

## “Why have a formal membership process? Can’t I just consider myself a part of this church and attend regularly?”

Although the New Testament does use the term “members” to refer to Christians, perhaps the best case for church membership can be seen in seven observations from Scripture that indicate formal identification as a member of a local church as the standard for Christians:

1. Once a Christian was formally and publicly identified with Christ through baptism, entering into a local church was the next step.
  - *“So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).*
2. There was no such thing as a “lone-ranger Christian.” Christians met together regularly to worship and share life.
  - *“And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47).*
3. The personal identities of local church members were known to the watching world—even persecutors.
  - *“But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3).*
4. Local churches were planted throughout the known world, each with its own elders who oversaw their church’s members.
  - *“When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:21-23).*
5. Church leaders were made responsible for a specific flock.
  - *“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder... shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:1-3).*
6. Christians were instructed to submit to specific leaders.
  - *“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb. 13:17).*

7. Christians had authority and responsibility to exclude false teachers and unrepentant participants from the church body (you can't expel someone from a church unless they belong to it in the first place).
- *"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector"*(Matt. 18:17).
  - *"Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light"* (Eph. 5:6-8). (See also 1 Cor. 5:11-13; Tit. 3:10; 1 Jn. 2:19)

Although these churches in the New Testament may not have had the exact same process for membership that our church uses (like a class and a signed form), being formally identified as part of Christ's body through one local church is the standard for God's people. That's why we encourage every Christian in our church to consider joining us as a member.