

For many years, Fort George Baptist Church used a traditional membership model in which people became members for life unless they chose to revoke their membership. In a previous generation, this model served the church well. People often stayed in one church for decades, membership was viewed as a formal and long-term commitment, and members were often highly engaged in the running of the church. Congregational meetings were well attended, and members expected to have a direct voice in many of the church's decisions. In that context, membership functioned as the formal structure through which a relatively stable group of people governed and guided the church.

However, the cultural context at FGBC has changed significantly. Today, the majority of people who attend have been part of the church for five years or less. We also have a high number of students, young professionals, young families, and people whose time in Prince George may only last a few years. While many of these people love the church, serve faithfully, give generously, and want to see the church function well, they are often less interested in formal congregational meetings or long institutional processes.

Because of this shift, our current membership structure can unintentionally hold people back from making a meaningful commitment to the church. The process and permanence of membership can feel like too high of a bar, especially for newer people or those who are unsure how long they will be in Prince George. As a result, many people who are actively part of the life of the church never become members causing them to miss out on the spiritual benefit that comes from formally committing themselves to a local church community.

Enter the proposed "Yearly Membership Model". Each year, we will have a "Membership Sunday", like today's, where we intentionally invite people to become members of the church. People would still be able to become members at any time throughout the year, but all memberships will expire on December 31st of the next year. This would give the church a natural annual rhythm of invitation, renewal, and recommitment.

There are several important advantages to this change. First, it will increase ownership among the people who currently attend FGBC. Rather than having a small group of long-standing members and a few newer members, annual membership would invite the whole church family to consider their commitment together. Second, it will make it easier for newer people to join the church, serve as members, and take responsibility for the health and mission of the church. Third, it will allow people who may only be in Prince George for a year or two to fully commit themselves to the church while they are here rather than feeling like they need to put their faith "on hold." Fourth, it will give us an annual opportunity to remind the whole church that membership means committing ourselves to pray, give, serve, worship, and live as part of the body of Christ.

Finally, this updated membership model better fits the governance structure FGBC has adopted, and more closely resembles what being part of the early church was like. It places less emphasis on membership as a formal institutional status and more emphasis on membership as a living commitment to participate in the life, mission, and community of the church. The goal is not to make membership less meaningful, but to make it more accessible, more active, and more connected to the actual life of the church today.

The Table will be bringing a motion to accept this new form of membership to our November Congregational meeting with the goal of adopting it in the New Year.