



## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

at  
First Evangelical Free Church (FEFC) of Chicago, Illinois

### Membership and Why It Matters

At First Evangelical Free Church, we understand that God automatically makes us members of the universal Church—the body of Christ Jesus—when we receive God’s grace through faith. At the same time, we believe that God directs us to commit to and share our lives with one another in specific gatherings, in local churches. “Church Membership” is the commitment to journeying with First Free Church in this way.

The purpose of this document is to clearly outline the process, requirements, responsibilities, and privileges of members of First Evangelical Free Church. Here are just three reasons why membership matters to us:

1. **It is a sound, biblically-based concept.** Believers are directed to meet with one another consistently (Heb 10:25), to confess their sins and pray for each other (James 5:16), and multiple other activities that can only take place in the context of commitment with a specific group of people, a local church.
2. **It sets us up for optimal growth and service.** There are some things that are only achievable from a place of full commitment; becoming a member of First Free opens up these opportunities so one can experience as much of an opportunity to grow and serve as possible in our church family.
3. **It course corrects for a commitment-less culture.** It’s no secret that people are terrified of commitment in our society, and the cost to our families, friendships, associations, and everything predicated on any sort of robust relationship suffers as a result. God calls us to a different way of life, and the process of membership helps us to experience this despite our fearful, cultural trends.

### How we are organized

- **Current EFCA partnership** – Since its inception in 1950, the EFCA has grown from about 275 to nearly 1500 autonomous churches united by a mutual commitment to serve the Lord Jesus by making disciples in about 50 different nations. We remain a member church of this network, located in the Windy City region of the Great Lakes District. Our sister churches ascribe to a similar Statement of Faith as ours:
- **Non-profit status** – In addition to being a member church of the EFCA, First Free is also a tax-exempt, 501(c)3 non-profit corporation under the State of Illinois. Our articles of incorporation are on permanent file with the State.

- **Official Church By-Laws** – Our present By-laws were adopted in January 2016, and undergo occasional updates and modifications at Annual Ministry Community Meetings. Our By-laws are the guidelines we use in ordering our affairs as a self-governing church. (Available at [firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/](http://firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/))
- **Congregationalist polity** – We maintain a congregational form of polity with our sister churches in the EFCA, both because we find warrant for this approach in the Scriptures' description of the early church and because the founders of the Free Church movement saw the negative results of outside powers or a closed group of people making all the decisions for local churches, such as the state or an elite group of leaders who are unaccountable to anyone else. We recognize that there are other forms of church government that people have developed from their reading of the New Testament, but congregationalism is our heritage. This means several things but especially the following:
  - **Allowing leaders to lead through our willing submission** – Part of God's plan is to provide training, guidance, and accountability for each one of us through leadership in the church. Our submission to church leadership is not a blind, no-questions-asked sort of obedience. Rather, a congregational form of government and the healthy functioning of the body of Christ require concrete familiarity, active love, and mutual submission that seeks the welfare of the entire body of Christ. (cf. Ephesians 5:21, Hebrews 13:17)
  - **Maintaining both unity and freedom amidst diversity** – A wide range of people from diverse backgrounds comprise our church family, holding a spectrum of different views about various spiritual matters. At First Free, we will uphold the standards of Scripture to provide doctrinal unity, especially emphasizing the ten articles of our Statement of Faith. Where Scripture does not draw a clear line, we will allow for disagreement; at the same time, we endeavor to exercise our liberty in such a way that we do not cause our brothers or sisters to stumble. We want to encourage each and every person to grow in their maturity and find a fuller life in Christ. (Romans 14:13ff, 1 Corinthians 8:9ff) (Note: See document on Our Handling of Disagreement for more information available [firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/](http://firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/))

## Benefits of Membership

Membership is not required to be part of our church community, to experience the rewards of Christian fellowship, community, and worship at First Evangelical Free Church. However, there are important additional benefits that go with committing to church membership.

- **Members are more firmly connected**, actively interrelated to the other parts of the body at First Free and therefore experiencing both greater unity with them and with God.
- **Members are significantly participating in mission**, helping to make disciples as a part of God's overarching plan of redemption. Ministry opportunities abound to share, grow, get equipped, be encouraged, and give of your time, talents, and treasures.
- **Members' commitment to belong yields growth**, both personally as a result of obedience to God's call on your life and together with the rest of First Free as we pursue life in Jesus in unity.
- **Members receive the highest priority of care and support**, both spiritually,

relationally, and financially from First Free's staff, leaders, and other members.

- **Members encounter increased opportunity for leadership and to help select leaders** since some leadership roles are reserved for members alone (e.g. Global Outreach Team leader) and only members can vote on the selection of some leaders (e.g. pastor or elder board member).
- **Members can help to set direction and vote on major issues** at our Ministry Community Meetings.
- **Members have access to more detailed, interior information about our church family** through congregational meetings, mailings, and have greater access to pastoral and elder leadership.
- **Members are held accountable and hold others accountable**, mutually supporting one another where it really matters.

## Qualifications For Membership

These qualifications are based on the 5th Article of our Official By-Laws (Available at [firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/](http://firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/))

- Membership at First Evangelical Free Church is hope to those who confess trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as personal savior.
- Members will commit to conducting themselves in a manner worthy of the Christian faith.
- Members must subscribe in all respects to the doctrine set forth in Article 3 of the By-Laws, which parallel the ten articles of our Statement of Faith (available online at [firstfree.com/our-people-and-beliefs/](http://firstfree.com/our-people-and-beliefs/))
- Members will demonstrate a willingness to work with other members of the Church to be disciples and make disciples of Jesus Christ while developing and using their resources and spiritual gifts to fulfill the vision and mission of the church.

