

## Discovering Membership

01.01.19

Yes, this a lot of information, but we do want to answer your questions well. Read it or skim it, then join Pastor Kevin for a Sunday brunch to talk more about becoming a member.

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# INTRODUCTION

We are thrilled you are interested in learning more about following Jesus and connecting with Alto Reformed Church. This is one of the most important decisions of your life. It is transforming to turn and follow Jesus, but to partner with other believers in following Jesus is an equally important and valuable step. You will be encouraged by the support of godly friends and find significance in the world as you serve others according to your strengths. We hope that as you reflect on this material, you will choose to become a member and partner in ministry with us.

## What is a church member?

The Bible teaches that we are members of a body (Eph. 4:25), but our culture tends to use the word *member* very differently. Look in your wallet for a moment. To how many organizations are you a member? I am a Staples Rewards Card Member, a Panera Bread Member, a Pizza Ranch Rewards Member, and a Family Christian Stores Pastor Perks Member. My health insurer calls me a member, my car insurance company calls me a member, my credit card companies even call me a member. Get the picture? The word *membership* is so over-used that the definition has become vague and confusing. Generally, it means we get something for less than we would if we were not members, but you had better read the fine print first. Membership could mean many things today, and thus we need to clarify what it means to be a church member.

## The Bible describes two kinds of belonging or membership.

**Positional Membership:** Scripture clearly teaches that when one chooses to follow Jesus Christ, he/she becomes a member of the one body (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Eph. 2:13-22; 4:3-6; Col. 1:13-22). When this occurs, you become a "positional member" in the universal Church. Positional membership is eternal and unchanging. It comes by grace through faith. (We will discuss this more in the section on "trust".)

### Ephesians 3:6

*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

**Participating Membership or Partnership:** The Bible also urges positional members to continue growing by becoming participating members or partners in a specific local church (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:25-31; 14:12, 26; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Tim. 3:14-15). Obviously, a person may be a member of several different local bodies during the course of his or her lifetime while maintaining an invisible bond of positional membership.

### 1 Cor. 16:15-16

*You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the Lord's people. I urge you, brothers and sisters, to submit to such people and to everyone who joins in the work and labors at it.*

God longs for all people to be saved and join his family, becoming "positional members," but he also longs for us to partner with other believers and become participating members in his Church.

## Why become a (participating) member?

Many people assume that because they profess Christ, further identification or involvement with a local church is an optional tack on. It is kind of like the service plan you can get on a new TV. You can take it or leave it. It might be helpful, but probably not. It's really up to you. Partnering with other believers should not be viewed as optional. We believe there are two major reasons for becoming a church member.

**1. We believe membership in a local church is a biblical mandate for every believer.** As noted above, "membership" sometimes reflects positional membership. While at other times, it clearly calls us to participation in a local church. (see Rom. 12:4-8) Paul's instructions clearly call us to work together as partners in sharing the Good News.

### Philippians 3:17

*Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

*"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (1 Cor. 1:10)*

It is not optional. As a follower of Christ, we are instructed to serve alongside other believers. You may want to be a lone ranger, but God knows you need a Taunto.

Jesus also longed for His followers to be deeply committed to one another. The night before his crucifixion he taught, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34) And later Jesus prayed, "...May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (John 17:23) Uniting together is foundational to New Testament teaching.

**2. We believe membership is beneficial and essential to your spiritual health.** In a culture where commitment is no longer highly valued, recognizable partnership is an important step that moves each of us out of the vague clouds of our good intentions and into the clear light of committed participation. It presents a challenge to "step out of the stands" and publicly affirm a commitment to Christ and to a specific local body. In this sense, membership can be a significant "defining moment" in one's lifelong discipleship journey. This step is essential to our spiritual health for two basic reasons.

First, we need support. We were not designed to walk alone. Paul instructed the believers to "carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2) There was one thing wrong with creation; Adam was alone. God gave him Eve. So too, we need others to support us in life.

Second, we need guidance. We read in the letter to Hebrews, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Heb. 10:24-25) The author of Hebrews also shared, "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." (Heb. 3:13) In both of these verses the word "encourage" means to entreat, admonish, or instruct. We need people around us who urge us to live holy lives, who keep us accountable, and who guide us through life's temptations.

*"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone." (1 Thes. 5:11-14)*

## What is the process to become a member?

We have broken the process up into three steps and ask that you prayerfully consider what God would like you to do.

1. **Consider** – Prospective members attend "Discovering Membership" to learn about our congregation and to understand the commitment/vows involved in membership. Attending does not obligate you to join, but allows the opportunity to make an informed commitment.
2. **Covenant** – Prospective members may decide to partner with our congregation and meet with our elders to request membership by transfer, reaffirmation of faith, or profession of faith and so covenant with us in ministry.
3. **Celebrate** – During a worship service, new members affirm the membership covenant and are welcomed into the congregation.

## What is the membership covenant?

A covenant is a joint commitment between two parties. In this case, it is a commitment between you and the other members of the congregation. When a couple gets married, they make a covenant with each other to work together. They each state vows or promises to the other. The intent is to bring stability and to clarify the level of commitment in the relationship. The same is true for the church.

Without a covenant, relationships often fall into unhealthy ruts and never develop true intimacy. Our membership covenant, also known as membership vows, summarizes the commitments of the members. These commitments can seem overwhelming, but they are helpful in articulating God's best for us. They give us a target and help us to know what it means to live like Jesus. Perfection is obviously impossible here on earth, but perfection is our goal. Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mat. 5:48) To shoot for less is inadequate.

You will fall short. You will mess up. But Jesus did not come to condemn you. Just like the woman caught in adultery, he offers forgiveness to you and then says, "go and sin no more." (John 8:11)

We only ask that you be real with us so that we might grow in humility and love together.

Because God has revealed his love and grace to us,  
We commit to follow Jesus by **trusting**, **connecting**, **growing**, **servicing**, **reaching**, and **worshipping**.

### Our Profession of Faith & Membership Vows:

#### Those Professing Faith and Joining Alto Reformed Church:

I believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;  
and confess Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

I accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments  
as the only rule for faith and life.

Relying on the grace of God, I promise  
to **confess Christ publicly before others**,  
to **serve Christ daily**, and  
to **walk in Jesus' way**.

I promise to **exhibit the joy of new life in Christ**;  
to **share fully in the life of the church**;  
to be **faithful in worship** and **service**;  
to **offer my prayers** and **gifts**; and  
to **seek to advance God's purposes**  
**here and throughout the world**

I promise to **accept the spiritual guidance of the church**;  
to **walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation**; and  
to **seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace**.

#### The congregation:

We promise to **love, encourage, and support**  
**these brothers and sisters**  
by **teaching the gospel of God's love**,  
by **being an example of Christian faith and character**, and  
by **giving the strong support of God's family**  
**in fellowship, prayer, and service**.

#### All:

Together, we will pursue our mission to know Jesus and make Jesus known.

#### Summary of Membership Vows

- I will **trust** Jesus as my Savior and Lord.
- I will **connect** deeply with Jesus' followers.
- I will **grow** to be like Jesus.
- I will **serve** sacrificially as Jesus did.
- I will **reach** out to the world with the love and truth of Jesus.
- I will **worship** Jesus as the ruler of my life.

Just like the Israelites, "You have declared today that the Lord is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice." (Deuteronomy 26:17 ERV) Undoubtedly, you will fail at some point. However, he is faithful to forgive and set us back on the right track. (1 John 1:9) So, confess your failure to God and keep doing your best for God.

# OUR MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS

These commitments explain the broadly stated commitments in our Membership Covenant.  
They form the basic structure and content of "Discovering Membership."

## **COMMITMENT TO TRUST: (faith)**

**Because I was rescued by grace, I will trust Jesus as my Forgiver and Leader.**

I confess that I have sinned; I have turned from God and His plans for me.  
I accept God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ, my Savior, because He took my punishment on the cross.  
I submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, my King, and to the authority of His Word.  
I will seek to live according to God's plans and purposes.  
I have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit.



## **COMMITMENT TO CONNECT: (fellowship)**

**Because I was formed for God's family, I will connect deeply with other believers.**

I will seek to build others up by being positive and friendly.  
I will seek to cultivate deep, authentic relationships with believers on a regular basis.  
I will seek to develop deep, healthy relationships with those living in my home.  
I will seek to be more loving, grace giving, and forgiving, resolving conflict with others in a Biblical manner.  
I will seek to preserve the unity of the church by supporting our mission, vision, beliefs, and leaders.



## **COMMITMENT TO GROW: (discipleship)**

**Because I was created to become like Christ, I will grow continually to be like Christ.**

I will seek to learn more of God's Word through relevant and meaningful ways.  
I will seek to develop authentic relationships with others, who encourage and inspire spiritual health & growth. (small group)  
I will seek to establish healthy habits, (spiritual disciplines) first of which will be a quiet time in God's Word and prayer.  
I will seek to respond to challenges with peace and faith rather than anxiety and fear (spiritual fruit).  
I will seek to honor God with my finances (budget) and my personal giving to His work (tithing).



## **COMMITMENT TO SERVE: (ministry)**

**Because I was designed for serving, I will serve selflessly according to my strengths.**

I will seek to nurture a humble, servant-hearted attitude in all I do.  
I will seek to evaluate my unique God-given design and how well my activities fit who I am.  
I will seek to express my design by serving in a ministry in the church or community at least once a month.  
I will seek to expand and develop my unique design for ministry as God guides me.  
I will seek to encourage, equip, and empower others for ministry.



