

One of the greatest privileges you have as a Christian is membership in the church. It's an honor to be part of the community of faith—both locally and world-wide—and to enjoy the blessings of life, worship, instruction and service with God's people. We invite you to think about this privilege and then to join with us in this portion of Christ's kingdom.

### WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

The Bible says that the church is a gathering of people who belong to God because they believe in his Son, Jesus Christ, as their Savior and Lord. The Bible places great emphasis on the importance of the church. It is called the people of God, the Body of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. It is also called the Bride of Christ and God's flock.

So the church is a wonderful thing! Every Christian should desire to be openly associated—and officially united—with the church. To demonstrate what we mean, we invite you to look at some basic questions about church membership.

### WHAT IS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

When you unite in an official way with a particular congregation of believers, you become a member of that church. Our church is connected with other Bible-believing Christians through our denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America. This larger fellowship enables us to serve together in missions, nurture, and other church-related ministries.

In the Presbyterian Church in America you join a church by public profession of faith in Christ, by reaffirmation of faith or by letter transferring membership from another church. The elders of our congregation will interview you concerning your faith and, upon approval, will publicly welcome you into the church. This joyful event usually takes place in a worship service.

When you join the church, you become, a communicant member—because you have the privilege of participating in Communion (the Lord's Supper) and you are entitled to all the rights of membership and involvement in the life of the church. The children of church members become "non-communicant members" upon their own baptism. The sacrament of baptism publicly acknowledges that your children, too, are part of the family of the Lord and enjoy the outward privileges of church membership. They become communicant members when they publicly profess faith in Christ on their own.

### WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN A CHURCH?

- The Bible calls believers to publicly confess what they believe: Jesus himself said that he would build his church on such confessions of faith.<sup>1</sup> Certainly, joining a church is an appropriate, meaningful way to do this, along with our normal witnessing in everyday life.

- Becoming a church member is one evidence that your conversion is genuine. It shows that your faith is in Christ. In the Old Testament covenant community, this was done by such actions as circumcision, the Passover and sacrifices. In the New Testament, professing Christians are told to test the reality of their profession.<sup>2</sup> Church membership is one way to do this. It keeps you from drifting from church to church, experience to experience, doctrine to doctrine.

- A local Congregation is a visible expression of the unity of those who are committed to the Lord. The New Testament is dotted with references such as "the church at Antioch," "the church in Corinth" and "the church at Ephesus." Today, there are such groups of believers throughout the world. A believer, therefore, should desire to draw close to other believers in his locality and be identified as a member of that church.

- Many times in the New Testament, believers are reminded of their responsibility to one another. Christians must "*submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*" (Eph. 5:21). This involves a corporate responsibility, including a specific, concrete commitment to fellow members of this part of the Body of Christ. It also means a willingness to submit, in the Lord, to our board of elders (we call them our "session"), who care for us in Christ's name. Joining a church enables you to fulfill this important commitment.

- Church membership provides an orderly framework by which the church may fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord (Matt. 28:19, 20). The two primary elements of this command to disciple the nations are evangelization (with baptism) and teaching. Since Christ has given both of these ministries to the church, you can help fulfill his Great Commission by becoming a member of a local congregation.

- Jesus Christ is Head of the church. He rules the hearts of his people by his Word and Spirit<sup>3</sup> and he also rules through the means of human instruments, the elders of the church. The Bible teaches that believers are to place themselves under the direction and care of such men.<sup>4</sup> Church membership gives our elders an important way by which to provide this care for you.

### WHAT ARE THE DUTIES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

- A "one-another" concern for the other members, showing interest in and encouragement for their spiritual and physical needs. You will find yourself working together with us toward common goals. This includes the redemptive purpose of church discipline through which members can show genuine loving concern for others in the church family.<sup>5</sup>

- Prayer support for the church—the pastor, elders, deacons, teachers, members, ministries, youth and children, special needs and opportunities. Prayer should be offered for the church throughout the world and for all gospel mission efforts.

