

Church Membership

Practice

2023 07 01

Contents

1	Concept of Church Membership	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Why this Membership Policy?	2
1.3	Key Elements of Church Membership	3
1.4	Definition of the Church Membership	4
1.5	Commitment Expected from Members to Church	5
1.6	Support and Opportunities Available	7
1.7	Church Membership Process	8
1.8	Maintaining Membership	8
1.9	Is Church Membership Biblical?	9
1.10	Why the Lord wants us to be committed to a local church? . . .	10
1.11	Reasons Why Membership Matters	11
1.12	Benefits of church membership to the Christian?	12
1.13	The Benefits of a Church Membership Class	13
1.14	Frequently Asked Questions	13

Preamble: This document represents the convictions of the Church on the matter of Church membership. We recognize and respect that other local Churches may hold positions different from this. We discourage those who are part of the Church from circulating this manual recklessly. Any questions or concerns should be directed to the leadership of the Church. While this

is documented with the best of the current understanding, amendments are possible if any need arise.

1 Concept of Church Membership

1.1 Introduction

The Church is a local and visible expression of the universal body of Christ. The purpose of our existence as a local Church is to glorify God by living as body of Christ manifested by means of corporate worship, observance of the Lord's Supper, prayer, doctrine, fellowship, evangelisation, and discipleship (Mat 28:20, Acts 2:42, 1 Cor. 16:2). Scripture refers to the body of Christ as made up of many individual members (Rom. 12:5). Individuals become members of the universal body of Christ by fully trusting in the work of Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins and being justified by the blood of Christ. We also see in the New Testament a call for every member of the universal body of Christ to come together with other members as part of a local expression of the universal Church that gather for the purposes listed above (Heb. 10:25). This then establishes a need for every believer in Christ to also be a member of a local Church.

Every group needs a clear and common understanding of various aspects of membership. In the context of a local Church this includes the conditions and process of membership, and the responsibilities of members towards the Church and the Church towards its members. This manual outline what 'membership' in the Church means in practice. It explains the meaning of membership, the implications of membership, including responsibilities and benefits, and the process of becoming a member.

While membership in the Church is the preferred goal for all who attend, the Church remains open to receive those who wish to know more about the Christian faith and the Bible and may not yet be ready for membership. The use of the term 'Church' in the rest of this manual refers specifically to the Church as a local expression of the universal body of Christ unless specifically noted otherwise. Similarly, the term 'membership' refers only to membership in this Church as a local expression of the universal body of

Christ.

1.2 Why this Membership Policy?

A question that may arise in the context of this membership policy is why it is needed at the present time given that many like-minded Churches including this Church has existed for many years without such a policy. The leadership through a process of mutual consultation and prayer have felt the need to create this policy for the following reasons:

1. Effective functioning of the Church requires a defined policy on membership as well as other key matters which provides the clarity needed for the Church to accomplish its goals.
2. Having clearly defined policies for membership as well as other key aspects of Church governance will better ensure that the Churches function smoothly.
3. A written policy on membership provides a clear understanding to all about the nature of Church membership and especially what are the expectations from members towards the Church and vice versa. The Bible is clear that all members of the body of Christ have duties and responsibilities they should fulfil within the local Church.
4. A clear policy on membership provides leadership with clear guidance on how to handle their responsibilities towards those who are associated with the Church.

1.3 Key Elements of Church Membership

Membership in a Church involves the following key elements:

1. Participating in the life of the Church: Church membership requires a believer to express his or her solidarity and like-mindedness with other believers (Phil. 2:2) and to fulfil his or her responsibility towards the body of Christ (Phil. 2:1-5, Gal. 6, 1 Cor. 12:14). The Church provides avenues for a believer to participate in the life of the Church and utilize

his or her spiritual gifts to build up the members of the Church (Eph. 4:15-16). The opportunity to involve in various ministries of the Church is according to the gifting and under the oversight of the leadership who will ensure that the whole Church is edified by the discharge of responsibility. This means that all may not have all responsibilities in equal proportion.

