



## **SEND EVANGELICAL CHURCH** **MEMBERSHIP COURSE** **MEMBERSHIP**

Reading: Acts 2v36-47

### **Introduction**

We become members of the universal church by trusting in Jesus Christ. The Church = people who trust in Jesus and belong to God (1 Peter 2:9)

A local church is a group of believers committed to Christ and to each other.

Membership is belonging to a local church. Membership is having our name on the membership list / roll of a local church.

### **1 WHY DOES SEND EVANGELICAL CHURCH HAVE A CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?**

#### **A) The people of God, committed together**

The Bible refers to the church as a family, a building, the body of Christ, the flock of God. A believer is like a member of the family (Gal 6v10), a brick in the building (1Peter 2v4-8), part of the body (1Cor 12v14-27), a sheep of the flock (Acts 20v28). These speak of people belonging to God and belonging together. (See page 1.02 (1C) Descriptions of the Church)

The New Testament practise is for believers to be baptised. These believers were committed to the Lord and to one another. They were living in fellowship together and living before the world. This belonging together and commitment together, we call membership. (Acts 2v40-47)

A local church is the visible expression of the universal church. Being a member of a local church is the visible expression that we belong to the universal church.

#### **B) Belonging in the New Testament Church**

In the New Testament belonging to a church is seen in different descriptions.

- i) The early church knew who belonged 'to their number'. (Acts 2v41,47, 4v4)
- ii) People joined the church so were 'added to their number'. (Acts 2v41,47)
- iii) Outsiders did not join the church. (Acts 5v13)
- iv) Saul, after he was converted 'tried to join the disciples'. (Acts 9v26)
- v) When a person is under church discipline they are put out of the church fellowship. (1Cor 5v2,13)
- vi) When people moved from place to place letters of recommendation were sent to the church. (Acts 18v27, 2Cor 3v1-3)

This shows that the local church knew who belonged to each church. We call this belonging, church membership.

### **C) Benefits of having a church membership**

All people are welcome at the worship services of the church, but it is good for the church to have a membership for the following reasons.

- i) Truth  
There is to be agreement on the essential truths of the faith.  
(Eph 4v5, 1Tim 3v15)
- ii) Organisation  
A church should be run in an orderly way. (1Cor 14v40) Being a member of a church shows one is committed to the work of the church and its future direction.
- iii) Pastoral Care  
A member submits to the leadership and pastoral care of the church.  
(1Peter 5v1-5)
- iv) Help  
Members seek to help one another. (Gal 6v10)
- v) Evangelism  
Evangelism and mission is done under the guidance and support of the local church. (Acts 13v2,3, Acts 2v47) The aim in evangelism is not just to see people converted to Christ but become growing disciples, committed to a local church. (Matt 28v18-20)

Membership is to belong to a local church. Membership is to be committed to a local church.

There is a difference between *attending* and *belonging* to a church, as there is a difference to being a visitor in a household and being a member of the family. Visitors, however welcome, remain visitors, family members share in all aspects of the family. There is a relationship between members of the family, which a visitor cannot fully share.

Membership in a church is like becoming a member of God's family, which meets at that local church.

## 2 HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF SEND EVANGELICAL CHURCH

### A) Membership

The New Testament practise is for believers to be baptised. These believers, who were committed to the life of the local church and living in fellowship together, joined together in communion. (Acts 2v41,42)

We become a member of a local church by fulfilling the procedure adopted by that church.

For membership at Send, a person applies to the elders, who will interview the prospective member. This will be shared with the church and the person welcomed into church membership at a communion service.

### B) Historical Position

Church membership opens the door for service in the life of the church.

When a member moves to a new area, their membership is transferred to their new local church. (Acts 18v27) A transfer of membership occurs between like-minded churches.

Hence membership is seen as something very important for a believer and for the church.

In membership:

The believer is saying, 'I accept you as the church of God and commit myself to you'.

The church is saying, 'We accept you as a child of God and commit ourselves to you'.

## 3 WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Often today people think in terms of 'What's in it for me?' There are privileges in belonging to a church but the Bible stresses our responsibilities.

In a local church the privileges and responsibilities of church membership are like opposite sides of the same coin.

As we fulfil our responsibilities as members, those things become a blessing to us and enrich our lives.

eg As we serve the Lord together with others, our faith in Christ grows, our partnership with other members deepens and we see God using us in his work.

The responsibilities can be summarised in 3 areas:

### A) Responsibilities To God

- i) To Believe the Gospel
  - A believer is to confess that Jesus is God's Son, died for them, rose again and is Lord of all. (Acts 2v36-39)
  - This is evidenced in baptism, daily life and conversation. (Acts 2v41,44)

- ii) To Glorify God
  - We glorify God by holy living. (1Pet 1v15,16)
  - We glorify God by praising his name with reverent, glad and sincere hearts. (Acts 2v43,46,47)
  
- iii) To Learn the Truth
  - A believer is to be devoted to the apostles' teaching / doctrine. (Acts 2v42)
  - This means we will love the truth, obey the truth and seek to grow in understanding the truth.

