



Wavell Heights Presbyterian Church
Communicant membership guide



The logo consists of a stylized cross formed by two overlapping shapes, one blue and one green, positioned to the left of the word "Introduction" written in a handwritten-style font.

The “church” is not merely a building made of bricks and mortar. The church is God’s multi-cultural, multi-generational family of people who are being gathered and changed by Jesus Christ. Therefore, everyone who trusts and follows Christ is a member of God’s worldwide church, of which Wavell Heights Presbyterian Church is a local expression.

As local churches form and grow all over the world, they read the Bible and come to conclusions about what they believe and how they will act on those beliefs. Networks of churches with commonly held beliefs and practices are often called *denominations*.

Wavell Heights Presbyterian Church is part of a denomination which stands in an historic stream of Protestant Christianity, having certain convictions about the Bible, God, and church. We have a general “vision” for the kind of church we hope to be:

“In prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit and being guided by the unchanging truth of the Bible, our vision is to be a vibrant, intergenerational, multicultural community where the good news about Jesus Christ drives us into loving relationships, spiritual growth, willing service and clear witness - that the church might grow and God be glorified.”

Communicant Membership is a formal way for people to express their commitment to our growing church community—its people, beliefs, and vision.

In summary, a Communicant Member is a baptised Christian, who . . .

- (1) daily follows Jesus as their King and Saviour
- (2) consciously believes core Christian doctrines
- (3) actively commits to strengthening their church community, and
- (4) respects our denominational distinctives

We hope you enjoy reading through the five short sections that follow, and that you’ll prayerfully consider whether you’d like to become a Communicant Member. If you have any questions please speak to Matt or one of the elders.

Matt, Greg, Andrew & Steve

September 2018

1 DAILY FOLLOWING JESUS

2000 years ago Jesus called his first disciples by simply saying “*follow me*” (Mk. 1:17; Jn. 1:43). But it wasn’t a call to simply walk around with Jesus! It was a call to a whole new kind of life—to submit to Jesus as King and learn to trust him and walk in his ways. That’s what we call “discipleship”. Discipleship is not just going to church once a week. It’s a lifelong journey of *turning from sin* (sin is disobeying and disregarding God), and learning to *trust and follow Jesus*.

However, our daily tendency is to make *ourselves* the ultimate authority in our lives. It just comes naturally to us. But being a disciple is about making a conscious choice to say “no” to the rule of self, and say “yes” to the rightful rule of Jesus over us. Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must *deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.*”** (Luke 9:23) This means being a Christian is about daily saying “no” to ruling ourselves, and committing our lives to Jesus Christ. But it’s something we can’t do in our own strength—we need the Holy Spirit to work in us. He will enable us to slowly and prayerfully change to become more like Jesus (Romans 8:29). The New Testament give us guidance on what following Jesus looks like in everyday life:



- **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”** (Ephesians 2:8-9). Following Jesus isn’t about earning ‘brownie points’ with God. It’s a thankful response to the grace he has shown us through Jesus. You’re not saved by any effort on your part, instead *you follow Jesus because, through faith in him, you’ve been saved by grace!*
- **“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”** (1 Peter 3:15). Remember that God has set up Jesus as the rightful ruler over all creation. Tell your heart daily who runs the show.
- **“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful . . . so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”** (2 Timothy 3:16-17). One of the best ways to be equipped to follow Jesus is to read the book that’s all about him! Regular Bible reading—even if only short sections are read—can be life-changing.
- **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”** (James 1:22). Seek to be a person who hears what God says in the Bible and incorporate it into your life. Don’t take your cue from society, music, and movies—do what *God* says!
- **“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”** (Colossians 4:2). Daily seek to communicate to God in prayer. Praise God and thank him, realising you are dependent on him every second of your life. Pray for yourself, others, and the church.
- **“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”** (Galatians 6:10). God will provide many opportunities for followers of Jesus to do good things for others. Whether it’s the person who lives across the road, a workmate, someone at Uni, or someone at church, *do good works!*
- **“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another.”** (Hebrews 10:24-25) Regularly gathering with God’s people—on Sunday and through the week—is a big part of how we can help each other follow Jesus.

