

Church Membership

What is membership all about?

Church membership is open to all those who have been baptised (or would like to be) and are prepared to publicly profess their faith in Jesus. In practical terms, you are asked to make vows and your name is added to a formal document called the church roll. Like other memberships joining the church comes with responsibilities and privileges.

On a deeper level, underpinning our practice of welcoming and admitting individuals into membership is a profound spiritual truth: There is no such thing as a stand-alone Christian. Every Christian woman, man, or child is part of something bigger than themselves.

A list of names on a membership role might not seem especially spiritual, but it is an attempt to take seriously our shared identity as set out by Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Joining the church is not how you **become** a Christian. Rather, joining the church is a way in which a Christian publicly proclaims their faith in Jesus and recognises their new identity in Him and as part of His Church. It is something of an act of 'nailing your colours to the mast'. Today, this kind of commitment is profoundly counter-cultural. One aspect of our increasingly secular age is the pressure to keep faith private. Sure, faith is acutely personal: it touches our inner thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, our identity, and ambitions. But our faith in Jesus is to find expression in the whole of our lives: public and private; Monday to Sunday; alone and with others.

What commitments am I asked to make?

In joining the church, you are asked to respond to four simple questions with the words 'I do'. The first question concerns your belief in God, your confession of Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and your commitment to meeting with other Christians to worship on a Sunday. The other three establish your commitment to bible reading and prayer, living and speaking for Jesus, and serving and supporting the work of the church in the world.

For some of you to take these vows would be to make a public commitment to what you are already doing (or trying to do!) as part of our church family. For others, it might involve a step towards a deeper commitment in terms of your personal devotional life, your giving or service in the life of the church.

Why should I bother with this? Is it not just a formality?

Four reasons why membership is more than a formality and is actually very precious are:

1. It is a meaningful but unshowy way of expressing our private convictions in public.
2. The act of publicly professing your faith in the presence of a family of believers who are committed to you, remember you in prayer, and sharing their lives with you, can be a profound experience.
3. It is also a huge encouragement for others in the church to see other people commit to Jesus and His church.
4. There are a whole bundle of smaller and largely practical reasons. The Church of Scotland, of which we are a part, has built the concept of membership into all of its structures. Therefore, it is easier to participate in the wider life of our church if you have dotted the I's and crossed the T's. At a local level, it is easier for our elders and pastoral care team to identify and keep in touch with those in our church family. At a national level, for example, you can only explore a call to full-time ministry if you have been a member for more than three years.

You might have already considered membership in the past and still have firm reasons for not joining the church. Please do not feel that your non-membership makes you in any way a second-class citizen here in Stonelaw.

Please get in touch with me if you are interested in exploring membership further.



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