

## MEMBERSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP

### Membership and Fellowship

The Scriptures are wonderfully clear in teaching that when we put our trust in Jesus Christ and His redemptive work, we become children of God. Several wonderful expressions are used to describe that new family relationship, one of them being that we have become *members* of the Church, the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27). This membership is established by God Himself – it requires no further application, no doctrinal examination, and no service requirement.

The Scriptures also have a great deal to say about the individual Christian's participation in a local gathering of believers, which we refer to as the local church. The New Testament defines the requirements for being part of a local church, the conduct expected of its members, and the responsibilities of that local gathering to its individual members. This association with a local church can be described as "membership" (which speaks of status) or as being "in fellowship" (which describes the interactions of its members). The Bible tells us that when an assembly's members are in right relationship to God and to each other, there will be growth and edification (Ephesians 4:1-16).

This short guide attempts to define the Biblical standards for being a committed participant in any local church, and what it means to be "in fellowship" with the believers at Fifth Avenue Chapel. It does not pertain to our willingness to receive occasional visitors at the Lord's Supper, or the welcome of all individuals to our gospel and teaching meetings.

### **Requirements for Membership**

Those received into fellowship at Fifth Avenue Chapel are not by any means perfect, but they will evidence in word and deed several essential characteristics taught in Scripture.

**Believers** – Membership is limited to those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 10:9-10 (See also: 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4)

**Baptized** – Members of the local church have responded to the command to be baptized, as an outward symbol of having died to sin and self, and resurrection to new life. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19 (See also: Acts 2:38-41, Matthew 28:18-20)

**Sound Doctrine** – Not all members will be theologians or understand the deep things of Scripture, but they will be committed to the plain teachings of the Bible as expressed in the assembly's Statement of Doctrine and Practices. "Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus." 2 Timothy 1:13 (See also: Psalm 1:1-3, 2 John 1:10)

**Christian Walk** – Members of the assembly make a sincere effort to live according to biblical standards of conduct. While none of us is perfect, there should be no evidence of overt, unrepentant sin. "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to

keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:1-3 (See also: Colossians 3:5, 1 Peter 2:24, Matthew 3:8)

### **Evidence of Committed Membership**

The character, growth and ministries of a local church are dependent on the commitment and conduct of its individual members. The Scriptures anticipate evidence of committed participation in various ways, consistent with age, health, financial status, and other obligations.

**Faithfulness** – Those who claim membership in a local church shall be committed to its people and its ministries. Regular attendance and involvement in various church ministries is the norm, not the exception. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:25 (See also: 1 Kings 8:61, Acts 2:42)

**Worship** – Both individual and corporate worship are expressions of gratitude for the salvation we have been granted by faith in Christ, and for the other blessings we enjoy as children of God. Participation at The Lord’s Supper is an essential part of our faith, not simply an optional add-on. “Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” Hebrews 13:15 (See also: 1 Corinthians 11:26, Psalm 96:9)

**Service** – The New Testament teaches that all believers possess one or more spiritual gifts, which are special attributes or abilities, given by the Holy Spirit, for the performance of useful functions within the Body of Christ. Every member of the fellowship is part of “the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:16 (See also: Galatians 5:13b, Ephesians 4:1-16, Romans 12:4-8, 1 Corinthians 12:4-27).

**Submission** – God has provided the church with leaders who serve as shepherds of His people. Submission to these leaders is part of association with the local church. “Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Hebrews 13:17

**Support** – The ministries of the local church are dependent on the financial support of its members. The ability to provide this support varies from person to person but, wonderfully, the Lord is concerned not so much with the amount we give as He is with the attitude behind those gifts. “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” 2 Corinthians 9:7 (See also: 2 Corinthians 8:1-5)

### **Assembly Responsibilities to Its Members**

Just as individuals have personal responsibilities to the assembly, so the church has responsibilities to its individual members. What should members expect to receive?

**Love** – Believers are repeatedly encouraged to love one another and to express that love in practical ways. This mutual support is one of the reasons we enjoy being together! “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.” 1 Peter 1:22 (See also: 1 Corinthians 13, 2 Corinthians 6:1-10)

**Prayer** – Recognizing that we cannot address every need ourselves, we are also told to support one another in prayer. “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” James 5:16 (See also: Acts 6:4, Colossians 1:9)

**Teaching** – The local church is the primary provider of sound Bible teaching, encouraging spiritual growth. Supervision of that teaching is an important ministry of the Elders. “And I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.” Jeremiah 3:15 (See also: Acts 6:4, Titus 2:1)

**Shepherd** – While our Lord is physically separated from His church, He provides for its care in several ways. One of these is by appointing Elders who are charged with caring for those in the fellowship. “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly.” 1 Peter 5:2 (See also: Hebrews 13:17)

**Discipline** – On those occasions where sin takes control it is the responsibility of the church to take restorative action. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” Galatians 6:1 (See also: Hebrews 12:6-11, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Timothy 1:20)

### **Becoming a Member of Fifth Avenue Chapel**

Those considering membership at Fifth Avenue Chapel should be able to affirm commitment to two foundational assembly statements:

1. What We Believe – Formal Doctrinal Statement
2. Membership & Fellowship

Individuals in agreement with both documents, and who wish to pursue formal association with Fifth Avenue Chapel, may speak to any of the elders to initiate formal reception into the fellowship.