

Covenant Discipleship Leader's Guide



The guide for a new sort of
Communicant's Class

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Introduction—Welcome!

So, you're leading the Communicant's Class for your church! That's an exciting position to be in—and it's also an important and honored position. In the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), we take your role in this process very seriously, and we trust that you do, too.

Maybe you've led a class like this before, or maybe it's your first time. Perhaps it is simply your first time using this material— and if so, you may or may not realize that this curriculum represents a significant departure from “traditional” Communicant's Class curricula. Regardless of your experience level, we've provided this leader's guide to give you an orientation to the curriculum, an introduction to the resources you may wish to make available to the families you will be leading, and some suggestions for structuring the “class” and your leadership of it.

A few words about the class/curriculum...

There are a lot of questions that come with the possibility of taking a child through a Communicant's Class— questions that you will eventually take part in fielding. While we have provided help throughout the Parents' Handbook for dads and moms to be able to more competently answer their children's questions, we know (from leading these ourselves!) that this often covers only part of the material. At the very least, your role will be to encourage families who aren't sure if they— or their children— are ready for this step. Naturally, we don't wish to rush a child into church membership when they do not have faith; neither, however, do we wish for covenant children who have embraced their parents' faith as their own to be denied the benefits of membership.

To be sure, the only requirement that we can biblically make of any person is that they be able to give a credible profession of faith, or as the PCA's *Book of Church Order* puts it: they must have “a profession of faith in Christ, have been baptized, and have been admitted by the Session to the Lord's Table.” But beyond that, many believe that it is important that a child who wishes to join the church should understand the commitment that they are making, and the nature of the institution to which they are making that commitment. With that in mind, we have designed this curriculum for a three-fold purpose:

1. To give certainty to the profession of faith that the child might make and solid understanding of the faith they profess;
2. To educate the child about the church and its ministry, basic theology, leadership, and role in their lives; and
3. To provide an opportunity for parents to interact with their children about these important aspects of life.

Therefore, it is our belief that, within reason, there should be no age limit or requirement for church membership, nor for participation in a Communicant's Class. We feel that any child that can understand the Gospel and make a profession of saving faith in Jesus Christ can also understand the important aspects of the church that they will be learning through this material.

That is where you, parents, and the Covenant Discipleship communicant's class come in. Ministry to children begins with parents; they, not the local church, are primarily responsible for the direct spiritual oversight and education of their children. The local church community takes only a distant second place in this role. Many churches have youth ministry or children's ministry programs and staff, but these exist to complement parental nurturing, and to offer a support system and resource center for parents—not as a replacement of their obligation and duty.

This is why we have chosen the name “Covenant Discipleship” for this curriculum. Through the family covenant, parents are raising their child or children as disciples to be a part of the church, and this class is just one step in that process.

How it will work...

This material was originally designed to be used as a nine-lesson class done in a nine-week span; you and the rest of the leadership of your congregation may decide to offer it in exactly that manner. However, you—or the parents involved—may feel the need to take a different pace with the curriculum, be it faster or slower; this is one of the very reasons it is designed the way it is. The first six lessons will be done at home. The last three lessons will be done in a classroom setting, perhaps during the Sunday School hour or in a small-group style context. These lessons are where you come in: they will be a review of the material done in each of the three categories.

We have found it helpful to offer an orientation class at the beginning of the time period in which we are going to offer the class. We have done this in a

group, gathering all of the families who will be participating together for a one-time class. We have also done it one-on-one with each family that will participate. Either way works well, and each has its merits and difficulties. We would encourage you to determine which will best suit your context.

Here is the basic schedule of the nine-lesson Covenant Discipleship Class:	
Orientation	A walk-through of how the class and curriculum work
Lesson 1	Faith and Its Foundations: What is Faith and Why Have It?
Lesson 2	Understanding Your Faith: Up Close and Personal
Lesson 3	Basic Training: a Look at the Basics of What We Believe
Lesson 4	Why Do We Baptize Babies? And Other Good Questions...
Lesson 5	The Church: Isn't It Just a Building?
Lesson 6	Getting Down to Business: the Organization of the Church
Lesson 7	Faith and You: Review of Lessons 1 & 2
Lesson 8	What Presbyterians Believe: Review of Lessons 3 & 4
Lesson 9	We Are the Church Together: Review of Lessons 5 & 6

About the books...

We have designed the curriculum in a workbook format; from the beginning, we found it helpful to provide students with workbooks that would be their own, which they could write in and mark up as they chose. Therefore, you will need to order a single copy of the *Student's Workbook* for each child/student who will be working through this material.