A Communicant Member seeks to daily follow Jesus as their King and Saviour.

2

BELIEVING CORE DOCTRINES

Here at WHPC we believe the Bible to be a collection of divinely-inspired documents that teach the truth about God, human nature, life, and eternity. As such, our consciences are bound to believe what the Bible teaches on these matters. Jesus prayed to his Heavenly Father for his followers, saying “*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.*” (John 17:17) If a person wishes to formally express their commitment to our church via Communicant Membership, we expect they will be people who consciously believe the clear truths that God reveals to us. Unless we agree on our core beliefs (called “doctrines”), our church will not enjoy the unity it needs to be effective in its life and witness.

The core doctrines of the Bible relate to who God is, who we are, and how people can come into a right relationship with God through faith in Jesus. Here’s a summary:

God: the God of the Bible is the only true God—a ‘triune’ spiritual being who exists as three co-equal, co-eternal persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

God as Creator: God created and sustains the universe. He created human beings to live under his authority as caretakers of this world. The world, including us, is *his*.

Humanity’s sinful state: human beings sought a path of independence from God’s loving rule. We are by nature, ‘sinners’. Our sin deserves God’s righteous judgment.

God became human, died, and rose again: Jesus Christ came into the world—fully God and fully human. He died, taking on himself the judgement for the sin of God’s people, and rose bodily from the dead on the third day.

Jesus will return: Jesus ascended to heaven, and will return one day to judge all people and establish the full and final reign of God in the new heavens and the new earth.

Salvation is found in Christ alone: a restored relationship with God is only found by turning from a life of disobeying and disregarding God, and trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and eternal life.

The Bible: the Bible is God’s “word” to us—his *message*. It is trustworthy and true in all that it intends to teach us.

Sanctification: God gives his moral instructions in the Bible to demonstrate his holy and loving character, to promote human flourishing, and to drive us to trust in Jesus Christ. It is God’s will that we grow in obedience to him: not to gain favour, but as a thankful response to his love and grace. God gives us his Holy Spirit who enables us to mature spiritually.

The Church: the visible church is the gathering of those who seek to trust and follow Jesus Christ. Everyone in the church has gifts and resources that can be used to encourage others.

Mission: the church has a mission to proclaim *the gospel*—to call all people to repentance and faith in Christ, whilst intentionally serving and doing good for others.

A helpful summary of our core beliefs is found in the Apostles’ Creed:

*“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord.
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.
He descended to the dead. On the third day He rose again.
He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic [i.e. universal] Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”*

A Communicant Member consciously believes the core doctrines of the Christian faith.

3 ACTIVELY COMMITTING TO CHURCH

Among all the various groups and associations in the world, the church is utterly unique. Why? Because the church is God's idea. The church is his intergenerational, multicultural family, saved by Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The church, therefore, is so much more than a building and so much more than an hour on Sunday. It's God's growing family, who witness to the wonder and worth of Jesus Christ in word and deed. It's a group of very different people to whom God gives gifts and resources in order to strengthen the life and mission of his church. Consider these famous words from the New Testament:

“For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord . . . Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality . . . If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (The Apostle Paul, Romans 12:4-18)

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and **you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Jesus, in Acts 1:8)

Far from merely being a nice association of moralistic people, the church is to live as Christ's “body” on earth—growing together, caring for each other, and reaching out to others. It is to be an active and enthusiastic community which seeks to bring glory to God through Christ in all things. Therefore, we expect that Communicant Members will . . .

