

Tell me about ... baptist church

Church Membership

What is church membership?

When people become members of a local church they are identifying themselves with a local 'body' of Christians. In fact the church was Jesus' idea! One day when Simon, one of his disciples, said to Jesus, "You are the Christ", Jesus responded with the words, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church."



When Jesus spoke about the church he did not mean a building! In fact the Greek word for church is "ekklesia" and it means a gathering or assembly. To become a member of a church means to join with other Christians in the new community that Christ founded.

Why become a member?

When we become Christians and are 'born again', we become members of God's family. St John wrote, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave them the right to become children of God." (John 1. 12) So our faith has a corporate dimension; we belong to one another as family.

As part of this new community of faith, we worship and serve Christ together, and we love and care for one another. The early church recognised this (read about it in Acts 2. 42-47). It is also within this faith community that we gather in Christ's name to seek and do his will (specifically we do this at the 'church meeting').

First and foremost church membership is about commitment to Christ, which in turn leads to commitment to one another.

- Paul Beasley-Murray, (former Principal, Spurgeon's College)

In addition to the various abilities God has given each one of us, the Bible teaches that God also gives us spiritual gifts. There are many gifts, and he gives different gifts to different people. Yet when a church is serious about working together to serve God, there are always all the gifts necessary to carry out God's will. St Paul wrote:

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

We have different gifts according to the grace given us.

(Romans 12:4-5)

But do I have to 'sign up'?

It is sometimes said that church membership is never mentioned in the Bible. Whilst it is true that the phrase 'church membership' does not actually appear, it is certainly implied!

On the Day of Pentecost when the church was born, it began with 120 believers. After St Peter preached his first sermon, we read that about 3,000 were added to their number that day. There was a distinctive group who were the members of that first church.

When St Paul speaks of a church, he is talking about a defined group of believers who are growing together in Christ. He uses a number of

pictures, including that of a living body (already quoted) and that of a spiritual building, “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (see Ephesians 2: 19-22).

To ‘sign up’ to membership is to say that one is serious about this spiritual family that God has called us into, and to recognise the commitment we have to our brothers and sisters in the faith as well as to God.

What are the benefits of membership?

Some of the benefits of membership have already been mentioned. It provides a spiritual family to support and encourage Christians in their walk with Christ; it gives them a place to discover and use their gifts.

We should never view church membership as
joining a club or organisation.

David Coffey, (Ex General Secretary, Baptist Union)

It also gives a sense of belonging, opportunities to learn more about the faith, scope for growing spiritually and acts as a place of accountability (for more about this, see Matthew 18: 15-17).

What are the responsibilities of membership?

Jesus commanded us to love each other and this was to be the mark of discipleship (see John 13: 34-35 and I John 3: 16). In the Bible we are also commanded to pray for each other, encourage, serve, teach, accept, honour, forgive and submit to each other. We are to be devoted to one another and bear one another’s burdens. Obeying these commands is what being a member of a local church is all about.

Overleaf is a covenant contained within our Church rules which attempts to express our relationship with God and with each other.

We, the members of Rushmere Baptist Church, covenant together before almighty God that, as He has graciously gathered us into a Church as His redeemed people, we will worship Him by the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the power of His Holy Spirit. We will be true to the teaching of the New Testament and to all the great principles of our faith. We will witness to and work for the great Head of the Church as opportunity offers. We will be loyal to the Church of which we form a part. We will act in Christian love toward one another in all our relationships.

(from Rushmere Baptist Church rules)

Our responsibilities as church members could be summarised as follows:-

- ◆ share in worship together each Sunday whenever possible
- ◆ spend some time each day in prayer and reading the Bible
- ◆ try to witness for Jesus Christ to those around
- ◆ live lives according to biblical principles
- ◆ give financially to God's work through the church
- ◆ seek to take some active part in the life of the church
- ◆ attend church meetings where together God's plan for his church is sought.

The Final Question

What about you?

Do talk to the Pastor or one of the cons about how to become a church member



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