

Why Membership?

We live in a world that may seem to have “commitment-phobia.” In the words of a wise church pastor, “commitment-phobia is the fear that in promising to do something good we will miss out on getting something even better.”¹ For many of us, we hesitate or fail to make commitments because we want to *keep our options open*. We simply don’t want to be *tied down*.

So, why—in a world that sometimes frowns upon commitment—is the church asking me to make a commitment to it? Well, that’s a great question! First, we must have a right understanding of the church, and then we can gain insight into why commitment to the church is important.

What Is the Church?

The New Testament describes the church as a people who declare allegiance to Jesus Christ through grace and faith. The church exists in a spiritual form (all true believers throughout history) but also in a physical form (local gatherings of believers). A local church is an assembly of people committed to Christ and to one another. Together, we hear God’s Word, participate in baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and practice living out His commands.

At Princetown Church, we seek to **love Jesus, love one another, and live with purpose** by living out our vision; **helping you take your next step with Jesus**. We want to see you take steps from *investigating* Jesus, to *believing* in Him, to *engaging* in God’s Word which grows godly habits, to becoming an *ambassador* who invests in others, and ultimately in becoming a *multiplier* who empowers others on others and leaves a godly legacy. We live these steps out through our cultural values: *Worship, Community, Equip, Serve, and Outreach*. These steps and values aren’t simply a checklist or a timeline. They represent our desire to help people continually grow in their relationship with Jesus.

What Is Church Membership?

Church membership is how we formally recognize and commit to one another as believers.²

Although the Bible doesn’t prescribe a specific membership program, it clearly demonstrates that Christians belonged to and were accountable to local churches.³ Churches may have different processes for recognizing believers, but membership is one way we formally acknowledge this commitment to Christ and one another.

¹ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 155.

² Collin Hansen and Jonathan Leeman, *Rediscover Church - Why the Body of Christ is Essential*, ©2021, 75.

³ Galatians 1:2 shows that individuals were counted as part of different local churches in the region of Galatia. Jesus gave the church responsibility and authority to affirm the true gospel and recognize those who genuinely profess faith in Him (Matthew 16:13-20; 18:15-20).

Who Can Become a Member?

Anyone who has:

- Made a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- Been baptized.
- Participated in the membership process.
- Been affirmed by the elders.

Children are welcome to become members but must personally participate in each step of the process. When they turn 18, they are given the opportunity to reaffirm their membership and participate as voting members in congregational meetings.

Why Join a Church?

The church is for followers of Jesus—those who profess Him as Savior and Lord and desire to obey Him. Those who don't yet know Jesus as savior are welcomed to investigate Jesus through the church. If you follow Jesus, you should be part of a Bible-teaching church. God designed the church as a spiritual family where we grow in our faith and encourage others to take their next steps with Jesus. Church membership isn't about gaining a title or access to a program; it's about committing to Christ and His people.

Here are six biblical reasons to join a church::

1. To Assure Ourselves

Church membership doesn't save us. Salvation comes only through God's grace and faith in Jesus Christ. However, a committed church relationship helps us recognize the evidence of genuine faith through our obedience to Jesus and love for others (John 13:35).⁴

2. To Spread the Gospel

"Two are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). This principle is especially true when fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). The church is a missionary family, equipped by God to share the gospel and make disciples. Jesus commands us to make disciples together, not alone. Membership gives us the opportunity to partner with other believers in making Jesus known.

3. To Expose False Gospels

Paul warns entire churches to watch out for false teaching and those who create divisions contrary to biblical truth (Romans 16:17). In the Church, we have an opportunity to challenge the world's

⁴ Jesus teaches that our love for Him is demonstrated through obedience to His commands (John 14:21; 15:10, 14; 13:17). As we apply this in our church by gathering for Worship, growing in Community Groups, and encouraging one another, we are reminded of God's work in our lives.

misconceptions about Jesus by living out the true gospel through humility, love, and obedience.⁵ When we commit to one another, we help protect the truth of the gospel and demonstrate the difference Jesus makes in our lives.

