

Understanding Membership

At Rockford Reformed Church (RRC), we understand that membership is not a status in an organization, it is a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. The New Testament teaches that all who have put their faith in Christ are members of his body, which is the church.¹

We also recognize that there are many local churches spread throughout the world. We all belong to the Church Universal, yet each local church exists for an express purpose and is a local expression of Christ's body.² We believe that God's will for an individual member of the Body of Christ is to enter into a committed relationship as a member of a local congregation. In this document, we share our understanding of membership based on the Scriptures, and how membership is expressed at RRC.

1. Four reasons why membership is needed

A. Biblical reason

(a) Membership is a biblical reality; we are members of Christ's body. We must embrace the truth of who we are in Christ. We are also members of a local expression of Christ's body; we need to understand what this means, and live out of this reality.³ (b) Christ is committed to the church and we are called to be committed to one another. Faithfulness is fruit of the Spirit.⁴

B. Cultural reason

Being committed to others builds Christlike character and a genuine community of faith. We live in a culture where many people base commitments upon their own needs or feelings, rather than considering the highest good of others. Churches can be seen as consumer services; people go to the church that best meets their needs and leave when it no longer meets their needs. A steadfast commitment to our local congregation helps counter the self-absorbed, uncommitted tendencies in our culture.⁵

C. Practical reason

Membership helps congregational members and leaders know who is a member of the family and who is committed to the congregation and its vision.

D. Spiritual reason

Membership produces spiritual growth. Many commands in the Bible can't be accomplished apart from commitment to one another.⁶

2. Steps towards commitment

A person's connection and commitment to Christ, his community, and his cause identify where a person is in his or her journey towards biblical membership. At RRC, we recognize three levels of association.

A. Attendees

People begin to connect with RRC when they begin attending Sunday Services, Small Groups or other events. They may or may not be a believer. All are welcome as long as they are respectful in word and action. Attenders may desire to serve, which we gladly welcome in practical areas if their lifestyle and behavior does not detract from our mission. They are connected to our community, but may not yet be committed to Christ, His Community, or His Cause.

B. Adherents

People eventually identify RRC as their church home. Adherents are Christ followers and affirm biblical truth and lifestyle, and they are supportive of our beliefs, values and leadership. They have expressed that RRC is their church. They may have attended our membership course, but they may not be ready or able to make the high level of commitment required of membership. They have become a part of our centered set

¹ Ephesians 4:25, 5:30, Colossians 3:15

² 1Corinthians 12

³ Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 6:15; 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22, 23; 3:6; Colossians 1:24

⁴ John 10:8, 11, 12; Ephesians 5:25-32; Romans 12:10, 16; 2Corinthians 13:11; Ephesians 4:32; 1Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 3:13; 10:24-25; 1Peter 4:8-9; 1John 4:7, 11; Galatians 5:22

⁵ See Footnote 4.

⁶ See Footnote 4.

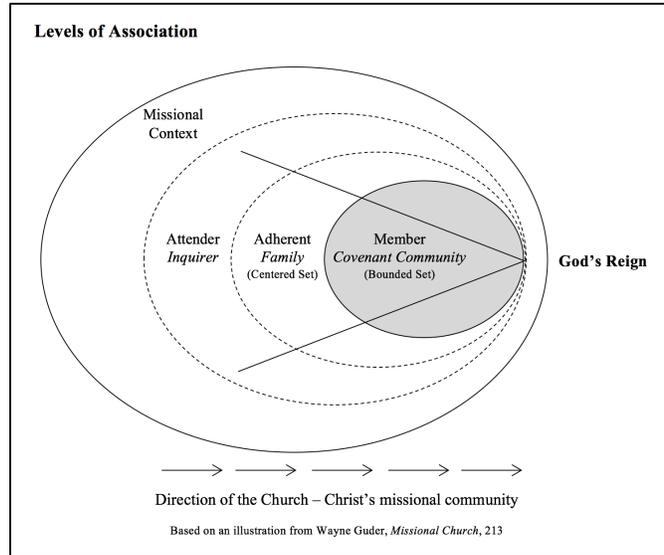
community (centered on Christ, His Word, and His Mission), and are moving with us towards becoming fully devoted followers of Christ. Adherents may serve in all areas of ministry where they are gifted and called with the exceptions of leadership and teaching.⁷

C. Members

Members are fully committed and fully functioning members of the body of Christ. They express in heart, word and deed that they are...

