

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

Exploring Nazarene
History and Polity



SESSION 6

Membership as Covenant in Community

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Membership as Covenant in Community

SESSION OVERVIEW

Membership as Covenant in Community

Agreed Statement of Belief

Articles of Faith

Nurturing and Spiritual Formation

Spiritual Formation as Discipline and Stewardship

Covenants of Christian Character and Conduct as Guides for Spiritual Formation

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the Agreed Statement of Belief and the Articles of Faith
- be able to explain the biblical foundation for the doctrinal statements
- be in agreement with the doctrinal statements
- understand and be able to explain the covenant of membership
- understand and be able to explain the covenant of membership, especially as pertaining to holiness, as a transformed life of Christlikeness
- be committed to spiritual formation
- understand and explain the relationship of crisis and process in pursuit of holiness
- be familiar with the Covenant of Christian Character and the Covenant of Christian Conduct and understand how they serve to guide and enable holy living
- understand and explain the corporate and personal practices of spiritual discipline
- be practicing spiritual disciplines

Membership as Covenant in Community

INTRODUCTION



This session focuses on membership as a covenant. One dimension of the covenant is a commitment to a shared doctrine. This session first considers the significance of community. Then it examines the implications of the Agreed Statement of Belief and the Articles of Faith. Next the focus shifts to the second dimension of community living that is the basis for membership in the Church of the Nazarene. Becoming a Nazarene has meant there is a commitment to a shared vision of lifestyle. Holiness doctrine stresses the lifestyle of transformation that occurs through corporate and personal disciplines. The meaning of a holiness lifestyle is informed by the Covenants of Christian Character (General Rules) and the Covenant of Christian Conduct (Special Rules).

MEMBERSHIP AS COVENANT IN COMMUNITY



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What is the difference between looking at the Christian faith as an individual decision and considering it as a life lived within a community? How does our living change if we view it in a community rather than in individual context? The Christian life is to be lived in a community of believers. The biblical basis for this sense of community can be seen in the procedure of the Early Christian Church as recorded in Acts. In response to the preaching on the Day of Pentecost, the believers came together for worship and service. At first, Jewish Christians worshiped within Judaism, and then developed their own worship forms.

Because of the personal nature of conversion, sometimes the Christian faith has been erroneously reduced to a personal act. Once this viewpoint has been taken, the false conclusion is drawn that nothing else is to be done for us to make it to heaven. This misrepresentation of Christianity fails to recognize the need for transformation and growth here on earth.

Many elements of the Christian faith speak to the necessity of community. For example, the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist require participation in a group. Only in extreme cases of sickness would the Eucharist be taken by an individual outside a group, and then only as an extension of the Body of Christ. Baptism is performed as a public witness within the congregation.

This concept of community has an even stronger force for the Church of the Nazarene, which came into existence because people wanted to covenant together around both a shared doctrine and a shared vision of lifestyle. Holiness brought people together to form a church so the doctrine of entire sanctification could be proclaimed and a common lifestyle could be lived within a community. Because of this focus on holiness, the group was willing to place less stress on certain other features of doctrine. Membership as covenant in community in the Church of the Nazarene means at least the coming together as a group to further the proclamation of the holiness message and to foster the transformation that comes through holy living.

AGREED STATEMENT OF BELIEF



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In the Constitution of the *Manual* (paragraphs 20-20.8), of the Church of the Nazarene, article four of the section on The Church is entitled Agreed Statement of Belief. In the earliest *manuals*, this section was the central section on doctrine. Following the *Manual* revision in 1923, the Articles of Faith were given prominence. The Agreed Statement provides some important insights into the role of doctrine in the Church of the Nazarene.

The *Manual* (paragraph 20) provides focus on the nature of the church. The controlling feature of the section states, “Recognizing that the right and privilege of persons to church membership rests upon the fact of their being regenerate, we would require only such avowals of belief as are essential to Christian experience.” This statement affirms the principle that church membership is based upon the existence of religious experience, “church membership rests upon the fact of their being regenerate.”

The second part of the statement clearly articulates the principle that the beliefs selected as binding on all must be those that provide the foundations for Christian experience: “only such avowals of beliefs as are essential to Christian experience.” Here is an attempt to be flexible on the doctrinal differences that might be held by Christians. Many ideas might be important, but they should only be binding on everyone if they are direct foundations of a person’s religious experience. This viewpoint on the role of doctrine suggests again the significance the church places on our personal experience with God.