## **COMMITMENT TO REACH: (evangelism)**

**Because I was made for a mission, I will reach out courageously to the world.**

I will seek to captivate unbelievers by sharing Christ's love through intentional, sacrificial acts of kindness.  
I will seek to actively pray for and courageously cultivate relationships with unbelieving friends and family.  
I will seek to sow seeds of faith in unbelievers by connecting them with other believers and ministries.  
I will seek to share my spiritual story with unbelievers and lead them into a relationship with Jesus.  
I will seek to pray about, reflect on, and ultimately go where God wants to use me cross-culturally.



## **COMMITMENT TO WORSHIP: (surrender)**

**Because I was planned for God's pleasure, I will surrender completely to Him.**

I will seek to faithfully engage my body, mind, and heart in inspiring worship of God (attend Sunday gathering).  
I will seek to pray alone and with others on a regular basis.  
I will seek to honor God with my physical and personal health (exercise & nutrition).  
I will seek to be holy by reflecting on my life, confessing sin, receiving forgiveness, and submitting to guidance.  
I will seek to please God in every dimension of my life by balancing His purposes in my life.

# TRUST: THE BIG STORY GOSPEL

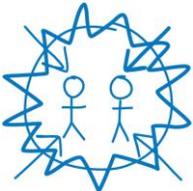
The Big Story is a gospel presentation tool designed to lead others to make a decision for Jesus Christ and join his mission to heal the world. Built on the premise that most people ache for a better world, The Big Story presents the gospel using the following main points shown visually as "worlds":



**World 1: Creation:** The world and all that's in it was designed for good.

*"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." (Gen. 1:31)*

IF YOU ARE IN WORLD 1, you think the world is fine. But we have seen that it is hard to reconcile this with the suffering in the world. How do you reconcile these things?



**World 2: Fall:** We—and the world—were damaged by evil.

*"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23)*

IF YOU ARE IN WORLD 2, you're overwhelmed by the evil in the world, and even the evil in your own heart. Jesus is calling you to follow him.



**World 3: Christ:** Jesus came to restore the world and everything in it to what God intended.

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)*

IF YOU ARE IN WORLD 3, you have some understanding of what Jesus did, and he is calling you to follow him.



**World 4: Faith:** Jesus invites us to join him and his community to heal the world.

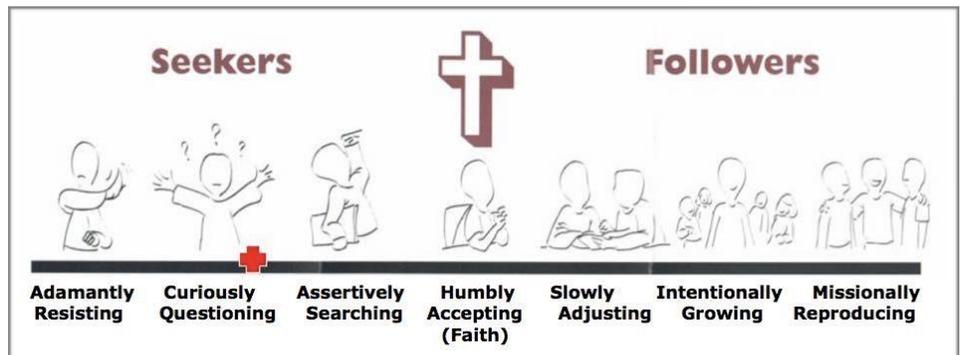
*"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." (Mark 1:17 NIV)*

*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34)*

IF YOU ARE IN WORLD 4, you are trusting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, seeking to do good in the world, and letting God's Spirit guide you through the Bible and prayer.

## So, where are you at with Jesus?

Would you like to become a follower of Jesus and engage in his mission to heal the world with his community and with the help of his Spirit today? You can begin by telling Jesus you would like to become a follower. You can pray using "A Prayer Response to Jesus" below.



## A PRAYER RESPONSE TO JESUS

Jesus, I believe that your death and resurrection broke the cycle of corruption in the world and in me. I acknowledge my responsibility in contributing to the damage in the world. I receive your forgiveness. I choose to follow you and let you be my leader. I receive your Spirit.

(See [www.intervarsity.org/evangelism](http://www.intervarsity.org/evangelism))

# TRUST: SACRAMENT #1- BAPTISM

## What is a sacrament?

The word sacrament is based on the Latin word sacramentum, which means "something sacred." In the early church sacramentum came to stand for many things sacred, including rites that had a hidden meaning. During the Reformation, using Scripture as a guide, the reformers limited the number of sacraments to two: baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments, instituted by Christ, are a means of grace within the covenant community. They are visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible and the means by which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Baptism

### What Is Baptism?

A sign is a promise, a signal, a visible representation of a reality that is yet to be seen. Baptism, a sacrament (ordinance) of the church, is a sign of what God has already done for and continues to do within His people; a sign that points us to a deeper reality; a visible sign of an invisible grace. Theologian John Calvin noted that baptism is "An outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith" (Institutes, IV.xiv.1)

(See our confessional statements in the section on our beliefs.)

### What Is Baptism A Sign Of?

Water is the key ingredient in cleansing. It is the water that takes the dirt and grime from our body, removes it, and makes us clean. Likewise, the water of baptism is a sign that, just as water washes away dirt from the body, so the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ wash-away all my sins. "To be washed with Christ's blood means that God, by grace, has forgiven my sins because of Christ's blood poured out for me in his sacrifice on the cross. To be washed with Christ's Spirit means that the Holy Spirit has renewed me and set me apart to be a member of Christ so that more and more I become dead to sin and increasingly live a holy and blameless life." (Heidelberg Catechism #70)

Peter explains, *"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body[world] but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolized baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saved you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."* (1 Peter 3:18-22)

Paul explains this washing away as death, *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* (Romans 6:3-4)

The Heidelberg Catechism puts it this way; "Sacraments [baptism and the Lord's Supper] are holy signs and seals for us to see. They were instituted by God, so that by our use of them he might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and might put his seal on that promise. And this is God's gospel promise: to forgive our sins and give us eternal life by grace alone because of Christ's one sacrifice finished on the cross."

### Why Do We Baptize?

We baptize because God's Word instructs us to do so. Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20) Paul said, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins." (Acts 2:38)

### Does Baptism Save?

The answer is a resounding "no"! The bible is very clear that only Jesus saves. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me" (John 14:6). He did not say "Baptism is the way, the truth, and the life". Baptism is a sign to us of what God has already done and made available to us through Jesus. But in and of itself, baptism has no saving value. God professes His love for us and promises to cleanse us from sin by grace through faith in Jesus. The offer of God's grace is on the table, but each person must make a personal response and receive it. How? It's done by accepting Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as payment for your sins and by choosing to follow Him as the leader of your life.

### How Should Baptism Be Done? Immersion or Sprinkling?

Immersion powerfully symbolizes the death of our old self and resurrection to new life. (See Rom. 6:1-11, Col. 2:11-12) Sprinkling or pouring symbolizes the washing or cleansing from sin. (See Titus 3:5, acts 22:16)

Throughout the New Testament, baptism was done by immersion, that is putting someone completely under the water and bringing them back up. Mark tells us that John baptized people "in the river Jordan." (Mark 1:5) He also tells us that Jesus "came up out of the water." (Mark 1:10) (Also see Acts 8:36-39)

Sprinkling was practiced by priests in Old Testament times to cleanse ritually unclean objects. (See Lev. 14:48-52, Num. 19:18-20) There is also evidence outside of Scripture that the early church baptized by sprinkling. Therefore, we practice both methods. You can choose.

### **Should You Be Baptized?**

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and have never been baptized, then the answer is "yes". Jesus said in Mark 16:16 "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved". Baptism does not save you, only faith in Jesus Christ does that. Baptism does not make you a believer, but it does show that you already believe. Baptism is the outward sign of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing you to a place of repentance and faith.

If you were baptized as an infant, the answer is more complicated as there is little in Scripture to guide us. Paul wrote "There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." (Ephesians 4:4-6) Therefore, if you were baptized as an infant, you do not need to experience baptism as an adult.

### **What is the process for me to be baptized?**

1. Attend "Discovering Membership," as we recommend joining the church along with professing your faith in baptism.
2. Call the office to set a time to meet with the pastor.
3. Fill out the "Request for Baptism Form" prior to meeting with the elders.
4. Meet with the pastor and elders at 7PM on the first Tuesday of the month. They will want to get to know you, assure that you understand what baptism is about, answer your questions, approve or deny your request, approve an elder to assist, and approve a date.
5. On the date of the baptism, please sit towards the front of the sanctuary and bring family and friends. After the baptism, you will receive a Baptismal Certificate.

### **What About Baptizing Children?**

Nearly every Christian Church affirms the Biblical origin of baptism. In the Old Testament God chose to bless Abraham saying, "I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you" (Genesis 17:7). The "covenant" is God's promise to be our God and our descendant's God, now and always.

God then asked Abraham and his descendants to recognize this covenant by establishing a sign...circumcision. "This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you. For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised" (Genesis 17:10-12a). The sign designated by God for those who followed Him was the circumcision of all baby boys on the eighth day. For over 4,000 years the blood of baby boys marked the entrance of the covenant relationship with God.

When Jesus came to earth, he not only shed blood through his own circumcision, but more significantly through His death on the cross. Colossians 2:11-12 states, "In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him for the dead". The sign of the covenant was changed from circumcision to baptism because the sign of blood was fulfilled through Jesus. Baptism is now the bloodless sign of the covenant with God.

Up to this point, there is an agreement regarding baptism. The church affirms that the sign of the covenant changed from circumcision to baptism. The question that remains is if the time of the sign changed, do we baptize infants or are we now to baptize adults only? The Reformed Church in America (RCA) believes that God calls his church to include children of believers in the covenant family. The sign of the covenant has changed from circumcision to baptism (Colossians 2:11-12), but the time of the covenant sign has not changed. The reasons for this belief are fourfold.

