

## **Church Membership West Road and Westley Community Q&A**

It is our hope that if you have been coming to either West Road Church or Westley Community Church for a little while, you will start to feel at home with us. If you have reached this point and you would consider yourself to be a Christian then the next step we would encourage you to consider is to become a member of the church.

You may have a written list of questions: -

- What do I get out of it?
- What do I have to give in terms of money, for example, or time?
- What will it cost me?
- Do I have to do something to show I am a member?
- What if I don't want to be member anymore?
- What if I have a problem with another member – is there a church way to resolve it?
- Does it matter if my partner is not a Christian?
- What sort of commitment is involved?

Hopefully this document will go some way to answering these questions for you and give you a good insight into what church membership entails.

### **Introduction**

#### **The History of the West Road Church**

West Road Church started around 1847 with people meeting, at first, in private homes. As the fellowship grew, they hired rooms in the Quaker building in St John's Street, then in premises at 15a Garland Street. Numbers increased, and in 1902 the fellowship moved into the old Methodist chapel at 23 Garland Street. The church has always had a strong evangelistic edge – and in 1939 moved to West Road in response to the rapid expansion of the town to the west. International evangelist Harold Wildish spoke at the opening meetings and the Sunday school grew to 150 almost immediately. The site was re-developed, and the present building was opened in 1992. With our growing numbers, it was decided in 2014 to plant a sister congregation on the Westley Estate. This church now meets in the Westley Middle school and although both congregations can seem pretty distinct we consider ourselves as one church, meeting on two sites.

#### **Back to the Bible**

It is the aim that the answers in this leaflet can be traced back to the Bible. This is a foundational principle of West Road/Westley Community Church that what we believe and the way we are organized should follow the pattern and principles of the Bible.

#### **The word 'church'**

An example of why we need to constantly refer back to the Bible is the word 'church'. Ask most people to explain the word 'church' and they will start talking about an old

building with a spire and no toilets. But in the Bible, the word 'church' never refers to a building. The church is people. The New Testament word is 'ekklesia' and it means a gathering or assembly.

### **What do I get out of Church Membership?**

In the town, you have to join Bury Library or else you are not allowed to borrow books. It is not the same with church. The doors are open. The services are public. Nobody is forced to join the church and the main motivation is not what we obviously gain from joining. We join, because by doing so, we are embracing the purpose of Jesus for our lives.

### **Why should I join the church?**

It was never God's intention that Christians should be alone. In the New Testament, the church is most commonly pictured as a body or a building. These are communal metaphors. A brick on its own is just a brick – but as part of a grand design it can be part of something magnificent. A hand alone is grotesque – but as part of a body, it can change the world.

### **Why should I join the church? (2)**

Even a quick reading of the New Testament shows that Christians are expected to 'belong' to their church - not merely attend it. The mechanisms of membership are not all that clear in the N.T. (I think this is because the mechanics need to be flexible in different times and in different cultures) but the principle of membership is evident. In 1 Corinthians 5 v 2 a clear distinction is made between being 'in' and 'out' of the fellowship.

### **Why shouldn't I join the church?**

The Ethiopian Eunuch said to Philip why shouldn't I be baptised? (Acts 8v36) I like the question framed this way around. Why shouldn't I join the church? Are you are a Christian and West Road/Westley Community is the church that you mostly attend – what reasons have you got for not joining? We would be pleased to discuss them further with you.

### **Is the church important? (1)**

To answer this question we need only to look at Jesus attitude to the church. Jesus is passionate about the church. He was willing to give his life for the church (Ephesians 5 v 25) Jesus continuing work is to build the church (Matthew 16 v 18) Jesus is the head of the church (Ephesians 5 v 23) The church is Jesus' body (Colossians 1 v 18) The church carries Jesus personal guarantee of success and ultimate victory (Matthew 16v18) Through the church, God's glory is displayed to the whole universe. (Ephesians 3 v 10) The church is central to God's purposes in history and eternity (Ephesians 5 v 27)

### **Is the church important? (2)**

The church is God's main school of discipleship. The church is God's base for world evangelism. It is his model community. It is his hospital for the hurting: his provision for the hungry: his champion for the oppressed, his beacon of justice and hope, his light for the world and his workshop for heaven.