The second principle found in the Agreed Statement section is that the statement for these significant ideas would be brief. Each statement has little or no elaboration. Following is a summary of these eight beliefs.

- The first statement of belief acknowledges God and the Trinity.
- Two centers belief and practice on the Scripture.
- Three and four recognize the sinfulness of humans and their need for salvation.
- Five ties salvation to Jesus who is our atonement and the object of repentance.
- Six states believers are to be entirely sanctified.

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- Seven affirms the Holy Spirit provides assurance both to those being saved and those being entirely sanctified.
- Eight has general statements relating to the return of Jesus and the final judgment.

The primary reason for the study of doctrine is so we can understand our relationship with God. The focus also is on what shared beliefs shape a community's requirement for membership. As individuals, we may have varied beliefs on several subjects like the millennium and the mode of baptism. This community of the Church of the Nazarene has been formed to emphasize our relationship with God and how this relationship unfolds in living a life of holiness.

ARTICLES OF FAITH



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The Preamble of the Church Constitution immediately precedes the Articles of Faith and provides additional perspective as to the role of doctrine in the Church of the Nazarene. The statement reveals again the principal foundation on which the Church of the Nazarene is formed. The key sentence reads, “the faith once delivered to the saints, especially the doctrine and experience of entire sanctification as a second work of grace.” The identity of the Church is connected with the experience of the doctrine of entire sanctification. Second, these doctrinal statements are provided to further cooperation with other Christian groups so the Kingdom can be advanced. The placing of scriptural references at the end of each Article of Faith suggests a desire to have these statements seen as based upon the Bible.

The Articles of Faith themselves may be grouped in various ways: what unites the church to other groups, the nature of salvation, the church, and eschatology.

The first four articles connect the Church of the Nazarene to other Christian groups and separate them from other religions. The first statement on the Trinity makes Christians different from many other religions, particularly Islam. Next the focus is placed upon belief in Jesus Christ, who as God and human provides salvation for the world. Salvation only in the name of Jesus brings Christianity in conflict with such religions like Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

The next article affirms that God works in the world through His Holy Spirit. This section concludes with placing all belief and practice on the authority of the Scripture. The key phrase of this statement is “inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation.” Again, the focus of Scripture just like doctrine should be informing us about religious experience. Christians study the Scriptures to discover how to relate to God.

The second division of the articles focuses on salvation. Sin is acknowledged as the problem for which salvation is needed. Sin is viewed from both the perspective of a condition and an act. The condition of being a sinner is from birth. Salvation is needed for healing the sinner from both acts of sin and from the condition of sin itself. The next two articles indicate the family of Christian denominations to which the Church of the Nazarene belongs. The atonement reveals that Jesus has come to die for all humans, and free agency means human beings have been graced with the ability to respond to the gospel message when they hear it.

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The next article considers the nature of the salvation experience by discussing the nature of repentance. The attention is on the acts of salvation or the meanings of being saved and entirely sanctified. Regeneration is through the grace of God. Entire sanctification is viewed both as a crisis act of having God at the center of our living and a stimulus of spiritual development.

The doctrine of the church and the sacraments are addressed next. The church is both a universal body centered in Christ with all Christians, and a historical reality in the form of such groups as the Church of the Nazarene with all the national and cultural factors in place. As the church, the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist (Communion) are administered. The ecumenical character of the Church of the Nazarene is seen in its view on baptism. It is available to both believers and infants. The mode can be sprinkling, pouring, or immersion.

The Articles of Faith conclude with statements on such eschatological themes as the Second Coming, the final resurrection, and final judgment. Again, the ecumenical nature of the church is seen in its view on the Second Coming, as the statements do not take a specific millennial position as to how and when Christ will return.

NURTURING AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION



NOTES

Some Christians view the Christian life like buying a ticket for an event. If we buy a ticket and present it at the concert or sporting event, the ticket allows us to enter into the event. Some Christians view conversion as the ticket a Christian needs to have in his or her possession in order to enter heaven. Once a person has an experience of conversion, then nothing else matters.