- regularly meet for Sunday worship to celebrate the gospel, encourage your church family, and conscientiously listen to the preaching of God's word (Hebrews 10:24-25; James 1:22).
- pray regularly for the people in your church, including its leaders (Colossians 1:9-12).
- seek to do good to all, and to live at peace with those around you—especially those in your church family (Galatians 6:10; Romans 12:18).
- use the gifts and resources God has given you to strengthen the message, ministry, and mission of church (1 Corinthians 12:7; Romans chapter 12; Matthew 28:18-20).
- be aware that your public conduct serves as a witness to Christ and will shape people's perceptions of our church. Actions and attitudes that damage the public reputation of our church and its message will be taken seriously by the church's leadership (1 Corinthians 10:31; Philippians 4:5; 1 Timothy 5:17).
- be open to receiving pastoral care and spiritual counsel from the elders, the Pastor, and anyone set apart by them for this purpose (Proverbs 16:20; Hebrews 13:17).
- where possible, take part in celebrating the Lord's Supper when it is held (Acts 2:46).
- give regularly to support the financial needs of our church's gospel ministry (2 Corinthians 9:5-11), as your means allow.

A Communicant Member actively commits to their church in order to strengthen its members, ministry and mission.

4

RESPECTING OUR DISTINCTIVES

Presbyterianism has a rich history. It emerged from the Protestant Reformation (in the 16th century), finding its strongest historical roots in the British Isles. A “Presbyterian” is simply a follower of Jesus who is part of an historic Protestant denomination. Along with all of God’s people, Presbyterians love core Christian beliefs, but they also have some distinctive beliefs which are sometimes not shared by all denominations and traditions under the broader banner of Christianity. Here are some you need to know about:

Church Governance

One of our distinctives is that each local church is cared for by appointed leaders called *elders*. But elders aren’t like ‘bosses’ or corporate managers. Rather, they model their leadership on the example of Jesus by serving, praying, helping, and teaching others by their word and example. Collectively the elders (along with the Pastor) are called a “Session,” and are responsible for the overall direction and spiritual health of the church. They are there to help, encourage, and where necessary, call people to repentance. In keeping with the clear instructions of the apostle Paul, only men of good standing in the church may become elders.

The Lord’s Supper (Communion)

Communion in the Presbyterian Church of Australia is considered a sacred sign of God’s redemptive work in Christ. Unlike some churches, we do not believe that bread and wine (or juice) are mysteriously transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Nor do we believe that taking communion makes a person right with God. Instead, communion is a way to deeply reflect on and be humbled by the finished work of Christ. It reminds us of our need of Christ, and the grace that is ours through faith in him. Through sincere reflection on Jesus’ broken body and spilled blood, God strengthens us inwardly by the power of his Spirit. Generally speaking, only those who are old enough to ‘own’ and profess their faith are encouraged to participate. The Lord’s Supper is celebrated in our church on a quarterly basis, which is the practice of most Presbyterian churches in Australia.

Infant Baptism

Like virtually all churches, Presbyterians baptise adult converts to Christianity. However, we also baptise the children of believers. We consider the young ones among us to be followers of Jesus too. We do not teach that in and of itself, baptism saves people. However the waters of baptism are a “covenant sign” - they remind us of God’s promises in Christ and point us all to the hope held out in the gospel. The reality of the Christian life is not based on *when* water was put on a person, or *how much*, or in *what way*, but on the finished work of Christ.

The Sovereignty of God in Salvation

Presbyterians have a high view of the sovereignty of God. By ‘sovereignty’ we mean that God is free to exercise his rule and power in whatever ways match his good character and holy purposes. This applies especially in God’s ‘predestining’ of some people to be saved. While all people are called to repent and put their trust in Christ, those who do so are only able to because of God’s prior choice and power. The apostle Paul said “It is because of him (God) that you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Salvation is a miracle—something only God can do. And yet in the gospel God challenges all people to repent and believe, for all people truly owe him praise, trust, and obedience.

Continued on the next page . . .

