

# Church Membership at Ambassador

## ***Introduction***

Like many other evangelical churches throughout the world, Ambassador International Church has church membership. This pamphlet aims to answer basic questions about church membership and to explain what church membership at Ambassador looks like:

- Why do we believe church membership is biblical?
- Why is it important to become a member of the church?
- What are the expectations for church members?
- How does someone become a church member?

## ***Why do we have a formal church membership?***

The main reason that we have church membership at Ambassador is that we believe it is a clear Biblical teaching. We'll examine some of the Biblical texts that support this belief in the following question. We also believe that formal church membership helps Christians and churches live out the type of loving, committed community life that we see in Scripture. Formal church membership helps members to walk in more intimate fellowship with God and with one another.

## ***Where is formal church membership in the Bible?***

Although there is no specific verse that explicitly commands Christians to become "members" of a church, the principles of church membership are clearly taught throughout the New Testament. Here are some characteristics of church life that support the idea of church membership:

- First, the New Testament is unambiguous that the Christian life is to be lived in the context of community, namely, the church.

The church is presented as a community of people who are deeply committed to one another:

*Acts 2:42-47, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”*

*Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

- Secondly, New Testament images of the church indicate a close bond and connection among members. The images imply interdependence and togetherness. The individual members seem to be inseparable from one another. The church is called:

**A household** – *1 Timothy 3:15, “If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”*

**A temple** – *Ephesians 2:19-22, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his 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.”*

**A body** - 1 Corinthians 12:27, *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*

**A family** – Galatians 6:10, *“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”*

- Third, the relationship between the church leadership and individual Christians is best facilitated by church membership. Church membership helps both church leaders and individual Christians to fulfil their responsibilities.

*Hebrews 13:17, “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”*

This verse seems to imply two things in relation to church membership:

- ◆ Each Christian has a specific group of leaders under whose authority they are.
  - ◆ Church leaders are to keep watch over and are accountable for a specific group of Christians.
- Lastly, the concept of church discipline, which is clearly taught in Scripture, seems to require the practice of church membership.

*Matthew 18:15-17, “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”*

In order for someone to be removed from the church, they first need to be a part of the church. Church membership allows

Christians to be held accountable by the church as a whole.

### ***What difference would being a member make to me?***

- It would show that you are willing to grow as a disciple of Christ. Jesus commanded his followers to love one another, and by joining a church you are showing that you are committed to loving other Christians and obeying Christ's commands.
- It would allow you to be committed to and serve a diverse group of Christians. We are often drawn to people who are just like us, but church membership calls us to commit our lives to a diverse group of people from different backgrounds who have one thing in common – their belief in Jesus as Savior.
- It would mean that other members and the pastoral leaders are committed to you. God has designed us in such a way that we need love and care from other believers in order to grow. Church membership helps facilitate committed Christian care for your spiritual life.

### ***Does it matter whether or not I become a church member?***

We think it does! The New Testament sees the church as a community of people who are committed to each other. We are committed to Christ because he is committed to us. We should be committed to each other as one of the most important expressions of being committed to Christ. Although commitment may seem scary, there is actually something wonderful about being committed to a single local body of believers.

Membership also affects how far you can be involved at Ambassador International Church. Although our public gatherings are open to all, we are moving towards a position where leadership positions and most service opportunities in the church will be for members only.

## ***What are the expectations of church members?***

Becoming a church member means that the other members, along with the pastoral leadership, will be committed to you and your spiritual growth. It also means you have a responsibility towards everyone else. The New Testament teaches that members are expected to:

- **Attend the public Sunday worship service**

*Hebrews 10:24-25, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Attending public worship services is vital for Christian growth. We come together weekly to worship God and to listen to His word spoken to us. Our attendance also encourages other believers and allows us to receive encouragement from others.

- **Pray for one another**

*James 5:16, “Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”*

Throughout Scripture, we see examples of God’s people praying for one another. Members should regularly pray for the needs of fellow members. Also, we hope that if possible members will attend Ambassador’s monthly prayer meeting that currently meets on the last Wednesday of each month

- **Give financially to the church**

*1 Timothy 6:17-18, “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good,*

*to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”*

Christians recognize that all material wealth comes from God’s hand. By giving financially to the church, we are expressing our gratitude for all that He has given to us as well as our trust in Him to provide for all of our needs. The church relies upon the support of its members. The New Testament shows that Christians are to give generously, sacrificially, and joyfully.

- **Serve the church**

*Galatians 5:13, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”*

God has saved us so that we can walk in good works that He has prepared for us to do (Ephesians 2:10). These works include using the gifts that He has given us to serve our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:7). Serving may include being involved in a formal ministry in the church, but, more likely, it may involve serving informally through meeting the various spiritual and physical needs of other members.

- **Witness to outsiders**

*Colossians 4:5-6, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.”*

Having received forgiveness of our sins, Christians should seek to make known the good news of Jesus Christ to those outside of the church.

- **Live a life worthy of the gospel**

*Philippians 1:27, “Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know*

*that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel.”*

We are called to live holy lives to the Lord. This does not mean that we live perfect lives! But it does mean that we are to fight sin and make the gospel attractive by the way we live.

- **Work towards church unity**

*Ephesians 4:2-3, “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”*

Members of the church seek to reflect to one another the same kind of patient, forgiving love that they have received from God. Members seek to guard the unity of the church in their relationships with one another.

***What if I’m only going to be in Hong Kong for a short period of time? Should I still join?***

We would encourage all people who plan on being in Hong Kong for at least 6 months to join the church. Much spiritual growth can occur by being a member of a church for even a relatively short period of time. Also, many people frequently stay in Hong Kong longer than they originally plan. For those who plan on being in Hong Kong for less than six months, the Ambassador leadership will strive to get short-term attendees plugged into the life of the church in every way possible.

***Can I be a member of two churches, say, one elsewhere and Ambassador in Hong Kong?***

From Ambassador's point of view there would be no problem with this - although you may want to check with the other church as well. Usually most people are members of just one church and we would always encourage people to be an active part of any church of which they are a member. However, we also recognise that there might be circumstances where someone might wish to retain membership of

a previous church while being actively involved at Ambassador. In these circumstances we would want the person to become a member of Ambassador even if they also retain their membership elsewhere. If someone moves on from Ambassador to another church, then usually they would cease to be a member of Ambassador and would join their new church.

### ***Do I need to be baptized in order to join the church?***

Ambassador believes that the Bible teaches believers' baptism, which means that people should profess faith in Christ first and then voluntarily participate in the act of water baptism. Ambassador only practices believers' baptism and encourages all believers to be baptized. However, Ambassador also believes that baptism is a secondary issue in the Christian faith, and therefore has open membership. This means that we will accept into membership believers in Christ who have received a recognized Christian baptism as infants.

### ***How can I become a member?***

We would love the opportunity to discuss membership with you and to welcome you into membership. The first step is to join us at a Membership Information Meeting – you will see these advertised regularly in the church bulletin. The next step is to complete a Membership Questionnaire. These are explained at information meetings and can be done on our website. After submitting a questionnaire, one of our elders will get in touch to find a convenient time for an informal interview. These are a chance for us to hear more about how you became a Christian, to learn how we can best serve you, and to answer any questions you have.