- Committed to Christ.
- Committed to Christ's Community.
- Committed to Christ's Cause.

Members aren't perfect! But members have made a conscious commitment to grow towards full devotion to Christ, his cause, and his community. They are part of the centered set community, but also have joined the bounded set of those who have made a clear commitment to journey together as members of the local body of Christ. Members may serve in all areas of ministry that are consistent with their gifts, maturity, and calling, including leadership and teaching (e.g. Life Group leaders, ministry directors, deacons, elders, and teachers).



3. Members are truly committed to Christ, his Community and his Cause.

A. Members are Committed to Christ

1. Members believe and have been baptized: Members believe in Jesus Christ, God's Son. They trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord, have been baptized in his name, and are committed to the essentials of the Christian faith.⁸
2. Members follow Christ: As disciples of Christ, members commit to renewing their minds in his truth and following his ways. Through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit within, members seek to live as Jesus would live if Jesus was living their life.⁹
3. Members manifest the Fruit of the Spirit: Members commit to walking by the Spirit and living in obedience to God's Word, so that their life might increasingly display evidence that they have become new creations in Christ.¹⁰
4. Members spend time with God: Members commit to intentionally nurturing their relationship with God and growing in knowledge of His Word.¹¹

B. Members are Committed to Christ's Community

1. Members protect the unity of the community: Members commit to pursuing the vision of Christ's church together as a congregation, following their leaders, and honoring one another.¹²
2. Members encourage one another: Members are mutually submitted to others in their congregation. They commit to encourage one another, and to love one another as Christ loves us. They commit to only speak words that build others up, and refuse to engage in gossip or slander.¹³

⁷ Note on "members" and "adherents": The Bible teaches that all who have put their faith in Christ are members of his body (see footnote 3). Furthermore, all who have put their faith in Christ have submitted to him as their Lord (Romans 10:9; 1 Corinthians 12:30). Thus the Bible calls and expects all Christians to be fully committed to Christ, the Church, and the mission of Christ. However, we recognize that we are all on a journey towards full commitment. Some believers, though they are, indeed, *members of Christ's body*, may not be ready to fully commit to all that is expected biblically of a member of Christ's body. We embrace these "adherents" as family. We are in process; we recognize and respect that reality in all of our lives. We all fall short of the high calling of being a member of Christ's body, but members at RRC have made a conscious and public commitment to grow towards that high call.

⁸ Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-13; 18:8; 19:4; 22:16

⁹ Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 4:23; 5:1-2

¹⁰ Matthew 7:24; Luke 11:28; Acts 6:7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22-23; James 1:22-25; 1 John 5:2

¹¹ Psalms 63:1; 119:11, 105; Philippians 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:16; 10:22; James 4:8

¹² Romans 2:10; 12:10; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 3:8

¹³ Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 26:20; Matthew 22:39; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 4:16, 29, 31; 5:1-2, 21; Colossians 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 10:25; James 2:8

3. Members connect in community: Members pursue and enter into authentic relationships with others in the body of Christ.¹⁴
4. Members faithfully meet together: Members faithfully attend Sunday Services as well as other small groups and events. These times together are vital because: (1) In community believers receive—they grow and are encouraged through fellowship, through the Word, through worship, through the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), and through ministry. (2) In community believers give—they encourage, bless, and strengthen others.¹⁵

C. Members are Committed to Christ’s Cause

1. Members spread the gospel: Members are committed to fulfilling the Great Commission in their life in ways congruent with their God given gifts. They are committed to the mission of Christ and his Church to preach the Good News, to bind up the brokenhearted, to establish justice, to free those in captivity to sin and Satan, and to bring healing to lives and communities.¹⁶
2. Members serve the congregation: Members commit to being involved in ministry that meets the needs of our congregation and community. Members seek to understand their gifts, passion and calling, and to be equipped in ministry so that they might effectively fulfill God’s purpose for their lives.¹⁷
3. Members pray together: Members faithfully join together in prayer, asking God for his wisdom and grace to further his mission for the local congregation and beyond.¹⁸
4. Members give to the Lord with joy: Members generously return a portion of their financial blessings to the Lord who has given so generously to them, and commit to developing the discipline of tithing.¹⁹