We give ourselves first to the Lord and then to one another. (2Cor 8v5)  
 The health of the church depends on the spiritual health of the individual members.

## **B) Responsibilities To Christ's Church**

- i) To Pray for the Church
  - Prayer is central for all aspects of the church's life. (Acts 2v42)
  - We are to pray in personal devotions, in families and at church. We pray for the work and ministry of the church and for the members of the church.
  
- ii) To Join in the Fellowship of the Church
  - The church is to be a family. This means we join together in the activities of the church and are committed to building loving relationships in the church.
  - Fellowship is not automatic it must be worked at. (Phil 2v1-4, Eph 4v3)  
 We are to practise love and forgiveness. (Eph 4v32)

Here are some do's and don'ts -

### Don't

Condemn  
 Be touchy  
 Make mountains out of molehills  
 Gossip  
 Be cliquy  
 Ignore anybody  
 Look for the limelight  
 Be stingy  
 Be a passenger

### Do

Be slow to be angry  
 Pray for those you find difficult  
 Work for harmony  
 Keep confidences  
 Get to know all the members  
 Help those who fall  
 Pull your weight  
 Be generous  
 Look for people you can help

The fellowship of the church depends on loving relationships between members. We each have a contribution to make to the deepening fellowship of the church.

- iii) To Attend the Activities of the Church
  - We seek to be present, as far as practical, at both Sunday services, and midweek. (Heb 10v25, Acts 2v42)
  - A growing believer will want to be with his Lord and join with his church family. Persistent absence in meeting together with God's people indicates something is not right spiritually.
  - A believer also has responsibilities to their family, to their employer/job and to society, so will need wisdom as they serve God in all these areas.
  
- iv) To Serve in the Church
  - God has given each member gifts and opportunities for service. We are to be willing to serve God as he has gifted us, in the work of the church, under the guidance and direction of the leaders. (Acts 2v42,45)
  - Our service is necessary for our growth and for the maturity of the church. (Eph 4v12,13)
  
- v) To Support the Church Financially
  - We are stewards of all the Lord has given us. We are to be wise and faithful stewards. (Matt 25v14-30, 1Tim 6v17-19)
  - It is the responsibility of the members of the church to give the money to support the work of the church.
  - The majority of our giving should be to our local church, where we are being fed spiritually and where we are serving. (Acts 2v44,45)
  - We should give regularly, proportionately, voluntarily, joyfully. (1Cor 16v1-4, 2Cor 9v6,7)
  
- vi) To Respect the Leaders of the Church
  - The elders do not seek to lord it over the flock but to serve as good shepherds responsible to Christ. (Heb 13v17, 1Pet 5v1-4, Acts 20v28-30)
  - They have a pastoral and caring ministry, watching over the Lord's flock.
  
- vii) To Submit to Church Discipline
  - Discipline maintains the purity and witness of the church as it seeks to uphold the gospel in the world. (Matt 18 v15-17, 1Cor 5v1-5)
  - Discipline seeks to restore erring members.

### **C) Responsibilities To The World**

- i) To Live a Holy Life
  - We are to live a life that is pleasing to God and is good for his church. (1Pet 2v12)
  - We are to be in the world but not of it. (John 17v13-19)  
We are to witness to the world but not become like the world.

- ii) To Serve in the Community
  - We are to do good to all. (Gal 6v10)
  - God determines the places we live. (Acts 17v26). This means we are to serve him where he has placed us; in family life, in the neighbourhood, at work, as members of society and in the world.
  - As a church, our focus locally is the Guildford Park area, so that we might do good to the people who live and work here and do good in this area.
- iii) To Witness to All
  - We are to be witnesses to God wherever he had placed us; in the home, in the community and at work. (Acts 8v4, 11v19,20, Eph 6v5-9, Col 3v23)
  - We are to pray and work, so that the Lord may add to the church here and overseas. (Acts 2v47)

## SUMMARY

If we are committed to Christ and His Word, we will want to commit ourselves in membership to our local church.

As we fulfil our responsibilities as church members, we grow in our love and obedience to God, we experience a deepening sense of fellowship with God's people and we are strengthened in our witness to the world.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1 What are your responsibilities to Christ?
- 2 What are your responsibilities to the other members of the church?
- 3 What are your responsibilities to the leaders of the church?
- 4 What are you looking for in becoming a church member?
- 5 What will you contribute as a church member?

## BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

Acts 2v36-47

- 1 How did the people respond to Peter's message? (v36-42)
- 2 What features marked the lives of the new believers and of the early church? (v41-47)
- 3 In what ways have you benefited from these features at Send Evangelical Church?

## RESOURCES

Belonging – The Case for Church Membership by Colin Dray (An FIEC Publication)