community Church doing business as Pleasant Chapel Community Church.

Section 2. Although Pleasant Chapel operates independently and is not subject to the control of any other organization, we seek to cooperate and partner with other like-minded churches, through ministries that continue in the commission of Christ.

Article 2. Identity and Purpose

Pleasant Chapel Community Church is people who are finding repurposed life in following Jesus Christ. We are responding to His forgiveness, mercy, and grace as we work to fulfill His command to build His kingdom by making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Pleasant Chapel Community Church seeks to provide a place where all are welcome to connect with God by exploring faith and growing in their relationship with Jesus. We provide opportunities for people to worship and be in fellowship with other followers, support one another in life, help those in our communities who are in need, and share the Good News of Jesus with others.

Article 3. What we believe

Section 1. *About God.* We believe in the one true, holy and living God. He is infinite in power, wisdom, justice, goodness and love, and rules with gracious regard for His creation and salvation of humankind, to the glory of His name. We believe He reveals Himself as the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, distinct but inseparable, eternally one in essence and power.

- We believe the Father is the Creator and Sustainer of all things. The Father can be intimately known by knowing the Son, Jesus.
- We believe in Jesus Christ, truly God and truly man, in whom the divine and human natures are perfectly and inseparably united. He is the eternal Word made flesh, the only begotten Son of the Father, born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. He lived, suffered and died on the cross. He was buried, rose from the dead and ascended into heaven to be with the Father, He shall return. He is eternal Savior and Mediator, who intercedes for us, and by Him all people will be judged.
- We believe the Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and Son as God. He is present in the world to make people aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also dwells in followers of Christ in order to provide them with power for living, understanding of truth, and guidance to do what is right. He enables followers with gifts and resources to serve and participate in His kingdom. He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment.

Section 2. *About Scripture.* We believe the Bible reveals the Word of God. The Bible is God's revelation about Himself to humankind and is to be the rule and guide for faith and practice.

Section 3. *About Humankind.* We believe God's special creation is humankind, male and female, bearing His very image. Humanity's original purpose is to bring glory to God in fellowship with Him. Sin's effects pervade and corrupt all of creation and all of life including cultural, social, and religious life. All humans inherit sin, are inclined to sin, and are lost without the saving grace found in entrusting one's life to Jesus Christ and receiving forgiveness He provides by His sacrificial death. Because God created humankind in His own image, and that Christ died for humanity, we believe that all persons possess dignity and worth.

Section 4. *About the Church.* The church is the community of all followers of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head of the church, whose mission is to make disciples and spread the love of Christ. Followers of Christ should actively engage in the local church to worship Him, to know Him, to pray, to make new disciples, to grow to maturity in faith, and discover and utilize their personal gifts in the life of the church.

Section 5. *About Hope.* We believe that God’s plan includes the giving of new life to those who choose to receive the forgiveness found in His sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. New life has real purpose and meaning in Christ here and now as well as an eternal life in the presence of God in the future. We believe in the return of Jesus in glory to bring this age to an end bringing judgement to Satan, unbelievers, and all evil. We believe true followers of Christ will receive a glorified body to be made present with God and with all of the believers from all ages.

Section 6. *About the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion.* Sacraments are special *means of grace* that exceed human understanding. From our traditions, we recognize baptism and communion as sacraments. For us, baptism marks the initiation into the church and signifies the beginning of the process of salvation for the individual. Communion is our response to Jesus’ command when He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” We participate in the meal Jesus shared with His disciples on the night before His arrest and crucifixion. It is then we remember what He has done for us, confess our need for Him, and proclaim our hope found in Him. For more information regarding the church’s understanding of the sacraments see the Appendix.

Section 7. *About Human Sexuality & Marriage.* It is not the purpose of Pleasant Chapel’s polity to make statements regarding the church’s position on every current social or cultural issue. However, because of the current nature of the disaffiliation from the UMC and because human sexuality is such a divisive and yet ambiguous problem within the church, the following reflects the church’s belief.

