

Church Membership at CBC Elgin

What is church membership?

Here at Calvary Baptist Church, we understand church membership to be a formal and covenantal relationship between a Christian and a local church in which both are responsible for one another's spiritual health, growth, and transformation.

Why formal and why covenant?

In the Bible, covenants are binding legal agreements made between multiple parties. Covenants were not only binding, but they were also commitments of intimacy (Lev. 26:12, Neh. 9:38). The Bible calls the church "the bride of Christ" (Eph. 5:25-27, Rev. 19:7-9). And so, as in a marriage relationship, both the formal and covenantal aspects of the relationship are important (Hos. 2:19-20). An informal relationship lacks the sacred, binding commitment and mutual accountability of a formalized marriage. And in a covenantal relationship, each member agrees to serve one another, love one another, and remain committed to one another through thick and thin. Therefore, a church membership that is neither formal nor covenantal is like a marriage relationship that lacks legal validation or public declaration. Church membership should therefore be both formal and covenantal.

What does the Bible say about church membership?

The Bible clearly assumes local church membership even though no single passage completely describes all its elements. Many New Testament commands cannot be understood, nor fully obeyed or lived out, except in the context of local church membership; for example: church leadership roles (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Heb. 13:7,17, Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:2), church discipline (Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5, Titus 3:9-11), the exercise of Spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-31, 1 Pet. 4:10-11), baptism (John 3:5, Acts 2:41, Rom. 6:4, Matt. 28:19-20), the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34, John 6:53-58), etc. Each of these are described in the context of a covenantal community.

What is the purpose of church membership?

The purpose of church membership is for the local church and the individual believer to be strengthened into Christlikeness and spiritual maturity. Church membership brings individual believers, often from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life, into formal, committed relationship with one another. In this context, believers are able to help disciple one another (Matt. 28:18-20), encourage one another (Heb. 10:25, 1 Thess. 5:11), rebuke one another (1 Tim. 4:12, Luke 17:3, 1 Tim 5:20), build one another up (1 Cor. 12:14, Eph. 4:11-12), stir one another up to good works (Heb. 10:24-25), love one another (John 13:34, 1 Pet. 4:8, Romans 12:10), serve one another (Gal. 5:13), etc. By doing all of this a church exhibits obedience to Christ (John 14:15).

What is required for church membership?

In order to become a church member, one must: profess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Rom. 10:9), be committed to following Jesus as a disciple (Luke 14:25-33), be baptized (John 3:5, Acts 2:41, Rom. 6:4, Matt. 28:19-20), acknowledge and affirm the Bible's authority and its expression in the church's doctrine (Titus 1:9, 1 Tim. 6:3-5, 2 Tim. 4:2-4), be committed to living a life consistent with his or her professed faith (Titus 2), agree to abide by the church covenant (1 Tim. 6:3-5, Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Cor. 5), and be approved and affirmed by the church (Matt. 16:19, 18:15-20, 28:18-20). This sounds serious, and it is! But true disciples of Jesus joyfully embrace and submit (Hebrews 13:17) to these formal and covenantal steps and assume these responsibilities out of love and devotion to the God who saved them from sin and promises eternal and abundant life.

What is the church's role in this formal, covenantal relationship?

A local church's role includes publicly affirming, through baptism, the authenticity of a professing believer's faith, and overseeing and disciplining the believer into spiritual maturity. Examples of how this takes place

include but are not limited to: teaching the Word of God and its good news of salvation through Jesus (Matt. 28:18-20, 2 Tim. 2:2, Mark 16:15), teaching and equipping individuals to follow Jesus and obey his commands (Eph. 4:11-12), facilitating a community of prayer (Phil. 4:6, 1 Thess. 5:17, 1 Tim. 2:1-4, James 5:16), providing opportunities for believers to serve one another in the church and to serve others in the community and on the mission field (Mark 16:15, James 1:22), etc.

What are the responsibilities of church membership?

With the joys and privileges of church membership and inclusion in the community of believers come the responsibilities of being a healthy church member, and being a committed church member.

Being a *healthy* church member includes but is not limited to: being an active listener of God's Word as it is taught by the church (James 1:22), being a student of the Bible's key doctrines (Titus 1:9, 2:1), seeking to know, love, serve, and obey God by helping proclaim the gospel in one's own sphere of influence (Mark 16:15, 2 Cor. 5:16-21), genuinely following Jesus and seeking to become more like him daily (Rom. 8:29, 1 Cor. 11:1, 2 Cor. 3:18, 1 John 5:3), being deeply committed to discipleship - both living as a disciple and discipling others (Matt. 5:14-16, 28:18-20, 2 Tim. 2:2), constantly maturing in the faith (Col. 1:28-29, Eph. 4:11-16, Heb. 6:1), being committed to prayer and Scripture reading (Phil. 4:6, James 1:22, Heb. 2:1, 4:12, Ezra 7:10), and being involved in missions work and service (Mark 16:15, Matt 28:18-20).

Being a *committed* church member includes making church attendance and involvement a top priority (Heb. 10:25, Acts 2:46, 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:18), sacrificing personal preferences when necessary for the good of the church (1 Cor. 12, Phil. 2:3-11), exercising spiritual gifts and natural abilities to build up the church (1 Cor. 12, 14), demonstrating financial sacrifice and generosity to the church (2 Cor. 8:1-15, 9:1-15), seeking unity of heart and mind within the church (Phil. 2:2, 1 Pet. 3:8, 1 Cor. 1:10, Eph. 4:1-6), regularly participating in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34, Luke 22:19-20), graciously offering and accepting rebuke and discipline (1 Cor. 5, 1 Tim. 5:10, Matt. 18:15-20), humbly following and submitting to church leadership (Heb. 13:7, 17, Acts 20:28, 1 Pet. 5:1-5), and actively participating in the ministry and mission of the church (Matt. 28:18-20).

How do I become a church member?

Prayerfully seek the Lord's direction for your life. If this local church is the community of believers to which God is calling you, speak with one of the pastors about becoming a church member.

"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 19:7-9, 21:2-4