4. To Edify the Church

One of the church's responsibilities is to encourage and build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Our church's vision is to *help people take their next step with Jesus*. God has not designed us to do that alone. The church isn't a place where we simply attend, receive benefits, or maintain a status. It's a family where every member has a part to play (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).⁶

5. To Clarify Responsibility

God designed the church with spiritual leaders who are responsible for caring for and shepherding His people (Hebrews 13:17). Membership formalizes the relationship between church members and church leadership. Through membership, we invite our leaders to shepherd us, encourage us, and lovingly pursue us if we begin to wander from God. Just as marriage formalizes a relationship between a husband and wife, church membership establishes a commitment between the individual and the church. We call this a **membership covenant**. This covenant clarifies what you can expect from church leadership and what church leadership can expect from you.⁷

6. To Glorify God

Ultimately, our lives should identify us as God's people and bring Him praise and glory.⁸ God called us to make disciples, not just individually, but together (Matthew 28:18-20). We Glorify God when we commit to relationships together (Romans 15:5-7). When we humbly submit to God's design for community, leadership, and accountability, we declare that following Jesus isn't about us, but Him!

*We hope this explanation helps you understand why Princetown Church encourages you to make a commitment through church membership. Whether you are new to Christianity or have followed Jesus for many years, we encourage you to become a committed member of a local church. As we seek to Love Jesus, Love One Another, and Live with Purpose, we want to help you take your next step with Jesus. Membership isn't the finish line—it's an important step in a lifelong journey of following Jesus. **There's always another next step with Jesus. Let's take it together!***

⁵ Dever, 165.

⁶ Paul describes the church as one body with many members, each contributing unique gifts for the benefit of everyone (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Membership provides opportunities to serve others. Official members can be approved for teaching and discipleship roles. They also can participate as voting members during congregational meetings. Being committed to a church family also challenges the individualism of our culture. We recognize that we need one another to grow. In our church, we value *Community Groups*, *Equip*, and *Serve* to help us grow together, develop our gifts, and encourage one another in our walk with Jesus.

⁷ With clarifying responsibilities the church has a responsibility to address continual, unrepentant sin. Jesus describes this process in Matthew 18:17, and Paul addresses it in 1 Corinthians 5:2. While church discipline may seem difficult, its purpose is restoration—to bring someone back to God and the church (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). This is one reason formal membership matters. It establishes the relationship and accountability necessary for the church to carry out these biblical responsibilities.

⁸ Dever, 170.

What's Next? Taking Your Next Step And Becoming a Member

*Church membership is an important step in becoming an active part of our church family. It is part of our “next steps” process and helps us **Love Jesus, Love One Another, and Live with Purpose.***

STEPS TO BECOME A MEMBER:

1. PRAY

Ask God to guide you as you consider committing to Princetown Church. Evaluate if you have put your faith in Christ for your salvation and obeyed him in getting baptized. Membership requires a personal faith in Jesus and being Baptized. Questions: ianb@princetownchurch.com

2. DISCOVER (2 Weeks)

Meet others, learn about our mission, vision, and cultural values, and discover how you can take your next step with Jesus. Bring your questions! Find upcoming groups at princetownchurch.com/groups.

3. 101 GROUP - Growing as a New Believer (4 Weeks)

Participate in a 101 Discipleship Group, either one-on-one with a mentor or in a larger group. Together, we'll explore the foundations of following Jesus and what it means to live out our faith. Learn more at princetownchurch.com/equip.

4. 201 GROUP - Sharing Jesus as a New Believer (4 Weeks)

Participate in a 201 Discipleship Group, either one-on-one with a mentor or in a larger group. Together, we'll explore the good news of Jesus and what it means to share Him with others. Learn more at princetownchurch.com/equip.

5. COMMIT

- Read and affirm the *Membership Vows* (attached below)
- Join a Community Group - princetownchurch.com/groups
- Complete the *Membership Commitment Card* (attached below)

6. UNDERSTAND

Read the Inactive Membership Letter and Introduction (attached) to understand our expectations for continued, active membership.

7. SHARE YOUR STORY

Share with one of our church leaders (elders) your story of why you want to become a member at Princetown and how you have trusted Christ.

Ready to take your next step?

Complete the Commitment Card or contact us at office@princetownchurch.com.

Princetown Church Membership Vows

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God and without hope for your salvation except in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of sinners, and do you receive and depend upon Him alone for your salvation as He is offered in the gospel?
3. Do you now promise and resolve, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to serve Christ in His Church by supporting and participating with this congregation in its service of God and its ministry to others to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and to the spiritual oversight of this Church Session, and do you promise to promote the unity, purity and peace of the Church?