Pleasant Chapel welcomes all people to explore and grow in Christian faith, to connect with this family of fellow followers of Jesus Christ, and to participate in the church’s ministries. All are accepted and all are affirmed as people who have sacred worth and bear the image of their Creator. Accepting and affirming, however, do not mean all behaviors correctly reflect the image that followers of Christ are to bear (this is the basic reason many churches have struggled with the issue of human sexuality). Followers of Christ are called to live holy lives that reflect the goodness of our Creator.

We believe that human sexuality is a gift from God to be expressed within the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. Expression not in the marital covenant is sexually immoral and is therefore not condoned, celebrated, or promoted by Pleasant Chapel. For more information regarding the church’s understanding of human sexuality see the Appendix.

Article 4. Membership

Section 1. Membership into Pleasant Chapel is a step in the journey of faith of the individual who joins. Those who desire to unite with Pleasant Chapel in membership shall become a member upon taking vows declaring the Christian faith through appropriate services of profession of faith and membership. The service calls potential members to:

- confess Jesus Christ as Savior and put their whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as their Lord;
- profess their agreement and belief in the basic truths of the church;
- commit to God by committing to this local body of fellow followers of Jesus Christ;

- acknowledge they are vital to the overall health of the body;
- pledge their prayers, presence, resources, skills and their service to God through this church;
- submit to the spiritual authority of the local church.

Section 2. Membership of new persons is a step in the journey of the existing members of the church. Existing members

- commit to uplift and support the new members and welcome them into this community of faith;
- provide the space and opportunity for new members to grow in Christ in discipleship, fellowship, and ministry.

Section 3. With membership comes the privilege to serve on committees and vote in congregational votes.

Section 4. Children and infants baptized are *baptized* members. Professing members are *voting* members.