The *Parents' Handbook* is much like the workbooks, except there is guidance for parents in how to approach the discussions they will have with their children as they work through the materials together. In many sections of the *Parents'*

Handbook, for example, there are references to the *Westminster Confession of Faith* with suggestions on where to look for more information on a particular subject. You will want to provide each family a copy of the *Parents' Handbook*, but a family may use their handbooks over again—indeed, you might encourage parents to make notes of their own and refer to those notes when subsequent children work through the same materials.

The rest of this guide...

We want to help you lead your congregation's families through this as best as we can; therefore, in the rest of this Leader's Guide you'll find the following parts:

- A list of "talking points" for an orientation
- A brief outline for each of the review classes
- A list of recommended resources that we suggest you keep on-hand
- A few words about Sessions interviewing children for membership

This will be an exciting time for you, your congregation, and the families that are working through this material. It is our prayer and hope that it furthers or develops opportunities for you to minister to parents and families.

Talking Points for Orientation to the *Covenant Discipleship Communicant's Class*

If you choose to lead an orientation to this class, you may wish to include the following points as a part of your discussion with parents and families:

- ✓ **What it's all about:** why is church membership important? What is required for membership in the church? Why is it necessary and/or helpful to have a "Communicant's Class"? All of these will be touched on within the materials for the class, but it may be useful* to introduce these ideas here.
- ✓ **What is expected of parents:** this format is a substantial departure from what most parents will be accustomed to from a church— even if they are already homeschooling their children. Therefore, it is vital that you stress how much the completion of this material is dependent upon them.
- ✓ **How the curriculum is laid out:** flip through it with parents and students, helping them to see what the format of the books is. Don't assume that students will recognize that they will have a good bit of work to do, even though the cover of their book says "workbook!" Point out to parents that they have all of the materials their students have in their books. Show parents how they have discussion aids and other help as a part of their books.
- ✓ **Suggested approach for parents/children:** explain to them what your suggested timeline is for the class. If you (and the leadership of your congregation) have determined to complete the class in a nine-week period, make parents aware of that. However, emphasize that the parents are the best arbiters of whether that schedule and pace suits their children; help them to know that your timeline is only a guide and suggestion.
- ✓ **Supporting resources:** make sure that parents (and students) are aware that they are not alone in this process, nor must they have all of the answers for the questions that will inevitably come up. Point out that the church has gathered a small library of resources that is available to them for lending. Also, remind them that you, as the leader(s) of the class, will be available to them.
- ✓ **Pray:** don't forget to pray for them and with them as they prepare to get underway.

* Depending on the background and experiences of your congregation, you may even *need* to speak to these issues to persuade questioning parents that it is important that their children join the church.

Review Class #1: Faith and You

Review of Lessons #1 & #2.

I. What is Faith?

I. Is faith something you do?

II. Is it enough to just “have faith” or is there something particular that you must have faith in?

III. What is an example of faith that we might find in the Bible?

II. Why is the Bible important?

I. What makes the Bible important for our faith?

II. How do we know that we can trust the Bible?

III. What does it mean that the Bible is inspired? Infallible?

III. How does God relate to you?

I. Does everyone have a relationship with God?

II. Why do we talk about sin and the fall as being important to our relationship to God?

III. Does your sin have any affect on your relationship to God?

IV. What is “salvation”?

I. What is the purpose of salvation?

II. How can a person receive salvation? Can they earn it or get it themselves?

III. How does Jesus make salvation possible?

V. What is YOUR testimony of faith?

I. Do you— as an individual person— need salvation through faith in Jesus?

II. How has God been at work in your life to bring you into salvation?

III. What is your “testimony of faith”?

Review Class #2: What Presbyterians Believe

Review of Lessons #3 & #4.

I. What are “covenants”?

- I. What are some of the important covenants in the Bible?
- II. Why are these covenants important?
- III. Does God always keep His promises in covenants?

II. What are “justification” and “sanctification”?

- I. What does it mean to be “justified”?
- II. What does it mean that we are being “sanctified”?
- III. What is the difference between the two?

III. What is “predestination”?

- I. What does it mean for someone to be “predestined” in the way that the Bible uses that word?
- II. Where does the Bible talk about predestination?
- III. Why might someone have difficulty with the idea of predestination?

IV. What is the sacrament of Baptism?

- I. What was circumcision for in the Old Testament?
- II. What does Old Testament circumcision have to do with Christian Baptism?
- III. What does it mean when someone is baptized?

V. What is the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper?

- I. What was the Passover in the Old Testament? What does Passover have to do with the Lord’s Supper?
- II. What happens in the Lord’s Supper? Why is it important for a Christian?

Review Class #3: We Are the Church Together

Review of Lessons #5 & #6.