4. Membership benefits

Membership refers to our position in Christ and in His body. Membership in Christ gives us his abundant and everlasting life. Commitment to a local body of believers positions us to grow spiritually, to find encouragement in our walk with Christ, to love others as we minister to them, and to work together to spread the Kingdom of God on earth. Because of their commitment, members can also be entrusted with leading and teaching in the local congregation.

5. Membership commitment

At Rockford Reformed Church, we consider being a member of a local congregation both a delight and a privilege. When we declare our membership in this local congregation, we commit to Christ, Christ’s community, and Christ’s cause with joy, for we know that in meaningful, lasting relationships we truly thrive. Furthermore, we are persuaded that there is no greater cause than that of Christ’s Kingdom, and give our lives fully to this mission. As members, we commit wholeheartedly to the essentials of the Christian faith, for we know that these truths, clearly set forth in God’s Word, express the love and goodness of God our Father, and the good news of Christ Jesus our Lord who alone brings salvation to us and to all who put their faith in him. Christ is our Lord and Savior, his people are our family, and his cause is our life mission.

As members, we have attended a membership course so that we might understand the biblical meaning of membership. We have affirmed before RRC leaders and the congregation our commitment to Christ, to his Church worldwide and his community at RRC, and to his Kingdom cause.²⁰

¹⁴ Romans 12:10, 13; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 10:25; 13:1–2; 1 Peter 1:22–23; 3:8; 4:9

¹⁵ Acts 2:42–47; Romans 1:12; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:1–16, 29; Colossians 2:6–7; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Hebrews 3:12–13; 10:24–25; Jude 1:20–25

¹⁶ Isaiah 61:1–4; Micah 6:8; Matthew 28:18–20

¹⁷ Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–20; Ephesians 4:1–16

¹⁸ Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; Luke 21:36; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:31; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Peter 4:7; Jude 1:20

¹⁹ Malachi 3:8–12; 1 Corinthians 9:3–14; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5; 9:6–15

²⁰ [Official policy statement adopted by the RRC Consistory] Process for declaring membership at Rockford Reformed Church (RRC): People interested in joining RRC by transfer of membership or by profession of faith are asked to attend a membership class – the Discovery Class for adults, or the Youth Discover Class for youth – to confirm that they have made a genuine commitment to Christ and that they understand biblical membership. (If a person is not able to attend a membership class for several months, or if the person is being led by the Holy Spirit to make a profession of faith immediately, at the Pastor’s discretion the person may join prior to attending a membership class if he or she commits to attend the class as soon as possible, and if the Pastor believes the person has made a genuine commitment to Christ, his community, and his cause.) Those joining will then meet with the Pastor and at least one Elder to share their testimony of faith in Christ. The Youth Director is encouraged to attend when the person being interviewed is a youth. Once the Elders have voted to receive their membership, they will be officially recognized as RRC members. They may then be received publicly before the congregation, and may make a public profession of faith if they have not done so already.

The Essentials of the Christian Faith

Rockford Reformed Church

Revised: 2016-05-10

One God - We believe that there is one living, true and eternal God, who exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, equal in power and glory; that this triune God created all, upholds all, and governs all.²¹

God the Father - We believe in God the Father, an infinite, personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, justice, wisdom, power, and love; that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of people; that He hears and answers prayer; and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.²²

God the Son - We believe in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten son, conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin Mary. We believe in his sinless life, his miracles and teachings, his death on a cross to pay the penalty for our sins in our place, his bodily resurrection, his ascension into heaven to the right hand of the Father, and his perpetual intercessions for his people. We believe that in his first coming to earth, Jesus inaugurated the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. We also believe in Jesus' personal, visible, second coming to earth when the Kingdom of this World will fully become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.²³