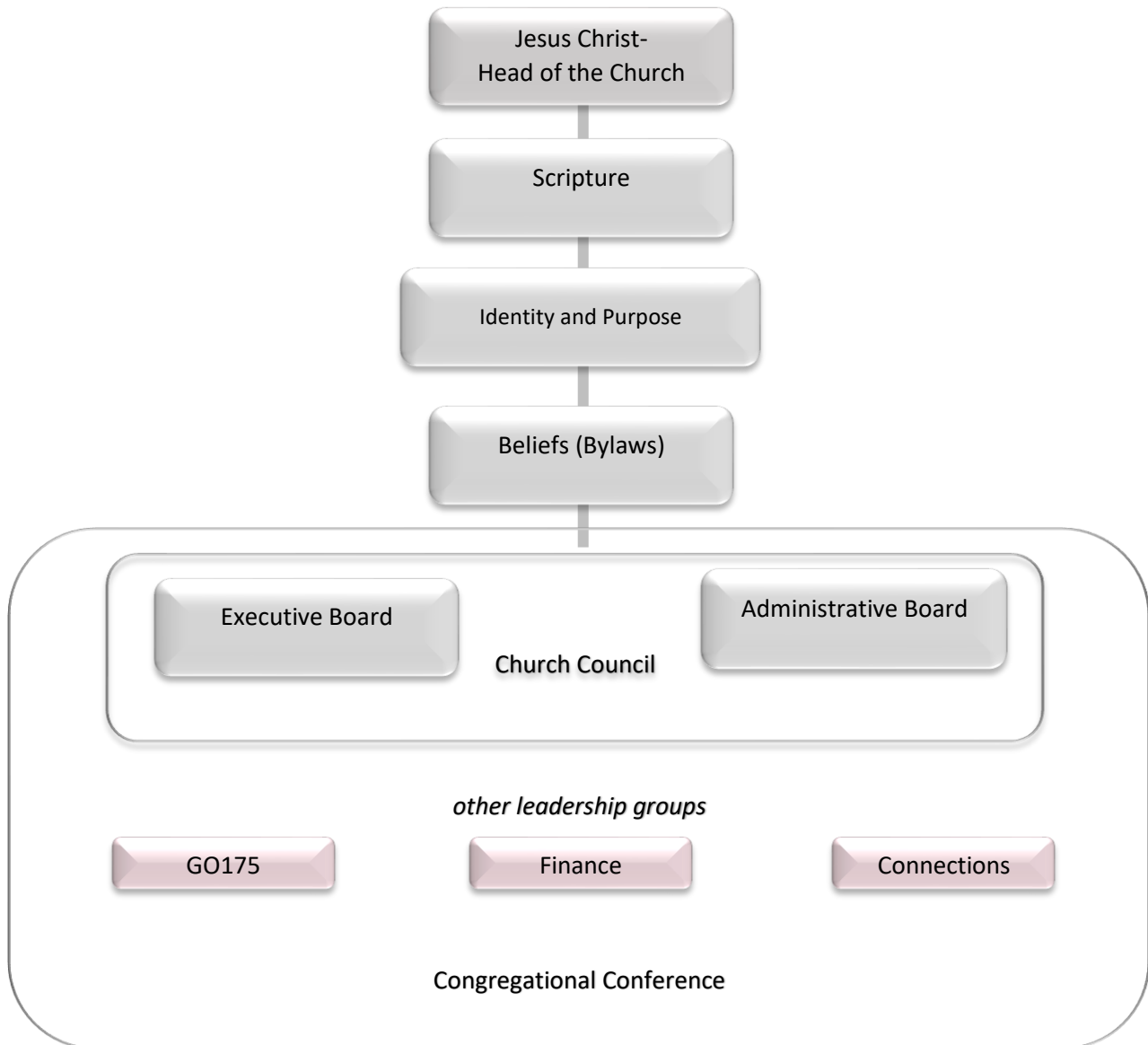
Article 5. Government

Section 1. Organization

Pleasant Chapel Community Church acknowledges Jesus Christ as its head. Scripture, guided by the Holy Spirit, is the guide in matters of faith and church order.

The members of Pleasant Chapel entrust the leaders they choose to govern the church. Leadership, under the guidance of God, governs issues of ministry and business within the church. Pleasant Chapel is governed by the **Church Council** – the Executive Board, the Administrative Board, and the senior pastor. Those matters considered to be of major importance will be presented to the Church Council for approval, such as major financial decisions, changes to the Bylaws, capital improvements, nominations, and staff changes. The **Congregational Conference** is the entire voting membership of Pleasant Chapel and meets when necessary to review annual budget, approve nominations, approve changes to the Bylaws, and approve financial decisions valued greater than 20% of the budget which have been approved by the Church Council.

Organization of Pleasant Chapel Community Church



Section 2. Committee (Board) Membership and Meeting Procedures

- ¶ 1. Committees are made up of people from Pleasant Chapel Community Church who have been nominated by the *Connections Team (Nominations)* and approved at the annual Congregational Conference. Committee members serve a 3 year term and must sit out 1 year before being re-nominated.
- ¶ 2. A target number for the Administrative and Executive boards is 12. There should be 10-12 church members and no more than 2 non church members on the Boards. There should not be 2 or more people on the same committee (board) from the same family.
- ¶ 3. A Chairperson and Secretary will be selected by each committee at the beginning of each year.
- ¶ 4. Each Board should meet at least quarterly. Meetings should be conducted using Parliamentary Procedure. A simplified guideline for Robert's Rule of Order can be found in the Appendix. Minutes should be recorded and stored electronically.

¶ 5. In order for a committee or board to meet, a quorum (minimum attendance) is required. A quorum for Pleasant Chapel is 2/3 membership or greater present. In order for a motion to be passed a positive vote of 2/3 or greater of those present is required. Proxy (or virtual) participation is acceptable.

Section 3. Serving in a leadership role in Pleasant Chapel is a very important responsibility which requires a great commitment from each member for their time, their abilities, and of their faith. Members acknowledge this commitment for their term of service by agreeing to the Board Covenant Agreement. The agreement can be found in the Appendix.

Section 4. Executive Board

The Executive board deals in matters more *spiritual* in nature. The pastor (staff) reports to this board. Sunday, midweek, and special services are this board's responsibilities. Discipleship, spiritual development, social and service events are also maintained by this board. Members of this committee will commit individually and collectively to

- The prayerful leadership of the ministries of Pleasant Chapel.
- The pastoral care and spiritual direction of the congregation.
- The careful management of church programs, ministry, and staff. This includes the responsibility to hire, license pastors to preach, review (and remove if necessary) staff including pastor, appoint teachers, ministry teams and directors, etc.

