

Church Membership



"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Ephesians 2:19-22

Why formal church membership?

Many of the benefits of congregational fellowship are available to anyone who becomes involved at St Peters, formal members or not. But there are good biblical reasons for formal church membership¹:

The Bible indicates that church membership was a reality in the New Testament church:

In the New Testament, the word "church" often refers to specific local churches (e.g. the church at Ephesus or Corinth). Here are five indications that membership was an important aspect of life in these early churches:

1. **The meaning of "the whole church":** In 1Cor 14:23, Paul says "if the whole church comes together in one place..." How would the leaders know if the "whole church" was there if no formal relationship was established?
2. **The biblical metaphors used to describe local churches (e.g. the church as the temple, body, family of Christ):** These are used specifically of local churches and each metaphor has a clear distinction of who is part of the church, and who isn't. (See Eph 2; 1 Cor 12)
3. **The instructions for pastoral oversight and spiritual leadership:** Pastors were to care for "all the flock" (Acts 20:28. cf. 1Tim 3, Acts 20, Phil 1:1, Titus 1). Leaders of the citywide churches must have had some listing of believers. Since leaders were accountable for the souls of the flock under their care (Heb 13:17), they must have had some commitment for care.
4. **The meaning of the word "join":** In Acts 5 the shocking death of Ananias and Sapphira is recorded. In v13 we read that no non-Christians "dared join them [the church] even though they were highly regarded by the people." The original Greek word for *join* has strong connotations of commitment. The same word is used to speak of *joining* to the Lord

(1Cor 6:17). So, joining the early church in Jerusalem was never a casual thing.

5. **The instructions for church discipline:** Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5 talk about putting a person out of the church and treating him like an unbeliever. Since unbelievers were welcome at times of worship, this removal must have indicated a break in distinct formal association.

Reasons for joining a church:

1. You have the benefit of receiving the care of, and being accountable to, spiritual leaders. Every believer must "obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account." (Hebrews 13:17). This command assumes that you have a covenant with certain spiritual leaders. They are responsible for you and you to them. Some people may say, "I am accountable only to God." Ultimately, yes, only God has authority over you. But a biblical understanding of sin should sober us about making ourselves the sole judges over our own hearts, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). Hebrews 3:13 says we need others to exhort us "daily" lest we become hardened by sin.
2. You have the opportunity to help shape the ministry of the congregation. Members choose officers and guide the direction of the congregation (Acts 6:1-6). While congregational meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, only members of our church may nominate and vote for Council members, have a formal say at our Annual Vestry Meeting or lead ministries in the church.
3. You are generally more likely to play the kind of church role the Bible describes for Christians: you'll guard against being an independent Christian (Matt 18:15-17, Heb 13:17); you'll have greater opportunities to use spiritual gifts (1Cor 12, Eph 4); you'll openly demonstrate the reality of the Body of Christ (1Cor 12:27); you'll encourage new believers to a proper commitment to the local body (Heb 10:24f).

Please fill out and return the form (overleaf). You can then expect to be contacted for a membership interview with one of the St Peters ministers and thereafter your application will be presented to the church council.

¹ These points are based largely on the article 'Why Formal Membership in a Church' from Redeemer Church, New York (2007).

Title:	Surname:	Names:
Date of Birth:	Email:	
Contact Numbers:		
Residential Address:		Postal Address:

1. What do you understand 'a Christian' to be?

2. How and when did you become a Christian?

3. For approximately how long have you been attending St Peters?

4. Please give a brief summary of other churches you have been part of in the past (if any):

5. Do you agree with the St Peters "Core Beliefs" and "Values"? Feel free to comment or elaborate:

6. We encourage all members to join one of our mid-week Fellowship Groups. Would you like more information about this?

7. We encourage all members to play an active role serving at St Peters. Is there any particular area in which you would like to serve?

Signature: _____ Date: _____