God the Holy Spirit - We believe in the Holy Spirit, whose ministry is to glorify the Son; who was sent by the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify, and empower for godly living and ministry all who believe in Christ; we believe the Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Jesus Christ and that he is an abiding Helper, Teacher, and Guide.²⁴

The Scriptures - We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, fully inspired by Him, and the infallible rule of our faith and practice; they are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord who speaks through them in living power.²⁵

Regeneration - We believe that all people are sinners by nature and choice and are therefore under the judgment of God. Those who repent of their sins and confess Jesus Christ as Lord are given new and eternal life by God through the Lord Jesus. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, and that no one can come to God the Father except through Jesus His Son. We believe all Christians have received the Holy Spirit, and that all can experience the fullness of the Spirit's work – the gifts, the fruit and the power of the Spirit that is theirs in Christ Jesus.²⁶

The Church - We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic church, the living spiritual body of which Christ is the Head and all people born of God's Spirit through faith in Christ, whether living now or in ages past, are members. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁷

The Resurrection - We believe in the resurrection of all men and women to a final judgment; the eternal life and blessing of those righteous in Christ, and the eternal death of those who reject Christ.²⁸

The Apostles Creed - We affirm the truths set forth in the Apostles Creed...

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.²⁹

²¹ Matthew 28:19; Isaiah 40:28; Isaiah 46:8-11, 1Timothy 6:15, Revelation 17:14

²² Matthew 6:9; Isaiah 6:3; Romans 11:33-39; Psalms 138:5-6; Matthew 7:11; Isaiah 55:6-7

²³ John 1:14-18; Luke 1:18-20; Hebrews 4:15; Romans 5:8; 1Corinthians 15:1-8; Ephesians 1:20; 1Thessalonians 4:16; Mark 1:14-15; Acts 1:11; Matthew 25:31; Revelation 11:15

²⁴ John 14:26; 16:8; Titus 3:5; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13; John 14:16; 1Corinthians 12:4-11

²⁵ 2Timothy 3:14-17; Romans 15:4; James 1:22

²⁶ Ephesians 2:1-10; Acts 2:38; Acts 4:12; Romans 6:1-4; Ezekiel 36:26; John 1:12-13; John 10:9; John 14:6; Romans 8:9-10; Romans 10:8-13

²⁷ 1Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 2:19-22; Ephesians 4:3-6; 1Peter 2:4-5. The word "catholic" means "general, universal, concerning the whole." In the Apostles' Creed it refers to "the true body of believers over all the earth and throughout all ages."

²⁸ 1Corinthians 15:20-24; Revelations 20:11; 21:8

²⁹ The earliest form of the Apostles' Creed was probably written before 140 AD. See footnote 27 for meaning of "catholic."

Membership Commitment

At Rockford Reformed Church we understand that membership is not a status in an organization, it is a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ and his Church. The New Testament teaches that all who have put their faith in Christ – whether living now or in ages past – are members of his body, which is the church.¹ There are many local churches spread throughout the world. We all belong to the Church universal. Yet each congregation exists for an express purpose and is a local expression of Christ’s body. Our unique place in Christ’s body is only actualized as we live as healthy members in a local church.² We consider being a member of Christ’s Church and of this congregation both a gift and a delight.

When we declare our membership in Rockford Reformed Church, we are committing to Christ, Christ’s community, and Christ’s cause with joy, for we know that in meaningful, lasting relationships we truly thrive. Furthermore, we are persuaded that there is no greater cause than that of Christ’s Kingdom, and we give our lives fully to this mission. As members, we commit wholeheartedly to the essentials of the Christian faith, for we know that these truths, clearly set forth in God’s Word, express the love and goodness of God our Father, and the good news of Christ Jesus our Lord who alone brings salvation to us and to all who put their faith in him. Christ is our Lord and Savior, his people are our family, and his cause is our life mission.

Having made a commitment to Jesus as my Lord and Savior, and being persuaded that my Lord desires me to be committed to a family of believers³, I hereby make this membership commitment first to my Lord and his Church universal, and then to the body of Christ at Rockford Reformed Church.