## Responsibilities and Expectations of Members

- **Living under the saving lordship of Jesus Christ**
  - Members should have assurance that all their sins are forgiven and publicly confess Jesus Christ as their personal savior. God's Word says that you can be fully assured that your sins are forgiven and that you are walking in a right relationship with Him. (Hebrews 10:22, 1 John 1:9, 1 John 3:18-24)
  - Members are determined to follow Christ and live a life of holiness and devotion to him through God's grace and power. Jesus is the cornerstone of our life together as church, and we are promised as believers that the Holy Spirit will be active in our lives, working to make us more like Christ. (Ephesians 2:20, Romans 8:26, 27; Matthew 6:24-33; Colossians 2:6, 1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)
- **Work with the philosophy of ministry of First Free** (Note: see Article 3 & 4 of By-Laws for detail, available at [firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/](http://firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/))
  - Members are willing to respect the Statement of Faith and doctrinal positions of First Free in particular and the EFCA in general. We strive to live and work under the authority of God's Word; so, we ask for your awareness of our understanding of how Scripture structures our beliefs and activity.
  - Members are willing to submit to and support the leaders of First Free. God has determined that every local church have a group of people who are to discern Christ's leading for that church, make decisions based upon sound biblical

principles, and serve and care for the congregation. He calls us to support these leaders actively. (Matthew 18:15-17, 1 Thessalonians 5:11-13, Hebrews 13:17)

- Members are willing to engage in the mutual accountability of church discipline. When one of us sins and is unrepentant, we are obligated by Scripture to hold that member accountable based on biblical standards of a Christian lifestyle. We do not aggressively seek out opportunities to discipline, but when arise, we will move to restore the person to fellowship with God and others as Scripture describes—seeking to produce healthy faith, encourage spiritual healing, and preserve both the purity and integrity of the witness of the Body of Christ. Such matters involving church discipline include violations of Christian love, unity, morality, and truth. (Galatians 6:1,2; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:13; Ephesians 4:15; 2 Thessalonians 3:14; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:10-13)
- **Dedicated to a life of Bible study and prayer, both personally and corporately**
  - Members know and practice that the Bible is the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16)
  - Members are willing to submit to the authority of the Bible. We should read the Word of God daily and apply its lessons for living, resulting in spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:2, Romans 15:4).
  - Members recognize that we depend upon God for the illumination of Scripture, guidance, strength, health, protection, and spiritual renewal. Members seek a life of devotion in prayer that deepens one's relationship with God and draws on the power that only God's Spirit can provide.
  - Those of us living with family will endeavor to cultivate them on Biblical principles. We believe strong Christian homes will result when people pray for their families and seek to know and obey God's Word. (Proverbs 12:7b, Ephesians 5:22-6:4, Deuteronomy 6:4-9)
- **Actively participate in the community life and ministry of First Free Church**
  - Members seek to follow Jesus' command to love one another, encourage each other to growing fellowship with God and all who are a part of the First Free Church in the day to day (John 13:34-35; Romans 12:5, 10a, 14:19; Hebrews 10:24-25; James 5:16; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 2:5)
  - Members are committed to regular, concrete expressions of community life, attending worship services, getting plugged in with a small group, and participating in the ministry teams of our church family
- **Support the spreading of the gospel and the financial health of this church with tithes and offerings.**
  - God's Word tells us that a true disciple of Jesus Christ will be a faithful steward willing to give of time, talent and resources as an integral part of what it means to serve and become more equipped to minister. (Acts 20:3-5, Galatians 5:13;
  - Note: supplemental section 1 on Stewardship for more information, available at [firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/](http://firstfree.com/our-people-and-belief/).

## What Are The Steps To Church Membership?

There are three basic steps to church membership at First Evangelical Free Church: Participate in this class, you are actually pretty close to becoming a member. We recommend the following steps based on your sense of God's leading to move forward:

- First, participate in the Intro & Belonging Class, where you'll learn about our church

history, mission, vision, and the details about church membership. The class is typically scheduled 2-3 times per year, depending upon interest/need. There are two sessions that are each 90 minutes in length, are scheduled on consecutive Sundays immediately following a church worship service.

- Second, share your testimony of Faith in a membership interview with the church membership committee (will include a church elder or pastor and another current church member). The interview includes a chance to engage in questions and answers between the candidate and committee related to membership requirements.
- Third, if you want to become a member and meet the qualifications outlined above, then at the next scheduled Ministry Community Meeting (MCM) following your participation in class and your membership interview, your name will be included on a ballot of new member candidates, and a quorum of current church members may vote to affirm candidates as new members.

### **Once you are a church member, then what?**

Start living the vision and participating in the mission of our Church:

- **Immediate:** Sunday service, prayer, ministry teams, special events (e.g. Thanksgiving Eve service and pie fellowship on Wednesday, November 21)
- **Near future:** Get involved in a Small Group/Bible Study. New signups start every quarter. Look for information on our website or in the church bulletins each Sunday.
- **Longer term:** Get engaged in a ministry team, such as teaching Sunday School to children or youth, worship arts, hospitality, outreach and service projects, the possibilities are endless!
- **Begin to tell the story:** Share your story and God's story with others, in your neighborhood, workplace or favorite coffee shop, what God is doing in and through your life as you seek to follow Jesus while belonging to the First Free Church family.

If you are not sure about becoming a member of First Free yet, here are a few concluding words of encouragement:

- Talk to us!
- Explore community life here (i.e., Sunday worship service, small groups, ministry teams, etc.)
- Continue to seek God through prayer, the reading of Scripture, and the counsel of others.