

Someone who serves

Every follower of Jesus is called to serve him through the Holy Spirit, both in the church (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) and in the world (John 17:18). All believers have gifts for serving others (1 Peter 4:10) and are called to make a difference (Matthew 5:13-16).

Knowing Jesus gives us a heart to serve in church, home, work, leisure and public life. In order to use our gifts in God's service (Ephesians 2: 9-10) we may first need to discover what they are. Ask others you trust to give you honest feedback about where you are gifted and how these gifts can best be used in the service of Christ and other people.

Someone who gives

God has given us the precious gift of his only Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Everything we have comes from him and belongs to him. This makes a church member someone who gives generously.

Giving financially is crucial to resourcing God's work in both the local and wider church and such giving is also a sign that we love him more than money (Matthew 6:24). But giving involves much more than money. It also includes our time and effort, even when this costs us. It is giving ourselves.

Someone who tells others about Jesus

Being a church member means being involved in the mission of reaching out to others with the love of Jesus. Your local church will have specific ways to do this.

The thought of telling others about Jesus can be scary, but they deserve to know about the precious gift we have received (Acts 4:20): a restored relationship with God who loves us. Our lives should show that Jesus is real, but we also need to explain that we live as followers of Jesus and are members of his church.

Someone who is committed

It can often be hard to be a Christian in today's world. Jesus said that to follow him is costly and demanding (Luke 14:27-33).

Pressures of life can make commitment to Christ's church difficult too, but the Bible encourages us to keep meeting together (Hebrews 10:24-25). In this way we can love and support each other to bring honour and glory to Christ in every aspect of our lives.

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What is a church member?



Thank you for taking time to read this. You may be considering membership of a Presbyterian Church in Ireland congregation. Perhaps you are a member already and want to know better what it means.

This leaflet aims to describe the basics of being a church member. First and foremost, a church member is someone who has faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Without knowing Christ we might take part in religious activities but they won't change us on the inside.

As you read this leaflet you might think, 'I do believe but I struggle to do some of these things' or, 'I do them but not very well'. That's OK. The important thing is to be clear about what it means to be a member of Christ's church and then to pray for his help to live this way.

If you are uncertain what you should believe please speak to the Minister or someone else who can help you understand this better.

The
church
belongs to *God!*

We might think of the church as a building (or a denomination), but it is basically a body or family of people where the Spirit of God lives, through Jesus Christ (*1 Corinthians 3:11,16*).

A church member is...

Someone who believes

Believers trust Jesus Christ with their lives. This involves believing truths about him and having a personal relationship with him. The Bible, which Christians believe is God's Word, clearly tells us that the following essentials must be understood, believed and committed to if a person is to be a Christian:

- there is only one true God who has revealed himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- all created things came into existence and keep existing by the will of God
- the relationship between human beings and God was broken by sin and needs to be restored
- to sin is to think we know better than God and to live as if we don't need God, with our own ideas of what is right and wrong
- sin alienated us from God and deserves punishment, but in love for us God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who died in our place and took the punishment we deserved (*2 Corinthians 5:21*)
- being fully human like us, yet fully God, Jesus achieved forgiveness for us and restored us to a right relationship with God (*Colossians 1:21-22*)
- Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and now shares God's reign as Lord of all (*Philippians 2:9-11*)
- the gift of the Holy Spirit assures us of our restored relationship with God as Father, enables us to grow in character, faith and understanding and makes each of us an indispensable part of his body, the Church, with specific gifts to contribute
- it is Christians' certain hope that Christ will come again, final judgment will be done, sin, suffering and death will end and his people will share the Father's love in eternal joy.

Members of this family are called to love each other, no matter what, just as Christ loved us (*John 13:34-35*).

So, if Church membership is not like membership of a club, where you can opt in or out, what does it involve?

Someone who belongs

Because Christians belong to Christ, we also belong to one another as part of the family of God. While it is possible for a believer in a country where Christians are severely persecuted to be very isolated, it was always Christ's intention that believers would meet regularly.

As Christians we all belong to the 'universal church', a worldwide movement spanning the continents and the centuries, but we are also called to be involved in a local church as a concrete and living experience of this reality.

Depending on circumstances the definition of 'local' will vary (in some parts of the world people have to walk many miles to church). The important thing is to be rooted in and committed to a congregation of fellow believers in Christ.

Two key parts of belonging are baptism (if you are a believer and have never been baptised please speak to the Minister) and the Lord's Supper. For more on what the Lord's Supper is all about please ask the Minister – you could also read the booklet, 'Introducing the Lord's Supper', produced by the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Someone who worships

Because Christians believe, it naturally follows that they worship God for who he is and what he has done for them. To worship is not just singing songs of praise (although it very much includes this) but also to honour God with all of our lives (*Romans 12:1*).

As a church we have a special time in the week on Sunday when we gather to praise God, pray and hear from his Word, the Bible. This time must take priority over other demands because it is church family time that is to be protected.

Someone who prays

For a Christian, who lives in a restored relationship to God, praying should be something we do every day and throughout the day.

The Bible tells us that prayer is about offering praise to God, telling him we are genuinely sorry when we sin (*1 John 1:9*), saying thank you for what he has done and asking him to help us and others in many different ways (*Philippians 4:6*). It can be easy to do this on our own (as long as we remember!) but making the most of opportunities to pray with others who follow Jesus allows us to praise and thank God together and to encourage each other.

Someone who learns

We have been given the Word of God to feed and sustain us as Christians (*Matthew 4:4*). Just as a relationship is broken if there is no communication our lives are broken if we do not hear from God through his Word.

Like prayer, receiving from God's word is something that is done both on our own and together. The obvious example is the Sunday sermon but there will be other opportunities like Bible studies or informal ways like talking with others about what the message of the Sunday sermon means in your life (*Colossians 3:16*).

Christians also receive from God by spending time daily reading and reflecting on the Bible and filling their minds with the truths it contains.