

Stevenston High Kirk

(Church of Scotland)

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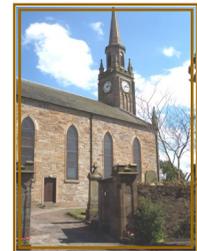
Members Handbook

"Touching the World with the love of Christ"



*Stevenston High Kirk
Schoolwell Street
Stevenston
North Ayrshire
Tel: 01294 463356*

*"We are a church with an open door and a warm
welcome!"*



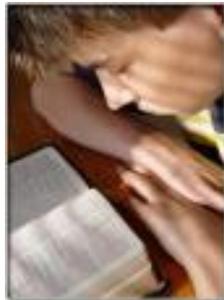
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We give grateful thanks to the Communications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland for kindly allowing us to reproduce in part and adapt sections of their "Members Handbook".

Recommended Reading

The booklist here is recommended reading to help you in your Christian faith. Please contact the minister for more information on recommended readings.

Don't just sit there.. Pray something! (Ronald Dunn)
Don't just stand there.. Have Faith! (Ronald Dunn)
A Bus from Bangkok (Dorothy Rose)
The Power of a Praying Parent (Stormie Omartian)
Screwtape Letters (C S Lewis)
Mere Christianity (C S Lewis)
Knowing God (J Packer)
Why Revival Tarries (Leonard Ravenhill)
Fair Sunshine (J Purves)
Daily Light (Samuel Bagster)
Morning & Evening (C H Spurgeon)
Around the Wicket Gate (C H Spurgeon)
Spurgeon (A Dallimore)
Memoirs and Remains of Rev Robert Murray McCheyne (A Bonar)
In the grip of Grace (Max Lucado)
Future Grace (John Piper)
Desiring God (John Piper)
Grow in Grace (S. Ferguson)
The Christian Life (S. Ferguson)
How to Read the Bible for all it's Worth (G Fee)
Pursuit of God (A W Tozer)
Experiencing the Depths of Christ (Madam Guyon)
Sit, Stand, Walk (Watchman Nee)
Absolute Surrender (Andrew Murray)
Power through Prayer (E M Bounds)
Pilgrim's Progress (J Bunyan)
Life of God in the Soul of Man (Henry Scougal)
The Cross in Experience of our Lord (R A Finlayson)
The Lord's My Shepherd (Douglas MacMillan)
God of all Grace (Douglas MacMillan)
Expository Thoughts (J C Ryle)
Why I am a Christian (John Stott)
Cross of Christ (John Stott)
Joy Unspeakable (Martyn-Lloyd Jones)
Great Doctrine Series (Martyn-Lloyd Jones)
A Faith to Live By (D Macleod)
Be Series (Warren Weirsbe)
Essential Truths of the Christian Faith (R C Sproul)
Commentary on the whole Bible (Matthew Henry)



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Introduction

When you publicly confessed faith in Christ and joined his church, it was a source of joy and encouragement to the wider church as well as to you. However, although you may have just become a member, it may be the case that you might not know much about what joining a church really means. You might not even be sure why you should have joined a particular church at all – you may have joined one just because you know it is what Christians tend to do!

This kind of feeling is not unusual: many new believers have these kinds of questions and this booklet is designed to help you to understand why every believer should join a church and what being part of a church involves.

Why should I join a church?

To begin with, it is important to understand that when you became a believer you entered a world of new relationships: Of course, the most important of these relationships is the one between you and Christ – but you have also come into a Christian family of brothers and sisters as well as a Christian kingdom of fellow citizens (Ephesians 2:19).

Although the bond which binds the family – or, if you like, the citizens – is a spiritual one, God commands us to express that bond, and nurture it, in a visible and open commitment to one another, a commitment which will always involve privileges and responsibilities.

When we think about it, that is the way all families and kingdoms work: within families, for example, there are relationships with distinctive roles. Within most families, you will find relationships such as parents and children, husband and wife, older brother and younger brother and so on. God structures all these relationships and, as a result, we find privileges and responsibilities working both ways within the organisation known as 'the family' (see, for example, Ephesians 5:22- 6:4).

