



MEMBERSHIP BOOKLET



Thank you for considering becoming a member at Cowal Kirk. This booklet is designed to give you more information about what membership in the church looks like, and what is expected of a member of the church.

If at any time you feel that membership is not for you, or it is not right at this moment, please make that known, there is absolutely no pressure.

What is membership all about?

Church membership is open to all those who have been baptised (or would like to be) and are prepared to publicly profess their faith in Jesus.

In practical terms, you are asked to make vows, and your name is added to a formal document called the church roll.

On a deeper level, underpinning our practice of welcoming and admitting individuals into membership is a profound spiritual truth: There is no such thing as a stand-alone Christian. Every Christian woman, man, or child is part of something bigger than themselves. One of the ways that the bible conveys this truth is through the image of a body.

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth: *“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it”*

(1 Corinthians 12:2)

The language of membership is drawn from this image of a body (the origin of the word ‘member’ is the Latin word *membrum*, meaning: ‘limb’).

A list of names on a membership roll might not seem especially spiritual, but it is an attempt to take seriously our shared identity as set out by Paul in *Ephesians 4:4-5*:

“There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

Joining the church is not how you become a Christian. Rather, joining the church is a way in which you proclaim your trust in Jesus and recognise your new identity in Him and as part of his Church.



It's an act of '*nailing your colours to the mast*' in other words: **'to declare openly one's opinions or allegiances.'**

Today, this kind of commitment is profoundly counter-cultural. One aspect of our increasingly secular age is the pressure to keep faith private.

Faith is acutely personal: it touches our inner thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears, our identity and ambitions. But our faith in Christ is to find expression in the whole of our lives: public and private; Monday to Sunday; alone and with others.

The route of divorcing your private and public self is taken by many in our society, but it is not open to followers of Jesus.



First Things first

What is required to become a member of the church?

The primary requirement is that you must **believe**.

Profession of faith has always been an integral part of church membership.

In the Bible, Romans 10: 9 says that: *'If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.'*

You must be able to articulate what the Christian faith is about and know Jesus as your personal Saviour and Lord.

That is not to say that you have it all entirely sorted out — faith is an ongoing process, and we all continue to learn more about God — but the basics must be there so that you can take the first vow (**see the *Membership Vows* later in this booklet**) in good conscience.

The expectation is that you will continue to **follow** Jesus in your everyday life and honour him with how you live out your life.

The **secondary** requirements are that:

- ♦ You will come to church regularly.
- ♦ You will read the Bible and Pray.
- ♦ You will give a proportion of your time, talents, and money to the Church's work.

These secondary requirements will be explained, in our meetings.



Why should I come to church regularly?

There are several reasons why it is important to come to church regularly.

Firstly, as Christians, it is important that we set aside time to worship God and to spend time with other Christians.

(Hebrews 10:25)

Secondly, it is among the church that we can learn and grow in our faith with others; not always when we are on our own.

Thirdly, in the church, you find a family and a place to belong. When you are struggling, they will help you to keep going. And when they are struggling, they ask that you do the same for them. In the church, we are accountable to one another.

Why should I read the Bible and Pray?

If we want to grow in our faith and grow in the knowledge of who God is and what he has done, it makes sense that we spend time seeking God in **prayer** and by **reading the Bible**.

It is good for us to read a bit of the **Bible** every day. We shouldn't treat the Bible as a self-help book - but to find out about what God is like and what he expects from us.

You may want to use Bible Reading Notes to help you go through the Bible in manageable chunks, and to help with the bits you don't understand.

Sometimes **prayer** can seem like a scary thing. Maybe you think that a prayer ought to be long and with flowery language - but that is far from the truth.

We can simply come before God and share what is on our heart. He also will place people and situations before us to pray through.

To help us to pray - it might be good for us to look at the **Lord's Prayer** as a model (*Matthew 6: 9-13*) or to use the **ACTS** model (see next page).