Princeton Church Member Commitment Card

WORSHIP:

- ☐ I have trusted Jesus as my Lord and Savior
- ☐ I have been baptized and believe that my baptism symbolizes Jesus' saving work for me
- ☐ I'm committed to worshiping at Princeton Church consistently
- ☐ I'm committed to joyfully, regularly, sacrificially, & generously give to the general funds of the church

COMMUNITY GROUPS:

- ☐ I'm already committed to _____ Community Group
- ☐ I will join a Princeton Community Group by _____.

EQUIP:

- ☐ I'm committed to take my next step with Jesus. My current step of spiritual development is (Believer, Engager, Ambassador, Multiplier) pick one step - Find the survey to see where you are at princetownchurch.com/pathway _____
- ☐ I have completed the 101 and 201 groups.
- ☐ I'm committed to engaging with God through Bible reading and prayer. Give specifics of what you plan to do:

SERVE:

- ☐ I'm already serving in the following way(s): _____

I'd like information about serving in the following areas:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ☐ Nursery | ☐ Production Team | ☐ Facility Maintenance |
| ☐ Kids Church | ☐ Worship Team | ☐ Administrative Support |
| ☐ Student Ministries | ☐ Cafe Team | ☐ Group Leader |
| ☐ Local Outreach | ☐ First Impressions | ☐ Photography |

OUTREACH - Care. Love. Share:

- ☐ I will pray for those I know, who do not know Christ. List one name in each category to pray that they would trust Jesus.

Family

Neighbor

Work (or School)

Other

- ☐ I will ask God for opportunities to tell others about Jesus.

MEMBERSHIP

- ☐ I am interested in meeting with an Elder to pursue membership

Inactive Member Letter Introduction

NOTE FROM THE ELDERS: *As elders, we are held accountable by God for shepherding the congregation's hearts (Heb. 13:17). We desire to equip and encourage members to keep to their vows of supporting and loving others and God through the church's ministry. There are many reasons why someone might disappear from the church, but a person's vows can't be fulfilled if they are absent. Our goal is to be in contact with those people and see how we can help care for them and help them experience the joy of their vows. If a member still does not participate in the church's life after attempts to talk through this, this letter is sent to them. We attempt to invite them back or to find out if they wish to be removed from membership. We share this document with you before you become a member so you know our heart in partnering with you in the gospel.*

Inactive Member Letter

Dear **MEMBERS NAME**

As members of Princetown Church, you are loved, and we desire you to receive the spiritual care you need. Because we take seriously our responsibility to spiritually guide and care for our church members, you are receiving this letter as an opportunity for you to clarify your intended involvement with Princetown Church. Although it is understood that churches hold various perspectives of church membership, Princetown Church has taught that church membership is like that of a covenant partnership in the gospel. As the Apostle Paul begins his letter to the Philippians, communicating his thanks to God for the church's "partnership in the gospel," so we at Princetown Church view church membership this way.

This means that Christ-followers follow a biblical pattern of church involvement, which includes: intentionally and regularly gathering together for worship; connecting relationally with one another for the purpose of growing in God's Word together (we primarily do this in community groups); giving of our time and talents to serve one another; generously contributing our finances and other resources to the community that is the local church; and, intentionally investing in those who do not yet know Christ and inviting them into a relationship with Jesus. We do all this with the vision of the Great Commission in mind—that we would be equipped by God, with one another, to be sent out into the world to live as missionaries for the gospel.

Since you have been inactive in your partnership in the gospel with Princetown Church in one or more of these ways for longer than one year, we would like to invite you to clarify your intentions regarding your involvement with Princetown Church.

Because we care and want to shepherd well, we ask that you please respond to this letter in one of two ways:

1. **Re-commit to being an active member and covenant partner in the gospel.** You can do this by contacting the church office: office@princetownchurch.com; 518-355-0794. We ask that you respond no later than **INSERT DATE**. After contacting the church office, we will help you schedule a time to meet with a couple of our elders.
2. **Choose to withdraw from church membership.** Although you can do this by simply not responding to this letter before **INSERT DATE**, we invite you to respond so that we can better understand your circumstances/reasoning for withdrawal. We want you to know we love you and that you are always welcome to attend here, even if you withdraw from membership.

We thank you in advance for your time and response.

In Christ's Grace,

The Elders
Princetown Church