Your elders, or others in your congregation, might guide you to some useful daily reading notes that explain passages for you (e.g. Scripture Union Notes, Our Daily Bread, UCB Devotional, Spurgeon's Morning and Evening).

Make sure you read both Old and New Testaments, reading larger passages of stories (such as the life of Joseph), and smaller sections when it is detailed teaching (like Ephesians). Try learning some of the Proverbs (God's gems of common sense for daily living) and some of the psalms (the language of the heart) off by heart and meditate on them (Psalm 119:99,100).

In all your reading of the Bible, pray for the help of God's Holy Spirit to guide and teach you.

Conclusion

We hope that this booklet has given you an insight into the life and work of the High Kirk and some of the privileges and responsibilities of being a member of this congregation.

If you have questions that have come to you from reading this booklet, please speak to your Minister or any of your Elders who will be happy to help you in any way they can.

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Community

You must also live out your Christian life in your neighbourhood and at your workplace.

Your environment is unique to you. God has placed you in your unique environment to be a witness to himself both by what you say, but also, perhaps more often, simply by your consistent Christian lifestyle.

Your workplace and neighbourhood are mission fields and so, whenever an opportunity arises, try to humbly testify as to why you are a Christian, and pray that your lifestyle will not contradict the Gospel message.

Your Spiritual Life

It cannot be overemphasised that you will not progress in any area of the Christian life unless you continue to care for your own spiritual life. Nothing is more important than your own personal relationship with Christ and, like any relationship, it needs to be protected and nurtured. In this connection, it is vital that you develop good spiritual habits for yourself, apart from your involvement with the church.

The two key areas that you must protect at all costs are your own times of Bible reading and prayer. It is during these times in which he speaks to you through the Bible and you to him in prayer that your relationship with God will grow. You will discover that reading and prayer are not always easy and that the Devil will spare no effort in keeping you from them, but your spiritual health will be greatly enriched as you daily look to Christ in worship for strength, guidance and fellowship.

When it comes to our personal time for worship, try to find a quiet place and time when you can be guaranteed some peace to meditate, read and pray. Make sure that you develop it as a daily routine. It may also help to try to vary the way you read the Bible.

The same holds true of kingdoms: they are also structured with a King (or Queen), treasurers, administrators and lawyers as well as a whole host of offices and roles which enable all the citizens to live in harmony.

In this respect, God's family, or kingdom, is no different: when we become believers, God commands us to join his special family / kingdom called 'the Church'. Although there is an important sense in which you join this kingdom inwardly when you are born again, God commands you to join it outwardly as well.

In Old Testament times, you would enter God's kingdom visibly through circumcision – a sign of initiation and cleansing – but, in our New Testament age, you enter the Kingdom visibly by acknowledging Christ's Lordship and by being baptised – also a sign of initiation and cleansing (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 8:36-38; 1 Peter 3:21)

Christ's church is organised into individual, connected groups known as 'congregations'. This title was often used in the Old Testament to describe a local assembly of God's people. In the New Testament also, Paul could speak of the 'churches' (plural) in Galatia. So, wherever the church exists in any place, the people belonging to it are called a 'congregation' or 'assembly' and when you join the church to become part of it, you will do so by joining a local congregation which will be organised as Christ commanded it to be.

You have joined the congregation of the High Kirk which is part of the Church of Scotland. Although the High Kirk congregation is made up of people who have been brought up in the Church of Scotland, many have also come from other denominations. There is a booklet welcoming you to the High Kirk which will explain more about the history of the local and national church.

The structure is just as we see it in the New Testament. To help the church to function properly as a united fellowship, we have Elders who are the spiritual leaders in the congregation and they are set apart for the work of spiritual oversight. The Minister is an Elder who has been recognised by the church as specially called by God to preach. Together, as a formal body, they make up the Kirk Session.



As well as having spiritual oversight, the Kirk Session also look after the more practical side of the church's life. Part of their responsibility is to use the money you give to the church in a responsible way. This will involve making sure that the local congregation fulfils its financial responsibility to the wider church, looking after all the buildings, giving practical help to anyone in the congregation who might be going through a particular time of need and contributing to other needy causes. They are also responsible for keeping the congregation informed regarding their stewardship of resources.