### **What do I have to give in terms of money, for example?**

There is no church membership fee. Finance is an issue, of course. Everything that West Road/Westley Community Church does is paid for by the giving of the members and congregation. The running costs of the building, rates, electric, heating, the upkeep of the building, the general expenses of ministry, photocopier, computers, phones, the staff wages – and on top of all that we give away to charity and missions each year. The Bible principle is that we should give generously (Deuteronomy 15 v 10), joyfully (2 Corinthians 9 v 7) regularly (1 Corinthians 16 v 2) and proportionally (1 Corinthians 16 v 2)

### **Tax Efficient Giving**

If you are a tax-payer, West Road/Westley Community Church can claim back the tax on any contributions (one off or regular) This makes a lot of difference – boosting our income by around 20%. For more information, or to set up a standing order please contact church treasurers via the church office. Information on giving is kept entirely private and confidential.

### **Making the church a beneficiary of your will**

The church has been enormously blessed over the years by the receipt of legacies. Some important projects and developments simply could not have been started without these gifts. Perhaps you could consider making the church a beneficiary of your will. Again our treasurers are probably the best people to talk to.

### **What will it cost me?**

It's a bit like asking what does it cost to raise a child? You can do a financial calculation (according to the Times Newspaper – the cost of raising a child to the age of 21 is over £180,000) but it doesn't really mean very much. The real cost is time, commitment and love.

### **What sort of commitment is involved? (1)**

It is a commitment to God and to each other; to love, nurture, encourage and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5v11)

### **What sort of commitment is involved? (2)**

To give some very practical answers -

- Make attending church a priority
- Join a Homegroup (if possible)
- Be part of the prayer life of the church – (All Church Prayer meetings are on Thursdays)
- Maintain good relations with other Christians
- Respect the leadership
- Look for ways to discover, develop and use the gifts God has given you for the good of the church
- Evangelism, social action, social justice, salt and light - how can you be involved?
- Support the church financially

**Do I have to do something to show I am a member?**

No. The normal practice is to welcome you in a normal church service, just by getting you to stand up (so people can see who you are) and then praying for you. We did hear of somebody who put off joining the church for years because they were so daunted by the thought of standing up in a service. If this, or anything else like it, is holding you back – please say.

**What if I don't want to be member anymore?**

There are three ways to get out of church membership: you can resign, you can be transferred to another church, or you can be expelled for heresy or conduct unbecoming. If you are resigning, we would like to talk with you to see if there are issues that can be resolved or failing that, lessons that we can learn.

**What if I have a problem with another member – is there a church way to resolve it?**

Good question. Yes there is. The first principle is that we should be forgiving (Ephesians 4 v 32) Beyond that, Matthew 18 v 15-18 details how we should respond to grievances. Gossiping, behind the scenes complaining, grudge nursing and faction building are not legitimate ways for Christians to deal with disputes and upset.

**Does it matter if my partner is not a Christian?**

Yes it does. God wants everybody to be saved. (1 Timothy 2v4) But in terms of becoming a church member, it shouldn't hold you back.

**Why doesn't West Road/Westley Community Church have church members meetings and voting? (1)**

Some churches do organise themselves in this way; others have Popes, Archbishops and Canons. But going back to the Bible what is the pattern there? In the New Testament we find that Elders and Deacons are appointed to direct and facilitate the work of the church. [\*] (Acts 14 v 23, Titus 1 v 5, 1 Timothy 3) The Elders lead the church and, to keep their focus on its spiritual ministry, delegate some of the practical responsibilities to the Deacons. (Acts 6 v 2)

[\*] God has also given to the church prophets, apostles, teachers, healers and administrators (1 Corinthians 12v28) but that is to open another discussion!

**Why don't you have church members' meetings and voting? (2)**

If important decisions are being taken, we commonly have a members' meeting, where the issues are aired and then discussed in smaller groups. In this way, we are gauging opinion and following the pattern of Acts 5 v 5 'this proposal pleased the whole church...'

**Who do I speak to if I'm not happy about something at West Road/Westley Community Church?**

Please speak up. It is much better to speak up than be unhappy or grumble behind the scenes. You can talk to any of the elders at any time informally. If you would like it to be a bit more formal you can ask an elder to mention a particular issue at our monthly

meeting. You can send a letter to the elders – which will be responded to either by letter or by arranging a meeting. You can ask for a meeting with the elders or some of the elders. If that sounds a bit daunting you could start by talking to your Homegroup leader.

### **Homegroups**

We encourage church members to be part of a Homegroup. This helps people to feel part of the church, develop friendships, study the Bible, pray and discuss real life issues. Homegroups are a strategic part of the pastoral care network of the church, and should be your first-line support network.