### **What Support Is There For Baptizing Children?**

#### **1. Biblical examples of infants in the early church being baptized.**

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household...At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Act 16:31-33). As one would expect, the entire family (adults, children, and infants) were all included in the act of being baptized.

### **What About Infant Dedication?**

There are several passages which give support to dedicating children: see Exodus 13:2, 11-12, 15; 1 Samuel 1:11, Luke 2:22-23; Luke 2:25-35 and Matthew 19:13-15.

We recognize and respect parents who hold different convictions. We believe baptism and dedication are intended to entrust our children to God, knowing that he will work in our children to bring them to a place of personal faith. If you feel strongly about dedicating your child, you are encouraged to talk with the pastor.

In 1 Corinthians the Bible equates the crossing of the Red Sea with the baptism of Israel. "I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor 10:1-2). The baptismal event included infants and children, who were carried across the sea in the tender arms of their parents.

## **2. Infant baptism is meant to be a tangible expression of the grace of God.**

"When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 2:4-5).

In infant baptism, only three out of the four parties make promises: the congregation, the parents, and God all express promises. The fragile infant is able to do nothing... nothing except receive the gift of God. Infant baptism is meant to capture the essence of how each person enters into the Kingdom of God—by grace alone.

"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "We love because God first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

## **3. It is true that the New Testament does not explicitly state, "Thou shall baptize infants".**

The lack of a New Testament command regarding the age of baptism is not proof against infant baptism, but support for it. Remember the background of baptism regarding circumcision on the eighth day. For 4,000 years the people of God had been carrying out the sign of the covenant with their children. If this practice were to change, we would most certainly expect the Bible to speak to this change. In general, a standing procedure stands unless we are notified to the contrary. In the case of infant baptism, the Bible does not notify us of such a dramatic change.

## **4. The history of the church confirms the baptism of children.**

For 1,550 of the church's 2,000 years of existence, infant baptism was the universally accepted practice...handed down from the disciples of Jesus themselves. It was not until 1550 that one branch of the church decided to discontinue baptizing infants in response to abuses of the practice in the church. Specifically, some in the church were abusing infant baptism by considering it to be the means of salvation rather than the sign of grace.

When baptizing infants, it is essential to focus on the meaning of the baptism. Baptism is a visible sign of God's invisible grace. Baptism itself does not give salvation to any child. We acknowledge the need for each person to receive Jesus Christ as their own personal Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 states, "If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." When we baptize infants, we recognize God's grace in the present and look forward to its fulfillment in the future. Each person must respond to God's grace in a personal way by receiving the gift of grace, Jesus Christ, and publicly professing faith in him.

We do not require all children to be baptized... but we do encourage it because of the biblical teachings mentioned above.

## **What About Infant Dedication?**

There are several passages which give support to dedicating children: see Exodus 13:2, 11-12, 15; 1 Samuel 1:11, Luke 2:22-23; Luke 2:25-35 and Matthew 19:13-15.

We recognize and respect parents who hold different convictions. We believe baptism and dedication are intended to entrust our children to God, knowing that he will work in our children to bring them to a place of personal faith. If you feel strongly about dedicating your child, you are encouraged to talk with the pastor.

## **What Does God Desire Of The Church And The Parents In the Baptism of Children?**

During the service, both the church and the parents share vows/promises to raise the children in a manner that points them to faith in Jesus.

## **What Do I Do Next?**

1. If you are not a member, attend "Discovering Membership." At least one parent needs to be a member of the church.
2. Call the office to set a time to meet with the pastor.
3. Meet with the pastor and fill out the "Request for Baptism Form."
4. Meet with the elders at 7PM on the first Tuesday of the month. They will want to get to know you, assure that you understand what baptism is about, answer your questions, approve or deny your request, approve an elder to assist, and approve a date.
5. On the date of the baptism, please sit towards the front of the sanctuary and bring family and friends. After the baptism, you will receive a gift and Baptismal Certificate.

### **Baptismal Vows**

#### **The Parents:**

I believe in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and confess Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord.

I will be a faithful member of this congregation, seeking to advance God's purposes here and throughout the world.

I promise to accept the spiritual guidance of the church;

to walk in a spirit of Christian love with this congregation; and

to seek those things which make for unity, purity, and peace.

I promise to instruct my child in the truth of God's Word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for him/her, to teach him/her to pray; and to train him/her in Christ's way by my example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church.

#### **The Congregation:**

We promise to love, encourage, and support these brothers and sisters by teaching the gospel of God's love, by being an example of Christian faith and character, and by giving the strong support of God's family in fellowship, prayer, and service.

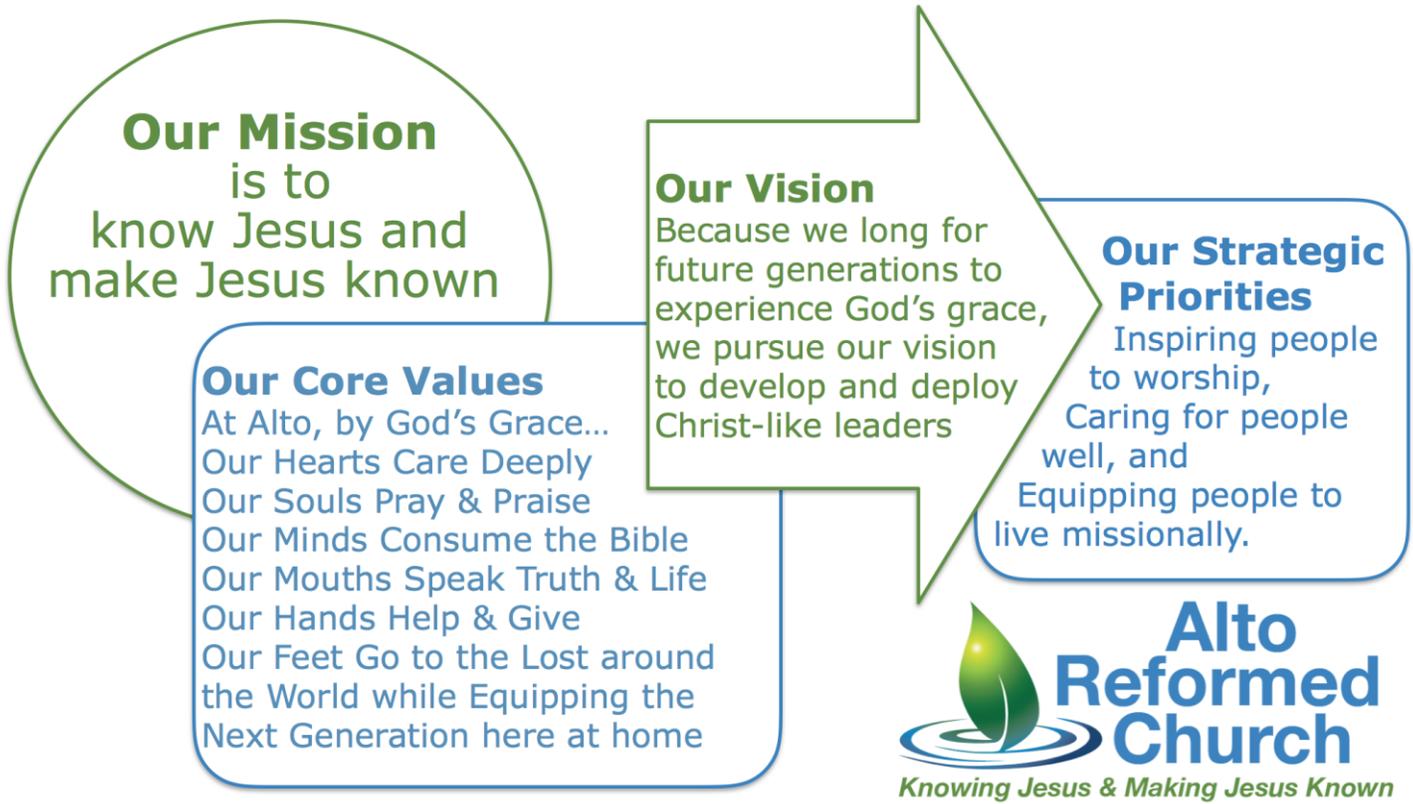
#### **Everyone:**

Together, we will pursue our mission to know Jesus and make Jesus known.

# CONNECT: OUR MISSION, VISION & VALUES

In 2016, the consistory adopted the following statements to help the congregation better communicate why we exist and what is important to us. Our Mission Statement comes from two passages of Scripture: "I want to know Christ..." (Philippians 3:10) and "It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known." (Romans 15:20)

Late in 2017, we adopted a vision and three strategic priorities. These statements are intended to guide us in decision making and help us focus on doing what's most important to growing God's kingdom in our community. So, if you are looking to make a real impact in the world, we hope you will partner with us.



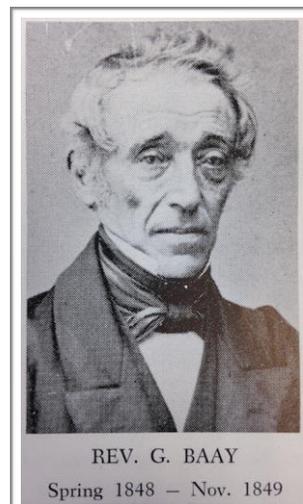
## CONNECT: OUR HISTORY

The Alto Reformed Church was organized as a church in **1855**. Some early history indicates that in **1845** Albert Meenk was the first settler in the area. He arrived from the Netherlands to worship God without government interference. Ten more families arrived the next year, and they gathered in a house to worship. Seven more families arrived in **1847**. Church services were held in various living rooms and grew quickly into the Reformed Church of Alto. A 20 x 28 ft. log church was built in **1847**, and in **1848**, the church's first pastor, Rev. Baay, arrived from the Netherlands to lead the pioneers in worship. For his services, Rev. Baay received potatoes, wheat, and other products of the field, as well as free-will offerings to supplement his salary.



