

## **Member – Disciple - Partner FAQ**

At Woodside, we want to change the way we think about ourselves as follower of Jesus. We are moving from calling ourselves Members to Disciples and Partners.

### **Why are we making this change?**

Member is a term used by many denominations including the Presbyterian Church. A person becomes a member by going through a class (Inquirers, Roots, Confirmation) signing a covenant, and making a public statement of faith in Jesus Christ.

While this seems like a good process, it creates problems and challenges. Membership:

- Creates a line – you are in or out, a member or a non-member.
- Causes people to think of the church as a club. People have your name on the roll, they pay their dues, they are in the club whether they show up or not, they expect certain privileges.
- Requires leaders to judge whether to keep people on the Membership roll or take them off. This creates a very awkward situation and hurt feelings since there is no standard definition of what a member does. Members who move or become inactive often still feel like members of the church family. When we remove them they feel they are being cut out of the Woodside family. The new online nature of church also allows former members who now live in various parts of the country to worship, attend small groups and carry on mission even when they are geographically distant.
- Results in a large membership roll which includes many inactive people.

### **Isn't Being a Member Biblical?**

Yes and No. The word “member” appears only 19 times in the New Testament. About half of these refer to members of the Sanhedrin which condemned Jesus to death. Most of the rest of the “member” instances do refer to being members of the Body of Christ – this is a useful term but a member or organ of a body is very different from a member of a club. A body cannot live if a large number of its member organs are inactive.

### **What is a Disciple?**

Jesus' final words in Matthew 28:19 are not “Go and make members” but “Go and make disciples.” In fact the word “disciple” appears 294 times in the New Testament – mostly in the four Gospels and Acts.

### **How is being a Disciple different than being a Member?**

While Membership is a line (you are either in or out) a Disciple is on a journey. Jesus says, “Come follow me.” The literal meaning of the Greek word Disciple is “learner” or “student.” For Jesus this doesn't happen in a classroom but as you follow Him through life with others.

### **What does a Disciple do?**

At Woodside a Disciple grows by Loving God (Worship and Prayer), Growing in Grace (Scripture and Community), Sharing with Others (Gifts, Ministry/Mission/Evangelism)

### **Who can be a Disciple?**

Anyone! Children, youth, adults. If they follow Jesus you can start the journey, pause, take a break, go backwards or run ahead. It's up to you. The church leadership no longer needs to judge if you are in or out of the Membership Club. Nor is the role of the church to judge whether or not you are a disciple but to help you and every person take the next step on the discipleship journey with Jesus. People will be at different places on the journey.

The church will regularly invite disciples, through various ministries, to take the next step. These include join a growth group, join a mission, attend worship, give, pledge, serve in a ministry.

### **Doesn't the Denomination require us to have Members?**

Yes – but it lets each congregation define what this means. Going forward we will focus on helping people be Disciples of Jesus. Anyone in this group can decide to also be a Partner.

### **What is a Partner?**

To meet the Presbyterian Membership requirements we will offer a category called “Partner.” Partner is a *subset* of Disciple. All Partners are Disciples but not all Disciples have to be Partners. The term “Partner” comes from “Part” an alternate translation for the Greek word also translated as “member.” “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many *parts*; and though all its *parts* are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ.” I Corinthians 12:12 (NIV)

### **How do you become a Partner?**

Disciples “opt in” to be Partners once a year – in December – for the following year. They sign a Covenant which is similar to our current Membership Covenant (see below).

### **So what's the Difference between Member and Partner?**

The difference is you decide if you want to be a Partner for a year. The Leadership doesn't judge if you are a partner, you do. When the next December comes around you decide if you want to renew for another year. Those who sign the Partner Covenant can vote and be elected to office.

### **I'm a Member now. Will I lose anything with this change?**

No. You will still be able to vote at congregational meetings and be considered for office as an Elder or Deacon. You simply need to renew your Partner Covenant once a year.

### **What if I forget to renew my Partner Covenant or want to sign it later?**

There's no time limit. You can sign it mid-year.

### **How will I renew my Partner Covenant?**

We will offer multiple options – during worship, on the website, the app, through email. We will make sure those who do not use electronic devices or who are unable to come in person have the opportunity to sign the Partner Covenant if they wish.

### **Does being a Partner still make me a member of the Presbyterian Church (USA)?**

Yes.

**Can I still participate in or lead a growth group, mission or ministry if I'm not a Partner?**

Yes. You don't have to be a Member to be a leader or participant now.

**Do I have to commit to certain giving if I want to be a Partner?**

We encourage all followers of Jesus to give their time, talents and treasure to the Lord but there is no giving requirement in order to be a Disciple or Partner.

**What about my children or youth? Is there an age requirement?**

A person of any age can be a Disciple of Jesus. Our ministries will continue to help children and youth grow as Disciples of Jesus. Around 9<sup>th</sup> grade we will offer a course which helps young Disciples become Partners. This will be similar to what we know today as Confirmation.

## **The Woodside Partner Covenant**

Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and been baptized I feel led by the Holy Spirit to be a partner in the Woodside church community for one year. In doing so, I commit myself to *grow* in the following areas:

### **I will Love God**

*By gathering with believers to worship regularly*

*By praying daily*

### **I will Grow in Grace**

*By welcoming new people*

*By participating in a Growth Group, Ministry and/or Mission*

### **I will Share with Others**

*By sharing my spiritual and financial gifts.*

*By serving others and inviting them to follow Jesus.*