While the Church of the Nazarene believes conversion is the basis for being a Christian and church membership, they have a different model of the Christian life. This model of Christianity envisions nurturing or spiritual development as having a role in the transformation process of the Christian. General Superintendent Goodwin summarizes this position in his 1933 *Herald* article, "The Nazarene Objective." He says, "The objective, therefore, of the Nazarene movement is the formation of holy character."

The model of the Christian life for a holiness church like the Church of the Nazarene is transformation. The events of conversion and entire sanctification *do something* to the person and *lead to something*. Conversion brings the person into a relationship with God. Entire sanctification causes the person to structure his or her living with God in the center. Both conversion and entire sanctification lead to spiritual development. Both conversion and entire sanctification orient Christians toward God. Most of the practical outcomes of these events take place in spiritual formation.

A Christian life is not passive; we must participate in activities that foster spiritual growth. This leads to an important understanding of the role or place of works in Christian living. Christians are saved and entirely sanctified by grace. We do not earn salvation. So what is the role of works? Works are not the price of conversion or entire sanctification, but works can become the means by which God transforms us into the image of Christ. We learn to be generous through giving. We learn to trust by committing ourselves to God in real life circumstances. This model of the Christian life and view of works does not mean when we arrive in heaven God checks the Book of Life to see if we have done enough works. The stress is not on doing something to qualify for heaven. Instead, the focus is on how God works to transform us.

Works are one way God changes our heart and living. The Christian life should not be viewed in terms of conversion as a ticket to heaven, but in terms of how practice enables us to learn a new skill. For example, we can study the instruction

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books for playing tennis, but true learning does not come unless and until we practice the required skill of actually striking a ball. The Christian life is not a mere academic exercise in studying the *Manual* for how we are to live, but it is through living that the grace of God transforms us.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION AS DISCIPLINE AND STEWARDSHIP



NOTES

We do not become a Christian or earn heaven through reading the Bible, worshiping in church, participating in the sacraments, or meeting with a small group. However, how long can we remain a Christian if we do not read Scripture, worship, participate in the sacraments, and perhaps find a small group? A focus upon Christianity as *only* an individual decision can easily leave out these concerns. Wesleyan forms of Christianity have always acknowledged the role of spiritual development and spiritual disciplines in the Christian life.

Traditional disciplines would include such activities as fasting, reading Scripture, and worship. Fasting has a long history from the New Testament days. Christians traditionally fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays. Classical Christianity incorporates this element of sacrifice in the season of Lent as a preparation for Easter. During Lent, a person might give up something in order to focus upon what Christ has sacrificed. In fasting, we give up something not simply to make a sacrifice, but to give time to put something in its place. In this case, we fast in order to have time to focus more upon God. Fasting usually focuses upon the giving up of food since it is the basic source of life. However, fasting could be the giving up of any activity in order to focus upon God. Simply giving up something is not fasting we do not replace that which is given with time for God.

Reading and studying Scripture would seem to be a basic activity of Christians. Even with easy access to Scripture, there is a lack among Christians of basic knowledge. Protestant Christians base the authority of their faith and practice upon the Bible. Laypersons have an obligation to study the Bible and to test preaching so they will be led in the right direction.

Scripture is to be studied for more than the understanding of the plot and characters of the story. Why read the Bible after we know the storyline? Jesus always feeds the 5,000. The lions always decide to eat someone else besides Daniel. The rich young ruler always walks away from Jesus. We read Scripture to allow God to change us, not simply for learning the content. Scripture should also be the focus of meditation, with us focusing upon small passages and allowing God's Spirit to move.

Christians have also understood spiritual growth as related to worship. One of the major controversies in the church has been the debate on worship styles between generations and cultures. What is the balance between worship as entertainment and participation? Worship occurs in many diverse formats

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throughout the world, from very structured and sacramental worship styles to the informal and chaotic. How we prepare for worship may be just as important as a worship style. For worship to take place, we have to have contact with the presence of God.

Other forms of spiritual development could include journaling, small groups, and mentoring. The 18th century was a period of time in which journals were frequently kept. John Wesley kept a journal for more than 60 years. Several reasons might keep persons from recording their thoughts in a journal. One is the discipline required. Another is the privacy of keeping a journal from being read by someone else. Why would anyone keep a journal? One reason is it can be a form of prayer as a prayer journal. Then we can look back and see how God has acted in our life. A journal could also be a short-term activity to help us work through a problem.

