



# **Talking About Church Membership and Friends of Stow Park Church**

*The small talk is over, and the question of 'joining the Church' has been raised.  
The person responding to the questions would probably be Stow Park Lay Leader  
but it might be an elder or a thoughtful Church member.  
The person asking the questions might, perhaps be you!*

*This Leaflet is designed to help answer your questions.*

**Stow Park Church  
Brynhyfryd Road, Newport, NP20 4FX**

An Ecumenical Partnership  
between  
The United Reformed Church  
and  
The Presbyterian Church of Wales



# Questions and Answers

## **Do I need to 'join' the Church and 'become a member' of it?**

Yes! The Church is more than a place you go to for worship or friendship. The Church is made up of people who are committed to following Jesus Christ. Everyone who is a Christian belongs in a special sense. Because they each belong to Christ they all belong to one another. Not only do you need to join the Church, the Church needs you.

## **What do you mean by the Church?**

The Church is the 'people of God', linked not by family relationships, but by relationship with Jesus Christ as 'one body in him'. Some belong to Christ's new community from birth because they are brought up within it. Some come into the community at a later age by deliberate choice. All remain within the community of the people of God because they acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

## **What do you mean by Membership?**

Members of the Church have made a public commitment to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour and serve within His Church. They have made promises to God and to each other. Together they are open to the demands Jesus will make on them through other people. Together they receive and share forgiveness and power from the Holy Spirit.

## **Do I need to be baptised?**

Baptism is a sign of being in Christ, part of 'the body', 'built into' the Church. It sets out for a particular person at a particular time all that God accomplishes in Christ for all people and all time. In baptism we are buried and raised with Christ; giving up the old and beginning the new life. So baptism is not just about formal membership but also about your relationship with Jesus Christ. In Stow Park Church we have two alternative forms of baptism, of infants and of believers. We expect Christians to be baptised only once. Baptism does not bring eternal life but is a sign that you have committed your life to God and Jesus and thus given eternal life by God's grace.

If you have previously been baptised but feel you need to be renewed in your spiritual life you may be rededicated in a special witnessing service.

## **What do you mean by infant baptism?**

When an infant is baptised, usually by sprinkling or pouring with water, the parents promise to bring up their children within the Christian community and faith. Later, when the children can take personal responsibility, and if they so decide they will make their own promises in a solemn act of commitment to Jesus Christ and his Church.

## **What do you mean by believer's baptism?**

When a believer is baptised, usually by immersion in water, the individual makes a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and his Church. Some people come to this point having grown up in the fellowship of the Church without being baptised as infants, because their parents believed it right to associate baptism with personal commitment. Other people will come to this point without having experienced the church or infant baptism, but now hearing the call of Christ.

## **What if I am already a member of another church?**

Stow Park Church can arrange to receive you by transfer if you are a communicant member of another church, whether URC/PCW or not. Should you move to another area similar arrangements can be made with a local church there.

## **What difference does 'being a member' make?**

The Christian life is all about receiving to give. The Church is the community which celebrates the Lord's Supper in remembrance of His death for us, as a sign of His coming Kingdom and as an expression of solidarity with Christ and with all believers. The members of the church have the privilege and duty to share in that act. They also share a commitment to witness to the Gospel and serve in the community where the church is set. Not to join with fellow members for these purposes is to hold something back in your commitment to Christ and to receive less from him.

## **Do I have to go to Church Meetings?**

All the most important issues in the life of the local church are brought to the Church Meeting for consideration and decision. Some will be about worship, or mission, or buildings; some a matter of purely local interest, some where the opinion of the local church is sought in shaping a national policy of the United Reformed Church or The Presbyterian Church of Wales. It is not so much a question of democratic procedures as bringing together as many members as possible to seek the mind of Christ in the decisions that need to be taken. Members should be there to assist in shaping the pattern of the church's work and witness.

## **What responsibilities would I take on?**

You cannot hold an office in the church unless you become a member. But this does not mean that all church members must hold office. You may be asked to take on a special responsibility because of your gifts, but for most church members their Christian responsibilities are much more beyond the church walls and meetings than they are within them. Our relationship with other people, our service to the community, our voice in shaping opinion and public policy, our employment or our leisure – these are all places where our Christian responsibility lies. Our service within the church may be limited.

## **I don't think my faith is strong enough.**

That hesitation must be taken seriously. But don't think that all church members are strong believers, untroubled by doubt.