Note: It may be possible that a member of the Church may have gifting or burden for certain ministry that may not be shared as the Church. In such situation, a member is free to exercise his/her gifting outside the context of this local Church. The Church expect the member to update the Church of such ministry and the Church will offer full prayer support. However, the member should ensure that such ministry should not affect membership commitment and that such ministry pattern should not contradict the doctrinal stand and testimony of this Church. We term such ministry as the 'Personal ministry' of the member of the Church.

2. **Shepherding by Church leadership:** Church membership provides the means for a believer to be shepherded and provided the nurture and soul-care needed to grow spiritually (Heb. 13:17, 1 Peter 5:2-3)
3. **Accountability to Church leadership and to other believers:** Church membership provides the protection that comes from accountability to God-ordained Church leadership and to fellow believers (Heb. 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5-8, 1 Thess. 5:12,13). Accountability is an important aspect in facilitating spiritual growth and requires submission to Church discipline when required.

1.4 Definition of the Church Membership

All those who desire are welcome to attend meetings of the Church. For clearly defining membership in the Church, those who attend the Church meetings may be grouped into the following three categories:

1. **Members:** Those who are disciples of Jesus Christ, who have been baptized as believers and affirm the Church statement of faith and have

voluntarily decided to be a member. Membership represents a commitment to participate in the life of the Church body. Members display this commitment by participating regularly in the meetings of the Church, by actively engaging in mutual service, fellowship, accountability, and edification, and by submitting to Church discipline. The commitment expected from members is further detailed in the next section.

Note: We believe that one person cannot be the member of more than one Church and hence, anyone who wants to be a member of this Church, as far as possible, should inform the former Church about becoming a member of this Church and leave the previous Church membership retaining good relationship with them. While this is the general policy, exceptions are possible especially those coming from like-minded churches. Discuss with the church leadership in case of any ambiguity.

2. **Attendees:** Those who regularly attend one or more meetings of the Church but have not committed as members. This category also includes those who have not yet trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation. The leadership and members of the Church will encourage those in this category to progress towards becoming members.
3. **Visitors:** Those visiting the city and looking for fellowship temporarily while in this city or those who are exploring different local Churches for the purpose of identifying a regular home Church.

In this context, note that the purpose of the above classification is not to create distinctions in interpersonal relationships between those who attend the Church. All those who choose to be part of our Church community will be always treated with love and respect.

1.5 Commitment Expected from Members to Church

Proper functioning of the Church body requires a commitment towards the Church by all members. All those who are members of the Church must commit to the following:

1. As a born-again and baptized believer, to live a holy life, honouring God, seeking to live a godly life, and fostering a living relationship with Christ through personal prayer and private study of the Word.
2. As members of the body of Christ, to conduct with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
3. To regularly participate in corporate worship along with God's redeemed people partaking of the Lord's Supper in the assembly of saints.
4. To take all possible efforts to not forsake any Sunday worship. When one is not able to attend the worship due to health or profession, then to inform the Church/leadership and as far as possible in advance. When one is out of station, to take efforts to attend worship in the like-minded Churches and inform the same with the Church.
5. To actively participate in ministries of the Church especially the Sunday worship gathering and various meetings of the Church including regular bible study and prayer meetings.
6. To take best effort to develop and use the spiritual gifts for the building up of the Church and the kingdom, proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers and encouraging and helping one's Christian brothers and sisters.
7. In all Christian vocations (single, married, parent, profession, etc), to follow biblical principles and strive to be an example to the rest of the Church and to the world outside.
8. To take the spiritual support of the Church on major life decisions such as marriage, career, etc.
9. To accept the biblical authority of the Church and honouring the leadership of the Church, receiving their pastoral care and, if one should become delinquent either in doctrine or life, submitting to their admonition and discipline.
10. To bring to the attention of leadership any issues regarding themselves or of another member that needs to be addressed spiritually.