Many churches have turned to small groups to encourage spiritual development. The intent is to bring together individuals around a similar theme to provide pastoral care. The group becomes the spiritual family and a source of accountability. The question of getting the right group of people together is always an issue, as well as developing the family atmosphere that leads to the possibility of real sharing.

Another way in which spiritual development might take place is through a mentoring program in which new Christians seek the guidance and advice of those who have experience in the faith. For this type of program to work, mentors require training. Just throwing people together may cause more frustration than good.

Other areas that must be included are stewardship and mission. Designing activities that help people give of their time and talents develop the character of a Christian.

Spiritual development should be intentional. While many may not work out a detailed plan, spiritual development will probably not occur unless we are conscious of the need to do something specific. As leaders in the church, we must be conscious about our own spiritual development and that of our congregation.

COVENANTS OF CHRISTIAN CHARACTER AND CONDUCT AS GUIDES FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION



NOTES

One of the issues of lively discussion for those wanting to be members of the Church of the Nazarene has been what was formerly the General and Special Rules of the Church and is now Covenant of Christian Character and Covenant of Christian Conduct. From the early history of the church, there have always been statements about lifestyle concerns. These Covenants reflect the commitment to a shared vision for a lifestyle of holiness.

The question is how, across multiple global cultures, can consensus be reached on lifestyle issues? The existence of the Covenants (General and Special Rules) does say Christians must be involved in relating issues of lifestyle to faith. Because of the dominance of the US in the early history of the Church of the Nazarene, many of these issues have reflected that culture. In the last 30 years, the church has begun to try to find out what it means to live in a global context.

The Covenant of Christian Character (General Rules) dates back to the rules of John Wesley; namely, doing what is good and avoiding evil. The Covenant of Christian Conduct (Special Rules) primarily considers selective cultural issues such as entertainment. It also includes a rule that church officers should profess the experience of entire sanctification.

A third section of the *Manual* containing statements on ethical issues is the Appendix. In 1928, R. T. Williams explained the function of the Appendix, to be where a particular Assembly can voice its opinion on an issue. Every twelve years the Assembly must decide if the issue should remain in the *Manual*. A range of issues from folk dancing, to athletics, to racial discrimination, to desocialization of alcohol, to AIDS has been the focus of a particular Assembly.

The question comes back to what it means to live in a shared community. Does it mean anything to join a church? Here the indication is that membership at least involves a shared belief and a shared vision of living. Holiness informs both. Community means not our individual viewpoints, but the common understanding of the group.

We are called to live out our faith within a community, the church. As members of a community we have shared commitments. This session has focused upon the shared commitments of belief and living. One important shared commitment refers to what is believed or our faith. Nazarenes, in particular, focus on religious experience and holiness. Since the Church of the Nazarene formed around the

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concept of entire sanctification, several implications result. Biblical preaching includes the call for the individual to be entirely sanctified. Holiness leads to a concern for spiritual development as part of the transformation process of salvation. Spiritual formation must be intentional and take concrete forms as reflected in the disciplines Christians have followed. The concern with transformation has led the church to set forth statements on particular cultural issues.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Read the Constitution and the Covenant of Christian Conduct in the *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene, 2005-2009*. Reflect on the different words and aspects of salvation as expressed in the Articles of Faith. Which one has special meaning for you? Why?
See: http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/EN_manual_2013-17.pdf
2. For additional discussion and information on spiritual formation, read: Tracy, Wesley D., E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia, and Morris A. Weigelt. *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1994 or Willard, Dallas. *Spirit of Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: Harper, 1991.
3. Discuss with your mentor (or other mature Christian) about developing a plan for spiritual development. Reflect on the most beneficial spiritual disciplines in your own personal walk. Which have been the most difficult to incorporate?
4. Read and reflect on Floyd T. Cunningham's *Expressing a Nazarene Identity: Frameworks for Lay Leadership* which can be found at *Expressing a Nazarene Identity: Frameworks for Lay Leadership | Wesleyan-Holiness Digital Library* (whdl.org). http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/EN_expressing_a_nazarene_identity-rev20180412_0.pdf
5. Read the following article and summarize its main theme.

THE NAZARENE OBJECTIVE

(General Superintendent Goodwin. *Herald of Holiness*, July 5, 1933. Used by permission.)

