

Church Membership FAQ (Adapted from Mars Hill Church, Seattle)

Why does Renewal have “members”?

Renewal is a church, and the Bible uses the metaphor of a body to describe the church: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor. 12:12). It’s a beautiful illustration of how we’re each created to serve different functions, we need everyone to function in order to be a healthy body, and all of us as separate parts find purpose and unity under Jesus, “the head of the body, the church” (Col. 1:18). Members are the church (Eph. 2:19-22).

What if I am already a member at my “home” church and plan on being here only temporary (i.e., RCF student)?

Within our denomination (PCA), we differentiate between a communing member and an associate member. An associate member is defined as *members who are believers temporarily residing in a location other than their permanent homes. Such believers may become associate members of a particular church without ceasing to be communicant members of their home churches. An associate member shall have all the rights and privileges of that church, with the exception of voting in a congregational or corporation meeting, and holding an office in that church* (BCO 46-4). Therefore, we still encourage you to take your membership with us at Renewal until God sends you onto the next chapter of your life.

What’s the difference between a member and somebody who just goes to Renewal every week?

At Renewal, we make a distinction between “members” and “congregant.” If you’re not a member, then you’re technically a guest that remains to a certain extent separated from our church family, and separated from the maturity, protection, accountability, and care that comes with being an active part of the church. This may not make much difference for visitors and non-Christians, but Christians who consume rather than commit to a local church do a disservice to Jesus’ body (the church) and themselves. Members, on the other hand, participate as the church: sacrificing time, talents, and money; committing to the care and community of their fellow members; and submitting to the authority God has established to lead our congregation. In short, the difference between a member and a non-member is that members are “on mission.”

What does it mean to be “on mission”?

To be on mission means that you’re a Christian, that your identity is founded in Jesus, and that you embody the Renewal vision statement by living a life of worship to Jesus, a life of fellowship with other Christians, and a life of mission to non-Christians (Matt. 28:18-20). These expressions are only possible with an identity established in Jesus. To learn more about what it means to be on mission, read about Renewal’s gospel vision and our core values.

Why should I become a member? What if I’m already fully involved in the life and mission of Renewal?

The church of Renewal is a family in a real biblical sense, adopted by God (Gal. 4:6-7; Eph. 1:5). We care for each other, pray for each other, and serve together. If you’re already a Christian, if you’re already in some form of Renewal community, if you’re already giving of your finances and your time, then you’re already fulfilling some functions of a member. Without making an official commitment, however, we cannot provide the same level of pastoral care and community support, in part because

we may not know who you are, and in part because the Bible requires that we take care of our family first (Eph. 2:19 cf. Gal. 6:10).

Not unlike marriage, we believe you express commitment to the family of God through a formal covenant, expressed through membership. Participating in the life of our church without becoming a member is akin to “life partners” who live together and act like a marriage couple without the formal covenant commitment of marriage. Membership forges the mutual relationship between a Christian and the church body.

If you’re not a Christian, don’t worry about membership until you’ve been reconciled to God through Jesus. If you are a Christian who has spent a lot of time at Renewal, however, search your heart and identify your hesitation. There may be valid reasons to abstain from Renewal membership. But we’re rebels by our cursed nature; if you bristle at the very idea of becoming a member, ask yourself why—and don’t hesitate to speak with one of the elders.

What are the benefits of being a member?

Scripture calls us a body, a family, a household; being a Christian is not a solo effort. Jesus works through the church (Eph. 2:10), the church is Jesus’ body (1 Cor. 12:27), and apart from Jesus, you can do nothing (John 15).

This isn’t a country club, and it isn’t L.A. Fitness. Again, members are the church. “In love [God] predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Eph. 1:4-5; 2:19). You don’t join for the perks—although members are allowed to vote. The benefit is that we get to worship Jesus together, serve in His kingdom, and be children of God! We enjoy the guidance that his Word provides, and, when sin comes between us, we enjoy the reconciliation Jesus’ blood provides.

How do I become a member?

First, join one of our community groups and participate in community. Take the Renewal membership class offered (once or twice a year). Through the class, you will learn about membership. To complete the process, you will need to interview with a Session member, write statements about your conversion and your experience of the gospel, sign the member covenant, and lastly, take your membership vows in a Sunday service.

What is a “member covenant”? Can I read it before I become a member?

A covenant is a promise by which we obligate ourselves to one another in such a way that the obligation of one party is not dependent on the faithfulness of the other (Ezek. 20:44; 36:22; Ps. 76:11; Hos. 2:19-20; 3:1; 2 Tim. 2:13). A covenant is what we would use to describe the vows between a husband and his wife, and between God and his people. We ask our members to sign a covenant so that we know that prospective members understand what it means to be a part of the church. The member covenant is not a legal document or some sort of cultic rite. It is an affirmation, an agreement, and a source of accountability for both the church and its individual members.

Do members have to be baptized?

Since Jesus commands that all of his disciples be baptized, baptism is a requirement for all Renewal members (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 1 Peter 3:21). If you’ve already been baptized since you became a Christian, you don’t need to get re-baptized. If you have more questions about baptism specifically, please speak with Pastor Luke (lukewoo@renewalmainlin.org).