

Why DPC membership?

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For many people the idea of local church membership sounds way too rigid and restrictive. Even if we acknowledge that Christian community is an essential part of the Christian life, we still often chafe against the idea of officially becoming a member of a church. So why is it that we at DPC believe that church membership matters? Aside from the very pragmatic benefits of church membership within the Presbyterian system – i.e. only members can be appointed to official church offices, vote in congregational meetings, add their names when calling a new pastor etc. – there are at least six other reasons for why Christians should become members of a local church.

1. Local church membership is biblical

The first and most important reason for becoming a member of DPC is that local church membership is based on biblical principles:

- All true Christians are citizens of the kingdom of heaven, journeying towards their true home in heaven (Phil. 3:20)
- All true Christians are members of Christ's universal body of Christ – the invisible church (Eph. 1:23).
- All true Christians need to live out their Christian life in the context of a specific local church (see points 3 - 4 below)
- Christ entrusts the local church with authority to test people's profession of faith and affirm or deny that they are citizens of heaven (Matt. 16:13-20; Matt. 18:15-18)

In that sense local *visible* churches are bit like embassies of the universal *invisible* kingdom of God. As an embassy of the kingdom, the local church does not have authority to *make* someone a citizen of heaven, but they do have authority to *affirm* or *deny* that someone is a citizen of heaven - to say: "We accept this person as a member of our local *visible* church, because we are convinced that they are already a member of Christ's universal *invisible* church."

2. Local church membership is your public and visible commitment to Christ and his people.

In becoming a member, you are stating before God and others that even though you are already a member of Christ's universal invisible church (including all true believers), you are committing to living out your faith as a member of this local visible church (Matt. 10:32-33).

3. Local church membership helps you to know who you are responsible for in the Christian life

The New Testament is full of commands calling Christians to "one anothering." Amongst other things, Christians are called to love, forgive, be patient, care for, teach, and admonish one another (Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:2, 32; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24). It is clear that these commands can only be obeyed in the context of a specific local church. Becoming a church member gives you a public opportunity to say: "With God's help I will seek to obey these commands in the context of this church. I am taking responsibility for you, I want you to take responsibility for me."

4. Local church membership helps your pastors and elders know who they are responsible for

The elders and pastoral leadership team at DPC have responsibility before God to watch over the flock that has been entrusted to us (1 Pet. 5:2, Acts 20:28). We take that responsibility very seriously. Of course, our job is made much easier when it is clear who is a part of our flock. Church membership offers this clarity because in becoming a member you say: "I want the leaders of this church to oversee my Christian life," and we as leaders say: "We are committed to overseeing your Christian life."

5. Local church membership enables effective processes of church discipline

As followers of Christ, we are to cast off sin and everything else that hinders us so that we can fix our eyes on him and run the race with perseverance (Heb. 12:1-2). However, we can sometimes run off track and so the local church has a role in helping and restoring us. There can be a need for a loving process of discipline in line with the local church's authority to test people's profession of faith and affirm or deny that they are citizens of heaven (Matt. 16:13-20). Sometimes in the process of dealing with sin in the church, we may need to sadly make a public declaration that, as far as we can tell, a particular unrepentant sinner is not actually a Christian (Matt. 18:15-20). This public declaration that someone is "outside" the kingdom of heaven is much more effective if there was a prior public declaration, via membership, that they were "inside" the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 5:12-13; Titus 3:10; 1 John 2:19). Church membership involves formally inviting our brothers and sisters to love us enough to call us to repentance.

6. Local church membership makes a powerful statement in our low-commitment culture

We live in consumerist culture in which we are constantly bombarded with a seemingly infinite number of choices. This mass of choices gives us the illusion of freedom but in reality, it often leads to what some people have called "choice-anxiety": "Should I commit to this phone plan? What if a better plan exists that I don't know about!?" Many people feel this way about choosing a church. Of course, it is important to be wise about choosing a church, but it is also important to actually make a commitment to a church. Counter-intuitively, publicly committing to a church, by becoming a member, brings great freedom and joy, rather than restriction and rigidity.

How do I become a member?

To become a DPC member you don't need to necessarily agree with all our core beliefs. You simply need to:

- 1.** Publicly demonstrate that you're a Christian – *done by being baptised (if you haven't already been) and typically by sharing your testimony at church*
- 2.** Publicly commit to living out your Christian faith as a member of DPC – *typically done by making vows in front of the church*

If you are interested in becoming a member, please speak to a pastor or an elder.