¶ 1. The job descriptions for pastors and staff, their selection processes, and review, renewal, and removal procedures may be found in the Appendix.

¶ 2. Requirements to teach/supervise children/youth (this is linked to the Administrative Board policy on Security/Safety) may be found in the Appendix.

Section 5. Administrative Board

The Administrative Board deals in matters more *physical* and *administrative*. Property and grounds, the maintenance of the property, building projects, finance, safety/security, and media (A/V, Webpage, Facebook, etc.) are the responsibility of this board. Members of this committee will commit individually and collectively to

- The careful management of church property and assets.
- The careful stewardship of church finances.

¶ 1. See Appendix for Finance Policies which include Committee description and selection process, reporting process (annual, monthly, etc.), offering collection process, budget development / approval process, definition of fiscal year, and spending procedures (who and how much?).

¶ 2. See Appendix for Security/Safety Policies and Procedures.

¶ 3. See Appendix for Building / Property use Policy.

Personal notes from Joel regarding membership.

While I do believe that membership in a local congregation has many positive aspects, I want to share with you my *personal* experience with membership that has not been all positive.

I became a member of a United Methodist Church in the early 70's. It was the right thing to do as a youth after completing confirmation classes and was a public profession of my faith and commitment to that local church (and I'm sure I had little idea what that was all about then – I was 10).

Later in life, I attended a different denomination and was involved in leadership and teaching. But I was unable to continue in that role because I was not a member. Membership could not simply be transferred because the Methodist baptism and membership would not qualify in this church. It was about then I began to learn a lot about denominations, doctrinal differences, and the many fights and divisions these have caused. Up to this point, I seriously thought a church was a church!

The more I learned and the more I experienced this, the more turned off I became at the notion of local membership. "I am however a member of the Church – big C. The universal church of the followers of Christ. That is more important than local church membership." If membership's purpose is primarily to divide because of differences in the way we practice our faith, I don't want anything to do with it.

So, I don't want to be part of that here. Membership should not be about agreeing to things that distinguish us from other people and therefore causing division. It should also not be about "country-club exclusivity", where members believe they have some spiritual advantage over non-members. Membership should not be about aligning yourself with a theology that is believed to be superior to other followers of Jesus Christ.

So what is membership for? Well, simply put it's about your money. It is how this local church can get the most cash out of you. No, that's not true. Put that in there to see if you are really reading this. It will probably be on the test!

Membership is about a number of things. First membership should be viewed as a growth step on your personal faith journey. You are publicly declaring that you desire to grow in Christ more deeply as you attend, learn and serve at this church. It is part of your on-going discipleship (which means learner) as you continue to grow.

Second, membership is about accountability. Like close family members, we through love encourage one another to continue on this walk, to continue to seek God in all aspects of our lives, to continue to resist sin, and to challenge one another to grow.

Third, membership is about commitment. It is about committing to this body, this local group of people, like a family. It is here that I believe many people miss an important aspect. This is a body or a family where *you* can grow, where *you* can be encouraged, where *you* can find ways to serve. But that is a two-way street. Family members need each other. Too often, it is too easy to simply skip out on church or church activities. But you are needed. We simply do not know what impact we have on other family members when we provide a hug, a smile, a helping hand, a word of encouragement, a little bit of love. Those family actions may have huge consequences that you may never know. Simply skipping out denies you the opportunity to be the needed family member to someone. The Bible describes the church like a physical body with many parts (1 Corinthians 12). Those parts all need each other. So we need to remember that when we are not committed in our presence, not only do we miss out on our personal growing, but we could be preventing others from growing simply because we were not there to do what we could have been doing.

Please do not think this is going to result in attendance taking or requirements to be present 100% of the time. We are all busy people with lots going on. But as we plan, as we prioritize, and as we grow, we need to always be mindful to the commitment we are making to the family at Pleasant Chapel.