

East Taieri Church

Mission Membership

What does it mean?



Church Membership. Really?

At East Taieri we believe that church membership is both biblical and important. Not everybody sees it that way, but please consider the following.

The Bible uses several images to describe the church. It is:

- A body made up of many diverse parts that, nevertheless, work together in cooperative unity, and care for each other.
- A family
- A flock
- An army
- A building made up of many “living stones”
- The Bride of Christ

With the possible exception of the Bride of Christ, all indicate a union of many parts – the many organs of the body, the members of a family, the sheep in the flock, the soldiers in an army and the stones in the building. Even the Bride of Christ is clearly not an individual, but the church made up of many members.

Each image also speaks of the importance of unity. The body passages speak of the importance and value of each member¹. Families rely on strong relationships, loyalty and care for one another. The flock follows one shepherd. An army requires absolute cooperation and loyalty. A building will not survive if the stones are not fitted together well and do not continue to support one another. The structural integrity of a building will be severely compromised if the stones just do their own thing.

¹ In fact, the concept of membership points back to this image, A member is literally “an organ or limb of a body”.

Additionally, each image speaks of interdependence. Each part needs the other parts and depends on those other parts. The Bible speaks a lot about the members of a church ministering to one another and building one another up.

Think of all the “one another” commands – love one another, forgive one another, carry one another’s burdens, be patient with one another etc. There are a lot of them, and they can only be obeyed when we are connected to one another and committed to one another.

In other words, the biblical picture of a church is of a people who are deeply committed to one another – deeply committed to caring for one another, ministering to one other, and working together. A church is not a casual association but a body, a family etc. That level of commitment requires a decision and a statement.

The church is a world-wide body, but it is also real, local fellowships. The one another commands can be practiced only in the context of a real local church made up of real people.

Being part of a church means saying:

1. I am committed to Jesus. Church membership is for those who have chosen to follow Jesus.
2. I am committed to this particular church. I am committed to these people. We will work together to fulfil the mission God has given us. I need them but I also have a contribution they need.”

There are practical advantages as well. When we know who is part of the church, we can be more intentional about including those people and providing for them, including providing for their growth in their faith and in their ministry. There is also a little more accountability.

Some decisions are made by seeking the discernment of members, not just anybody and everybody. No sensible organisation would ask people not clearly committed to it to make its most significant decisions.

Church membership is not just a weird, unbiblical, administrative burden. It is necessary for us to be an intentional and effective church. The Bible pictures a tightly-knit team. We need to know who is on that team.

At East Taieri

At East Taieri we have two categories of membership: Mission Members and Regular Attenders.

Mission Members are those we have been talking about; those who have expressed their commitment to Jesus and to this church.

Regular Attenders are those who for whatever reason have not yet taken that step but are a regular part of the life of the church. Those people are loved and valued just as highly. They might be on a journey towards being able to state those commitments and that is a valid place to be.

Why *Mission* Membership

We call membership “Mission Membership” because we believe all Christians have been gifted by God with abilities that are to be used in the service of Jesus Christ, that is, membership means being involved in the mission of Jesus. That might be exercised in the context of the church and its various programmes, or it might be exercised in the workplace, or the community, or wherever, but Mission Membership simply means being willing to be actively involved.

Mission Membership Sundays

Generally, once a year, at the time of the AGM, we have a special Mission Membership Service where there is opportunity to state those commitments. Those who have done it before are simply renewing their promises. Those who have not done it before (or not done it in the context of this church) but take part in the Mission Membership services, become members.

If they have not been baptised, we would love to celebrate baptism with them as well and will talk with them to organise that.

If people have been members of another church, we recognise that. We do not ask them to repeat their initial commitment to follow Jesus (that might have happened, for example, at their baptism). We simply ask them to reaffirm it in this new context.

If people have been Mission Members but are no longer involved or are no longer able to make the commitments, we would hope to encourage re-engagement through talking with them, and helping them overcome any hurdles. Or, it might be that they no longer want to be Mission Members.

The Words

These are the words used. You can see what we understand membership to mean. In fact, the paragraphs align with our mission statement: Know God; Grow in Christ; Go in the Spirit.

I put my trust in God, as heavenly Father, in Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and in the Holy Spirit as my Helper and Guide.

With God's help I will seek to love and obey Christ and to grow in my relationship with God through prayer and study of the Bible.

I promise to be a faithful member of the Christian community. With God's help I will share in the worship of the church and support its work with my time, talents and money. With God's help I will tell others of Christ in word, sign and deed and look for the coming of His Kingdom.

Any Questions?

This leaflet might not have answered all of your questions. We are more than happy to talk to you. Please do contact us if you would like to talk it through more.

We really encourage you to think about Mission Membership. If you are not a member already, is it time for you to take that step? Are you ready to state your commitment to Jesus and His church?

Ultimately, the decision is yours. There is no pressure to become a Mission Member. You have to be comfortable making the commitments. It is far better to wait and be sure, than do it prematurely. Again, if we can help you think about your own spiritual journey, we would love to do that. Please do get in touch.

You could contact:

- the church office (office@etchurch.co.nz, 03 489 6308)
- any of the church staff (see the 'About Us' section of the website: etchurch.co.nz)
- any of the elders