A new church was erected in **1857** on five acres of land donated by a few members of the congregation.

The current church is built in English style architecture, with its octagonal auditorium and rolling partitions, and was erected in **1898** at a cost of about \$8,000. It was described in the writings as "certainly one of the most attractive rural church buildings in the whole state". This building is still our primary space for worship.



In **1924**, it was decided that two services a month would be conducted in English rather than Dutch. Three years later, one service each Sunday was conducted in the language of the new country. The last Dutch service was a communion service held on December 30, **1945**.

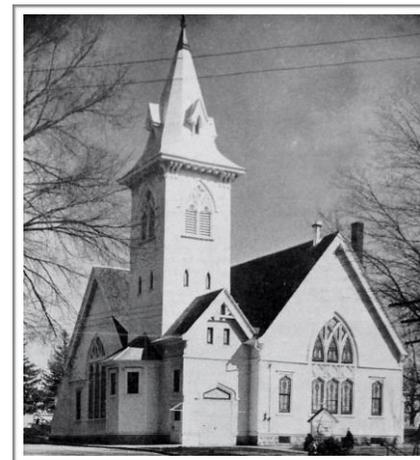
Additions and renovations to the original church building have been made to accommodate the growth of the church. In **1968**, the north wing of church was added to seat 225 more people. It included room in the basement for 10 Sunday School rooms. In **1997**, an elevator was installed to make it handicap accessible. In **2002**, it was voted on to add an addition for a larger entry way, bathrooms on the main floor, offices in the front, leaving the old offices and consistory room open for more Sunday School space, and a larger Youth Room to accommodate our growing youth ministry. The addition of the nursery, prayer room, and 2 classrooms was completed in **2010**.

The Church celebrated the 100th anniversary of its original church building on Saturday, August 8th, **1998**. A time capsule, which had been placed in a cornerstone of the building back in **1898**, was opened with much anticipation.

God has blessed the efforts of our forefathers and pastors, who gave us a rich foundation built on Jesus Christ. From a small beginning, the ARC has grown into one of the largest rural churches in the RCA. We have a rich history, but we cannot live in the past. We must move ahead, confident that God will continue to bless our efforts to promote the Kingdom of Christ in this community.

**Additional Historical Information is available at the "Fond du Lac County Local History Web":**

[http://www.wlhn.org/fond\\_du\\_lac/towns/alto/alto.htm](http://www.wlhn.org/fond_du_lac/towns/alto/alto.htm)



# CONNECT: OUR DENOMINATION'S MISSION & VISION



## OUR MISSION

The Reformed Church in America is a fellowship of congregations called by God and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be the very presence of Jesus Christ in the world. Our shared task is to equip congregations for ministry--a thousand churches in a million ways doing one thing--following Christ in mission, in a lost and broken world so loved by God.

## OUR VISION

### Imagine...

Laitly and pastors unleashed, hungry for ministry; congregations mission-minded and inviting, authentic and healing, growing and multiplying, alert to the opportunities around them.

### Imagine...

Classes and synods as communities of nurture and vision--accountable, responsible, sustained by prayer, alive to the Spirit.

### Imagine...

A denomination, locally oriented, globally connected, that prays in many languages and beholds the face of Christ in every face; a denomination renewed and renewing, raising up leaders, always directing its resources toward the front lines of ministry.

### Imagine...

Hurts being healed, the lost being found, the hungry being fed, peace healing brokenness, hope replacing despair, lives transformed by the love of Jesus Christ.

### Imagine...

The Reformed Church in America, engaging the world.

Live and Love Like Jesus  
Transformed & Transforming<sup>SM</sup>

## LIVING OUT THE VISION

### This vision will be lived out...

By congregations focused for ministry--creative, confident, healing, and radically attentive to the world outside its doors.

By consistories selected more for ministry than management, attuned to the Spirit, eager and equipped to serve.

By ministers of Word and sacrament open to dream, prepared to lead, willing to risk.

By classes that are empowering and proactive, living in communion, each accountable to all, and all to Christ.

By synods and staff that funnel resources to the local church, and keep us connected to the larger church.

By all the people of the RCA, a network of relationships, a fellowship that celebrates its gifts and confesses its failures, and where the ministries of all are valued and cherished.

To live out this vision by consistories, classes, synods and staff, our decision-making will be transformed by a pervasive climate of worship, discernment, and biblical reflection. We will no longer do business as usual, nor our usual business.



TRANSFORMED  
& Transforming

## TRANSFORMED & TRANSFORMING

Live and love like Jesus.

"Transformed & Transforming: Radically Following Christ in Mission Together" is the RCA's 15-year strategy for mission and ministry. Adopted in 2013, it's our commitment to the following three interconnected strategic priorities:

- Cultivate transformation in Christ
- Equip emerging leaders of today and tomorrow
- Engage in Christ's kingdom mission

<https://www.rca.org/resources/transform>

## CONNECT: OUR DENOMINATION'S HISTORY

In the small colonial town of New Amsterdam, on a Sunday in **1628**, about fifty people gathered around a crude table in a mill loft. Their celebration of the Lord's Supper marks the birthdate of the Reformed Church in America (RCA). The congregation they founded still continues today as the Collegiate Reformed Church in New York City, the oldest evangelical church in North America with a continuous ministry.

The Reformed branch of Protestantism is rooted in the Reformation of the 1500s. Its primary leader was John Calvin of Switzerland, whose reform movement spread to Scotland, where it became the Presbyterian Church, and the Netherlands, where it became the Dutch Reformed Church.

In the **1600s**, congregations of the Dutch Reformed Church in North America spread and expanded, even after the English took control of the region from the Dutch. The church sent its ministers to Holland to be ordained and did not hold services in the English language until **1764**. When America became independent, the Dutch-founded church also cut its ties to its European mother country. The Revolutionary War was particularly divisive in parts of the church and some of the congregations split from each other following the war. A group of parishioners loyal to the British settled in Canada along the St. Lawrence River. The congregations these refugees founded eventually became part of the Presbyterian Church of Canada.

Throughout the first half of the **1800s**, the church's Dutch beginnings shifted from an everyday reality to a remembered heritage as Dutch-language worship began to fade. The church, incorporated in the United States in **1819** as the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, changed its name in **1867** to the Reformed Church in America.

During this time, the RCA was already involved in worldwide mission programs in Africa and Asia. Long a pioneer in overseas mission, the church has consistently made a contribution beyond its size. The first RCA mission programs began in America in **1796**, when the RCA and other denominations formed the New York Missionary Society that primarily reached North American Indians. Missionaries had reached China, India, Africa, and other parts of America by **1820**, and the RCA revamped its Board of Foreign Missions in **1857** to be an RCA-only supported, non-partnered agency.

John and Harriet Scudder began mission work in Ceylon in **1819** under the direction of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Moving from Ceylon to the sub-continent of India, they established the Arcot Mission in **1853**. This work was continued by the Church of South India in **1947**.

Missionaries of the RCA established a mission in Japan in **1859** and one in Arabia in **1892**, and global mission outreach continued with the added support of the auxiliary Women's Board of Foreign Missions, organized in **1875**. (It merged with the general Board of Foreign Missions in **1945**.)

The church's growth in North America continued, bolstered by a new wave of Dutch immigrants in **1847**. That year, two groups, prevented in the Netherlands from worshiping in a Reformed church free from state domination, fled to the United States. They settled in Pella, Iowa, and Holland and Zeeland, Michigan. After consideration and deliberation, the Holland-area groups (in **1850**) and a splinter faction of the Pella group of settlers (in **1856**) united their churches with the Reformed Church in America.

During this period of growth, however, disagreements among congregations in Michigan arose about such topics as the singing of hymns (instead of only psalms) in worship, secret societies such as the Freemasons, and regular Christian education, among other issues. In **1857**, several congregations seceded from the then-named Reformed Dutch Church and became the Christian Reformed Church. Further secessions in **1882** added to the Christian Reformed Church, as did immigrants who seemed to choose the CRC almost automatically. The seceding church in the Netherlands, too, transferred its loyalty to the Christian Reformed Church, leaving the RCA without a sense of historical roots in Europe.

Despite the loss of congregations through the split with the Christian Reformed Church, through the additions of Midwestern congregations the Reformed Church spread westward and established a presence outside the eastern seaboard. Most of the RCA's influence in America continued to be among settlers and immigrants of Dutch descent throughout the nineteenth century--including two congregations organized with Dutch immigrants in Alberta, Canada, in **1909 and 1912**--though in **1895** the church started mission programs among Native American Indians. A mission program to Appalachian families began in **1899** in Jackson County, Kentucky. Ministries to other minority groups began during this time and during the **early 1900s**, but only the Native American Indian programs and the ministries in Jackson County still are part of the RCA.

Another expansion of RCA ministry in Canada took place in the middle of the twentieth century, following World War II. The RCA worked to assist Dutch immigrants who were leaving Europe and seeking new starts in Canada. By **1950**, the RCA had ministers working in seven sites helping more than 18,000 immigrants, and two congregations were organized in Ontario. This foundational work led to the establishment of the Regional Synod of Canada in **1993**.