- Personal spiritual growth by means of prayer, Bible study, the use of one's spiritual gifts and a consistent testimony for Christ in all areas of life. The church is not a place to be entertained, but rather a place to become equipped "*for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*" (Eph. 4:12). As a church member you will want to know God's Word and be active in its application.

- Faithful attendance at the worship services and meetings of the church. Jesus himself made it his custom to worship each week with God's people. And regular attendance will surely encourage you and strengthen you in your love for God and his people.<sup>6</sup>

- Contributing offerings to the work of the church and to its missions outreach. Such giving should be done regularly, cheerfully and with a spirit of gratitude to God. The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church that "*God loves a cheerful giver*" (2 Cor.9:7).

- Acknowledging the elders' authority and supervision in their watch over the members. While seeking to guard each member's rights, the elders also seek to defend the purity of Christ's church.<sup>7</sup>

- Telling the gospel message to your relatives and friends and inviting them to respond to Jesus Christ in faith. Jesus told his disciples—and the message comes to us today—"*You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8). When all members of our church are active in witnessing for Christ, there will be an enthusiastic and vital character to our congregation and its outreach.

## WHAT ARE THE PRIVILEGES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

- Awareness of your partnership in Christ. You are a vital part of this church in the fullest possible sense. As such, you'll be standing alongside all the other members of our church and actively working as part of the fellowship of God's people.
- Participation in the sacraments. Those who have confessed Christ publicly and have placed themselves under the care of the elders are invited to take part in the Lord's Supper. Baptism, likewise, is administered to believers and their children.
- Opportunities to serve. All members are encouraged to participate in the various fields of our church's ministry, thereby developing your spiritual gifts.
- Special oversight by church officers. The elders and deacons of our congregation are here to serve you. It is not only natural that they would give more attention to members, but it is also their special responsibility.
- Voice in the government of this congregation. Members in this way participate in directing the matters related to the growth and future of our church. At official congregational meetings you may enter fully into the discussions, plans, and decisions of this church.
- Active involvement in the larger denomination. The ideas, prayers, gifts and endeavors of the church which begin within the local congregation are then integrated with the ministries of the Presbyterian Church in America across the United States and around the world.

## HOW DO I BECOME A MEMBER?

In most cases a Christian who desires to join a particular church will attend the services and meetings of that congregation. After a period of time, you will want to make known to the pastor, an elder or perhaps another member of the congregation that you would like to become a member. You will then be given the opportunity to learn more about the teachings and ministries of our church. This may be done on an individual, family or class basis.

Next there will be an interview by our elders. They will want to be assured, as far as possible, that you give a credible profession of faith. They will look for a testimony by words and actions that you are trusting Christ alone for salvation and that you are trying to live as a Christian. Following your reception into membership by our elders, arrangements will be made for your public profession of faith. On the occasion of your public profession of faith, five specific questions will be asked.

### **Question #1** concerns your conviction of sin and grace:

Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope save in his sovereign mercy?

### **Question #2** concerns your faith in Christ as Savior:

Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel?

### **Question #3** concerns your commitment to live for Christ:

Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?

### **Question #4** concerns your pledge to support the church:

Do you promise to support the church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?

### **Question #5** concerns your regard for our church's leadership:

Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

## HOW LONG DOES CHURCH MEMBERSHIP LAST?

There is no expiration date for church membership. It continues from year to year as long as you fulfill your obligations to the membership vows. If you move to another area and desire to join another church, our elders will take appropriate action to make this possible. On the other hand, if you move and wish to retain membership, this can be arranged provided you continue to show an interest in our congregation.

Membership in a church is an important matter. It carries with it many privileges and many responsibilities. Yet most importantly, it is something that our Lord Jesus Christ desires of each of his followers. So we invite you to take steps today to unite with us.

## WELCOME IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST!

### Notes

1. Matt. 16:16,18
2. 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:10
3. Col. 1:18; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:1-2
4. Acts 14:23; 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-5
5. 1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:1-2
6. Lk. 4:16; Heb. 10:25; 1 Jn. 3:17
7. Matt. 18:15-18; Heb. 13:17



# COME JOIN US

*Becoming a Member of  
Christ Church Ventura  
in the Presbyterian  
Church in America*

