



WESTSIDE
christian church

MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK



WELCOME TO DISCOVERING CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT WESTSIDE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

This book is an introduction to our church family and will explain who we are, and what our church is about.

We desire to be a biblical community. This means we must grow in our knowledge of, and also, our obedience to what God says to us in the Bible.

Becoming a member of a church is the culmination of a series of important steps. But it is not an end in itself. Just as finally being hired doesn't mean your work is finished. Becoming a member of Westside affirms where you are spiritually and where you are going. It's a step of discipleship, a step on the lifelong path that was laid out by Jesus, and on which all true believers walk with dedication and resolve.

How do you become a member of Westside?

- read this book
- attend a membership class
- make an appointment with the Pastor to confirm your desire to join as a full member
- sign the Membership Covenant
- be introduced to the church family during a church service

The basis of membership

The basis of church membership is a living relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ. A member will have been baptized and publicly professed their faith and their dependence on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Reasons for membership

We believe it is important for all those claiming to be a follower of Jesus Christ, that they be formally connected to a church for the purpose of growing into spiritual maturity.

In our church we recognize the need for formal membership based on the following reasons:

1. A Biblical Reason: Christ is committed to the church.

"... Christ loved the church, and he gave his life for it" (Eph 5:25)

2. A Cultural Reason: It is an antidote to our society.

We live in an age where very few want to be committed to anything ... a job ... a marriage ... our country. This attitude has even produced a generation of "church shoppers and hoppers."

Membership swims against the current of our societies "consumer religion." It is an unselfish decision. Commitment always builds character.

3. A Practical Reason: It defines who can be counted on.

Every team must have a roster. Every school must have an enrolment. Every business has a payroll.

Every army has an enlistment. Even our country takes a census and requires voter registration.

Membership identifies our family.

4. A Personal Reason: It produces spiritual growth

The New Testament places a major emphasis on the need for Christians to be accountable to each other for spiritual growth. You cannot be accountable when you're not committed to any specific church family.

The difference between 'attenders' and 'members' can be summed up in one word: commitment. The church is the family of God in which every member contributes to its well-being so that it can grow and be effective, bringing Glory to God. A Christian without a church is like an orphan. God does not want his children growing up in isolation.

Membership Classes

Membership Classes are an opportunity to talk to the leaders of Westside about what membership means and to learn in a little more depth about what we believe and what sort of church we are. They are also an opportunity for us to get to know you and your spiritual journey a little better. Membership Classes are interactive and informal. The Membership classes are divided into three sessions which cover the following three topics:

1. What does it mean to be a Christian?
2. What does it mean to be Reformed?
3. What does it mean to be a member of Westside?

History of the Christian Reformed Church of Australia

The origin of the CRCA stems directly from the Protestant Reformation, which was a religious revolution and renewal from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. All Protestant denominations stem from this Reformation. Beginning with the Lollards and such men as John Huss and John Wyclif, the Reformation is most clearly identified with the revolt of Martin Luther (a Roman Catholic Priest) in Germany. It was further brought about by John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli in Switzerland.

The Reformation centred on questioning the authority of the then Roman Catholic Church with its emphasis on tradition and dictatorial teaching. A culmination of abuses and scandals within the church, Renaissance learning, the fall of Constantinople and collapse of the Feudal system, found that the world was ripe for a religious reformation that would touch all corners of God's earth.

This Reformation was a call back to the Bible, with emphasis on:

God's Word alone as the final authority by which humankind is to live...

We are saved by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone - not by works or deeds...

All believers have direct access to God with no need for an intermediary...

Following the 2nd World War many families found it difficult to survive in the difficult economic circumstances in Europe and decided to move to other parts of the world. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia was birthed in the early 1950s by predominantly Dutch immigrants. Since that time the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia have grown to over 60 churches with over 9000 members who desire to keep 'Reforming to reach the lost for Christ.'

History of Westside Christian Church

Westside Christian Church was started with the blessing of Classis Queensland by around 50 members from Inala Reformed Church who desired a church that was focused on reaching the lost for Christ and making an impact in their local community. It held its first worship service on Sunday, 30th September 2001, a month later it was incorporated and it was instituted on the 29th November 2003. Pastor Josh was called part-time in mid 2002 and after completing a further year at the Reformed Theological College in 2005 he became Westside's Vicar and was ordained as Pastor at the beginning of 2007.