11. Being open to discipling by spiritually mature believers in the Church and be willing to spend time to disciple other believers who need to be built up in their faith.
12. If at any point of time due to change in location of stay, or change in convictions, or any other valid biblical reason, to inform the Church through its leadership about the desire to leave the Church retaining good relationship with the whole Church and to become member of a good biblical Church in the new location.

At the Church we challenge every member to be committed to pursuing a life that aligns with Biblical standards of doctrine and practice. This is what every Christian is called to do. We recognize that these are high standards, that living a godly life is difficult, and that all of us will fail by varying degrees to completely meet these standards. We do not expect perfection. When a person makes a commitment to be a member of the Church, they indicate a genuine intent to live by the standards stated above, to strive to progressively make them a reality in their life with the help of God and through the prayers and support of the Church community, to continually progress on the journey of sanctification, and when they fail or are falling short, to pursue confession and true repentance.

1.6 Support and Opportunities Available

Besides playing a spiritual role, the Church also has a role to play in various temporal and life events. For the sake of clarity, the following indicates the extent of support available from the Church towards to the members, attendees, and visitors:

Members

1. Attend all the regular Church meetings.
2. Partake of the Lord's Table (baptized believers only).
3. Pastoral care and spiritual support.

4. Attestation by Church leadership of testimony and character.
5. Opportunity to lead ministries according to the gifting under the oversight of leadership.
6. Formal attestation by Church leadership, commendation letters, membership validation, etc.
7. Support for events such as wedding, funeral, child dedication, etc.

Attendees

1. Attend all the regular Church meetings.
2. Partake of the Lord's Table (baptized believers only).
3. Pastoral care and spiritual support (selective).
4. Attestation by Church leadership of testimony and character (selective).

Note: Selective implies a case-by-case basis discerned by the leadership.

Visitors

1. Attend all the regular Church meetings.
2. Partake of the Lord's Table (baptized believers only).

1.7 Church Membership Process

It is the desire of the leadership that all those who attend the Church become a member. The membership process will be as follows:

1. Any person who has been regularly attending the Church meetings and has an interest in membership may approach the leadership and express the desire to become a member.
2. The leadership will meet with the prospective member to understand their background and faith and determine if the person is ready to proceed with membership.

3. If the leadership determine that the person is not ready to proceed with membership, he or she may continue as an Attendee. The leadership will continue to work with such to help them move towards becoming a Member.
4. If the leadership determine that the person may proceed with membership, he or she will be given the Church Membership Manual containing the Church Statement of Faith, the Church Distinctives, and the Church Membership Application Form. All who desire membership must affirm their agreement with the Church through Member Application form by returning a signed copy.
5. Once the prospective member has completed the above process, he or she will be introduced as a Member of the Church.

1.8 Maintaining Membership

It is understood that all members may not always fulfil all their responsibilities to the Church. When a member faces challenges in meeting the commitments, the leadership of the Church will handle each situation in a spirit of grace and gentleness, with the intent to encourage and restore, recognizing that all, including leadership, are subject to failure (Gal. 6:1). Where needed, leadership will meet with members to discuss areas of concern, understand challenges, and counsel and encourage fulfilment of responsibilities as a Church member.

As part of this process, if a member expresses an unwillingness to remain committed to the requirements for Church membership, or if the leadership feel there is no intent to fulfil the commitments associated with membership, their status as members may be changed to as an attendee. As much as possible, any such change will be made based on a mutual understanding between the leadership and the member.