Reformed Theology

The general theological perspective of our denomination is called “Reformed”. This means that our church seeks to derive its teachings and practices from the Bible. Our church agrees with the five ‘solos’ which emerged from the time of the Protestant Reformation (1500s onwards). These five Latin phrases sum up five key beliefs that we hold:

<i>Sola Scriptura</i>	“Scripture alone”	The Bible is our highest authority in matters of faith.
<i>Solus Christus</i>	“Christ alone”	Jesus is the only way to be reconciled to God.
<i>Sola Gratia</i>	“Grace alone”	God’s grace, not our works, makes us right with God.
<i>Sola Fide</i>	“Faith alone”	It’s by faith (a deep, humble trust) that we are saved.
<i>Soli Deo Gloria</i>	“God’s glory alone”	We should do all things to bring glory to God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith

Our church has an historical statement of our doctrinal position called the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. It is a helpful guide to the things we believe. In our denomination it is considered a “subordinate standard,” meaning we value the Confession, but realise that the Scriptures themselves are our key authority. Printed copies of the Confession are available upon request.

Sexuality

In keeping with the clear teaching of the Bible, we hold that God’s ordained context for the expression of human sexuality is in a lifelong, loving, monogamous marriage between one man and one woman. All expressions of humanity sexuality outside of this divinely appointed relational context—regardless of how satisfying or natural they might seem—fall outside the Creator’s intention for human flourishing. Such conduct, as with all conduct that deviates from God’s good creative intentions (such as lying, greed, theft), are out-workings of the brokenness of humanity which is in rebellion against its Maker.

The Family

We acknowledge God’s valuing of the family unit—that, where possible, children are to be raised lovingly by their biological mother and father. We grieve the prevalence of divorce, domestic violence, addictions, and other factors which lead to family breakdown. We also value the New Testament teaching that husbands are to exercise a special role of servant-hearted leadership in the home. This leadership is especially shown in how the husband loves, listens, and leads his family into greater knowledge and love of Christ.

Hopefully these points have given you some idea of the distinctives of our church’s denomination. Obviously, there are other denominations that share these distinctives with us, but we need you to know that we hold to these *by conviction*. You can become a Communicant Member even if you hold to different views on some of these points. But we ask that Communicants respect our distinctive doctrines and practices. “Respect” will mean remembering this is a *Presbyterian* Church, which is part of the long-standing Presbyterian tradition. “Respect” will mean being open and honest with where you may disagree, but doing so in a way that doesn’t undermine the unity we seek. It’s about “keeping the main thing, the main thing” in the life of our church.

A Communicant Member respects the fact that our denomination (by conviction) has distinctive doctrines and practices.

5 WHAT NEXT?

Communicant Membership is about living as a follower of Jesus in a local church community. It's a formal way of saying "I'm committed to the people, beliefs and vision of this church". But Communicant Membership is only one of three key ways to be part of our church:

1. Communicant Member	2. Adherent	3. Regular Attendee
<p>A <i>Communicant Member</i> is a baptised Christian who daily follows Jesus, believes core Christian doctrines, commits to strengthening their church community, and respects our denominational distinctives. Communicants' names are entered into the church's records as being formal members of our church. They have full voting rights at congregational meetings.</p>	<p>An <i>Adherent</i> is a Christian who is also committed to our church. While they wish their commitment to be acknowledged in the records of the church, they refrain from becoming a formal Communicant Member. Adherents are welcome to attend all Congregational meetings, and may vote on some financial matters relating to the church.</p>	<p>A "regular attendee" is a person who is part of our wider church community, but does not wish to have their name recorded as a Communicant or Adherent. They might demonstrate a strong commitment to Christ and the church, but choose to refrain from formally recognising this.</p>

We believe that all of God's people are equally valuable and precious in his sight. All those who trust and follow Christ are members of God's worldwide church. However, every person who comes to our church will eventually have to consider what their level of commitment and involvement is going to be. We want you to know that **Communicant membership is an excellent way to express your love for the Lord Jesus and your commitment to this part of his worldwide church.**

So where to from here? If you'd like to become a Communicant or Adherent please let us know. We will need to meet with you to discuss it. The Session meets regularly and will consider all those who wish to become Communicants or Adherents.

If you have any questions please speak to one of the elders, or email Matt at: matt@wavellpc.org.au. We'd be delighted to hear from you.

Whatever you decide, we hope that you grow in living a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27)— for the good of God's people, the growth of the church, and the greater glory of God.