

## WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

To be a member of a church is to make a public promise to live according to the Word and to support the work of the congregation. In the Bible this is called a *covenant*. Every believer is part of the church as an *organism* (the spiritual Body of Christ), but only by a public promise can you be part of the church as an *organization*. A public promise is the basis for much in society: marriage, employment, citizenship, church membership, etc., are all relationships of accountability.

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 of Christ is a completely different community. Membership means *ministry and service*, going from being a consumer to becoming a provider of God's love and care to others. We therefore encourage all those who call UALC their church home to become official members.

### BIBLICAL REASONS FOR JOINING A CHURCH

1. You are not ashamed to identify with Christ or His people (Mark 8:38).
2. You stop being an independent Christian (Matthew 18:15-17; Hebrews 13:17).
3. You openly demonstrate the reality of the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27).
4. You have greater opportunities to use your spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4).
5. You participate in a stronger, more unified effort of God's people.
6. You have the privilege to shape the ministry of the congregation. While congregational meetings are open to anyone who wishes to attend, only members may pass resolutions, vote for changes to the by-laws and elect the leaders. Members also officially call the pastors to the work of the church and vote on the annual budget.
7. You have the benefit of receiving the care of, and being accountable to, spiritual leaders. Every believer must *"obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls"* (Hebrews 13:17). This command assumes that you have a covenant with certain spiritual leaders. They are responsible for you and you to them.

### CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

*Church* in the New Testament usually meant a specific local church like that at Ephesus or Corinth. Did people actually join local churches formally, or was it an informal association? Here are some indications.

- The Biblical metaphors used to describe local churches: flock, temple, body, and household are used specifically of local churches (Acts 20; Ephesians 2; 1 Corinthians 12; 1 Timothy 3). Each of these metaphors has a clear distinction of who is part of the church, and who isn't.
- In 1 Corinthians 14:23, Paul says *"if the whole church comes together..."* How would the leaders know if the *"whole church"* was there if no formal relationship was established?
- Pastors/overseers/shepherds were to care for *"all the flock"* (Acts 20:28). Leaders of the citywide churches must have had some listing of believers. Since leaders were accountable for the souls of the flock under their care (Hebrews 13:17), they must have had some commitment for care.
- After the end of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:13, no non-Christians *"...dared join them [the church], even though they [the apostles] were highly regarded by the people."* The Greek word for *join* has strong connotations of commitment. The same word is used to speak of sexual relationships (1 Corinthians 6:16) and joining to the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17).
- Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5 talk about treating an unrepentant person like an unbeliever and putting him out of the church (*expel*). Since unbelievers were welcome at worship, removal must have indicated a distinct formal association.

*"In the New Testament there is no such person as a Christian who is not a church member. Conversion was described as 'the Lord adding to the church' (Acts 2:47). There was no spiritual drifting."* (Douglas Millar)