

Introduction

We're glad you've chosen to find out more about Atlee! This class is the basic introduction to our church. Since we have members from many different backgrounds, this class was designed to give a clear explanation about who and what we are as a church.

The Basis for this Class

*"...You are a **member** of God's very own **family**....and you **belong** in God's **household** with every other Christian."*

Ephesians 2:19

Key Truths:

1. The church is a real family.
2. God wants you to be a part of a church family.
3. A Christian without a church family is a contradiction .

The goal of the Membership Class is to give you an opportunity to learn about Atlee Community Church, and then, if desired, to make a commitment to Christ and to become a member of the church.

Atlee's Vision

Atlee Community Church's vision makes Atlee unique in Richmond. Our church's vision is:

To turn unbelievers (and unchurched people) into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Atlee has 10 core values to carry out this vision. These core values are taught in Scripture and are a guiding force behind all that we do at Atlee Community Church.

Session #1 – Grace

Christ followers understand and have individually received Christ's saving grace. They have abandoned all attempts to earn God's favor through accomplishments of their own and find security only through Christ's sacrificial death on their behalf.

The parable of the prodigal sons in Luke 15, is an invitation to be "at home" with the loving Father. In many ways, the focus of Luke 15 is on a loving father.

God desires to bring his children home – for them to walk back into his welcoming arms. Many have an easier time entering God's arms, being saved by grace, than living in grace. The fact is that every believer can grow to experience grace more and more. Grace starts with repentance and forgiveness. It grows as those who accept God's forgiveness learn to see the many aspects of God's everyday generosity often taken for granted. They grow in grace as they fully partake of the life God has for them.

In order to understand God's grace and to make it a part of one's life, it is essential that each person understand the basic message of the Bible.

The Message of the Bible

The Bible's message is that Christianity is a "relationship," not a "religion." Religions are all about earning your way to God – trying to find a "religious" way to know or get to God. Christianity understands the truth of the Bible, which tells that God wants to have a personal relationship with Him, and has provided a way for that. God is not distant and strange; instead God is near, personal, and knowable. The good news of Christianity is that God has provided for both our purpose and happiness.

What is grace? In short, grace is undeserved favor.

Atlee's Structure and Affiliation

Atlee is a fully independent church. There are no outside authorities or boards that control us as in other denominations. The church is self-governed by its elected Spiritual Management Team and staff according to the Structure of Ministry document. Even though independent, Atlee affiliates with:

- Willow Creek Association
- Dover Baptist and Virginia Baptist General Association
- International and National Mission Boards

The advantage in affiliating with the above groups is that it allows us the opportunity to participate in conferences, leadership development, and world-wide extension ministries.

Atlee Community Church at a Glance

- Begun eight years ago, Atlee Community Church is a place where over 1,000 people gather at our two Sunday services to explore Christianity, taking the time they need to investigate its truths and consider its relevance to their lives. If you have given up on church or are looking for a church that understands the challenges and stresses you face in today's culture, Atlee is for you.
- Atlee Community Church held its first service on March 12, 1995, at the Best Western Hanover House, just off I - 95. Quickly outgrowing this location, the church moved to Atlee High School in August, 1995.
- Atlee offers quality presentations in a casual, non-threatening atmosphere. Sunday morning services are held at 9:00 and 10:30 AM. Each week, services include upbeat music, real life drama, multi-media, and positive, practical messages.
- Atlee offers numerous small groups that meet throughout the community virtually every day or night of the week for support, encouragement, Bible study, and prayer.
- New Community is our mid-week service that offers believers an opportunity to grow and deepen their faith through worship, music, and Bible teaching.
- 23 acres of property, one mile off I-295, on Pole Green Road in Hanover County, was purchased in 1998. In the summer of 2001, site work began for a 42,000 square foot facility, which included a 1,000-seat auditorium, space for various ministries, and administrative office space.

Atlee's Building Dedication took place on June 7, and the first Sunday services were held on June 9, 2002.

1. God designed us to live in a relationship with Him. He wants us to live lives that are filled with meaning and purpose.

"I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly." John 10:10

"God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." 1 Corinthians 1:9

"God created human beings, making them in His image. He blessed them, and said, live over the earth and bring it under control. I am putting you in charge."

Genesis 1:27-28

2. Humanity has a natural desire for independence and self-centeredness. The Bible calls this attitude sin.

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each one to his own way." Isaiah 53:6

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23

3. Sin prevents us from having a relationship with God.

"For the wages of sin is death..." Romans 6:23

When we are not in a relationship with God, we look for life in all the wrong places. We search for happiness and purpose in all kinds of ways... but none will give ultimate significance.