While Dutch immigrants were expanding the church in Canada, the Reformed Church in the United States also underwent change in the **1950s**, the years following World War II and encompassing the tensest years of the Cold War. The social and cultural mood in America welcomed churches and religiosity, if only as a counterpoint to the atheism practiced by the nation's Cold War enemies. Americans moving to the cities and suburbs prompted the RCA to spend millions of dollars to organize 120 new churches **between 1949 and 1958**, and for the first time in the denomination's history, many were opened among people unfamiliar with Dutch heritage and the Dutch Reformed traditions. In the **1960s**, mission work also took on a new tone, as the Board of Foreign Missions was renamed the Board of World Missions.

To further welcome people from backgrounds other than Dutch, the RCA formed four racial/ethnic councils between **1969 and 1980**. The councils help the denomination face and address issues related to race and ethnicity, dealing particularly with people connected to the RCA through Pacific and Asian American congregations, Hispanic congregations, Native American Indian congregations, and African-American congregations.

Women have always played a vital role in the RCA. Their contributions began with such activities as initiating and supporting missions in North America and around the world, and serving as missionaries. Today they are missionaries, teachers, study leaders, volunteers, elders, deacons, and pastors. Denominational approval of the ordination of women as elders and deacons came in 1972, though women had been ordained to those offices beginning in 1970. The first woman RCA minister was ordained in 1973, and ordination to the office of minister was opened to all women by an act of General Synod in 1979.

Today women continue their involvement in the Reformed Church, in many kinds of ministries. Dozens of women are ordained ministers in the RCA, serving as pastors and specialized ministers, pursuing graduate work, and serving elsewhere without charge. Nearly 40 percent of the students in RCA seminaries are women, and many women have been sent as delegates to General Synod.

In **2000**, the RCA assembled for Mission 2000, a whole-church event that aimed to discern and direct the denomination's role in mission into the twenty-first century. The RCA's Statement of Mission and Vision, introduced in **1997**, spells out the calling of the church, and the Pentecost Letter, written at Mission 2000, exhorts the many congregations of the RCA to go forth into their communities and make a difference there for Christ.

Emphasis on mission continues, at home as well as overseas. The "Discipling All Nations" paper talks about the need for and methods of ministering to people around the world in this new century. Urban ministries focus on churches and people who live in cities around North America, charged with the reminder that, as cities grow into population centers, the future of the church depends on how it touches the lives of people in the cities.

The mutual-mission initiative, new in **2002**, acknowledges the North American church's need to learn from the strong and developing church in the Southern Hemisphere and elsewhere in the world. This initiative will foster exchanges of people, knowledge, and understanding between the long-established North American churches and their younger, innovative, growing counterparts in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Reformed and always reforming, the RCA has moved into the twenty-first century, rooted and established in careful theology and committed to grow as the Spirit leads.

[www.rca.org/resources/rca-basics/brief-outline-rca-history](http://www.rca.org/resources/rca-basics/brief-outline-rca-history)

# GROW: OUR BELIEFS

Our beliefs are rooted in our being Christian, Reformed, and Confessional. While we understand there are many different views on Scripture, and we welcome discussion and debate, there are many essential truths which are very clear in God's Word. Paul urged Timothy to "watch your life and doctrine closely." (1 Tim. 4:16 NIV) So do not take this section on beliefs lightly, but also know that it is expected that you will wrestle with difficult issues throughout your life.

## We are Christian.

This simply means that we align ourselves with Jesus Christ. We believe what he taught is true, and how he lived set an example for us to follow. His Word, the Bible, is our guide and hope. Below is a summary of those teachings...

- We believe that God created the world and everything in it, including human beings.
- God created a perfect world. In the beginning, there was no sin, no hatred, no disunity, and no death. But God also allowed humans to make their own choices.
- The first humans, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God, allowing sin to enter God's perfect world. From then on, every human being has been born with sinful desires that lead to separation from God.
- But the story doesn't end there. God loves the world and the people in it so much, in fact, that he made a plan to take away the guilt of our sin.
- God sent his son, Jesus, into the world as a human. Jesus gave his life to pay the price for sins he didn't commit. Jesus accepted the punishment of our sins so that we don't have to.
- Three days after Jesus was killed, God brought Jesus back to life again, defeating the power of death and evil. Jesus still lives today, eternally in heaven with God the Father. One day he will come back to earth to put an end to evil, sin, death and pain, and renew all things. He will gather all who have believed in Him from every time and place to live with Him forever.
- Our faith is centered in God's love for us demonstrated in Jesus Christ, His son.
- When we accept Jesus' sacrifice for us and commit our lives to following Him, God sees us as perfect, the way we were first created to be. We cannot manufacture such faith on our own; it is the result of God's Spirit working within us.

## We are Reformed.

We're a part of a group of churches that connects way back to the 1500's when there was a great renewal in the churches in Europe. That period was called the Reformation – a time when a lot of Christians reformed their spiritual lives in order to get reconnected with God through the scriptures. The Five Solas, Latin phrases from the Reformation, summarize Reformed beliefs, but TULIP is equally important.

## We are confessional.

### TULIP (the Five Points of Calvinism):

**T** - total depravity. Man is completely helpless in his sinful state, is under the wrath of God, and can in no way please God. Total depravity also means that man will not naturally seek to know God, until God graciously prompts him to do so (Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10-18).

**U** - unconditional election. God, from eternity past, has chosen to save a great multitude of sinners, which no man can number (Romans 8:29-30; 9:11; Ephesians 1:4-6,11-12).

**L** - limited atonement. Also called a "particular redemption." Christ took the judgment for the sin of the elect upon Himself and thereby paid for their lives with His death. In other words, He did not simply make salvation "possible," He actually obtained it for those whom He had chosen (Matthew 1:21; John 10:11; 17:9; Acts 20:28; Romans 8:32; Ephesians 5:25).

**I** - irresistible grace. In his fallen state, man resists God's love, but the grace of God working in his heart makes him desire what he had previously resisted. That is, God's grace will not fail to accomplish its saving work in the elect (John 6:37,44; 10:16).

**P** - perseverance of the saints. God protects His saints from falling away; thus, salvation is eternal (John 10:27-29; Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:3-14).

### The Five Solas

**1 *Sola Scriptura*** ("Scripture alone"): The Bible alone is our highest authority.

**2 *Sola Fide*** ("faith alone"): We are saved through faith alone in Jesus Christ.

**3 *Sola Gratia*** ("grace alone"): We are saved by the grace of God alone.

**4 *Solus Christus*** ("Christ alone"): Jesus Christ alone is our Lord, Savior, and King.

**5 *Soli Deo Gloria*** ("to the glory of God alone"): We live for the glory of God alone.

This means that together we have statements of belief, called creeds and confessions. These statements guide our understanding of faith and shape its practice.

Along with most Christian churches, the Reformed Church accepts three creeds that were written in the first few centuries after Jesus' death:

- [The Apostles' Creed](#)
- [The Nicene Creed](#)
- [The Athanasian Creed](#)

In addition, four "standards of unity" tell what the Reformed Church believes:

- [The Heidelberg Catechism](#)
- [The Belgic Confession](#)
- [The Canons of Dort](#)
- [The Confession of Belhar](#)

In 1978 the Reformed Church approved [Our Song of Hope](#) as a contemporary statement of faith.

### Contemporary Topics and Positions

The Reformed Church in America's General Synod often speaks on important topics that face the church today. Careful and prayerful biblical and theological reflection shapes the church's response. "Reformed and always reforming," the church seeks to know the mind of Christ as it strives to be faithful in a changing, complex world. General Synod papers provide guidance to the members of the church and are a part of the church's witness in society. These reports and study papers were originally presented at General Synod, the RCA's annual church-wide assembly. Many were produced by commissions, task groups, and church agencies in response to a request by synod to study an issue in greater depth, often for a year or longer, so a future General Synod could make informed decisions.

One example of this research is this summary of a paper on pornography...

In **2008**, the Commission on Christian Action's report to General Synod included a paper titled "Pornography and the Internet." As the paper states, the Internet offers hundreds of millions of pornographic web pages, and this new availability has heightened ethical concerns. Studies show that there has been a huge increase in the number of people who access pornography and that a much wider cross-section of people, including women and children and many pastors, now obtain pornography. Because access takes place in the privacy of a home, people can avoid the social stigma that kept many of them from associating themselves with pornography in the past. The paper calls attention to the use of the Internet to distribute child pornography and as a tool for pedophiles and sexual predators to seek victims. It also mentions that Internet pornography is the main component of a new psychological disorder called "cybersex addiction" that has proved very difficult to treat. While acknowledging that fighting the multi-billion dollar porn industry with all its advocates and lobbyists is daunting, the paper concludes by stating: "Despair is not the appropriate Christian response...Some information regarding pornography is available, but most in the church are not aware that it exists and prefer to ignore the problems pornography is responsible for both in the church and in society. With all the information that is available, the church remains silent. It must, at a minimum, inform and educate its members. 'Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin' (James 4:17)." The commission concludes its report with a recommendation to have a denominational pornography awareness day, which synod approved. (*MGS 2008*: 223-225, [www.rca.org/pornography](http://www.rca.org/pornography))

### More Information:

You can read more about our beliefs and the Reformed Church in America at [www.altoreformedchurch.org/our-beliefs.html](http://www.altoreformedchurch.org/our-beliefs.html). For information on contemporary topics and positions go to [www.rca.org/Positions](http://www.rca.org/Positions).

### Statements on Contemporary Topics ([www.rca.org/Positions](http://www.rca.org/Positions))

Abortion  
Alcohol  
Capital Punishment  
Christian Zionism  
Environment  
Fair Trade Coffee  
Gambling  
Genetic Engineering  
Gun Control  
Hunger  
Immigration  
Physician-Assisted Suicide  
Poverty  
Socially Responsible Investing  
Sexuality (Divorce, Remarriage, Cohabitation, Pornography)  
Tobacco  
Women in Ministry

## **What Do We Believe Regarding Same-Sex Marriage?**

This is probably the most divisive issue in our denomination and our country. Many of you have a relative, friend, or acquaintance who considers themselves part of the LGBTQ community. Some in our congregation likely struggle personally with same-sex desires. The issue hits close to home for many and it's relevant to all of us because it has everything to do with the gospel.

