

Friday, March 15, 2024,

Hello family & friends of AHPC,

A question I'm often asked about is this: what does it mean to be a member of the church?

The short answer is this: It can mean many things. Most people associate membership in some club or organization to involve:

- 1) Money – either a set amount monthly or yearly, or an expectation of donations and gifts.
- 2) Involvement, participation, and volunteering. Any organization not only needs money, but hands on support in every way, and this is certainly the case for any church.
- 3) Some organizations and churches in particular have certain beliefs or commitments that those who want to become members must subscribe to. Churches in particular have a list of beliefs, sometimes called doctrines, that those who want to become members must profess. Sometimes, there are also rituals involved with such profession, such as baptism.

Although all three of these things are important and relevant to the life of AHPC, when it comes to membership, we have come to put the emphasis in another place above these three. Some people have money to give, and some people don't. Are they any less valuable and precious to us? Some people have time, energy, and physical/mental ability to volunteer and participate in all kinds of ways, and that includes leadership. But are those who cannot any less valuable or precious to us? Finally, some people are very clear and ready to embrace traditional Christian beliefs about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, providence, and final hope in this life and the next. But others struggle and have their doubts. Are they any less valuable and precious to us?

I believe that if we are to be truly the church of Jesus Christ, we need to value people as people equally regardless of their material means, their health and energy, or the certainty of their faith. So then, where is it that we put our emphasis in membership?

We ask for five humble commitments, and humble because we recognize how necessary it is to have God's grace enable any one of us to make progress toward fulfilling these commitments. Here are the commitments we ask of everyone who would become a member at AHPC:

- 1) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to personal growth in renouncing what is wrong and embracing what is right in your life and in the world?
- 2) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to becoming a closer follower

of Jesus Christ in his ongoing ministry of compassion and healing in the world by the way you care for all life around you?

3) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to the way of forgiveness with an open heart?

4) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to pursuing justice and truth in a spirit of openness to reconciliation rather than retaliation?

5) With the enabling of God's grace, do you commit yourself to growing spiritually as a part of this congregation, its worship, fellowship, and service, offering yourself and your substance, as you are able?

These commitments are not about beliefs or doctrines. They are about relationships, relationships with each other and with human and non-human life in the world. We need the enabling grace of God to make progress in these commitments as we know we will fail in our human vulnerability. But being committed to what truly matters before God and our truest selves is what we want to cultivate here at AHPC.

What do you think? Are you a member? Do you want to become a member? Speak to Rev. Rebecca or Dr. Harris.