

Shelbourne Street Church of Christ
Covenant Membership Identity and Process Charter
September 2014

In the life of every church there are points when it becomes vital and life-giving to clarify its identity and trajectory. In order to facilitate that clarity, and to invite our congregation more fully into the future growth and vision God has for us as disciples of Jesus, the Shelbourne Street Church of Christ has composed this document outlining the shape and process of membership in our church.

What do we mean when we say “member”? - understanding the spheres of church membership

We believe that God, through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus, not only brought salvation to humankind, but that He brings an inheritance of identity; specifically, that through the sacrifice of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit, those who are saved are initiated into the Church. This Universal Church is described as “The Body of Christ” (Ephesians 1:22-23), and it encompasses all who are saved in Christ and are called His disciples. This Church exists to give glory to God in Christ by being the physical manifestation of His Spirit (Romans 8:9-11) and the agent by which God is fulfilling His purposes in the world. (2 Corinthians 5:14-20)

When we speak of “covenant” membership, we are talking about the pledge to the local congregation at Shelbourne Street, rather than the membership of salvation in the Universal Church. We see a scriptural pattern of the followers of Jesus committing themselves to relationship with localized groups of disciples from the time of the establishment of the Church. (Acts 2:42-47). These local groups have become the means by which the spirit of God creates community among believers and makes them the family of God and extensions of His greater Body. (Ephesians 2:19-22). Contrary to the beliefs of culture, we need each other; the Bible makes it clear that each follower has gifts that make them indispensable to the local community of disciples, and that individuals are unable to pursue an effective identity and relationship as a follower of Christ outside of the context of the community of the local congregation of disciples. (Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:18-21). While Christ alone adds to the Universal Church, we see that disciples entered into covenant with their local communities, pledging themselves to the other covenant members to seek unity and the common purposes of the Church together (Ephesians 4:1-6), to devote themselves to the particular aim of the congregation to fulfill the mission of the Gospel of Christ (Romans 12:4-8), and to entrust themselves to the appointed leadership of the congregation for guidance, protection and spiritual care (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:1-5).

Though subordinate to the above, Shelbourne Street Church of Christ’s status as a society under the Society Act (BC) and as a registered charity under the Income Tax Act (Canada) are also important. Our status as a BC society gives us certain benefits, such as the ability to hold property in the name of the Church and members not being liable for debts or liabilities of the Church in their individual capacities. The Society Act permits societies to establish both voting and non-voting categories of membership, but in our society bylaws we have provided that all individuals who are covenant members of our Church are also voting members of the society. Among other things, our status as a registered charity enables us to issue official tax receipts that allow donors to reduce their income tax otherwise

payable. When we speak of “society” members, we are referring to the Society recognition rather than other spheres of membership.

What are the benefits of becoming a covenant member at Shelbourne Street?

We believe that the primary way a local congregation exhibits their role as agents of God’s Spirit of Grace is in the way we bring people into belonging and community. It is in making anyone who comes in our doors feel like they are welcome and can pursue relationship with God and people who follow Him, and in how we extend God’s welcoming presence out into the communities around us that we extend the knowledge and intimacy of God to others.

While our desire is that all feel that they have a place to belong at Shelbourne Street, we also believe that the call to covenant membership is an invitation to greater intimacy with God and greater purpose as a follower of Jesus than one can experience apart from it. Jesus himself welcomed fellowship with everyone, yet He laid out the invitation of discipleship as a greater commitment that is grounded in, and leads to, greater intimacy with Him and the Father. (Luke 5:27-32, 14:25-35).

We believe that entering into a covenant membership with the body of disciples at Shelbourne Street leads to these benefits:

- Greater intimacy with God through the relational commitments to discipleship we make together.
- Greater intimacy with one another through a culture of mutual support, commitment and accountability.
- Greater equipping in ones spiritual gifts and skills for use in God’s Kingdom, and opportunities to use them meaningfully
- Greater voice and place in shaping and participating in the particular aims and goals of the local congregation to fulfill the mission of the Gospel.
- Greater opportunities for spiritual growth and transformation into the image of Christ through the community of the church.
- Greater security and guidance in that purpose of growth and transformation through relationship with a committed leadership.

Every covenant is a two-way street. Those that choose to enter into covenant membership with the church enter into the pledge of the church leadership to guide and be accountable for aiding in the growth of these areas in members’ lives.

What does covenant membership at Shelbourne Street look like?

We believe that God has designed His Body, on a great and small scale, to be reflective of the fullness of the varied gifts, skills, personalities and stories He has invested in His children. Not all covenant members will express their membership identity in exactly the same ways; instead it is the desire that through seeking the will of God’s Spirit and the community of the congregation, a member will seek the best ways to interpret the membership identity as they fit into the Body.

We do believe that a commitment to covenant membership means that an individual will commit themselves to the following principles of identity:

A Covenant Member of the Shelbourne Street Church...

- Regularly attends the opportunities afforded for growth and community in the congregation, including worship gatherings, classes, small groups, and opportunities for service and fellowship. (Acts 2:42-47, Hebrews 10:23-25, Titus 3:14)
- Allows God to transform them through stewardship in the areas of time, priorities, skills, finances, and spiritual gifting. (Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 8-9, 1 Peter 4:10-11)
- Commits themselves to the core beliefs of the church as outlined in our statement of faith. (Ephesians 4:1-5)
- Invests themselves in the loving relationships that drive the purpose and mission of the church, and seeks to show that love in all the areas of influence and impact in their lives. (Colossians 3:15-17)
- Entrusts themselves to the appointed shepherds of the congregation for leadership, guidance, and counsel, both in their individual lives and the mission of the congregation. (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5)

How do I become a Covenant Member of Shelbourne Street?

Since we believe the invitation to covenant membership is grounded in greater relationship with the local church, we want the process of becoming a covenant member to be relational as well. We want to illuminate an identity and encourage people in their desire and efforts to embrace that identity, as well as providing an opportunity for leadership and prospective members to know each other better.

Membership orientation will be organized twice a year or more as needed. The orientation group will be led by one of the elders, a staff member, and two or more additional covenant members. People that are interested in signing up for the group may contact the church office to find out when the next group is starting. Whether you have been a member at a Restoration church, a member of another church tradition, or are just beginning relationship with a church, we would ask you to invest at least 3 months time to develop relationships and get to know Shelbourne before considering covenant membership.

Over the course of meeting together, the group will discuss the core values of the church, the vision, mission, and aim of the congregation, the covenant promises of the leadership to covenant members, expectations of the covenant members, and spiritual gift and service exploration. At the end of the group sessions, each person will be offered the opportunity to affirm their desire to be in covenant membership with the congregation through a written response. New members will be formally introduced to the rest of the congregation and prayed over by the leadership at the next worship gathering.