

BEING A MEMBER OF IMMANUEL CHURCH BRENTWOOD

BECOMING A CHURCH MEMBER: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

We hope that *everyone* at Immanuel will benefit from the life and work of the church, whether they have formally become a church member or not. But becoming a member is the best way to say: **“Count me in. I’m committed to Immanuel as my church family.”** It means that you want to participate in the work and the government of this church. And in response Immanuel’s members and leaders can say that we are committed to you.

Sometimes we find commitment daunting. But it’s a great thing when Christian people commit to each other and to the Lord in this way. Also, it’s the normal practice of most Reformed churches around the world.

WHERE DO WE FIND THE IDEA OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE BIBLE?

The Bible indicates that a Christian ordinarily will be a member of a local church. They won’t just associate casually or informally with a congregation, but will be committed wholeheartedly to other members of their church family and to the mission of that church. Here are five Bible reasons pointing towards more formal church membership:

- **The meaning of “the whole church”**
In 1 Corinthians 14:23 the apostle Paul talks about “the whole church” coming together. Presumably it was possible to work out whether the whole church was there or not!
- **Instructions for pastoral care**
Pastors are to care for “all the flock” (e.g. Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1, Hebrews 13:17). Leaders of New Testament churches must have had some listing of believers to whose spiritual care they were specially committed.
- **The meaning of the word “join”**
After the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:13) no non-Christians “dared join” the church. The word for *join* is very strong. The same word is used both of sexual relationships and joining to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:16, 17). It speaks of deep commitment.
- **Illustrations that are used to describe local churches**
The Bible says that the local church is like a flock of sheep, a building, a body, and a household (Acts 20:28, Ephesians 2:21, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, 1 Timothy 3:15). Each of these pictures implies that you can distinguish those who are church members from those who aren’t. Take the “body” as an example: it’s possible to work out whether a limb is attached to the rest of the body!
- **Instructions for church discipline**
Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-12 talk about what to do in response to serious and unrepentant sin. These Bible passages imply that church members are formally joined to their church.

IN PRACTICE WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A CHURCH MEMBER AT IMMANUEL?

Different churches invite members to express commitment in different ways. How does it work at Immanuel?

Practically, church members must be **baptized, aged 16 or over**, and have been **attending regularly** at Immanuel for 6 months. (Please ask if you’ve got questions about our baptism practice at Immanuel.)

Spiritual commitments are summed up in three short statements. These are listed below, together with some practical implications.

Every honest Christian knows that they fall short of God’s standards. But we believe these statements – which are both simple and searching – sum up the Lord’s plan of salvation, holiness and church commitment.

1. I am trusting the gospel of grace for my salvation

- I know that I am a sinner in God’s sight. Without Jesus and his death upon the cross I would face His holy judgement. My only hope is God’s sovereign mercy. *See Psalm 51:4*
- I believe that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Saviour. I trust Him alone for my salvation, as He is presented to me in God’s Word the Bible. *See Acts 4:12*

2. With the Holy Spirit's help I am seeking to grow in godliness

- I want to be devoted to personal Bible reading and prayer. *See 1 Peter 2:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*
- I want to share Christ with unbelievers such as I am able. *See 1 Peter 3:15*
- I want to live a holy life in line with the ethical teaching of the Bible in those different relationships to which God has called me – e.g. in marriage, family, workplace, community, church, etc. *See 1 Thessalonians 4:7*

3. I am committed to the people and work of Immanuel Church Brentwood

- With the Lord's help I want to love the members of Immanuel as members of my own family. (E.g. God wants us to encourage each other, resolve tensions biblically and respect those who lead the church). *See 1 Peter 4:8, Ephesians 4:2-3, Hebrews 13:17*
- I will be committed to meeting regularly with and praying for my church. (E.g. attending church regularly on Sundays and where possible joining a fellowship group and attending the church prayer meeting). *See Hebrews 10:25*
- Such as I am able I will give regularly to support the work of Immanuel. (The Old Testament pattern of the 10% tithe is a great challenge, but the New Testament doesn't state a percentage. It simply says that, before the Lord, we should give cheerfully and sacrificially. Obviously, we also encourage giving to other needs outside of Immanuel.) *See 1 Timothy 6:18*
- I want to use the gifts God has given me to help the church family and to aid our outreach to the unconverted. I understand and support the mission of Immanuel, and will seek to be involved in an area of service. *See Ephesians 4:16*

WHAT DIFFERENCE WOULD BEING A MEMBER MAKE – TO ME, AND TO THE CHURCH?

Becoming a church member won't automatically transform your Christian life or our church. But these kinds of church membership promises can be really helpful. How?

You need other Christians. Being a "lone-ranger" or semi-committed Christian isn't God's plan for any of us. In becoming a church member you can know that the rest of the church is committed to you in love. Specifically, we are committed to your pastoral care, to helping you grow spiritually and to using your gifts for the glory of God.

Other Christians need you. Mutual love is of course one of Jesus' key commands to Christian people (e.g. John 15:12, 17). In becoming a member you are showing practically that you want to love and encourage the rest of your church family (e.g. Hebrews 3:13).

Church members will also have a particular voice and responsibility in consultation and in shaping the direction of the church through participating in church meetings and the AGM.

Ordinarily, we require those leading ministries in the church or who are involved in up-front or Bible teaching roles to be church members.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER? OR WHAT IF I'VE GOT SOME QUESTIONS?

We understand that some regulars might not (yet!) become members. For some this might be for practical reasons (e.g. you're only living in the area for a short time). But other Christians may feel nervous about committing to a local church, perhaps because of bad experiences in the past.

We want to reassure: *all people at Immanuel are dearly loved and welcomed.* We don't want to put undue pressure on anyone. Whether a member or not, we simply want you to know Christ better and serve Him more, both in the church and in the world.

If in doubt – or if you've got any questions – please speak with our minister or one of the other elders.

WHAT IF YOU DO WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER?

Great – we're really glad! We believe that membership is a good and Biblical way of committing to Immanuel. Please arrange to meet with one of the elders to talk about next steps, to ask any questions, and to discuss opportunities for growth and service.