

Why should I become a member of Patterson Park Church?

In an age of seemingly infinite personal choice, why should a believer commit him/herself to a particular local church in membership?

What exactly do you mean by “membership” in a “church”?

We actually use the word “church” to mean more than one kind of entity. The “universal church” is comprised of all those who have put their faith in Christ throughout all time and in all places since the days of the earliest Christ-followers. In that sense, believers at Patterson Park Church are in fellowship with believers in present-day Mongolia, twelfth century Britain, and first century Palestine. All those who trust in Christ and follow him become members of the universal church the moment they first trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

But we also use the word “church” to refer to a particular local expression of the universal church, a local body of believers who meet regularly for worship, study of the Word, and fellowship. Membership in Patterson Park Church means more than regular attendance and faithful giving and service. Members of our Patterson Park Church are those men and women who have publicly committed themselves to identify with and submit to and contribute to a particular local body of believers, the one that meets at 3655 East Patterson Road in Beavercreek, Ohio, in the 21st century.

So why is it important for a Christian to become a member?

Everyone who attends our church can benefit from the privileges of being part of our congregation (crisis care, fellowship, hearing the preaching and teaching of the Word, etc.). But without membership, all of their sense of obligation and connection to our ministry must arise from their own personal convictions; people who attend without becoming members keep their options open because they have not made the firm commitment of membership. If they are not happy with a decision that the leaders make or they disagree with a direction the church is going, they cannot vote or put their name up to serve in a leadership position. If they are unhappy with something, sometimes their only option is to leave our fellowship.

Members, on the other hand, have voluntarily committed themselves to the ongoing and faithful support of our ministry and fellowship. This is why our constitution stipulates that for many ministry and service opportunities such as teaching adult classes or serving on church boards and committees, only members may participate. By committing themselves to our fellowship, members have secured the privilege to contribute to our ministry at a deeper and more significant level.

Members have also agreed to submit to the leadership of Patterson Park Church, the council of elders. In some cases, that submission to the authority of the leaders might entail the pastors and elders serving as mediators in disputes between people in the congregation and, when necessary, exercising spiritual discipline. (When the elders have to exercise spiritual discipline, we seek to follow Jesus' pattern outlined in Matthew 18, where the conflict is resolved at the most private level possible, involving the smallest number of people possible. Most matters can be resolved at this lowest level, but occasionally, and regrettably, and following Jesus's instructions, matters have to be brought before the congregation for notification and a vote.)

In other words, members of our fellowship are not merely consumers of and contributors to the ministry of the church; they are active, committed members of our body.

Many people who attend Patterson Park Church might identify PPC as "my church." And PPC is, indeed, their church. If they are in trouble, PPC will rally around in spiritual and emotional and material support. But it is the member who can say that Patterson Park is, in every sense of the word, "my church." It is the spiritual family I am committed to support and serve; it is the leadership structure to which I submit myself. I belong to Patterson Park Church and Patterson Park Church belongs to me.

Printed below is the "**Membership Covenant**," which the entire congregation will read aloud together at the Quarterly Family Gathering (church meeting) where you will be installed as incoming members of Patterson Park Church. This covenant expresses the commitment we are making to serve and support one another as members of Patterson Park Church:

Following Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and accepting the Holy Scriptures as our rule of faith and practice, and recognizing the privilege and duty of uniting ourselves for Christian fellowship, the enjoyment of Christian ordinances, and the advancement of His church on earth, we do now, in the sight of God and invoking His blessing, solemnly covenant and agree with each other to associate ourselves as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, as warranted by the Word of God.

We agree to maintain the institutions of the Gospel, to submit ourselves to the orderly administration of the affairs of the church, to personally participate in and financially support the ministries of the church, and to walk together in brotherly love.

And this we do depending on the aid of our heavenly Father, who so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation, and of Jesus Christ who has redeemed us with His blood, and of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Guide.

Amen