The Mission, Vision and Values of Westside Christian Church

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" Luke 19:10

Jesus had a mission. He came to earth from heaven knowing his purpose. Even at the age of 12, he asked his parents; *Did you not know I had to be about my Father's business?* (Lk 2:49). His single-mindedness, determination and reliance on his heavenly Father's guidance ensured that at the end of his ministry, he could pray confidently; *I have accomplished the work which you gave me to do* (Jn 17:4).

Jesus had a vision. He saw the preferred future, the new 'people' his mission would make. He knew what he had to be like, and what his followers had to be like, if the world was to sit up and take notice. He built a community of believers (12 at first) that would be the foundation of a vast network of followers who would fulfil his vision. Hence Jesus' prayer to his Father; *As you have sent me into the world, I also send them into the world* (Jn 17:18).

Jesus had a plan. His ministry unfolded in stages, and he said 'no' to many opportunities when they were the right things at the wrong time. With no shortage of need, he had to be selective about the people and possibilities in which he invested. Disciples had to be chosen from among many interested volunteers. Workers needed to be trained before being sent. Jesus sometimes moved on to new ministry opportunities even when people wanted him to stay. He recognized that some 'ministry growth' would be detrimental to his long-range plan, so he stifled it, telling people he had just healed not to go public. The control he exercised in relation to his ministry was always in response to the leadings of His heavenly Father, and was the appropriate way to facilitate his mission and vision in accordance with his values.

In his steps...

Westside desires to carry on Jesus' mission. We also want to identify our core values and act consistent with them. While the message of Jesus Christ is timeless, the forms (methods) and programs we use to further his work are flexible, they must be servants, not masters. We claim no infallibility for any of our ideas, but we believe we'll be more fruitful if we follow a well-defined strategic plan, always remaining open to how the Spirit may take us in new, unexpected directions. Like Jesus; *we seek to save that which was lost* (cf. Lk 19:10; 1 Tim 1:15).

Our mission (what we're doing)

The mission of Westside is: Transforming people into fully devoted followers of Christ.

Because Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, we feel compelled to do the same. But Jesus went beyond rescuing people from hell; he wanted to make them fit for heaven. Through the various ministries of the church, we desire people not only to meet Christ, but to also grow in their faith so that they live obediently to his commands and become conformed to his character.

Our Vision (what we're becoming)

The vision of Westside is: Our vision is to have a church home by 2020 to effectively reach our community with the love of Jesus.

Jesus came to announce the Kingdom of God and he gave people a glimpse of what God's Kingdom is like, a place of sacrificial love, of healing and acceptance, of grace and obedience to God's will. Through the various ministries of the church, we desire people not only to hear about Jesus Christ, but to also experience practical expressions of His love.

Our Framework (how we will achieve our mission)

- Sharing the Gospel in word and deed
- Connecting people into community
- Growing people in their faith
- Equipping people to serve
- Doing everything for God's glory

Our framework are the important aspects of what we do as a church that will help us achieve our God-given mission and attain our vision of seeing people's lives transformed. They are based on the five purposes of the church:

1. Worship - We exist to celebrate God's presence.

Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only (Mt 4:10).

Oh worship the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together (Ps 34:3).

2. Evangelism - We exist to communicate God's word and proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

You will be my witnesses (Acts 1:8).

The most important thing is that I complete my mission - the work the Lord gave me to do - to tell people the Good News about God's grace (Acts 20:24).

3. Fellowship - We exist to enfold and encourage God's Family.

You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God (Eph 2:19).

4. Discipleship - We exist to grow God's people in their faith.

Build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:12b-13).

5. Ministry - We exist to demonstrate God's Love.

Equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:12a).

Essentials We Believe

God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the Universe. He has eternally existed in three personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.