The heart of the gospel is God's conquering of our guilt by his grace. Each week we come before a holy God and acknowledge our sin and failure. So, we, at Alto Reformed, do not come throwing stones or condemning others to hell, but urging our brothers and sisters to go and sin no more. This is what we see Jesus doing with the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11). Jesus instructed us to confront those living in sin in order to restore them (Mat. 18:15-17). Paul takes strong action against a man sleeping with his step mother. We read in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13... *What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."* So, we hold the tension of grace and truth.

While our consistory has voted to align ourselves with The Gospel Alliance, we wish to speak loudly and clearly of our God who forgives the broken-hearted, redeems the repentant sinner, and sanctifies his children. We long to be a church known for love, welcoming and encouraging those in our community. At the same time, we cannot ignore the sin in our lives or in the lives of our brothers and sisters.

### **Please join us in these ways: Humility, Prayer, and Devotion...**

1. We ask that you **Humbly** acknowledge your own sinfulness and need for grace and tendency to judge those outside the church, especially those struggling with homosexuality.
2. We ask that you **Pray** for those struggling with homosexual feelings, their family members, our consistory, The Gospel Alliance, Room for All, and the RCA.
3. We ask that you **Devote** yourself to the mission of the Church to know Jesus and make Jesus known. We cannot let this division dishearten or distract us from God's purpose for us.

### **What is going on in the RCA regarding same-sex marriage?**

Same-sex marriage was first addressed by the RCA's highest governing body in 1978. Their official stance has not changed and was most clearly stated in 1990: "To adopt as the position of the Reformed Church in America that the practicing homosexual lifestyle is contrary to scripture, while at the same encouraging love and sensitivity towards such persons as fellow human beings" (MGS 1990: 461). However, some pastors, churches and classes (local groups of churches) have disregarded this stance. Many efforts have been made to bring unity on this issue.

The RCA has repeatedly studied this issue and reached the same conclusion, yet some leaders reject this position and affirm same-sex marriage. The 2016 General Synod sent two proposed amendments to the Classis for approval. (You can read a history of these motions at <https://www.rca.org/homosexuality>) They only received 60% and needed 67%. It is important to note that the liberal classes which voted "no" are much smaller, yet each Classis receives one vote. If we compare membership, nearly 75% of the RCA members support the amendments.

It was in March, after the failure of these proposed amendments, that several RCA leaders gathered to discuss how best to move forward. These leaders rightly concluded that the RCA polity/government is preventing discipline of churches and pastors who affirm and preside over same-sex marriages. In the RCA, the local Classis is tasked with the discipline of churches and pastors within its bounds. About 18 of our 45 classes are overlooking the clearly stated beliefs of the RCA. In 2012 and 2015 the General Synod attempted to find a "Constitutional way forward." Those roads have not worked, and Room for All members have vowed to stay and fight for the RCA to affirm same-sex marriage.

Thus, the Gospel Alliance has been created as a network of conservative RCA churches to stand with one voice. Their beliefs and values are available at <http://thegospelalliance.com>.

It is our understanding that these leaders are not looking to fight, but to pursue the mission of Christ in their communities. They wish to show grace and love to all people, while holding up Scripture as God's best for humankind. Essentially, two options are before them and us. The first, and much preferred, option is that those who disagree with the official stance of the RCA on marriage would either repent, graciously leave, or be disciplined. The second option is that the conservative congregations either jointly step into a different denomination or create a new one.

# GROW: MORE THAN BELIEFS

Growing to be like Jesus involves much more than ascribing to the “right” beliefs. **Becoming like Christ involves a transformation of the heart that leads to a change in attitude and action.** This is what Paul spoke of in Chapter 5 of his letter to the Galatians. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.” (Gal. 5:22-25 NIV)*

*We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. 12 In fact, though **by this time you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But **solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.** (Heb 5:11-14 NIV)*

Paul longs for believers to “become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:11-13 NIV) He longs for everyone to see Timothy’s progress in his life of faith and doctrine. (1 Tim. 4:15-16) The writer of Hebrews urges us to move on from milk to meat, that we would become mature teachers, who are able to discern good from evil. (Heb. 5:11-14)

In our covenant, new members promise “to walk in Jesus’ way... to exhibit the joy of new life in Christ...” and to be “an example of Christian faith and character.”

So, just as the believers in the new testament church did, we urge you to devote yourselves to the apostles’ teaching. (Acts 2:42)

Are you content and comfortable with where you are in your walk with Jesus? 38% of U.S. Christians are, according to a 2016 report from Barna. ([www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/](http://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/))

Too many Americans have settled for being born-again and left maturity and Christ-likeness for missionaries and pastors! So, let’s be a church that pursues Christ-likeness by every and all means possible.

## WILL YOU MAKE A SPECIFIC COMMITMENT TO DEVOTE YOURSELF TO THE APOSTLES TEACHING?

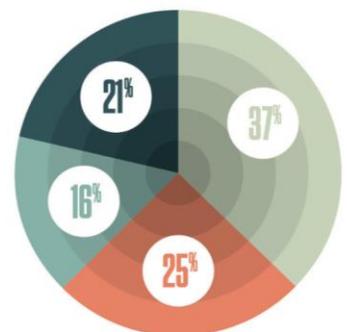
- I will attend church weekly.
- I will assist a Bible Class Teacher.
- I will read my Bible and journal daily.
- I will attend weekly prayer meetings.
- I will do devotions with my kids. (Check out [www.keysforkids.org](http://www.keysforkids.org) or [www.woh.org](http://www.woh.org))
- I will find a mentor.
- I will join a small group or Sunday school class.
- I will evaluate my progress.
- I will read a “Pastor’s Top 10” book.
  - The Case For Christ/Faith/the Creator*
  - Six Hours One Friday*
  - The Bondage Breaker*
  - Every Man’s Battle/Young Man’s/Young Woman’s...*
  - Resolving Everyday Conflict*
  - Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*
  - The Life You’ve Always Wanted*
  - The Purpose Driven Life*
  - Holy Discontent*
  - Next Generation Leader*
  - Crucial Conversations*
  - Total Money Makeover*
  - Living Your Strengths*
  - Systematic Theology* by Grudem

## What Is Working?

### HOW DO CHRISTIANS WANT TO BE DISCIPLED?

(AMONG THE 9 IN 10 CHRISTIANS WHO SAY SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS IMPORTANT)

- ON MY OWN ●
- WITH A GROUP ●
- ONE-ON-ONE ●
- MIX OF GROUP + ONE-ON-ONE ●



# SERVE: ASSESSING YOUR STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

## What were you made for?

God uniquely created you to serve his purposes. Understanding your personality, spiritual gifting, leadership style, and skills will help you know what God wants you to be doing with your life.

**ASSESSme.ORG**

**AssessME.org** exists to empower people and ministries to better understand God's unique design for each individual so that, together as the Body of Christ, we might more effectively accomplish the mission for which we were created.

We have chosen to use the resources at [www.assessme.org](http://www.assessme.org). This website provides a variety of assessments to help you better understand who you are and what you are uniquely created to be doing for the Kingdom. It also gives our staff access to your information so they can better mobilize the church. The assessments are FREE for you other than your time. (The church has purchased these assessments for our congregation at a discount.) It does take about 45 minutes to complete all four, but you can exit and login later if you need.

**How to discover your strengths:** (No computer? Call the office to set a time to do it at church.) Here are the steps we ask you take in the coming weeks...

1. Go to [www.assessme.org/8274.aspx](http://www.assessme.org/8274.aspx).
2. Click "Register Now".
3. Input your profile information.
4. Complete the assessments and print the results.
5. Schedule a meeting with a staff member to discuss your ministry involvement. Be assured we want you in a ministry you love. It may be hard at times, but, in general, it should feed your soul.

## Great Places to plug-in:

(Call the office if you are interested.)

Greeters  
Ushers  
Nursery  
Audio/Video Ministry  
Delivering CD's & DVD's  
Parking Assistance  
Acts 2 Crew  
Small Groups  
Sunday School  
Bible Class  
Vacation Bible School  
Walk Out Worship (Kid's church)  
Praise Teams  
Choirs: Sunshine Singers (elementary), Jr. Choir (middle school), Mixed Choir, Men's Chorus  
Prayer Groups  
Shepherding (visiting)  
Golden Lifers  
Women's Mission Circle  
Men's Bible Study  
Women's Bible Study  
Youth Ministry