ACTS stands for - Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication.

Adoration - give praise to God for who He is, and what he has done.

Confession - say sorry for the things throughout the day you have done or thought that were not pleasing to God.

Thanksgiving - give thanks for things which are good and which you are thankful for.

Supplication - an old word - just means ask. What things would you like to ask God for? Is it healing for a family member or friend? Is it help at work? Is it wisdom in a particular situation?



Why should I give a proportion of time, talents and money to the Church's work?

If God is important to you, and you appreciate what he has done for you in Jesus, it makes sense that we give back to him.

Time - There are various ways you can get involved in the church - whether in youth work, fabric, catering or in other ways. Currently we have several teams in the church in which each member can be involved:

Worship Service, Pastoral Care, Property, Communication, Kirk Café, Pizza church, Fundraising, Finance, Wee Shop, Bible study, AV team. Why not speak to the Session Clerk or to the Minister and find out more?

Talents - Each of us has gifts which can be used in the church. If you are gifted in a certain area - the church would be delighted to have you use that gift.

Money - It is good for us to give money to the church for the work of the church locally, nationally and abroad, in recognition that all we have is God's anyway.

Traditionally in the church, people have tithed, that is given 10% of their income to the church. But this is something to aim for rather than a requirement. It of course depends on your own personal circumstances; at times you may feel you are able to give more, at other times, less.

There are a number of ways in which you can give to the church:

through the open plate

by standing order

by WFO envelope.

If you are a taxpayer, and if you fill out a Gift Aid form, tax can be reclaimed on your donations.

Please speak to the Treasurer (details are in the magazine) if you would like more information or forms.

What commitments am I asked to make?

In joining the church, you are asked to respond to four simple questions with the words '**I do**'.

The first question concerns your belief in God, your confession of Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and your commitment to meeting with other Christians to worship on a Sunday.

The other three establish your commitment to bible reading and prayer, to living and speaking for Jesus, and to serving and supporting the work of the church in the world.

For some of you to take these vows would be to make a public commitment to what you are *already doing* (or trying to do!) as part of our church family.

For others, it might involve a step towards a deeper commitment in terms of your personal devotional life, your giving or service in the life of the church.



***Why should I bother with this?
Is it not just a formality?***

I once wrestled with these questions myself, especially when I joined God's church in the Presbyterian Church in Zimbabwe.

Let me suggest four reasons, drawn from my personal experience, why I think membership is more than a formality and is in fact very precious:

1. It was a meaningful but unshowy way of expressing my private convictions in public.
2. The act of publicly professing my faith in the presence of a family of believers who were committed to me, remembering me in prayer, and sharing their lives with me, was a profound experience.
3. I came to discover how much of an encouragement it was for others in the church to see myself and others commit to Christ and to the church.

It is humbling to think that your simple '**I do**' might represent the happy answer to the prayers of someone else.

4. A whole bundle of smaller and largely practical reasons.

The Church of Scotland, of which we are a part, has built the concept of membership into all its structures.

Therefore, it is easier to participate in the wider life of our church if you have dotted the i's and crossed the t's.

At a local level, it is easier for our elders and pastoral care team to identify and look after folk who are members.

**I'd like to think about this some more,
what should I do?**

Please get in touch with Everisto in person, by email, or on the phone. He would be very happy to chat about what this might mean for you.



Membership vows

These are the vows you will make to become a member of the church:

Question 1:

Believing in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and confessing Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, do you promise to join regularly with your fellow Christians in worship on the Lord's Day?

Candidate: I do.

Question 2:

Do you promise to be faithful in reading the Bible, and in prayer?

Candidate: I do.

Question 3:

Do you promise to give a fitting proportion of your time, talents, and money for the Church's work in the world?

Candidate: I do.

Question 4:

Do you promise, depending on the grace of God, to profess your loyalty to Jesus Christ, to serve him in your daily work, and to walk in his ways all the days of your life?

Candidate: I do.

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