1.9 Is Church Membership Biblical?

There is gross misconception about church and the need of church membership in the Christendom. Consider the following:

1. Authority and Submission: **Heb. 13:17.** (Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you) clearly raises two questions:
 - (a) As a disciple who is my leader to whom I obey and submit? Regarding this question, the Scripture clearly command Christians to submit to and honor elders of the local church (1 Tim. 5:17). Obeying this command requires a believer to commit to a local church and her elders.
 - (b) As a leader who are all I am responsible for? Regarding this question, the Scripture clearly command elders to care for specific people (1 Pet. 5:1-5; Acts 20:29-30).
2. Church discipline. **1 Cor. 5:11.** But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler? not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?. Obeying the commands given in the context of church discipline clearly necessitates local commitment to a covenant community of faith expressed through church membership.
3. Indirect indications: The first century church had clear understanding of church membership as evident from the following passages:
 - (a) Acts 2:37-47 that there is a numerical record of those who believed (v. 41) and the church was tracking the growth (v. 47).
 - (b) Acts 6:1-6, we see elections take place in order to address a specific problem implies they know who belong to them.
 - (c) Rom. 16:1-16, we see what appears to be an awareness of who is a church member.
 - (d) 1 Tim. 5:3-16, we see a clear teaching on how to handle widows in the church and in verses 9-13 we read this.

- (e) 1 Cor. 12. Obedience to the exhortations of this chapter requires commitment to a covenant community of faith.
- (f) Rom. 12 (12:3 For I say to everyone who is among you). Obedience to the exhortations of this chapter requires commitment to a covenant community of faith. E.g., love one another, give preference to one another, etc.

1.10 Why the Lord wants us to be committed to a local church?

1. Church attendance is not merely an obligation till we reach heaven but is the divinely designed institution meant for our own protection and maturation, and for the good of others.
2. Growing in a biblical holiness possible only with active interaction with others in my own local body; my own slothfulness in zeal is exposed, as is my lack of patience, my prayerlessness, and my hesitancy to associate with the lowly etc.
3. Yet this interaction also gives me the opportunity to be lovingly confronted by brothers and sisters who also struggle in faith like me, as well as a safe place to confess and repent.
4. But when church is just a place you attend without ever committing, examine whether you are always leaving the church whenever your heart begins to be exposed by the Holy Spirit, and the real work of sanctification is beginning to happen.
5. Summarizing, local church membership is a question of biblical obedience, not personal preference.

1.11 Reasons Why Membership Matters

1. Jesus established the local church, and all the apostles did their ministry through it. The Christian life in the New Testament is church life. Christians today should expect and desire the same.

2. The church is its members. To be a 'church' in the New Testament, especially in Acts, is to be one of its members.
3. It is a pre-requisite for the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a meal for the gathered church, that is, for members (1 Cor. 11:20, 33).
4. Membership is the church's affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom and an authorized representative of Jesus before the nations.
5. It is how to declare one's highest allegiance. Your membership in the local church is practiced in letter and spirit becomes a public testimony that your highest allegiance belongs to Jesus and his church. Trials and persecution may come, but your only words are, I am with Jesus and his church.
6. All the biblical images of church such as 'body of Christ', the 'temple of the Spirit', the 'family of God', and 'army of the Lord' involves the concept of accountability and commitment to the Lord expressed through a local church.
7. Membership helps you to know which Christians on planet Earth you are specifically responsible to love, serve, warn, and encourage. It enables you to fulfill your biblical responsibilities to Christ's body (for example, see Eph. 4:11-16; 25-32).
8. Membership helps you to know which Christian leaders on planet Earth you are called to obey and follow. Again, it allows you to fulfill your biblical responsibility to them (see Heb. 13:7; 17).
9. Membership lets Christian leaders know which Christians on Planet Earth they will give an account for (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).
10. Membership gives you the biblically prescribed place to participate in the work of church discipline responsibly, wisely, and lovingly (1 Cor. 5).
11. Membership places an individual Christian's claim to 'obey' and 'follow' Jesus into a real-life setting where authority is exercised over us (see John 14:15; 1 John 2:19; 4:20-21).

12. Membership puts the alternative rule of Christ on display for the watching universe (see Matt. 5:13; John 13:34-35; Eph. 3:10; 1 Peter 2:9-12). The very boundaries which are drawn around the membership of a church yields a society of people which invites the nations to something better.