4. God has provided a way back into relationship.

"For Christ died for sins once for all. The just for the unjust to bring us back together with God." 1 Peter 3:18

"But God demonstrated His love for us in this: While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

“The wages of sin is death, BUT the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 6:23

“For it is by grace that you are saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast.” Ephesians 2:8-9

GOD HAS DONE HIS PART. OUR PART IS TO ACCEPT THE GIFT OF GRACE HE OFFERS!

5. How to become a Christian and begin a relationship with God:

- Admit you are a sinner and that you can do nothing to earn God's forgiveness.
- Believe that Jesus Christ died as payment for your sin.
- Trust Christ as your personal savior.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

“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.”

Romans 10:9

Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...”

Revelation 3:20

6. You can be certain you have eternal life.

“These things have been written to those who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13

Membership Covenant

If you are a Christian and believe God would have you become a participating member of Atlee, we ask that you be active in the church in these ways.

- I am in agreement with Atlee's **Vision** *“to turn unbelievers and unchurched people into fully devoted followers of Christ”* and will support Atlee's methods of ministry.
- I will attempt to live out Atlee's ten **Core Values** in the specific ways listed on the previous page.
- I have read Atlee's **Structure of Ministry** document and I am in agreement with the church's beliefs, structure and practices.
- I understand Atlee's **Seven Step Strategy** to accomplish our vision and will actively support the church in each one:
 - Step #1 - *Building bridges of relationship with those around me.*
 - Step #2 - *Learning how to better deal with and answer questions related to my faith.*
 - Step #3 - *Invite others to seeker services on Sunday.*
 - Step #4 - *Participating in a small group.*
 - Step #5 - *Making a commitment to make worship a regular part of life and attend New Community.*
 - Step #6 - *Managing my spiritual gifts, talents, and financial resources in service of Christ.*
 - Step #7 - *Supporting Atlee's leaders and also endeavor to grow in leadership abilities myself.*

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Living Out The Core Values

Those who choose to participate with Atlee Community Church are asked to support the church by living out the ten core values:

1. Since we believe that teaching and worship are the catalyst for transformation in my life, *I will attend ACC faithfully* (Hebrews 10:24-25).
2. Since we believe that seekers matter to God and to the church, *I will build relationships with others and invite them to the seeker service* (Luke 5:27-32; Luke 15).
3. Since we believe that the church should be culturally relevant while being doctrinally sound, *I will support methods of ministry used at ACC to reach our culture for Christ* (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
4. Since we believe that followers of Christ should be authentic and long for growth, *I will be responsible for my personal growth in Christ* (Colossians 2:6-7).
5. Since we believe that the church should operate as a community of faith using their spiritual gifts, *I will serve in the body of Christ by discovering and using my spiritual gifts* (1 Peter 4:10).
6. Since we believe that loving relationships should permeate every aspect of church life, *I will promote and protect unity and love at ACC* (Philippians 2:2).
7. Since we believe that life change happens best in a small group setting, *I will be involved in a small group* (Colossians 2:6-7).
8. Since we believe that excellence honors God and inspires people, *I will support the church financially* (1 Corin. 16:2).
9. Since we believe that the church should be led by those with leadership gifts, *I will follow the leadership given by the staff, Spiritual Management team, & other leaders* (Hebrews 13:17)
10. Since we believe that pursuit of full devotion to Christ and

His purpose is normal for every believer, *I will pray for the church's effectiveness* (Colossians 4:2).

Following Christ in Baptism

What is the meaning of Baptism?

- Baptism illustrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"We are buried with him in baptism and raised to walk with him in the newness of life." Romans 6:4

- Baptism illustrates the new life of a Christian.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, and the new has come."

2 Corinthians 5:17

**BAPTISM DOES NOT MAKE YOU A CHRISTIAN ...
IT SHOWS YOU ARE ONE.**

**IT IS AN OUTWARD SIGN OF AN INWARD DECISION.
A PHYSICAL SYMBOL OF A SPIRITUAL TRUTH.**

Why be Baptized?

1. To follow Jesus' example.
2. To obey Jesus' instructions.
3. To demonstrate/show that you are a Christian.

Baptism follows the beginning of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Much like the exchanging of wedding rings follows the vows.

The Greek word used for baptism in the New Testament means to "immerse" or to "dip."

Notes

The only requirement for baptism is belief in Christ. We do not baptize children until they are old enough to understand and believe this personally.

Our church recommends that you be baptized again if you have not been baptized by immersion since you became a believer. It doesn't devalue a prior experience, but simply reflects your desire to be baptized in the same way Jesus was baptized.



Believers extend God's grace each time they reach out to others – when they pray for them, forgive them, include them, and share with them the good news of God's grace available to all.