(Gen 1:26-27; 3:22; Ps 90:2; Mt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 1:2)

Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on a cross. He rose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory and will return again someday to earth to reign as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

(Isa 9:6; Mt 1:22-23; Jn 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Acts 1:9-11; Rom 1:3-4; 1 Cor 15:3-4; 1 Tim 6:14-5; Tit 2:13; Heb 4:14-15)

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son of God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. He gives every believer a spiritual gift when they are saved. As Christians we seek to live under His control daily.

(Jn 16:7-13; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor 2:12; 3:16; 2 Cor 3:17; 14:16-17; Gal 5:25; Eph 1:13)

The Bible

The Bible is God's Word to us. It was written by human authors, under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. Because it is inspired by God, it is the truth without any mixture of error.

(Ps 12:6; 119:105,160; Prov 30:5; 2 Tim 1:13; 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21)

Human Beings

People are made in the image of God, to be like Him in character. People are the supreme object of God's creation. Although every person has tremendous potential for good, all of us are marred by an attitude of disobedience toward God called 'sin'. This attitude separates people from God, is the cause of evil in this world, and ultimately leads to death and eternal damnation.

(Gen 1:27; 2:17; Ps 8:3-6; Isa 53:6a; 59:1-2; Rom 3:23; Jam 1:15)

Salvation

Salvation is God's free gift to us but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offering of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith we are saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith.

(Jn 1:12; 14:6; Rom 5:1; 6:23; Gal 3:26; Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:26)

Eternal Security

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. If you have been genuinely saved, you cannot 'lose' it. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and keeping power of God that gives us this security.

(Jn 10:29; 2 Tim 1:12; Heb 7:25; 10:10; 14:1; 1 Pet 1:3-5)

Eternity

People were created to exist forever. We will either exist eternally separated from God by sin, or eternally with God through forgiveness and salvation. To be eternally separated from God is Hell. To be eternally in union with Him is eternal life. Heaven and Hell are real places of eternal existence.

(Mt 1:18; 2:44, 46; Jn 2:25; 3:16; 5:11-13; Rom 6:23; Rev 20:15)

Sacraments

Sacraments are symbols used by God to connect with us in a unique way to reassure us of His forgiveness and love. These symbols/sacraments are known as 'signs' and 'seals'. *Signs* in that they are physical symbols of a spiritual reality, and *Seals* in that they guarantee that what is symbolized is real. Sacraments inspire us to remember what Jesus has done for us on the cross, and remind us that Jesus promised to always be present with us. Christ instituted two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Scripture clearly teaches that the sacraments are only for those who can receive them in true faith (i.e. believers).

Baptism

In Baptism the *sign* is water - which points to the blood of Christ. The *seal* is the guarantee that as surely as water washes away dirt, so surely Christ's blood cleanses us from all our sins. We believe that all those who believe in Jesus, and their children, ought to be baptised because they have entered into God's covenant of Grace. (Mt 28:19-20; Acts 2:39; 1 Pet 2:9)

The Lord's Supper

In the Lord's Supper the *sign* of bread and wine point to the body and blood of Christ. The *seal* in the Lord's Supper is the guarantee that as we share in the bread and wine the Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus and strengthens our faith in his sacrifice on the cross. (Is 53:5; Mt 26:26-29; Jn 10:11, 26-30; 1 Cor 11:24-26)

Our Values

Each person is a unique individual and as such we differ in values with regard to how we go about serving Christ. Yet certain common values unify our efforts and define our distinctiveness.

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought (1Cor 1:10).

Values dictate how people behave, and everyone has them, the question is what are the values we feel are important in our church? We believe these ten values capture the heart of the church that we believe God is calling us to be. These values express the ethos, or character, of Westside Christian Church.

Value 1: Devotion to Jesus Christ

We believe that devotion to Jesus Christ and His cause is normal for every believer and so we want to put Jesus Christ at the centre of everything we do.

Value 2: Small Groups

We believe that life-change happens best in Small Groups of authentic Christian relationships where people can express Christian love for one another.

Value 3: Evangelism

We believe that lost people matter to God, in fact everyone is wired for a relationship with God. So we want to be a Church that reaches out to unchurched people and invites them into relationship with Jesus Christ.

Value 4: Prayer

We believe that we can only be effective by the power of God in our lives and so we want to live in constant dialogue with Him.