1.12 Benefits of church membership to the Christian?

1. Membership helps to commit yourself to love and serve others by means of encouragement, rebuke, prayer, and ministry of the Word.
2. Membership helps you to receive love and help from an entire group of Christians who have now publicly committed to watch over you spiritually.
3. Membership helps you to receive pastoral care from the leadership of that local church who are accountable to God and who will care for you, pray for you, and personally counsel and teach you.
4. Membership serves as godly deterrent against serious sins through church discipline. This is an immense comfort and encouragement to those of us who know the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3:12).
5. While membership in a church doesn't guarantee that someone is a Christian, it should assure believers of the genuineness of their faith.

1.13 The Benefits of a Church Membership Class

Joining a local church is an important decision. Leadership therefore has the responsibility to properly teach and shepherd the prospective members.

1. Membership classes should ensure that members understand and articulate the gospel clearly.
2. Membership classes should also ensure they understand the biblical pattern of a local church including essential doctrines, functioning of the local church and including church governance.

3. Membership classes help to equip people into serving the local church including the spiritual gifts and opportunities to serve the Lord through the local church.
4. Membership classes help a member to understand what the church expects from its member and what happens if members do not live up to it consistently and deliberately thus preempt potential church discipline issues.

The writers of the New Testament always assumed that the local churches to whom they were writing had a clear understanding of who was a member of the church and who was not (1 Cor. 5:2; Col. 4:5; Gal. 6:10). Church membership classes are one of the most effective ways to examine, assimilate, and clearly demarcate new members into a church family.

1.14 Frequently Asked Questions

1. **Can a member lose their membership?** All members are expected to fulfil the responsibilities listed in this manual. However, the leadership recognize that this can be challenging. When a member is not fulfilling the responsibilities, the leadership of the Church will always operate with grace and encourage and counsel the member towards positive change. However, if over a period the member does not show any inclination or interest to fulfil the responsibilities of a member, loss of membership could occur.
2. **How will those who are part of the Church Community know who are members and who are not?** The leadership will maintain a membership list that will be available to all. Regardless of membership status, all those who choose to be part of the Church community should be always treated with love and respect. The goal of those who are members will be to encourage all to move forward on a journey towards membership.
3. **Does membership apply to individuals or to entire families? Are children considered Members?** Membership applies separately to

an individual. Within a family, husband and wife will be considered for membership as individuals. As such, it is possible for one spouse to be a Member and the other to be an Attendee. Minor children of a member will receive benefits (e.g., participation in Sunday School) as children of a member. A child of a member who is saved and baptized will be considered as a member after going through the process outlined in this manual.

4. **Can a person continue indefinitely as an Attendee?** Becoming a member is a voluntary choice of each person. The leadership desire for all who are part of the Church community to progress towards membership. All who are part of the Church community, whether a member or an attendee, are expected not to engage in activities that damage the testimony of the Church and the Lord Jesus Christ. If a person is not having a negative impact on the Church or its testimony, they may continue as an Attendee.
5. **Does a member have to subscribe to every tenet of the Church Statement of Faith?** The Church Statement of Faith represents the core belief and doctrines of the Church and will be taught and practiced in the Church. In cases where someone has doubts or divergent opinions on a specific area of the Church Statement of Faith, they must bring these up to the leadership for evaluation and discussion. The leadership will determine if and how such divergences should impact membership. In cases where someone with a specific divergent opinion is allowed into membership, they will be required to avoid teaching or influencing others in a way that deviates from the Church Statement of Faith.
6. **How about those already considered themselves as members?** As this membership policy and process is being introduced into an existing setup, we will go through a process of asking those currently attending the Church to consent to the Church member commitment. If anyone does not meet the criteria for membership, then the leadership will inform them, and they will be considered as Attendees. All those newly coming into the Church after the introduction of this membership policy

and process will be assessed for membership as per the process described above. A list of Church members will be maintained and made available to all members.

Note: The next section covers the convictions, ministry pattern, and distinctiveness of this Church. The next section is followed by the statement of faith related to major doctrinal positions.