The local congregation is not merely an organisation for its members, for the church must also exist to reach out in love to our communities with the good news of the Gospel of Christ.



Our vision is:

*“To GLORIFY, ENJOY and SERVE God,
MINISTERING hope and the love of Christ to the WORLD.”*

As we seek to **glorify** God in all things, we pray that the High Kirk will grow stronger through **worship**.

As we **enjoy** God's presence, we pray that the High Kirk will grow warmer through **fellowship**.

As we **serve** God in our daily lives, we pray that the High Kirk will grow deeper through **discipleship**.

As we endeavour to **minister** hope and the love of Christ to those in need, we pray that the High Kirk will grow broader through **ministry**.

As we go out into our **world** with the love of Christ, we pray that the High Kirk will grow larger through **evangelism**.

In connection with formal church life, you may desire to get involved in: Children's ministry (Sunday Club, crèche, Girl's Brigade); Men & Women's ministry; helping out on our Alpha & Discipleship Courses; public Bible reading; public prayer; helping at housegroups and other small groups. You may also have gifts in practical areas around the church (catering, gardening, cleaning, etc); specific outreach work, administration and contributing articles for the Church Magazine.

Informally, there are other very important gifts to offer such as the gifts of encouragement, hospitality, welcoming visitors, visiting the elderly and sick – and, perhaps, taking a gift or a tape of the church services to them – developing friendships, writing to missionaries and spending time with people who are lonely and vulnerable.

In the wider church context, you may have leadership gifts to offer: involvement with SU (Scripture Union), Church of Scotland Summer Missions, working with YWAM (Youth With A Mission), helping other Christian agencies, working with underprivileged and needy people, as well as a host of other areas where your gifts may be used.

Family

Your witness for Christ will be watched most closely at home or by those closest to you.

The Bible has a great deal to say about our family relationships (for example, Ephesians 5:22-6:2; Colossians 3:18-21 – as well as countless proverbs from the Book of Proverbs!)

Christ has saved you in your family situation, and the reality of your relationship with Christ will be noticed first at home or by your wider family, wherever they are.

Pray for your family, that you will be given opportunities to share the Gospel with them if they are not Christians and pray for wisdom to put Christian principles into practice in a sensitive and attractive way (for example, 1 Peter 3: 1).



Responsibility

Later, we will see how you can contribute to the fellowship, but it is useful to highlight for now that when you contribute to the life of the fellowship, you will increasingly discover the grace and gifts of others.

True congregational fellowship involves mutual commitment and, if you stumble in your walk, it is important that you don't walk away from the fellowship but remain within it.

Whether or not you attend these small groups, it is important that you develop close Christian fellowship.

Wider Church Fellowship

You will gradually be introduced to the wider work and fellowship of the Church of Scotland through different events, activities, and conferences. We also support the other local denominations and fellowships through our prayers, through special worship events and through various activities.

Spiritual Gifts and Service

It is important to recognise that God has given you specific gifts of spiritual character and ability with which to serve Him (Romans 12:4-8). It is also important to consider how you can use and develop these gifts in your local situation, remembering always that the greatest gift you have through faith is the love of God which you are always to show others (1 Corinthians 13). It is useful to remember that your call to serve Christ involves the following three spheres of service:

Church

There may be many different ways in which you can serve Christ in your congregation.

What does joining the church involve?

If joining the church means that we join a kingdom and a family, then it follows that we immediately have important privileges and responsibilities. Let's examine some of these privileges and responsibilities here:

Spiritual Oversight

Privilege

It is your privilege to have Elders set over you by the Lord. Just as parents exercise loving care, leadership and discipline in our families, so the Elders fulfil that role in the church. When they, as a formal body (the 'Kirk Session'), received you into the fellowship, they became obligated to care for your spiritual needs by giving you spiritual leadership and training. Depending on your situation, this might involve such things as guidance, encouragement, comfort and rebuke (Acts 20:28-31; 2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

They may also be involved in leading Bible studies and prayer meetings and they will guide believers, as well as those who are not yet believers, with private counsel (1 Timothy 3:1-7). On some more delicate matters in particular, older women have a special responsibility to teach younger women in the congregation (Titus 2:4).