Look around you during worship next Sunday; you will see others who are sharing your anxiety about the quality of their personal faith, however confident they may seem. The Church is there to help us all grow in our faith. Willingness to learn, and to admit the weakness of our faith at some points, is to be welcomed in church members, so long as we believe that with Christ all things will eventually become clear to us. Remember, faith has been compared with a pilgrimage, a journey which every Christian must make.

## **I don't think I'm good enough**

None of us are, that's why we are Christians. The Gospel is good news for those who know they are sinners. The Church seeks to follow the high standards set by Christ, but all of us know how far our best efforts to please him fall short. We are not made Christians by our merits, but by our faith in Jesus.

## **I'm afraid 'time' is a problem for me.**

It is for all of us. We have to balance the claims on our time and interest. Commitment to the Church can seem to be one more demand; but in reality all uses of our time fall within our Christian discipleship – we have to be Church members in everything we do. We shall need to give priority to sharing in the Church's worship and life, but spending hours in church buildings is not necessarily a better reflection of our discipleship than being a reliable friend and colleague elsewhere. Not having time may be an excuse!

## **What about money?**

We believe that the Church's work is Christ's work. We need to provide money for that both locally and in the wider fellowship, just as we provide time and energy and imagination. Our giving is regular and generous if we are indeed committed to follow Christ. All kinds of practical schemes using envelopes or bankers orders can be arranged to make giving regular. Tax payers can sign a covenant form at no extra cost to themselves to enable the local church to recover the tax paid on their giving. But in the end, you must decide how generous you can be.

## **Do I really have to choose one denomination?**

Well, you cannot join the great Church without belonging to some part of it so that means being part of a local church, and denomination, though there are more and more special situations, Local Ecumenical Projects, like Stow Park Church where new members can belong to several denominations. Stow Park Church is committed to seeking visible unity with all Christ's people and is a union which has brought together different denominations. Belonging to Stow Park Church is a first step towards discovering the unity Christ wills. *(Please see the Appendix at the end regarding 'Being a Friend of Stow Park', if you wish to belong to Stow Park but unwilling to leave your present church.)*

## **What must I do to become a Church Member?**

Talk to the Lay Leader, an elder or a friend who is already a member. If you want to go further, Stow Park Church will prepare you for membership by arranging a deeper discussion of some of the things we have talked about here, and other matters as well. Perhaps there will be a group of people preparing together to make their public commitment to Christ and to the Church. The elders and the church meeting will be told of your wish to belong and asked to approve, so that they can offer you their friendship and support. They are receiving you into membership rather than allowing you to join. It is good to have new members because they bring new gifts and new opportunities.

## **Well, I needn't decide straightaway...**

... But why not? The invitation is from Christ, and if by joining, you are confessing your faith in Jesus Christ, sharing it with others, and helping the Church to be more effective in bringing the Good News of Christ to the world, why delay? Certainly pray about it, then we hope, your prayer will lead to decision and action.

## **Why not now?**

We hope that you have been able to feel that you were part of this conversation. However long we might have made it, there would still have been points to clarify and claims that need considering. So do take the matter further. The Lay Leader, or an elder of the Church, will be pleased to help you.

## **Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of Stow Park Church**

1. With the whole Christian Church, Stow Park Church believes in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **The living God, the only God, ever to be praised.**
2. The life of faith to which we are called is the Spirit's gift continually received through the Word, the Sacraments and our Christian life together. **We acknowledge the gift and answer the call, giving thanks for the means of grace.**
3. The highest authority for what we believe and do is God's Word in the Bible alive for His people today through the help of the Spirit. **We respond to this Word, whose servants we are with all God's people through the years.**
4. We accept with thanksgiving to God the witness to the universal faith in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds. We acknowledge the declarations made in our own tradition by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ in which they stated the faith and sought to make its implications clear. **Faith alive and active: gift of an eternal source, renewed for every generation.**
5. We conduct our life together according to the Basis of Union in which we give expression to our faith in forms which we believe contain the essential elements of the Church's life, both universal and reformed: but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises to change the Basis of Union and to make new statements of faith in ever new obedience to the Living Christ. **Our crucified and risen Lord, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.**
6. Held together in the Body of Christ through the freedom of the Spirit, we rejoice in the diversity of the Spirit's gifts and uphold the rights of personal conviction. For the sake of faith and fellowship it shall be for the church to decide where differences of conviction hurt our unity and peace. **We commit ourselves to speak the truth in love and grow together in the peace of Christ.**
7. We believe that Christ gives His Church a government distinct from the government of the state. In things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head. Civil authorities are called to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind, and to respect the rights of conscience and belief. **While we ourselves are servants in the world as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.**
8. We affirm our intention to go on praying and working, with all our fellow Christians, for the visible unity of the Church in the way Christ chooses so that people and nations may be led to love and serve God and praise Him more and more for ever. **Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is: to God be eternal glory. Amen.**