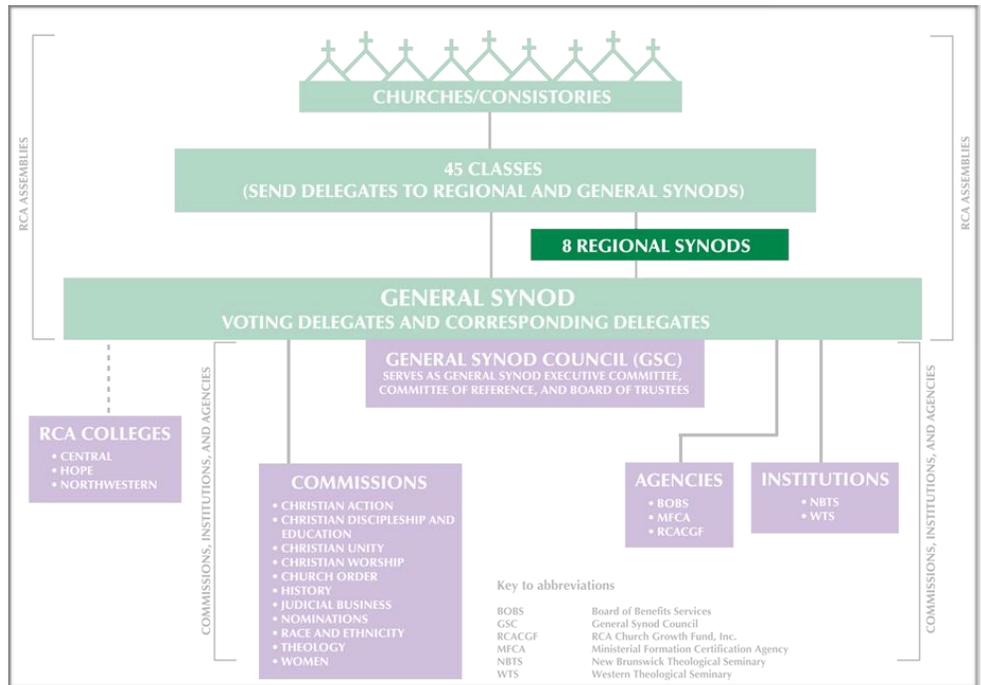
# SERVE: OUR STRUCTURE & GOVERNMENT

## The Structure & Government of RCA

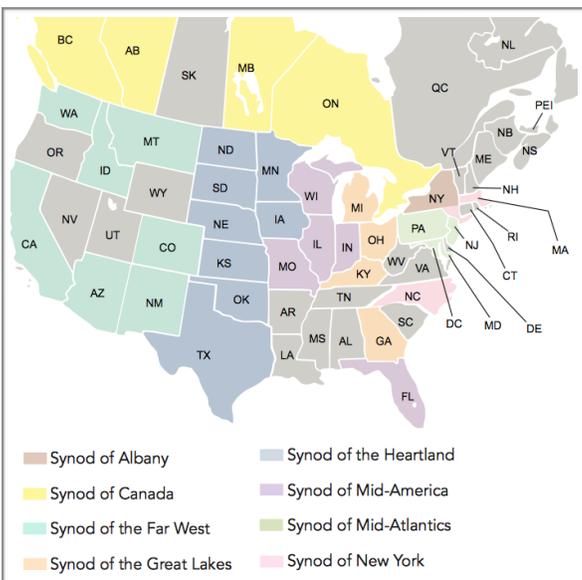
It has often been pointed out that in the organization and government of the church, three different systems have emerged in history. On one end of the spectrum is that system which centralizes authority in one person who is set over a larger or smaller area of jurisdiction. This system prevails in all those churches, which have what is called the "episcopal" form of government. Their administrative officer is a bishop. On the other end of the spectrum is that system which makes the final court of appeal each separate congregation. Under this plan, the membership of each individual church is the final regulating authority. However, churches which hold similar ideas may band together in a voluntary association. The Congregational and Baptist churches share in this "independent" form of government.

True to its median position, this Reformed Church of ours is governed under a system which stands halfway between these two. The individual congregation is not an independent unit possessed of final authority, nor is authority centered in one person. Church authority is rather vested in a series of representative groups, composed of an equal number of ministers and elders. In this respect, our Reformed Church form of government is not unlike our representative American form of government.

We believe that all authority exercised in the church is received from Christ, the only Head of the church. The power that Jesus Christ bestows on his church flows through the Holy Spirit to all the people.



Each RCA congregation has a body called a consistory that oversees its ministry. Besides the minister(s), the consistory includes elders and deacons who are elected from the congregation.



While elders, deacons, and ministers of Word and sacrament (pastors) are called from among the people, we believe the Spirit of the Lord appoints them to their special tasks, and they are responsible, first of all, to the Lord of the church.

A governing body called a classis oversees ministers and congregations in a specific geographic area. We are part of the Wisconsin Classes.

Regional synods support the classes (classes is the plural of classis) in their geographic area and enable congregations, classes, and the denomination to work together. The RCA has eight regional synods. We are part of the Synod of Mid-America.

General Synod, an annual denomination-wide meeting of ministers and elders representing classes and regions, makes decisions that affect the life and work of the entire Reformed Church. At this annual gathering, the members of the General Synod reflect on, celebrate, and oversee the ministry, mission, and operations of the church.

More info is available at [www.rca.org/organized](http://www.rca.org/organized). Copyright © 2008 Reformed Church Press.

## SERVE: OUR LEADERSHIP

The Consistory includes called pastors and elected elders and deacons. Elders and deacons serve for 3 years and then are ineligible for office for 4 years. Each of them has a specific ministry area in which they connect, communicate with the consistory, and sometimes oversee.

**Staff:**

Erin Anderson, 4K Teacher  
 Adrea Daane, Equipping Children & Families Director  
 Cory Kok, Property  
 Melene Kraemer, Custodian  
 Doug Shotsky, Equipping Adults Pastor  
 Jessa TerBeest, Equipping Youth Director  
 Rev. Kevin Van Wyk, Lead Pastor  
 Megan Vande Zande, Office Administrator

**Ministry Teams:**

(We have many teams under these ministries.)  
 Worship Ministry Team  
 Equipping Children & Families Team  
 Equipping Youth Team  
 Equipping Adults Team  
 Care Ministry Team

| <b>2019 Executive Committee</b>           |   |
|---|---|
| Kevin Van Wyk, Pastor                     | Cory Kok, Chair of Deacons, Exec.           |
| Larry Mulder, Vice President              | Jason Vande Zande, General Treasurer, Exec. |
| Paul Bruins, Clerk of Consistory & Elders | Ned Derksen, Benevolent Treasurer/Care Team |

| <b>2019 Consistory</b>                             |  |
|--|--|
| <b>Elders:</b>                                     | <b>Deacons:</b>                                    |
| Paul Bruins, 2019 – Clerk of Consistory & Elders   | Joel Buwalda, 2019 – Facilities Team               |
| Steve Daane, 2019 – Outreach Team                  | Jason Mulder, 2019 – Facilities Team               |
| Larry Mulder, 2019 – Sacraments, VP                | Matt Schultz, 2019 – Outreach Team                 |
| Randy Bruins, 2020 – Equipping Teams               | Ned Derksen, 2020 - Benevolent Treasurer/Care Team |
| Scott Vandelist, 2020 – Care Ministry Team         | Matt Pluim, 2020 – Facilities Team                 |
| Mark Zeatlow, 2020 – Care Ministry Team/Sacraments | Jason Vande Zande, 2020 – General Treasurer        |
| Jack De Jager, 2021 – Worship Ministry Team        | Joel Bruins, 2021 – Equipping Teams                |
| Rueben Hopp, 2021 – Care Ministry Team             | Cory Kok, 2021 – Chairman of Deacons               |
| Gary Navis, 2021 – Care Ministry Team              | Chad Loomans, 2021 – Worship Ministry Team         |

Also See: Alto Reformed Church's Bylaws (<http://www.altoreformedchurch.org/our-beliefs.html>)

# REACH: YOUR STORY

We are to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (1 Peter 3:15 NIV) Read over Paul's story and then use the questions to begin to write your story. (Acts 22:1-21 NIV)

**What was your life like before knowing Jesus? What was life like when you strayed from your relationship with Jesus?**

**How and when did you decide to trust Jesus? What happened that you have returned to Jesus?**

**How has this decision made a difference in your life? What is it like now to follow Jesus?**

# REACH: YOUR MISSION FIELD

We encourage you to reflect on the relationships you already have and on friendships you could develop that you might be a light to the world.

Will you join us as we BLESS the world?



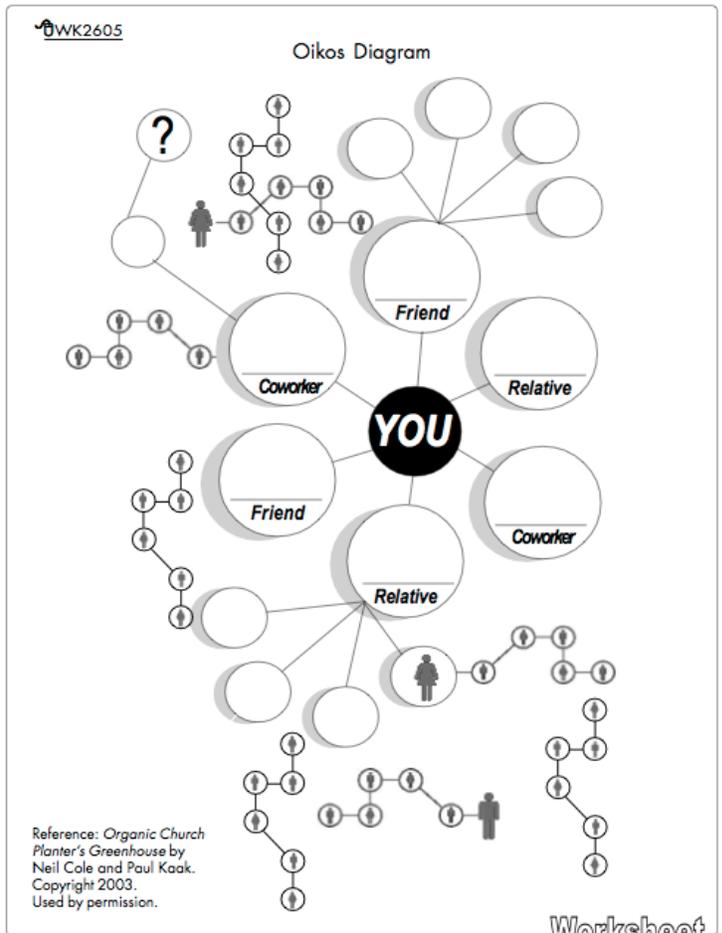
**Begin with Prayer**

**Listen**

**Eat**

**Serve**

**Share Your Story**



Worksheet

## REACH: OUR MISSIONARIES

Our mission is to know Jesus and make Him known. One of the ways we are making this mission a reality is by supporting missionaries both locally and around the world. To learn more about the missionaries we support, please visit their sites.

