

Membership at City Reformed Church

Meaning of Membership

To become a church member is to enter into a covenant relationship with a local body of believers. A covenant occurs when two or more parties make a solemn oath to one another. Our God is a covenant-making God. In Genesis the Lord promises Noah never to flood the earth again, and then he calls Abraham out of Ur to make him a father of many nations and a blessing to all peoples. At Sinai, he gave Moses the law to govern Israel, and David was promised an eternal kingship. With Jesus, all these covenants were confirmed and expanded in the new covenant, established in his blood. Membership is a response to God's salvation promises to us in Jesus Christ. In ancient Israel, after the exodus out of Egypt, God's people were numbered, identified by tribe and in some case named person-by-person. Throughout the bible there are long genealogies of names because being named is part of what it means to belong to God's covenant people.

When we become members of the church we make a public promise to live according to God's Word and to support the life and mission of the congregation. The church body also promises to support and care for members as a unified local worshipping community. Without the covenant commitments which membership calls us to these promises cannot be honored and fulfilled. A public promise, or covenant, is the basis for all society, according to the Bible: marriage, employment, citizenship, and church membership are all relationships of accountability and trust. For the church to be faithful to its calling, organized in its care for people and wisely able to deploy its resources, it is necessary to keep track of those who belong to the church.

In a culture that believes "the customer is always right" and where colleges promote themselves with taglines like "invest in you," church membership is a profoundly counter-cultural act that says to the world, "it's NOT about me." This means that membership in a church is not like membership in a social club or other organizations. Most organization members are consumers; the organization exists to serve them. The Church is a completely different community—membership means ministry and service, going from being a consumer to becoming a contributor: sharing God's love and care to others through giving of our time, talents and resources. Instead of entitlement, church membership provokes in us a life of sacrifice and self-giving. Church membership is a call to become like Jesus who did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life for the sake of others (Mark 10:45). Through the self-giving existence that membership calls us we concretely join our lives to God's kingdom work in the world.

Expectations of Membership

Membership at City Reformed Church is not passive, but active. There are four commitments to which membership in the church calls us: believing, belonging, behaving and building.

Believing

Admission to the church as a professing member is based upon one's ability to articulate and provide indication of an authentic profession of faith in Christ. This means that you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving his displeasure, and without hope except through his sovereign mercy. *You must profess the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and you must receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel.*

We wholeheartedly embrace the historic Christian faith expressed in all the ecumenical creeds of the universal church (e.g., the Apostles and Nicene Creeds). To become a member at CRC you must be able to affirm what is taught in these creeds since they encapsulate the core of orthodox faith across all traditions and denominations that call themselves Christian. We are also unapologetically committed to the theological heritage of the Protestant Reformation as a member church of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, a denomination with roots back to the 1800's in America, and grounded in the historic reformation theology as expressed in the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordt.

We know that many people are drawn to CRC that have little exposure to the Reformed tradition. And we recognize that for most people understanding and embracing a theological tradition is not a simple matter but requires a long spiritual journey. While being an office-bearer (elder, deacon or pastor) at CRC requires full subscription to the Reformed confessions, membership does not. We welcome to membership all believers who confess a catholic faith (i.e. affirm ecumenical creeds), but might not readily identify themselves as "Reformed." Nevertheless membership does mean a willingness to live supportively and peacefully within the Reformed culture, values, and doctrines of CRC.

Belonging

Not only does the gospel save us from spiritual alienation it saves us from a life of isolation and loneliness by placing us into the community of Christ. The currents of God's grace run most deeply within the society of the church. God calls us to belonging in the church (Heb. 10:24-25). At CRC we believe that growth and renewal only take place within the context of community. For this reason *church membership requires us to join our life with the community life of the congregation. This involves a commitment to regularly attend worship services and where possible to join a community group within the church.* The meaning of belonging is being a vital part of the social life of the church.