I. What is the church?

I. What is the church universal? Who is a part of it?

II. What is the church particular? What is the difference between the church universal and the church particular?

II. How does the church minister to people?

I. How does it minister to others?

II. How does it minister to you?

III. How are you involved in the ministries of the church? How could you be involved?

III. What are denominations?

I. What denomination are we a part of?

II. What does that mean? How does that make us different from other churches?

IV. What are church officers?

I. What different types of officers are there?

II. What do the different types of officers do?

V. Why is church membership important?

I. What is required for church membership?

II. How would you— as a member of the church— support the church in its worship and work? What does it mean to do that?

III. Why is it important that you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church?

IV. How does a church member study the purity and peace of the church?

Recommended Bibliography / Resource Guide

Frequently in the *Parents' Handbook*, we refer parents to outside resources that will assist them in leading their students through the material. In our use of this material, we have found it helpful to have a copy of these resources available (or more than one) for parents to borrow as they work through the curriculum. Below you'll find a list of the resources we recommend that you acquire for your church's library.

- [*Westminster Confession of Faith and Westminster Larger & Shorter Catechisms*](#). We usually provide a copy of the Confession and Catechisms to each family who is using the *Covenant Discipleship* curriculum, but we would at least encourage you to have copies on hand for lending.
- [*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*](#) by Josh McDowell.
- [*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*](#) by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart
- [*The Canon of Scripture*](#) by F. F. Bruce
- [*Hath God Said?*](#) by R.C. Sproul.
- [*Christ of the Covenants*](#) by O. Palmer Robertson
- [*William the Baptist*](#) by James M. Chaney (edited by J. Ed. Eubanks, Jr.)
- [*Infant Baptism*](#) by John Sartelle
- [*The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*](#) by Pierre Marcel
- [*The Sacraments*](#) by R.C. Sproul
- [*Why Do We Baptize Our Children?*](#) by Richard Pratt
- [*Maximizing Your Effectiveness*](#) by Aubrey Malphurs

Thoughts on Sessions Interviewing Children

In many churches, the Pastor(s) and Ruling Elders are intimidating, even frightening, to younger children. In addition to being grown men, it is easy to see that they are authority figures, and children may naturally shy away from them. This is especially the case if the men aren't well-known to the children.

That may not be the case at your church; if not, then that is a wonderful testimony of how your church's leaders have presented themselves to the whole congregation—children included— as being approachable.

Even so, when the time comes for the interview with the Session for a child to join the church, most children will assume a degree of shyness that is understandable, even if the child isn't normally a shy child and the adults are well-known. Furthermore, children often assume that, if they are called before a group of adults who are "strangers" to them, that they must be in trouble.

It may be helpful to keep the following thoughts in mind when presenting children before the Session.

- ✓ **Meet in a place where the children aren't "lower" than everyone else.** If you can, meet with them in a setting where they can sit in chairs that don't swallow them. You might even consider having everyone sit in child-sized chairs, so that you are all on "their level."
- ✓ **Meet with them in small groups.** The PCA's *Book of Church Order* does not require that those seeking membership must meet with the entire Session. Therefore, it is completely in order for a group of two or three Elders to meet with a child, without the rest of the Session, then report back to the Session whether they were satisfied with the child's profession of faith. This can be a significant step toward alleviating the awkwardness and fear.
- ✓ **Include parents.** Don't make a child come alone before the Session, even if the parents suggest it. Ask them to join their child.
- ✓ **Speak softly.** Most men are given to speaking loudly, but this may seem to a child like yelling. Encourage all of the Elders present to speak with gentle, soft tones as best as they can.
- ✓ **Offer many reassuring and affirming words.** Go out of your way to say many things to the child that affirms them and reassures them that they are not in trouble. "We're very proud of you for coming to see us," or "It makes us very happy to have you here" are some good starting points. "You did a great job of telling us about your faith" or "Thank you for sharing your testimony with us"

might be a good way to end. Find affirming words for in-between, if you can. Affirm anything and everything that you are able to.

- ✓ **Ask helpful questions.** Give them as much as you can as a starting point in the form of questions. While you want to stop short of leading them to say something they don't actually think or believe, asking questions that direct the conversation can be helpful.
- ✓ **Don't correct them.** If they say something that is wrong, ask questions to make sure they stated accurately what they meant. If they persist in their error, take care not to shame or embarrass them by correcting them publicly. Instead, speak to their parents after the fact about the error— and if necessary, speak freely with the rest of the Session about it as it concerns whether or not the child ought to be admitted into full membership.
- ✓ **Pray with them when they are finished.** Don't simply pray for them, but invite them to pray with you— aloud, if they are willing (but don't force them). Praying with them will esteem them in their faith. Plus, this is rare opportunity that the shepherds of the church have to pray with the youngest members of the church; don't miss out on it!