

MEMBERSHIP - WHY DO WE NEED IT?

The ICT is now registered officially with the Italian authorities. Legally, according to our constitution, we are required to have a formal membership. This ensures that each member is involved in the church's decision-making on matters such as the use of finances, the appointment of leaders and the future direction of the church.

But it's also much more than this...

MEMBERSHIP - WHAT'S DIFFERENT?

Becoming a member of a local church is different from becoming a member of another club or society. Usually you join a club for some benefit you can receive. But you join a church with a desire to love and serve others, with God's help.

Looking at some of the many "one another" verses in the New Testament helps us to see this:

Love one another (John 13:24; 1 John 3:11)

Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)

Serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13)

Be kind and compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19)

Teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)

Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11; Hebrews 10:35)

MEMBERSHIP - WHO'S IT FOR? WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

Church membership is like a marriage. When you marry someone you make a public commitment to that person, and vow to be faithful. This brings security, satisfaction and growth to the relationship.

Church membership is for those who have a personal faith in Jesus Christ. It's about committing yourself publicly to the Lord Jesus and to his people in this local church fellowship. It's stating that you belong to the ICT; it's your spiritual home; and you are choosing to serve others, worship God and grow more like the Lord Jesus Christ in this community.

In a marriage ceremony the bride and groom could just say, "I love you!" to each other, but usually they enter a covenant by making promises to one another. The marriage covenant helps to show what "I love you" actually means.

In a similar way the promises of the membership covenant help to make clear what you mean when you say, "I belong to this church". The bible verses show how each promise reflects the way God calls us to live as his children.

Belonging to a local church, where people love and work together for Christ's sake, is a great privilege. It's God's way of helping us to grow in our faith. We're not all the same, but we are a part of Christ's body:

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:26).

MEMBERSHIP - WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

The word *church* in the New Testament usually means a specific local church like that at Ephesus or Corinth. Did people actually join local churches formally, or was it an informal gathering?

1) The Bible describes the local church using different images: a flock (1 Peter 5:2-3), a temple (1 Corinthians 3:16), a body (1 Corinthians 12:27), and a household (Ephesians 2:19). Just as it was clear that a sheep belonged to a flock or a hand belonged to a body, so there must have been some clear way of recognising that a Christian belonged to a local church.

2) The Apostle Paul writes "if the whole church comes together in one place..." (1 Corinthians 14:23). There must have been some formal relationship in place to know if the "whole church" was there.

3) The Bible teaches that pastors or elders are to care for "all the flock" (Acts 20:28), to "shepherd the flock" under their care (1 Peter 5:2), to "keep watch" over the believers (Hebrews 13:17). There must have been some formal way for the leaders to identify those they were expected to care for.

4) When people were converted to Christ, they were baptised and "added to the church" (Acts 2:41, 47). This was certainly not a casual association, but a committed devotion to the apostles' teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42).

So in the New Testament there is no such person as a Christian who is not a church member.

MEMBERSHIP - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

- Q Am I still welcome at the church if I am not a member?
- A Certainly! Everyone is most welcome to the services.
- Q I'm only here in Torsion for a short time. Is it worth me joining the membership?
- A Probably not, but if you're going to be around for a few years then it's worth considering.
- Q Can I apply for membership if I am already a member of a church in another part of Italy or the world?
- A Yes, perhaps a form of 'associate membership' could be arranged, in agreement with your 'home' church.
- Q Do I need to become a member immediately?
- A No. Don't rush. Think and pray through the commitment you would be making.
- Q How do I apply for membership?
- A Begin by completing and returning the membership form.
- Q Will my details be kept private?
- A Yes. The information you give will be used only for church purposes.
- Q When would my membership cease?
- A You would cease to be a member if:
- you moved away from Torino permanently
 - you felt you could no longer keep the promises of the covenant
 - it became clear by your behaviour that you had broken your promises and were refusing to change.

MEMBERSHIP - QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

- Q Will membership involve a lot more meetings?
- A We are required to hold a full members' meeting at least once a year. Other meetings would be called as the need arose.
- Q As a Christian, aren't I already a member of Christ's Church?
- A Yes, you belong to Christ's 'universal Church' if Jesus is your Lord and Saviour; but there's also the matter of belonging to the 'local church' where you can fulfil the Lord's call to love, serve and encourage "one another".
- Q Do I have to be baptised to become a member?
- A We may come from different church backgrounds regarding baptism, but if you're a believer in Christ you should consider seriously his command to be baptised. We would talk about this in your application.
- Q As a member, do I have to give a certain amount of money to the church?
- A You promise to give "cheerfully and regularly" to the work of the Lord, but the amount you give is a matter between you and the Lord.
- Q I'm not perfect. I'm afraid that I could fail. Can I become a church member?
- A No Christian is perfect yet! That's why the covenant says "we are aware of our weaknesses". It also mentions "the help of the Holy Spirit" and the fact that God has called us by his grace. We can only keep these promises as we rely upon God for his help.

Becoming a Member of the International Church of Torino

Questions and Answers

www.torinochurch.com