# Admittance to Church Membership Service

## Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 12: 12-20, then verse 27

### Introduction

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church, and in accordance with the decision of Stow Park Church meeting, we now receive, by (re)affirmation of faith, into Full Membership of Stow Park Church, a local Ecumenical Partnership:

**Name(s)**

### The Affirmation

By (re)affirmation of faith we welcome you into membership of Stow Park Church. You have confessed your faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, and have accepted the privileges and responsibilities of the Church of Christ.

We rejoice in the pilgrimage that has brought you to this time and place. We give thanks to God for every community of faith that has nurtured your faith along the way, and for your desire to join with us at Stow Park in Christian faith and discipleship.

As you come to unite with us in this congregation we invite you to affirm your confession of faith, and to promise to live as faithful members of this fellowship.

So, **Name(s)**:

Do you confess your faith and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, maker of heaven and earth, giver of life, redeemer of the world?

**I/WE DO**

Do you promise to continue in the worship and fellowship of the Church in this congregation, accepting the gift and cost of following Christ, and proclaiming by word and action the good news of God in Christ?

**I/WE DO, WITH GOD'S HELP**

**Now a question to the congregation:**

In welcoming this/these friend(s) as fellow-member(s) in the life of this church, do you promise your friendship in the Lord, and will you give him/her/them your support in prayer and service, so that he/she/they, with us, may continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God and witness to Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

**Congregation only: WE DO, AND WITH GOD'S HELP, WE WILL.**

**Let us pray:**

God of grace, You call us to be Your servant people, and gather us into the body of Christ.

We thank You for sending **Name(s)** to work with us in serving your kingdom.

Confirm us all in the power of your covenant to live in Your Spirit, to love each other and to share the mind of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**AMEN**

**The Lay Leader and one or more elders greet the new member(s) with the right hand of fellowship as a sign of welcome.**

## **Friends of Stow Park Church**

If you are a member of another Church or Christian Denomination but attend Stow Park activities, such as Stow Park Café Church, Stow Park Ecumenical Bible Studies, or Prayer Meetings and would like to belong to Stow Park in a more formal manner but still wish to retain membership of your present church or denomination, you may like to consider becoming a formal **Friend of Stow Park Church**.

### **What would this entail?**

Accepting the **Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of Stow Pak Church** as laid out in this booklet.

### **Would I be able to attend and vote at Church Meetings?**

You would be welcome to attend and vote on domestic issues affecting Stow Park Church or Centre only, but not on any matters that affect the wider denominations.

### **Would I be able to become an Officer in the Church?**

Only as a Volunteer in the Church and Centre which is important and vital work and would be greatly appreciated.

### **Is there any Financial Obligation?**

No, but if you wish you may regularly or occasionally contribute to the running expenses of the mission of Stow Park Church or Centre.

### **Would I be able to take part in other activities in the Church or Centre?**

Most certainly and you would be made most welcome.



## Membership Analyses Card

### Confidential Questionnaire

Name ..... Date of birth .....

Address.....

Post Code..... Telephone Number.....

Email (if any).....

Previous Church (if any)

Do you believe in: The Nativity (Virgin Birth): Yes/No Christ's Resurrection: Yes/No

The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit): Yes/No

Life after Death: Yes/No

Have been baptised? As a child: Yes/No

As an adult by immersion: Yes/No

If 'No', would you like to be baptised: Yes/No

Have you ever given your life to Jesus (Been born again)? Yes/No

## Friends of SPC Analyses Card

### Confidential Questionnaire

Name ..... Date of birth .....

Address.....

Post Code..... Telephone Number.....

Email (if any).....

Previous Church (if any)..... Status/Position.....

Do you believe in: The Nativity (Virgin Birth): Yes/No Christ's Resurrection: Yes/No

The Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit): Yes/No

Life after Death: Yes/No

Have been baptised? As a child: Yes/No

As an adult by immersion: Yes/No

If 'No', would you like to be baptised: Yes/No

Have you ever given your life to Jesus (Been born again)? Yes/No

# Renewal of Baptismal Promises Service

## Introduction

As a community of God's and in conjunction with **Name** let us remember that we have been baptized and reaffirm our commitment to follow Christ in baptism.

God has set us as a seal upon His heart.