Remember Nhu – Bob Abel  
[www.remembernhu.org](http://www.remembernhu.org)

Steve Bialy  
<https://converge.org/give/183229>

Caribbean Christian Center for the Deaf – Chris Briggs

Eurasia - Erika

Overland Missions - Jersey Hoffner

SIM – Randy & Wanda Potratz

Youth for Christ - Scott Ritzema  
[www.yfc.net](http://www.yfc.net)

## REACH: OUR OUTREACH INITIATIVES

The Outreach Team is dreaming and creatively finding ways to show God's love to our community, but many other ministry groups initiate their own outreach initiatives. This is just a sample...

**Acts 2 Crew:** Cleans yards in the Spring and Fall. They also respond in emergency situations like the recent tornado that hit our area.

**Christmas Reverse Offering:** Each year, we randomly give out 10 envelopes of \$100 and asked the recipients to bless an individual, family, or organization in our community.

**Alto Fair Give-away:** At the Alto Fair, we give away hundreds of books and devotionals for children and adults.

**Easter Meal & Egg Hunt:** On Easter Sunday, we provide an egg hunt and meal at the Union (Youth Center) in Waupun. This is a great opportunity to connect with our community over a meal.

**Love Offering/White Gift:** Each Fall, one or two people facing financial challenges are selected to receive a significant gift which we ask the congregation to give towards.

**Community Table:** We help provide bag lunches for children for a week during the summer and serve a Friday meal periodically at the Community Table which is part of the Waupun Food Pantry.

**Summer Celebration at Medema Fields:** Each June we invite the community to a free picnic with various games like kick ball, soft ball, and a home-run derby.

## WORSHIP: OUR OPPORTUNITY TO LOVE GOD

Unfortunately, many in our culture have fallen into a trap of looking at worship as guilt-ridden duty, instead of an inspiring opportunity. At Alto, we believe worship, prayer, and giving should give you joy and inspire you to follow Jesus in faith. Here are some ways you can worship.

### **Opportunities to Worship:**

Worship Service: Sunday at 9:30am

Praise Teams

Choirs: Sonshine Singers (elementary), Jr. Choir (middle school), Mixed Choir, Men's Chorus

### **Opportunities to Pray:**

Tuesday at 7:30am

Tuesday at 8:00am

Wednesday at 5:45pm

Sunday at 8:30am

### **Opportunities to Give:**

Your tithes and offerings can be designated in two ways: General Fund and Benevolent Fund.

#### 1. General Fund:

This fund is used for general operating expenses of the church, such as staff salaries, utilities, and general maintenance of the buildings and grounds.

#### 2. Benevolent Fund:

This fund is used to pay missionary salaries, fund special mission projects, as well as help those in need within our church and community.

### What are my options for giving?

You may give offerings either by using cash/check or auto pay.

- Cash/check - At the beginning of each year, the church provides offering envelopes, along with a benevolent offering schedule. If you would like to give offerings using cash or check, you may place your offering inside the offering envelope and place it in the offering plate during the worship service. On the front of the offering envelope, you may specify how much money to allocate to the general fund and to the benevolent fund. If you do not specify, 100% goes to the general fund.
- Auto Pay - When using the auto pay option for your offering, 80% goes to the general fund and 20% goes to the benevolent fund. If you wish to contribute by transferring your money electronically from your bank account, please contact the church's office administrator for the numbers to our auto pay account at NBW Bank. You may also make an online payment to the Auto Pay Account using your bank's home banking service. If you have any questions, please ask one of the Deacons.

Your gifts to the Alto Reformed Church can be used in many ways to keep the work of Jesus Christ alive and well! Please be assured that your deacons take this work very seriously. We welcome your input and suggestions and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

\*Please note that the Alto Reformed Church only provides receipts for contributions equal to or greater than \$250.00 made at a time with a check. If you would like to be able to use your offering contributions as a tax deduction, it would be best for you to keep track of this.

# WORSHIP: SACRAMENT #2- COMMUNION

## Communion

### What Is Communion?

Communion, also known as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, is Christ's gift to the church. On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and shared it with his disciples. "This is my body that is for you," he said. "Do this in remembrance of me." He also took a cup of wine and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me." (Matthew 26, Mark 14, and Luke 22)

Following Jesus' example and instruction, when the church celebrates the Lord's Supper, we receive gifts of bread and wine; we give thanks to God; we break the bread and pour the wine; we share the food and drink with each other. In these simple actions, believers experience a profound mystery: Christ himself is present, and his life passes into us and is made ours. As baptism is the sign and seal of our engrafting into Christ, so the Lord's Supper is a means by which Christ continually nourishes, strengthens, and comforts us.

### What Happens During Communion?

Through our prayers and the sharing of bread and wine, we are joined to Christ and through Christ to each other. At the table, we remember what God has done for us. The past event of our Lord's death, resurrection, and ascension comes into the present so that its power once again touches us, changes us, and heals us. We gather at the table with joy. Our eating and drinking is a celebration of our risen Lord. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ is present with us at the table, and so we give joyful thanks for what God has done and is doing in our lives and in the world. We come to the table in hope. We look forward with joyful anticipation to the coming reign of God when "steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 85:10).

### How Does The Reformed Church Practice Communion?

Within the RCA, there is great diversity in the practice of communion. Some churches serve communion once a month, some do more or less frequently. The practice of the early church and the teaching of the Reformers of the 16th century was to celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly. The Book of Church Order calls for communion to be celebrated at least once every three months, if possible. Some churches use a common cup for the wine or juice, and some use individual cups. Some churches practice intinction (dipping the bread in the wine), and some serve the elements separately. Sometimes people are served in the pew. At other times, they may be invited to come forward to the table. These practical decisions are largely left to the leaders of the congregation. At Alto Reformed Church, we currently celebrate the Lord's supper 4-5 times a year. Sometimes we pass plates of individual servings, and sometimes we come forward using intinction. So as to not exclude any believers, the bread is now gluten free.

### Who May/Should Participate In Communion?

"We welcome all those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life. Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however, eat and drink judgment on themselves." (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 81; 1 Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32)

Paul challenges believers to participate in communion in a manner that is sincere and authentic. He writes to the church in Corinth...

*"Eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in the right way. Don't do it in a way that isn't worthy of him. If you do, you will be guilty. You'll be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone should take a careful look at themselves before they eat the bread and drink from the cup." (1 Cor. 11:27-28 NIRV)*

So, we welcome any who are trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins to participate in the Lord's supper. If your child understands the above statement, they too are welcome to the table. As well, we want to urge those who trust Jesus to join with us in ministry as active confessing members. For more information, check out "Discovering Membership" on our website or at the information table.

**LORD'S DAY 28**

**Q. How does the Lord's Supper remind and assure you that you share in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and in all his gifts?**

**A.** In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and to drink of this cup. He has thereby promised: First, as surely as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup shared with me, so surely his body was offered and broken for me and his blood was shed for me. Second, as surely as I receive from the hand of the one who serves and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ, so surely he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood.

**Q. What does it mean to eat the crucified body of Christ and to drink his shed blood?**

**A.** It means to accept with a believing heart the whole passion and death of Christ, and by it to receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In addition, it means to be united more and more to his blessed body by the Holy Spirit dwelling both in Christ and in us that, although he is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, always living and being governed by one Spirit, as the members of our bodies are governed by one soul.

**Q. Where has Christ promised that he will feed and nourish believers with his body and blood just as surely as they eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup?**

**A.** In the institution of the Lord's Supper which reads: "...that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

This promise is repeated by Paul in these words: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor. 10:16-17)

**LORD'S DAY 29**

**Q. Are the bread and wine changed into the real body and blood of Christ?**

**A.** No. Just as the water of baptism is not changed into Christ's blood and does not itself wash away sins but is simply God's sign and assurance, so too the bread of the Lord's Supper is not changed into the actual body of Christ even though it is called the body of Christ in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments.

**Q. Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood? And why does the apostle Paul call the supper a participation in the body and blood of Christ?**

**A.** Christ has good reason for these words. He intends to teach us that as bread and wine nourish this temporal life, so too his crucified body and shed blood truly nourish our souls for eternal life. But more important, he intends to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge, that we, through the work of the Holy Spirit, share in his true body and blood as surely as our mouths receive these holy signs in his remembrance. He also intends to assure us that all his suffering and obedience are as definitely ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.

**LORD'S DAY 30**

**Q. Who ought to come to the table of the Lord?**

**A.** Those who are displeased with themselves for their sins, and who nevertheless trust that these sins have been forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the passion and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and make their life whole. The unrepentant and hypocrites, however, eat and drink judgement to themselves.

**Q. Should those be admitted to the Lord's Supper who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly?**

**A.** No, that would dishonor God's covenant and bring down God's wrath upon the entire congregation. Therefore, according to the instruction of Christ and his apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such people, by the official use of the keys of the kingdom, until they reform their lives.

## MEMBERSHIP NEXT STEPS

### The ball is now in your court...

**1. You are encouraged to get answers to your questions.**

We hope this has answered many of your questions, but it has probably raised a host of new questions. You are encouraged to ask the pastor or elders about any of these. Feel free to call the office to set a time to meet.

**2. You are encouraged to request membership.**

Simply, fill out a form to request membership by profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or transfer and bring it to an elders' meeting. Please, call the office to let us know you are coming.

# WELCOME

We are excited to have  
you join the family!