Each person who participates with Atlee is encouraged to take the *Contagious Christian Class*, which is offered on a regular basis. This class will teach you how to share your faith in Christ with others in a natural and confident way.

As preparation for next week's session, read Acts 2:42-47 and answer this question: What activities did these early followers of Christ do on a regular basis?

1. Devoted to teaching and community/fellowship
2. Broke bread and prayed together
3. Shared what they had with each other
4. Ate together in homes
5. Praised God with sincere hearts

God has provided what we need. It is called a tithe.

The literal meaning of the word tithe is “a tenth part.” To tithe is to be generous with one’s earnings by giving ten percent to God’s work. Christ-followers recognize tithing as the historical standard of giving in Scripture. From the beginnings of the early church, the tithe was a beginning point from which Christians gave much more as needs arose (Acts 4:32-34). In response to Christ’s abundant giving, we are to increasingly display a generosity and cheerfulness in supporting the work of the church and reaching out to a needy world.

There is only one time in the Bible when people are invited to test the goodness of God.

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” (Malachi 3:10)

Intentionally moving toward or beyond tithing demonstrates a pattern of giving that honors God.

There is an unmistakable connection between tithing and generosity and spiritual life itself.

- Every time you give generously, you reinforce that all you have is from God. God is Owner; you are a faithful steward.
- Everytime you give generously, you make a declaration: *I will trust you, God, even when trusting isn’t easy or natural.*
- Every time you give generously, you are reminded of how much you have been given. By counting your blessings, you resist the “more monster.”



Each member at Atlee is asked and encouraged to give regularly to both the church’s operating budget and the building fund.

Session #2 – Growth & Groups

1. **Growth:** Christ followers know that they gratefully respond to God’s grace by actively pursuing a lifelong process of spiritual growth by seeking to become conformed to Christ. To this end, they consistently attend to their own spiritual development. Christ followers regard the Bible as the final authority in all areas that it teaches about and desire to be fully obedient to it. They honestly confront areas of personal sin and seek the Spirit’s power in turning from bad habits and sin.

When you become a Christian, God provides:

A clear <u>conscience</u>	Romans 8:1
Security and <u>assurance</u>	Romans 8:38-39; 1 John 5:13
Wisdom and <u>direction</u>	Proverbs 3:5-6
Help with <u>problems</u>	Romans 8:26
Contentment and <u>peace</u>	Philippians 4:6-7; 4:19

In pursuing full devotion to Christ, people grow as they engage in practices, experiences and relationships that will help them be conformed to Christ. Every believer should be involved in the following four areas:

1. Read and study the Bible. Learning from God - not just for information but seeking to develop Christ-like character in your own life.
2. Prayer. In solitude, distancing yourself from various outside influences and developing an inward attentiveness to God.
3. Community/worship. Committing yourself to come together for the purpose of worshipping a God who is worthy of praise, learning from the teaching of Biblical truth, and connecting with other believers.

4. Sharing your faith. Clearly knowing how to share your own story of how Christ changed your life and being able to communicate to others how they can accept God's grace in their life.

As followers of Christ mature in Christ, they honor God's desire for them to participate in community in order to grow in Christ-likeness, express and receive love, and carry out the ministry of the church. Every person should have a personal growth plan that includes each of these four elements, which will purposefully and creatively push them to deepen their knowledge and relationship with Christ.

2. Groups: One of the best ways to do grow spiritually is by connecting relationally to a small group for study, support, service and accountability. Life change best happens in such small groups where genuine relationships are characterized by both grace and truth that flow freely over time. In the light of truth, people can find direction to live life as God designed it.

While Jesus ministered in all kinds of contexts (teaching to large crowds, meeting people in the marketplace, and visiting families in their homes), Jesus' ministry to these varied groups was preceded by and proceeded out of a small group context. Jesus began his earthly ministry by establishing his "small group," the twelve disciples. Jesus spent a great deal of time with his small group. Relationships, not organizations, were central in Jesus method. Because of Jesus' emphasis on people, not programs, the only "organization" that merited Jesus' continuing time and attention was his small group. Jesus used the small group context to live out his life, teach, and model spiritual knowledge and behavior.

Small groups are the vehicle through which ministry at Atlee Community Church is delivered.

Session #4 - Generosity

Christ followers realize that they have been bought with the price of Christ's sacrifice, and that everything they are and have belongs to Him. In light of this, they desire to be responsible caretakers of the material resources God has entrusted to them.

People's minds and hearts are naturally shaped by greed and possessiveness. We are by nature clingers - "mine" is one of the first words a child learns. Society advocates increasing one's "standard of living." Life as a devoted follower of Christ is instead concerned with increasing the "standard of giving." God is concerned with our giving, not because he wants our money or our possessions. God desires our hearts, and our giving is a truthful indicator of our hearts and our love.