### **Houseparty at Sizewell**

Every year there is a church houseparty at Sizewell. Joining in with this is a very good way to get to know people – but you'll have to be quick it is normally fully booked very quickly.

### **All-Church Prayer Meeting**

We have an All-Church Prayer Meeting on the third Thursday of the month. Church Members are urged to make this a priority in their diaries. There is promised blessing when we pray together

### **Yes – I'm interested in taking this membership thing further – what should I do?**

Please speak to one of the elders. A meeting will be arranged with a couple of people; at least one of them will be an elder. You will have an opportunity to share how you became a Christian. We will discuss this document, including the 'what we believe' and the 'my commitment' parts. We will also ask you if you have been baptised (it is not a membership requirement but we will encourage you in this direction) and we will ask if you have been a member of other churches previously. If you are a member of another church, the normal practice is for us to write to then requesting a transfer of membership – but we understand that this can sometimes be complicated.

### **Outline of meeting**

If you go on to arrange a meeting with one or two of the elders this will be the general pattern of the evening.

- 1 Prayer
- 2 Ask you what stage you are at, questions you may have (in other words it won't be automatically assumed that you want to join)
- 3 Discuss any issues arising from this document – or further questions
- 4 Discuss the Basis of Faith
- 5 Invite you to share your story of becoming a Christian
- 6 Find out if you are / have been a member of other churches previously
- 7 Ask if you have been baptised (it is not a membership condition – but we will encourage you in this direction)
- 8 Invite you to share you testimony with the wider church family (this could be written and printed in the churches monthly Link Magazine, or you could be interviewed or give a testimony in a service – it's up to you) – and set a date for you to be welcomed into at a church service.

- 9 Ask you to write a short biographical profile
- 10 Ask you to sign that you give permission (Data Protection) for us to keep your details.
- 11 Ask you for a photograph
- 12 Leave you with the membership form to fill in and send back to church office

### **6 months check-up**

After you have been a member for six months we would like to meet up with you again to see how you are getting on and to hear your comments. Also it is an opportunity to explore together the gifts and talents that God has given you and to see if there are ways that they can be used in the church. (1 Corinthians 12 v 7)

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### Basis of Faith

(this is simply the Evangelical Alliance Basis of Faith)

We believe in...

- 1) The one true God who lives eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.
- 2) The love, grace and sovereignty of God in creating, sustaining, ruling, redeeming and judging the world.
- 3) The divine inspiration and supreme authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, which are the written Word of God—fully trustworthy for faith and conduct.
- 4) The dignity of all people, made male and female in God's image to love, be holy and care for creation, yet corrupted by sin, which incurs divine wrath and judgement.
- 5) The incarnation of God's eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ—born of the virgin Mary; truly divine and truly human, yet without sin.
- 6) The atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross: dying in our place, paying the price of sin and defeating evil, so reconciling us with God.
- 7) The bodily resurrection of Christ, the first fruits of our resurrection; his ascension to the Father, and his reign and mediation as the only Saviour of the world.
- 8) The justification of sinners solely by the grace of God through faith in Christ.
- 9) The ministry of God the Holy Spirit, who leads us to repentance, unites us with Christ through new birth, empowers our discipleship and enables our witness.
- 10) The Church, the body of Christ both local and universal, the priesthood of all believers—given life by the Spirit and endowed with the Spirit's gifts to worship God and proclaim the gospel, promoting justice and love.

- 11) The personal and visible return of Jesus Christ to fulfil the purposes of God, who will raise all people to judgement, bring eternal life to the redeemed and eternal condemnation to the lost, and establish a new heaven and new earth.
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Yes – I would like to become a member

Yes – I have read this document including the Basis of Faith and the sections ‘What sort of commitment is involved?’

Yes – I give permission for the following details (including my picture) to be stored in the church database and used appropriately (not passed to third parties) for the Church Directory, the Link magazine, noticesheet and website

First name(s)

Surname

Gender

male/female

Date of birth

Any medical conditions that it would be useful for the church to know about (such as epilepsy or diabetes)

Address

County

Postcode

Telephone (landline)

Telephone (mobile)

Email address

Signature

Date

Please write a short profile of yourself (200 words max) you could include things write such as - where you were born, what school you were at, your first job, present employment, hobbies and sports, your family, favourite book / film / music / holiday destination. Bizarre ambitions. Famous people that you have met, and a few sentences about how you became a Christian and what your faith means to you (use a separate sheet or send it by email if that is easier)

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