

## **Second Session: Incoming Shoreline Freshmen Curriculum**

Watermark Students is a place for students to be known and accepted, taught about Jesus, and challenged to grow. One of the most intentional ways we challenge our students to grow is by encouraging them to fully commit and belong to a local church. We believe the church is the best place for students to be strengthened and supported by the people of God. As followers of Christ, we are called to belong to a church, rather than just attend. In our context, we believe that the best way for students to belong to a church is through church membership.

We believe church membership is the next step of obedience for students who want experience shepherding and discipleship, as well as grow in their faith. Once you become a member at Watermark, students will have the opportunity to be placed in a Community Group with other like-minded students. Community Groups are designed to challenge, equip, and encourage students to walk faithfully with Jesus. These Community Groups meet outside of the Small Group gathering, at another time determined by the group members.

Please take a few moments to read over the following page outlining the importance of church membership. Then take time as a group to read the verses and answer the questions below.

Verses to Read: Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Corinthians 12:12-26, 1 Peter 4:10

Questions to Answer:

1. Why do you think God desires His people to belong to a local church?
2. What do you think God intends the church to be?
3. Why does the Bible refer to the Church as the body of Christ?

## Church Membership for Students

**Summary:** Church Membership in a local church matters for three reasons. First, church membership is **commanded** by God in order to place members of his universal church under the leadership, shepherding, and oversight (pastoral and theological) of Elders in a local context. Second, church membership fosters biblical **community** as members are called to live out the “one another’s” of Scripture. Third, church membership allows believers to experience and reflect the **committed** nature of God’s love. These three reasons summarize why we are calling students to individually consider obedience demonstrated through church membership. Additionally, we desire students to have a healthy motive in pursuing church membership based on personal **conviction** rooted in Scripture.

**Commanded:** Throughout the New Testament, church leaders and members are instructed to love and serve members and non-members differently (e.g. Matthew 18:15-17). Without local church membership, church leaders would have no way of knowing who has been assigned to their care and attention. God will hold church leaders accountable for the condition of their flock. Church membership identifies those for whom local church leaders (think elders, and, by extension, Small Group leaders) will give an account. See 1 Peter 5:2-3, Acts 20:28, Hebrews 13:7, Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.

**Community:** Christians are called to belong to one other and build one another up. They are to function like parts of a body, different, but essential to one another. Church membership gives the believer a specific place to belong and a specific mission to contribute to. God has designed the local church to be a place where you experience the fullness of His love in your life, through His people. Our life and experience of God’s love is incomplete without being connected to the body of Christ. When we join a church, we are offering ourselves to one another to be among other things: trained, taught, corrected, and encouraged. See Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, 1 Peter 4.

**Commitment:** Church membership gives students the opportunity to count the cost of following Jesus. We are called to reflect the committed nature of God’s love. When God loves, He commits. He gathers us together into local churches so we can express that same kind of committed love for each other. In joining a church, you make visible your commitment to Christ and His people. Making a commitment is a powerful statement in a low commitment culture. See Matthew 22:37.

**Conviction, not Compulsion:** Church membership should be pursued based on a personal conviction, not compulsion from others. As leaders, we should challenge students to explore their motive for becoming a member, and encourage them towards a healthy, biblical motivation. If a student does not understand or does not feel ready for the responsibilities of church membership, they should wait to join. Our aim is to avoid thinking of “membership” to a local church as the key entitling you to certain privileges or something our leadership desires for the sake of numbers. Church membership is not a badge that one flashes to demonstrate their spiritual maturity nor is it a badge shown by leaders to flaunt their spiritual success. Church membership is a step of obedience for students who want to grow in their faith. See Hebrews 13:7, 17.