In baptism, God has brought us into union with Christ, made us one with all His people in heaven and on earth and assured us of everlasting life.

## Scripture Sentences

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another. (*John 15:16-17*)

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. (*1 Corinthians 12:12-13*)

## Profession of Sinfulness

Heavenly Father, I confess that since my baptism there have been times when I have not borne the fruit that You asked me to bear when I was baptised; that I have often neglected to honour Your name and left undone those things that I once promised to do for you.

Father, here and now I humbly ask your forgiveness in the belief that you will always do so if I come to you in penitence and truth and this I now do in the name of Jesus, your Son and my Redeemer.

## Profession of Faith

I believe in the one and only living and true God, creator, preserver and ruler of all things in heaven and earth. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Him alone I worship and in Him I put my trust.

I believe that God, in His infinite love for men gave His eternal Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who became man, lived on earth in perfect love and obedience, died upon the cross for my sins, rose again from the dead and loves me for evermore, my Saviour, my Judge and my King.

I believe that, by the Holy Spirit, this glorious Gospel is made effective so that through faith I receive the forgiveness of sins, newness of life as a child of God and strength in this present world to do His will.

I believe in the one, universal, apostolic church, in heaven and on earth, wherein by the same Spirit the whole company of believers is made one Body of Christ, to worship God and serve Him and all men in His kingdom of righteousness and love.

I rejoice in the gift of eternal life and believe that, in the fullness of time, God will renew and gather in one all things in Christ, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever.

## Thanksgiving for Baptism

Strong deliverer, holy One, for you alone my soul waits in silence, from You comes my salvation. Your Spirit first brooded over the waters of chaos, bringing life to a formless waste. After waters flooded the earth You made a covenant with Your people and gave us the rainbow to be a sign of hope. Through the waters of the sea, You led Your people out of bondage from slavery to freedom.

You sent Your Son Jesus who was baptized in the Jordan and received Your Spirit.

As I share in the baptism of His death and resurrection You set me free from the bondage of sin and opened the way to eternal life. For many waters cannot quench love.

**The waters closed in over me, the deep surrounded me. Out of the darkness I called to You and You answered me. You brought up my life from the depths. You are the Lord, my God.**

I praise You for Your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of joy who teaches us and leads us into all truth. You gather us in the Church through Christ, a people of your choosing, called to live justly and in peace. And so to You be all praise, honour and glory, through Jesus Christ our Saviour who with You and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever.

## **The Peace**

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you now and always.

## **Some Relevant Facts about Stow Park Church**

We are an Ecumenical Partnership, United Reformed (ex Congregational) and Presbyterian working as one church with responsibilities to the two denominations. Our Trustees are the Elders of the Church, appointed by the Church Meeting and ordained for life but serving for an agreed period of time. We are overseen by The Revd. Branwen Rees who is the ordained URC Minister for the 8 East Wales URC churches and we are led by Mr. Mathias Tchatchoua our Local Church Leader.

We meet for Sunday Worship at 10:45 a.m. and have Café Church at 6:00 every Sunday Evening. We have an active Children's and young people's ministry meeting on Sunday mornings.

We have an ecumenical Prayer Meeting every Tuesday morning at 11:00 a.m. Led by Mrs Lorraine Sampson and also an Ecumenical Bible Fellowship every Friday Afternoon at 16.00 p.m. Led by our Church Leader.

Our Overseas Mission is mainly through the Charity, Health Help International or HHI for short which we started in 1999 and which supports the destitute and disabled in Zambia and India, working from its office in Stow Park Centre. It is now a separate organisation with its own volunteer staff and registered charity status.

Our UK mission is centred in our Community Centre attached to the Church and has been helping 'those on the fringe of society' since 2010. It is staffed by a small dedicated team of paid employees and meets the needs of the community in many ways including training in Printing and other social enterprises. It has its own Trustees and Charity status and does extremely valuable work as it is open every weekday.

The current Church Elders are:

Pastor Mike Mortimer, *Chairman*  
Mr. Mathias Tchatchoua, *Secretary and Local Church Leader*  
Mrs. Lorraine Lane  
Mrs. Christine Roberts, *Treasurer*  
Mrs. Lynne Pope ( *Minutes Secretary*)

The current Centre Trustees are:

Mrs. Sheila Jones, *Chair*  
Mr. W. Clason, *Secretary*  
Mrs. Deborah Clason, *Treasurer*  
Mr. John Matthews.

Centre Staff:

Mrs. Helen Dowdell, *Manager*  
Mrs. Marie Crouch *Administrator*