1. I am committed to Christ, his Community and his Cause.

A. I am Committed to Christ

- 1. I believe and have been baptized: I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s Son. I trust Jesus as my Savior and Lord, have been baptized in his name, and am committed to the essentials of the Christian faith.⁴
- 2. I will follow Christ: As a disciple of Christ, I commit to renewing my mind in his truth and following his ways. Through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit within me, I will seek to live as Jesus would live if Jesus was living my life.⁵
- 3. I will seek to manifest the Fruit of the Spirit: I commit to walking by the Spirit and living in obedience to God’s Word so that my life might increasingly display evidence that I have become a new creation in Christ.⁶
- 4. I will spend time with God: I commit to intentionally nurturing my relationship with God and growing in knowledge of his Word.⁷

B. I am Committed to Christ’s Community

- 1. I will protect the unity of the community: I commit to pursuing the vision of Christ’s church together as a congregation, following my leaders, and honoring others.⁸
- 2. I will encourage others: I will be mutually submitted to others in my congregation. I commit to encourage others, and to love others as Christ loves me. I commit to only speak words that build others up, and refuse to engage in gossip or slander.⁹

¹ Ephesians 4:25, 5:30, Colossians 3:15

² 1Corinthians 12

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⁴ Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12–13; 18:8; 19:4; 22:16

⁵ Romans 12:1–2; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Ephesians 4:23; 5:1–2

⁶ Matthew 7:24; Luke 11:28; Acts 6:7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 5:22–23; James 1:22–25; 1 John 5:2

⁷ Psalms 63:1; 119:11, 105; Philippians 4:6; 2Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:16; 10:22; James 4:8

⁸ Romans 2:10; 12:10; Ephesians 4:3; Philippians 2:2; 1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 3:8

3. I will connect in community: I will pursue and enter into authentic relationships with others in the body of Christ.¹⁰
4. I will faithfully meet with others in my church family: I will faithfully attend Sunday Services as well as other small groups and events. These times together are vital because: (1) In community I receive– I will grow and be encouraged through fellowship, through the Word, through worship, through the sacraments (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), and through ministry. (2) In community I give – I will encourage, bless, and strengthen others.¹¹

C. I am Committed to Christ’s Cause

1. I will spread the gospel: I am committed to fulfilling the Great Commission in my life in ways congruent with my God given gifts. I am committed to the mission of Christ and his Church to preach the Good News, to bind up the brokenhearted, to establish justice, to free those in captivity to sin and Satan, and to bring healing to lives and communities.¹²
2. I will serve the congregation: I commit to being involved in ministry that meets the needs of our congregation and community. I will seek to understand my God given gifts, passion and calling, and to be equipped in ministry so that I might effectively fulfill God’s purpose for my life.¹³
3. I will pray together with others in my church family: I will faithfully join together in prayer, asking God for his wisdom and grace to further his mission for the local congregation and beyond.¹⁴
4. I will give to the Lord with joy: I will generously return a portion of my financial blessings to the Lord who has given so generously to me, and I commit to developing the discipline of tithing.¹⁵

⁹ Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 26:20; Matthew 22:39; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 4:16, 29, 31; 5:1–2, 21; Colossians 3:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11; Hebrews 10:25; James 2:8

¹⁰ Romans 12:10, 13; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; Hebrews 10:25; 13:1–2; 1 Peter 1:22–23; 3:8; 4:9

¹¹ Acts 2:42–47; Romans 1:12; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 4:1–16, 29; Colossians 2:6–7; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14; Hebrews 3:12–13; 10:24–25; Jude 1:20–25

¹² Isaiah 61:1–4; Micah 6:8; Matthew 28:18–20

¹³ Romans 12:3–8; 1 Corinthians 12:1–20; Ephesians 4:1–16

¹⁴ Matthew 21:22; Mark 11:24; Luke 21:36; Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:31; Romans 12:12; Ephesians 6:18; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 Timothy 2:1; 1 Peter 4:7; Jude 1:20

¹⁵ Malachi 3:8–12; 1 Corinthians 9:3–14; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5; 9:6–15