Responsibility

It is your responsibility to recognise that the Elders are set over you by the Lord, support them in their role and be submissive to their loving encouragement and discipline (1 Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:7,17). While the role of the Elders means that you can expect a visit from an Elder or Minister once in a while, it is important that you feel free to approach them at any time or even ask for a visit if you feel it would be helpful. So, if you are looking for guidance, prayer or help in any spiritual matter, or need someone to talk to about your Christian walk, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the Minister or Elders of your congregation.

The Privileges & Responsibilities of Worship

Worship is the greatest act in which we can engage and it is part of the duty of Ministers and Elders to organise and conduct public worship on the Lord's Day (Sunday) – which is the New Testament day of rest and worship and is to be kept holy to the Lord (1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Revelation 1:10).

The public gathering, by God's appointment and on his day, is of special importance and you must ensure that you make every effort to be there worshipping with his people (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25). The whole of the worship service can be seen as both a privilege and a responsibility when we look at it more closely.

Preaching

Privilege

The proclamation of God's Word is an important part of worship on the Lord's Day and is the special responsibility of your Minister.

You will find that the main part of your equipping and training as a Christian will normally come from the regular teaching of God's Word at the Sunday service of worship. You will probably also have access to other formal and informal teaching in the form of Bible studies or private counsel with any of the elders or other mature Christians in the congregation.

There should also be regular evangelistic preaching from the pulpit, so that you can bring along friends who are not believers.

Responsibility

You must ensure that you attend the church prayerfully, asking God to make you, as well as others, attentive to the Word in such a way that you receive it with faith and love, laying it up in your hearts and practicing it in your life.



The best way to give in a regular, disciplined way – which will ensure a regular income for the local and national church – is to use the envelope scheme or use direct banking. Just ask your treasurer for a book of envelopes so that you can put your offering in the suitably dated envelope every Sunday, and put the envelope in the plate.

A simple way to increase your giving by a third – without any additional cost to you – is by signing a Gift Aid form. Your treasurer will give you more information on this.

Congregational Fellowship

Aside from worship on the Sunday, your local congregation also has a weekday prayer fellowship on a Friday night where prayers are offered and further teaching and Bible study will take place. You will find that this meeting will greatly help to strengthen your Christian discipleship. You will also get to meet other members and make new friends.

The High Kirk provides the opportunity for further fellowship through small groups (often meeting in homes), possibly under the supervision of an Elder, where you can share in Bible study and fellowship.

Privilege

Your congregation is the special fellowship to which you have been joined by God and is the place where you are privileged to receive the fellowship of his people.

The fellowship should be characterised by true Christian love. The church fellowship is there to give you loving support and guidance and you will find that there are times when you will need special encouragement, advice or help (Colossians 3:14-16).

The High Kirk also has a Guild which meets on a Thursday night. This is another fellowship night where men and women can meet and encourage one another in their spiritual lives.

Offerings (Collection)

Privilege

It would be easy to see your financial offering as a simple responsibility but there is a sense in which it is also your privilege.

Giving involves you in the work of God's kingdom and stimulates your faith in God to care for yourself as well as for others. To help understand this, it is important to know that every congregation contributes much of its financial resources to the central funds of the Church of Scotland.

These funds meet the cost of a minister in full status as we contribute to the Parish Ministries Fund. We may also be involved in supporting other churches who are unable to meet the costs of having their own minister. We also help finance our national church committee structures.

As well as these costs, your local congregation may also be supporting various Missionary and charitable organisations. It will also be providing accommodation for your Minister as well as maintaining the church building and the manse. There will probably be other expenses which may include such things as local administration, a tape ministry or a church library.

Responsibility

In the Bible, emphasis falls on this 'giving' as an offering flowing freely from a thankful heart.

