

Church Membership: Benefits and Responsibilities

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This is an era of declining brand loyalty and ultimate consumer customization, yet church membership will always hold its value.

- It used to be that consumers would stick with stores and brands out of loyalty. Now, you go to the place with the best deal. You book a ticket on whatever airline has the best rate.
- We live in a “me centred” world. You can customize anything to your tastes, your preferences and I wish ... your budget.
- So why shouldn't we do the same thing with church?
 - Go where we like the music, go where we are catered to, go where we are not going to be offended. And then, once that church can no longer meet our needs, go to the next one, until the pattern repeats itself again.
 - I think that there is a part of everyone of us that is attracted to that thought, that we go where the grass is greener when it suits our wants.
- We must make our decision about what church we will covenant with on a much higher criteria than our own comfort and customization.
- WHY? Church isn't about me. Church is about Jesus Christ, and his Gospel, and His Kingdom.

Church is about advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world. Its about Jesus, and his kingdom, which we are apart of, but its about him and his goals, and not us. I want to covenant with a church that is in obedience and submission to Jesus Christ.

It is the mission of Hawkwood Baptist Church to...

Introduce people to Jesus and together become fully

devoted followers.

Jesus said,

Matthew 28:18–20 HCSB

Then Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Personally, I want to do way better at this part of our mission. I want to find ways that we can serve in Jesus name in our community, so that we can introduce people to Jesus, telling them about his saving power over sin, and the new life that he brings. I see room for improvement, and i pray that God does a work in my heart.

How about you? Do you have this passion as well? Today is a day to renew that passion, to ask God to do a work in our hearts

- Lets become a church that is so creative at finding ways to serve people
- Lets become a church that studies our community, so that we know where the hurts are, and where we can help best.
- Lets become a family that is united together for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let’s preach that gospel to ourselves, and lets preach that gospel to the world around us.

What is the gospel of Jesus? It is that he has come to seek and to save sinners. The gospel is that he has obeyed God the Father to completion, demonstrating God’s love perfectly as he gave his life so that God would be glorified and that we can be saved. The gospel is that Jesus is all powerful, resurrected from the dead and ruling at God the Father’s right hand, and all who come to him can be made right before God.

Its for this gospel that Church exists. So that we can live the gospel out together in community, and that as a community we will take this good news to the world.

That is the big picture, that is our job, that is what God is going to hold us accountable for.

And so today, we are covenant together as a church to obey God in this area, and we have 4 different headings that we will use to help us focus.

The four headings in our membership covenant each have a key word.

Unity, Responsibility, Ministry, Testimony

I will protect the unity of my church

- What's the best way to win a war? Divide and conquer your enemies. Cut them off from each other. Isolate them, break down the communication between them.
- Church, the gospel of Jesus Christ is far too important, and valuable, for us to allow any sort of disunity to exist amongst us. Disagreement, yes. Discussion, absolutely. But always in the spirit of unity, and building one another up. We must be quick to forgive, always praying for each other, never tearing another down, or slandering. We must strive to love one another as Christ loves us.
- Disunity breaks down our witness, it breaks down our effectiveness.
- How are we going to mobilize our church to do good works, if we are fighting each other.
- No, we must protect the unity of our church for the sake of the gospel.

Romans 14:19 HCSB

So then, we must pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another.

Write these ones down....

Pursue what promotes peace

Pursuit always involves effort. Some relationships are going to take work. Some people here today, are going to ruffle your feathers. Put the effort in to pursue peace.

- If you are pursuing someone in a car, you are going to have to step on the gas.
- If you are pursuing someone on foot, you are going to have to hurry up.
- If you are pursuing someone on the phone, you are going to have to keep calling until they pick up.

- Pursuit takes effort. Will you put effort into pursuing what promotes peace?

True peace with others is found when Jesus is at the centre of the relationship.

Pursue what builds up one another

One way that you can do this, is to make a habit of encouraging others. Say to yourself, I'm going to encourage someone at church every time that I go. Then you can build on that habit. You can encourage someone from our church throughout the week.

Church should be an encouraging place for all of us, and I'm sorry if it is not yet an encouraging place for you. But don't wait for someone to start encouraging you, start by encouraging others.

Lets pursue these things together in an effort to protect the unity of our church.

I will share the responsibility of my church

What is our responsibility anyway? The three sub points in our covenant are

1. By praying for its growth.
2. By intentionally involving myself in Christ's mission to the world.
3. By warmly welcoming those who visit.

I wonder if it would be helpful for us to think of responsibility through the lens of who it is that we are responsible too.

Turn in your Bible to John chapter 20. As you are finding your place, I'll set up the context. Jesus has been resurrected from the grave. The disciples are all present with the exception of Thomas. And Jesus appears to them and says this.

John 20:21 HCSB

Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."

It wouldn't have been the same if it was coming from Peter instead of Jesus. But when the resurrected Son of God sends you on his mission, then it carries a certain weight.

We are not going to pray for the growth of our Church solely because Pastor Shafer told us to. No, we are responsible to pray because the Bible tells us to.

Ephesians 6:18 HCSB

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints.

We are not going to involve ourselves with bringing the gospel to others only on the grounds that the elders said that was our mission. We are each responsible to God to carry out this work, because Jesus has commissioned all of his disciples to make disciples.

And similarly, we are going to welcome visitors to our church with hospitality and warmth, because this is God's will for us.

Let us take this responsibility seriously, and let us act in obedience to Jesus, our Lord, with the Help of his Holy Spirit.

I will serve the ministry of my church.

1 Peter 4:10 HCSB

Based on the gift each one has received, use it to serve others, as good managers of the varied grace of God.

I am a pastor here at the church, and one of the ways that I serve the ministry is by teaching and preaching. I do so with the intention of serving others. I want to see you encouraged and built up, and I trust God's grace for the enablement and power to do that.

But I won't be healthy if you aren't also ministering to me. I need your encouragement, your prayer, your kindness and your administration. I need you to teach me as well. Show me what you are learning, teach me, and I will be encouraged. What I am trying to illustrate is that our church is at its very best, when each member is serving. This builds up the church, and this helps each person to grow in their gifts as well.

There are both formal and informal ways that we can serve. There are teams and ministries that you can volunteer with.

We need to carry an attitude of service with us at all times. Attend service each week with the goal to be a servant. Come each Sunday with your eyes open for opportunities, and then live your entire life this way. Maybe there is a person you can encourage, perhaps there will be a time to pray for someone. Look around when the service gets out later on, and see if there are ways that we can serve

one another. Maybe there is a conversation that you can have with someone about serving together in our community as a way to share the gospel.

Service helps us all to function together as equals. Jesus is the head of this church, we worship him, and we are his beloved, serving one another in humility as good managers of the varied grace of God.

I will support the testimony of my church

By attending faithfully, by living a godly life and by giving regularly.

Philippians 1:27 HCSB

Just one thing: Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or am absent, I will hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, working side by side for the faith that comes from the gospel,

This brings us back to our mission. We are about the gospel of Christ. Introduce people to Jesus and together become fully devoted followers.

We are to live our lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. What does that look like?

It means many things, but for certain, it means that we need each others help. None of us can live our life worthy of the gospel on our own strength. We need each other. We need encouragement. We need prayer. We need to be challenged. We need to allow people to speak truth into our lives, and to show us our blind spots. We need the gospel applied to our own lives every day, and that is why it is such a blessing to be part of church. Its so good to be covenanted together, to serve God together, and to serve one one other with the love of Christ.

We don't come to church because of an experience that has been customized to perfectly suit our preferences. Instead, we covenant together, because together we get to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ and bring that good news with us wherever we go.