Behaving

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said that "When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die." The Christian life calls us to a costly obedience that changes our behavior. It calls us to a life of holiness and love (Heb. 13:1; 1 Peter 1:13-24). Such a commitment does not mean we will be perfect followers or never fail. Church membership isn't for perfect people but for repentant

people. It is for people who sense their desperate need for God's grace and mercy. And yet members are called to faithfully obey God's Word in all areas of their life. When we fail to do this we undermine and damage the reputation of Christ in the world. For this reason church ***membership comes with the commitment to be a faithful follower Christ.*** In becoming a member you give permission to the church body to hold you accountable and help you in being a faithful follower of Jesus. ***This will be evidenced by a willingness to be under the spiritual discipline, oversight and care of the elders and pastors at CRC*** (Mt 16:19; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9).

Membership also calls us to a commitment to pursuing peace in the church. Cultivating peace assumes a commitment to handle personal offenses in a constructive, biblical fashion, which entails dealing directly with the person who has offended you (Mt 18:15-20), repenting of your offenses against others (Mt 18:15-20), and refraining from gossip, slander, and other community-damaging behavior (Pro. 26:20).

Building

Membership comes with the awesome responsibility and opportunity to build the church and participate in God's coming kingdom (1 Peter 2:4-12; Eph. 4:7-16). For this reason, ***church membership calls people to serve and support the church with the generous giving of one's time, talents (Rom 12:5-8), and financial resources (2 Cor. 9:6-8).*** God gives every Christian spiritual gifts that are to be used for the common good and upbuilding of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12). This means every member is a shareholder in the mission of the church and has a part to play no matter how big or small. There are two primary ways that members contribute to building the church: first, by giving financially to support the church and its mission in a manner that is consistent with biblical stewardship; and second, by generously volunteering their time and abilities to fulfill the various needs and ministries of the church.

Benefits of Church Membership

Care and Nurture

Each church member, along with his/her family, will be assigned to a specific elder and deacon for official, regular care and oversight. The elders and deacons, along with the church, will also be there to respond when members are in crisis, embracing, praying, protecting, and offering counsel and financial support when it is needed. The church takes an active interest in the spiritual formation and development of members' children. This begins in baptism, extends through catechesis and all along is accompanied by support and encouragement to mothers and fathers in their high calling as parents. The church commits to provide a place of intimate belonging for all members no matter their station in life, to be a family in which to laugh, learn, live, and love in grace.

Accountability

Each church member has the benefit of official accountability to the elders. At first accountability might not seem like a "benefit" but in reality it is an incredible act of Christ's love through the church to keep us from self-inflicted spiritual harm. The Bible exhorts each member to ***"obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls."***

(Heb. 13:17) This command presupposes that a person is in a covenantal relationship with the local church leaders. Those who say, “I am only accountable to God” are not only out of line with Scripture, but are placing themselves in spiritual danger.

Influence

Each church member has the benefit of influence to shape the ministry of the church. It is the members who give final approval to the annual church budget. It is the members who elect officers to guide the direction of the church. Only members are eligible to serve as deacons and elders. Additionally, only members are eligible to serve in key leadership positions that contribute to the shaping and directing of the church and its specific ministries.

Process of Church Membership

There is a three part process of becoming a member at CRC:

In-Covenant Retreat

This seminar is the first step toward membership, although it in no way obligates a person to membership. Its format consists of a Saturday gathering (9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.), in which the vision, values, goals, and beliefs of City Reformed Church are communicated. Childcare and lunch are provided at no cost to the participant. [*The exact format and duration of this part of the membership process is still under review and development.*]

Membership Interview

After the seminar, an invitation will be given to set up an interview with one of the elders or pastor. These meetings are designed to allow the elders or pastor to get to know the prospective member better, to hear of how God has worked in his/her life, and to provide him/her with an opportunity to ask questions about the church. At this point, the prospective member is asked to give assent to the commitments of membership as understood by the key terms of *believing, belonging, behaving and building*.

Reception

At a Sunday worship service, new members will be asked to come forward and publicly affirm their membership promises. Those who have not been baptized will be baptized at this time and make a public profession of their faith.