What is our objective? What brought the Church of the Nazarene into existence? What is the purpose of all this effort, sacrifice and toil? Can we give a good reason for the hope that is in us, for aggressive evangelism? I believe we can. According to the Pauline vision as expressed the Ephesian epistle, God has one eternal purpose in Christ Jesus, our Lord—a purpose which centers in a people builded together like a temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit. So, also, our object has never been the mere building of a new denomination, nor the gathering of a following characterized by certain forms of dress, of doctrine or ritual. Neither has it been the building of church edifices after a given pattern or type of church architecture. We have a higher motive in our churchly activities. Not only have we undertaken to spread scriptural holiness, but our object is to build up believers in holy

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character and create an aggressive force for Christian evangelism. The divine purpose for the Church as set forth by the apostle Paul comprehends the revelation of the mystery hidden from the ages—that all men might be made partakers of the promise in Christ by the gospel. This mystery of the gospel is revealed in the divine plan through the manifold wisdom of God, by which, through a new and spiritual creation, God unites all believers into one glorious fellowship. This blessed fellowship which exists between Christ the living Head, and the Church which is His Body, is termed, “the fullness of him that filleth all in all.” Christ was to be enthroned in human life; and this was to be accomplished by the divine Spirit imparted to the inner man. Thus holy character is made possible through a spiritual experience grounded in the atonement and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This divine provision avails nothing without the co-operation of the human will in the formation of character. God provides grace, but man must consent, receive and believe from the heart.

The objective, therefore, of the Nazarene movement is the formation of holy character. We have not inaugurated a reform movement in customs or costumes, forms or formalities—rather an evangelism which promotes a transformation of the whole being into holy manhood and womanhood, and which radiates the divine life in all departments of holy living. God refines the nature and man works out this refinement in thought, word and deed. Every right decision strengthens character. Every right expression deepens it. We preach holiness, therefore, in order to deepen conviction for sin, that men may accept God’s promised deliverance from it. We preach holiness in order that believers may be established in the fulness of the blessing. We preach holiness in order to promote proper growth in grace so that believers may become strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Because of the personal nature of conversion with an individual repenting, the Christian faith should be viewed only as a personal act.
 - A. True
 - B. False
2. Membership as covenant in community in the Church of the Nazarene means the coming together as a group to further the proclamation of the holiness message and fostering the transformation that comes through holy living.
 - A. True
 - B. False
3. The primary reason for the study of doctrine is so we can understand subjects like the millennium and the mode of baptism.
 - A. True
 - B. False
4. The Articles of Faith (doctrinal statements) are provided to prohibit cooperation with other Christian groups.
 - A. True
 - B. False
5. Salvation only in the name of Jesus Christ brings Nazarenes in conflict with such religious groups as _____.
 - A. Islam
 - B. Buddhism
 - C. Hinduism
 - D. all the above
6. The Articles of Faith present sin as _____.
 - A. real and permanent
 - B. act and condition
 - C. a result of being human and permanent
 - D. personal and real
7. The Church of the Nazarene teaches that once a person has an experience of conversion, then nothing else matters.
 - A. True
 - B. False

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8. Works are not the price of conversion or entire sanctification, but works can become the means by which God transforms us into the image of Christ.
 - A. True
 - B. False

9. Wesleyan forms of Christianity have always acknowledged the role of spiritual development and spiritual disciplines in the Christian life such as _____.
 - A. fasting
 - B. reading Scripture
 - C. worship
 - D. all of the above

10. The Covenants of Christian Character and Covenant of Christian Conduct (formerly the General and Special Rules of the Church) allow consensus to be reached on lifestyle and cultural issues.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. Discuss what you understand it to mean for membership to be a covenant.
2. Explain the Agreed Statement of Belief and its rationale for the role of doctrine within the church. Clarify why the church selected the Articles of Faith.
3. Identify which doctrines connect Nazarenes with the universal church and which concepts are more distinctive and identify our role within the Christian witness. Answer the question: Do you feel the doctrines adequately reflect the experience of a Christian?
4. Explain the covenant of membership, especially as it pertains to holiness, as a transformed life of Christlikeness.
5. Explain the relationship of crisis and process in the pursuit of holiness.
6. Talk about how you understand the General Rules and the Covenant of Christian Conduct serve to guide and enable holy living.
7. Explain your understanding of the corporate and personal practices of spiritual discipline.