Value 5: Relevant Worship

We believe that God is worthy of all glory and praise and so we want to engage in heart-felt worship that crosses generations and musical styles while being relevant in our contemporary context.

Value 6: The Word of God & our Reformed Heritage

We believe that God speaks to us through His Word, the Bible and so we want to be a Church that reads, proclaims and obeys His Word.

Value 7: Discipleship

We believe that the Christian journey is a journey to becoming more and more like Jesus Christ and so we want to be a Church that helps people grow in their faith, love and commitment to Him.

Value 8: Justice & Mercy

We believe that God has a heart for the poor and marginalized in our world and so we want to be a Church that helps people in need.

Value 9: Ministry

We believe that God has gifted every Christian to serve Him and His people and so we want to be a Church that equips people for service.

Value 10: Family

We believe that God instituted the family unit and uses the family to bring about His purposes in the world and so we want to be a Church where the family is valued and every generation is ministered to and made to feel welcome.

How will we fulfil our church's mission?

The purpose of our church is to encourage those who don't know Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Leader to explore the truths of Christianity. Our church's objective is to keep moving people to Christ-likeness by following the steps outlined on the path. Our strategy to reach those in our community with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ as summarised in our Seven Step Strategy.

1. Attending Worship Services

Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are encouraged to become involved in the Sunday worship services. This provides believers with the opportunity to participate in corporate worship and to listen to teaching that will challenge them to grow into mature believers.

2. Participate in a Small Group

Small groups provide fellowship for the believer in which pastoral caring, sharing and bearing of life's highs and lows are met. Life change happens best in the context of authentic relationships where God's Word is studied and applied.

3. Involvement in Service

All members of Westside are encouraged to discover their spiritual gifts and use them within the body and so influence the work of the church in reclaiming the world for Christ.

4. Stewardship

Believers need to be educated in the area of money management and to recognise their individual responsibility to manage their money in a God-glorifying manner. Stewardship also includes the use of our time and talent for God's purpose.

5. Bridge Building

Lost people need to hear the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. That requires that believers build relationships with nonbelievers and invite them to our special services in the hope that the Holy Spirit may convict them of their need to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

6. Sharing a Verbal Witness

A witness in a courtroom simply describes accurately what he or she saw. That's what we do when we witness to un-churched friends. We describe the changes Jesus has made to our lives. It is not enough to just be 'nice' people ... unbelievers must hear why we are the way we are, who can save them, and how.

7. Calling people to respond

We want to challenge people to give their lives to Jesus. We do this by inviting people to attend a Christianity Explained course and invite them to give their lives to Jesus and become a member of

our church. We also run membership classes (see above) so that new believers are enfolded into our church family and commit themselves to continuing the mission and vision of our church.

Our Structure

Structure looks at the organisational parts of our church's ministries.

Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph 4:15-16).

The Head of Westside is Jesus Christ. As a church we seek to reflect His priorities in all we do and how we do it. No decision is ever made that would knowingly contradict any of Jesus' teaching. In addition, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we endeavour to discern God's program for us as a church here in the Greater Springfield region. Whenever we implement a plan, we keep one eye on our effectiveness, and the other on the next step God seems to be showing us.

Church Council

Under the Headship of Jesus Christ, we have a Church Council comprising of Elders elected from the membership of our church. Elders are referred to as office bearers, and include the Pastor. Elders usually serve a term of 3-4 years. Church Council's role is to oversee that the church remains on a true course biblically; that its members are being appropriately shepherded, that the body is being fed through insightful and accurate Bible teaching, and that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders. They are to care about the spiritual and physical well being of members, regularly praying for the sick. They are to guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or who are continuing in patterns of sinful behaviour. In doing so, they are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan, so that the truth of Christ will remain credible to both the congregation and the community. (Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9; Jam 5:14; 1 Pet 5:1-4)

In response to the biblical pattern of leadership, members of the body are taught in Scripture to lovingly support their leaders and submit to their leadership. (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17) Elder qualifications are summarised in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Reformed Doctrines

Westside Christian Church is a member of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and our doctrine is a strength the Christian Reformed Churches are known for all over the world.

