

Understanding the Faith

A Workbook for Communicants Classes

and Others Preparing to Make a Public Confession of Faith

REVISED EDITION

STEPHEN SMALLMAN

This workbook belongs to _____



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A Word to Teachers and Parents

From 1967 to 1996 I served as pastor of the McLean Presbyterian Church in McLean, Virginia. In my early years I searched for materials that would help me prepare the children of the congregation to understand the elements of the faith as part of their public profession of faith. This is what we Presbyterians usually call a Communicants Class. When nothing suitable was found, I began writing lessons myself and through the years I revised them again and again. I taught the class myself up until the time I moved away from that ministry. The privilege of working with those young people at such a critical moment in their lives (and partnering with parents who had laid the foundation) was one of the great joys of my ministry.

In 2001 my brother, Rev. Robert Smallman, helped me revise the materials into a much more appealing format and Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing made them available to a wider audience. I am very happy to say that since that time *Understanding the Faith* has been used by dozens of churches to prepare their young people to publicly confess their faith. But it has also become a resource for home-schooling parents and for people wanting a basic outline to introduce new believers to the essentials of the faith.

For the 2009 edition we have not made any significant changes in content, but we are making some changes in format you should be aware of:

- 1). The lessons will be formatted for use with the English Standard Version. The ESV is the preferred translation by an increasing number of churches that use *Understanding the Faith*. Those continuing to use the New International Version or other versions will still be able to answer most questions, but they should be aware that there will be occasional differences of wording.
- 2). The lessons will be formatted to conform to the classic edition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Copies of this older version are part of the public domain, and we believe the language is still accessible to modern users.
- 3). We are not including specific membership vows. This is still the focus of lesson 15, and if these lessons are being used for a public confession of faith you should be prepared to present and explain the vows of your particular denomination or church.

I am not providing a set of answers, because I think they should be self-evident as you study the Scriptures and the Shorter Catechism for yourself. When I taught the class (which consisted of reviewing the lesson by letting the students read their answers, and then discussing key points), I would make it very clear to the students that I expected them to come to class prepared — including the fact that the parents had signed the lesson. Very soon after the start of the class I would get in touch with the parents and encourage them to not just sign off on the lesson, but to actually review it after the young people had done their best to complete it. I had many, many expressions of gratitude from parents who appreciated what they had learned themselves as well as the opportunity it had provided to speak with their children about the truths of the faith.

One side benefit of the course is that by the end, the students not only can find their way through Scripture, but also do a good job of interpretation. In the early weeks, take extra time to help those who have not done much Scripture study to find their way in the Bible. If you use this in a church setting, it will be a challenge fitting this 18-week class into a church calendar. After several experiments, I settled on a class late Sunday afternoons from the first Sunday in December until late April. I have been told about many other creative ways that churches have incorporated *Understanding the Faith* into their overall Christian education ministry. However it is done, it is essential that we give our children this firm grounding in the faith.

It is best to begin each week with a review of key points from previous lessons. The catechism carefully develops a system of doctrine, and I have tried to follow that system. The students should see this logical progression of thought, so be sure to point out to them how one theme leads to the next. It is particularly important to spend several weeks reviewing the few things I assign the students to memorize: Question #4 ("What is God?"), the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments.

You will note that in lessons 10–13 I am asking the students to consider their own relationship to Christ. In my own teaching experience it was at this stage that I sought out a time to speak with them personally about this issue before I brought them to meet with the elders for the membership interview. In some cases the young people were not ready to make a personal confession, and in such cases we waited until they were. It is important that we respect each student's sensitivities, and not make assumptions about the young people's faith just because they complete the course.

I pray that these lessons will be helpful to you and the students you teach. I welcome any comments or questions. You are also welcome to visit the website of Birthline Ministries where I describe the other materials I have written for parents and new believers.

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Lesson 1

1.

THE MEANING OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP



This is the first of 17 lessons that you will be completing as a member of the Communicants Class. After you complete each lesson, check it with your parent(s) and have one sign it. It should be brought to class the next week.

Find answers to the questions by looking in the paragraphs above them or by looking in the Bible (English Standard Version — ESV) or the Westminster Shorter Catechism (S.C.). **You do not need to guess** unless the question asks what you think about something.

Please write down any questions you have and bring them to class. Questions are always welcome!

	nat was the reason for God's creating man? (See orter Catechism #1) Man's chief end is to				
	To glorify God means to give him the place of honor; is like shining a light on something to show how beautifulit is.				
	Look up these verses and write down ways we can honor or glorify God:				
	Psalm 50:23; 86:12				
	John 4:23				
	Matthew 5:16				
	I Corinthians 10:31				
b.	To enjoy God means that human beings are happied and most satisfied when they know God.				

Augustine was a great Christian who lived around A.D. 400. He said to God: "Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee."

1

Rewrite	that	saying	in	modern	English	the	way	you
understo	and it	:						



In the beginning, God created the universe, the earth, and everything on the earth, including man. He made it all good, and man could enjoy God's good creation and enjoy being with God. But man chose to disobey God and to live without him. This is sin, and sin has brought death, and sickness, and hatred and evil into God's world. But God refused to let sin ruin his world and had a plan to overcome sin. This plan was that he would rescue many, many people from sin and make them his special people, his family.



- 2. The Bible says man chose to disobey God and live without him. (Find the answer in the paragraphs above.)
 - a. What is this choice called?
 - b. What has sin brought into God's good world?_____

c. Will God allow sin and death to ruin his creation?

3. What is God's plan?

2

4. What is the Church?

One name for this people or family is the <u>Church</u>. The Church is a gathering of people who trust and serve the true God. God has always had his Church: at first the family of Abraham was the Church; later God used Moses to lead the Hebrew nation out of Egypt and the Hebrews (Israel) became his Church. Finally Jesus came and taught that all who truly believed in him could be part of his Church. So the Church was first a family, then a nation, then gatherings of people from all nations. Now God's special people are called Christians.





a. What are the three steps in the development of the Church? List the important person in each step.

b. Now God's people are called

c. When people use the word **church** they often mean something else. List some of the other ways you have heard this word used.



Whaf do You fhink?



Today the Church is called the Body of Christ. That means Jesus is the head, and we are the parts of the body. Jesus told the people in his Church always to remind themselves that this is true by having Communion (also called the Lord's Supper, because it is just like Jesus' last supper with the disciples). Communion is a way of showing that we have taken Jesus into our lives and are part of his Church. The name Communicants Class comes from the word communion. The Communicants Class is to help you prepare to become a communicant member of one gathering of Jesus' Church. If you were baptized as an infant or a child, you were received as a non-communing member of the church. Now that you are old enough to understand much more about Jesus, you need to study so that you can confess him as your own Lord and be a communicant member.



5. What is one term we use for the Church today?

a.	Who is the head?
	Who are the parts of the Body?
b.	What is the ceremony Jesus gave us to remind ourselves that he is our source of strength?
	also called the
c.	What does taking Communion show?

Were you baptized as a child?					
a.	Ask your parents why they had you baptized and write a summary of their answer.				
b.	If you were not baptized, ask your parents why they decided not to do that. Summarize their answer.				
W	you want to be part of Jesus' Church? nat is the name of the particular gathering of Jesus' church nich you attend?				
	a. b.				

99
Don't Forget!

Date Completed	
Parent's Initials	