While many believe that the Old Testament command to give a tenth of our income ('tithe') still applies, there can be no doubt that the New Testament commands Offerings (Collection) to be given **proportionately** (Acts 11:29), **sacrificially** (Luke 21:4), **regularly** (1 Corinthians 16:2), **generously** (Romans 12:8) and **cheerfully** (2 Corinthians 9:7).

The Sacraments

The Lord's Supper and Baptism are two sets of signs and symbols which Christ gave to the Church to remind us of important spiritual truths and which convey blessing to us when we use them in the right way. They are often referred to as 'sacraments'.

The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-35)

Privilege

Sharing in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper helps us to remember what Christ has done for us (1 Corinthians 11: 23-35).

The table, the one bread and the common cup (1 Corinthians 10:17) remind us of our union with one another in Christ and, when we come to the table in faith, we are strengthened and refreshed.

In some congregations – where numbers and church design make it difficult to come to a real table – people come forward to a special area which is often either marked off with a white cloth or contains pews covered in white cloth so as to remind us that we are at a table.

There is no rule in the Church of Scotland governing the frequency of communion. It is up to your Session to decide how often it is held. In some traditions, prior to the communion service itself, it was usually the practice to give either communion cards or small metal 'tokens' – with a communion related text from the Bible written on them – to those who will come to the table.

This practice was to remind us that the Lord expects the Eldership to organise the administration of the Supper and to ensure, as far as can be expected, that those present at the table ought to be there.

Although we no longer have this practice in the High Kirk, it is still encouraged that members take a text from the Bible to encourage them as they prepare for the Lord's Supper.

In this connection, it is important to remember that the Elders have a responsibility for ensuring that those who are in open wilful disobedience to Christ do not come to the Lord's table until they profess repentance.

In this way, we may lose this privilege for a time if our life brings open reproach upon the gospel (1 Corinthians 5).

Following good New Testament example, the Elders serve at the Supper (John 6:1- 13) and usually there is a special address to those who partake before the Supper is dispensed.

Responsibility

As we prepare ourselves for the Lord's Supper, we should examine ourselves, repent of any sins that are keeping us from a closer walk with Christ, and publicly re-dedicate ourselves to his service remembering that taking the Supper is also an important part of our witness to others (1 Corinthians 11:23-35).

Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20)

Privilege

When we come to faith in Christ, the Bible commands us to be baptised. As we saw earlier, if you were born into a covenant family (that is, a family in which at least one of your parents was a believer) you will probably have been baptised as a child.

In the Church of Scotland, baptism is usually performed by sprinkling or pouring water – note that the 'washings' or 'baptisms' of the Old Testament were normally sprinklings while the Holy Spirit is 'poured out' upon believers (Hebrews 9:10,13,19,21; Ezekiel 36:25-28; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:33). This baptism is a sign of being washed by the Spirit of Christ and of our sins having been forgiven because Christ has paid the penalty on the cross. Again, as we saw earlier, it is also the sign of our joining the visible church of Christ.

Responsibility

When you are baptised – and indeed from then onwards, particularly when you witness someone else's baptism – you should remember what Christ has done for you, and will do for you yet, in cleansing you.

You should also remember, with thankfulness, that he has united you by the one Spirit into the body of Christ as well as your obligation to obey and serve Father, Son and Spirit which your baptism implies (note that in the Church of Scotland, it is customary to take a vow of allegiance and obedience to your Saviour and Lord when you are being baptised).

Also, as we saw already, we believe that the Bible teaches us as believers, to baptise our children in anticipation of their professing faith as they are brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

In this case, if you are baptising your covenant child, you are also required to take a vow obliging you before the congregation to raise your child in this Biblical training and instruction.

Benediction

The Benediction (Blessing) is not a time to find keys, put on coats or start edging to the door!

It is a profound, authoritative assurance of God's presence with his covenant people and you should always receive it with faith and thankfulness.

Prayer and Praise

In these acts of worship, we respond to the Grace and Kindness of God by presenting our praise in song and offering our praise, confession, thanks and requests by prayer. In public prayer, when someone leads the assembly and you are largely silent, it is vital to remember that you are to participate in the prayer and join with it spiritually as it is offered up – just as certainly as you participate vocally in the singing of praise. You are to participate with understanding and with the whole heart.