Doctrine means 'to teach'. Biblical teaching is a major component of church life within Reformed Churches, as we believe this is essential if lives are going to change to conform to the will of God. Doctrines help us do this, as they communicate succinctly the truth of the Bible in specific areas. Doctrines are organised statements of the teaching of Scripture for the use of the Church.

Reformed Churches are also Confessional Churches. Confessions are not intended to be innovations, but rather faithful expositions of Scripture. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia subscribe to the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and the Westminster Confession. Copies of our doctrines, creeds and confessions are available upon request.

Church membership 'marks'

From Scripture, we believe that someone devoted to Christ and his Church will display certain 'marks'. When you are evidencing these characteristics within our body, then you truly are a participating member. In our attempt to identify these marks, we speak of *The Five G's*.

Grace

Grace is the word we use to describe God's love for us despite our sinfulness. And it is God's grace we see evidenced in the work and person of His Son Jesus Christ. (Eph 2:8-9)

Growth

Growth is the word we use to describe the fruit of our life produced by the Holy Spirit as we grow in Christlikeness. (2 Pet 3:18)

Groups

Groups is the word we use to describe individual members participation in the body of Christ and their connection with other members in significant relationships. (Acts 2:46)

Gifts

Gifts is the word we use to describe individual members commitment to serving Christ's body according to their spiritual giftedness and passion. (Rom 12:6-8)

Giving

Giving does not just refer to 'giving money.' It is the word we use to describe how individual members can honour God with their *time, talent and treasure*. We believe that God calls us to be generous with what he has so generously given to us. (2 Cor 8-9; Phil 4:11-19)

Membership Responsibilities

In a nutshell, the main responsibility of every member of Westside is to participate in the life of the church by simply following Christ (cf. Jam 1:22). We are to do as He would do, live as He would live. Living the Five G's, is all that will ever be expected of you: *live in grace... commit to growth... be in a group... use your gifts... and practice generous giving*. We believe these statements capture the essential 'marks' of someone devoted to Christ and His Church. Simply put, if you are evidencing these characteristics within the body, then you truly are a participating member. As a church, we want to formally affirm that fact and celebrate it!

Sometimes we fall into the regretful, almost infantile attitude of wanting 'the church' to do more for us. But WE are the church. If the church isn't doing something, WE'RE the ones not doing it, and WE'RE the only ones who can make it different. Too often we slip into a consumer mentality, we 'shop' for services we think are important. But we're not the shoppers at a spiritual convenience store, we're the proprietors here. Stocking the shelves is OUR responsibility. 'Meeting needs' is what WE do for others, and in the process, we find out what Jesus meant when He said; *it is more blessed to give than to receive*. Washing feet isn't a servant's job, Jesus taught us it's our job.

Membership privileges

Just as the key words "participating" and "commitment" describe the responsibilities of members, those words also imply that there are benefits. Specifically, members have the right to influence the key decisions of the church, most importantly the selection of office-bearers. From time to time, meetings or other functions are held that are for 'members only.' These events are usually called either to inform the core of the church of a major concern or to get input from the body. We regularly have congregational meetings where such matters are discussed together. Finally, virtually all leadership positions, and many ministry opportunities in the church, require membership as a

prerequisite. The primary reason to become a participating member, however, is not to gain a personal advantage, but to identify ourselves with the characteristics, or marks, of biblical maturity.

Membership Covenant (agreement)

We have tried to encapsulate the obligations members are asked to adhere to as outlined in Scripture and explained above, in the following "Membership Covenant".

Having professed my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour, and being in agreement with the church's statements, strategy, and structure, I now pledge my support to the Westside Christian Church as a communicant member and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following.

I will protect the unity of the Church

...By acting in love toward other members.

...By refusing to gossip

...By supporting the leaders

I will share the responsibility of my church

...By praying for its growth

...By inviting the un-churched to attend

...By warmly welcoming those who visit

I will serve the ministry of my church

...By discovering my gifts and talents

...By being equipped by my pastor to serve

...By developing a servant's heart

I will support the testimony of my church

...By attending faithfully

...By living a godly life