How we budget and spend our money reveals and shapes our hearts.

More than almost any other area of our lives, our handling of money and possessions reveals what we believe – not what we say we believe, but what we *really* believe. What do your actual day-to-day patterns regarding money and possessions indicate that you really believe?

Money management is a predominant theme in the Bible. Jesus said more about money and possessions than almost any other topic. Jesus reduced the truth about giving to the simplest of terms when he said: "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matthew 6:21)

When we focus on God's generosity, it is easier to be generous ourselves.

Our society puts pressure on us to want *more*. But *more* is an insatiable desire, and saying no to "more" can be difficult. We need a tangible and routine way to say, "*Money, you will not be the god of my life.*"

What are my spiritual gifts?

According to the *Spiritual Gifts & Passion Inventory* my top three spiritual gifts are:

1. _____, 2. _____, and 3. _____

In reviewing these gifts, I am most interested in the following details:

How should I choose to serve?

In selecting an area of service, your spiritual gifts indicate what you will do when you serve. Your passion indicates where you are best suited to serve. There is no right or wrong passion or spiritual gifts.

The Greek word that Paul uses for spiritual gifts is *charismata*, which comes from the root word *charis*, which is the word for grace. Grace is centered in Christ's forgiveness of sin, but it is not limited to that. God's grace is also evident in his continued generosity in granting to each person some specific gift of grace.

Since God gives us these abilities, each person should use his/her giftedness in humility, without comparison and competition with others. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:5-17) he demonstrated and asked that his followers offer humble service to others. This is best accomplished through putting into action one's spiritual gift(s).



Each person who attends Atlee is encouraged to plug into a specific area of regular service.

In preparation for next week's session, read 2 Corinthians 8:3-7, 9:6-8 and write down a few statements about your beliefs and practices on "giving."

The mission of Atlee's small groups:

"To connect people relationally, in order to assist seekers and believers toward full devotion to Christ."

Small groups provide the optimal environment for the life-change Jesus Christ intends for every believer.

Significant relationships occur best in the context of a small group. A small group of believers loving one another with God's love experience the life Christ promised at the deepest level possible. This love radically transforms them and demonstrates God's power.

Small groups are not a department of the church, but in a real sense they *are* the church, in its smallest unit. Small groups at Atlee are designed to be places where people can:

- know and be known
- love and be loved
- serve and be served
- celebrate and be celebrated

Acts 2:42-47 presents a great picture of how the earliest followers of Christ *grew* as they participated in *groups*.



Every person who calls Atlee home is asked and encouraged to grow in their devotion to Christ, with a growth plan that includes being a part of a small group and attending New Community.

In preparation for next week, take the *Spiritual Gifts & Passion Inventory* and read 1 Corinthians 12.

Session #3 – Gifts

Christ followers recognize that the church is composed of interdependent members, each uniquely gifted by God's Spirit for the purpose of building up and furthering the ministry of the church. They therefore intentionally strive to discover, develop, and utilize those God-given gifts, with the support and affirmation of the church. They have a servant mentality as they operate in places of service within the church. Believers passionately honor God, the giver of "every good and perfect gift," by serving one another for the common good.

A review of 1 Corinthians 12 reveals the following basic facts about spiritual gifts:

1. There different kinds
2. All come from one Spirit ... as He determines
2. Each person is given one... for the common good
4. They work together in the one body of Christ

Why should we serve?

The purpose for serving in the church is to:

(1) Glorify God and (2) edify others
Serving accomplishes both of these. Service is worship and worship glorifies God. Serving also builds up (edifies) the church.

We see this in many places in the Bible, but there are two key passages. In the Old Testament, we find this in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). The first four commandments describe how we are to honor God and the remaining six commandments describe how we are to love others.

In the New Testament this dual concept of service is found in the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40):

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The Bible says that God is the ultimate gift-giver; in fact, it calls him the giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17). It also says that God has given to all that follow him spiritual gifts, which enable them to serve others in the body of Christ.

What is a spiritual gift?

- Spiritual gifts are special abilities ...
They are divine endowments – abilities that God has given to us to make our unique contribution. (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- distributed by the Holy Spirit ...
We do not choose these. Instead they are by God's design. God gives these spiritual gifts to us for meaningful service within the body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:11)
- to every believer according to God's design and grace ...
Every believer has at least one spiritual gift, and every believer is a minister. (1 Peter 4:10)
- for the common good of the body of Christ.

The gifts we are given allow us to serve one another better. A major test of our use of spiritual gifts is how they glorify God and edify others. (1 Corinthians 12:7)