

Membership Categories Policy

A. Policy Statement

Georgetown CRC reviews the status of its members on an ongoing basis.

B. Guidelines:

We recognize that the following categories, though they can appear bureaucratic in nature and use, reflect spiritual realities significant to elders, members, the congregation as a whole, and the Lord Jesus himself. Therefore we use these categories with prayer and reverence.

We recognize that membership is a concept that is, in the eyes of some, outmoded and sectarian. Many do not see the need to belong to a particular congregation to be "in Christ". Therefore we focus our attention on the signs of healthy spiritual life more than the categories of membership.

We recognize that the restoring of a relationship between a person and God and a person and God's people is the aim of the ministry of Jesus. Therefore we strive to keep that relationship vibrant through frequent communication, respect for privacy, the supervision of ministry that promotes healthy discipleship, and prayer with and for each member.

We recognize that when relationships suffer, communication gets more difficult. Therefore we act cautiously in our verdicts about a person's membership status when communication is limited; and we make every effort to obtain accurate information.

C. Membership Categories

- i. "Professing" and "baptized" members have been accepted into the congregation by baptism or profession of faith in Christ, either here or via transfer.
- ii. "Inactive" members are members declared as "inactive" at a meeting of the pastoral elders owing to non-attendance, non-participation and non-contribution for at least one year. Unless there are extenuating circumstances (e.g. military service, residence in a nursing home) that make such participation impossible. Such members are not counted for the purpose of ministry shares.
- iii. "Lapsed" members: are members declared as lapsed because they are known to be worshipping in a Christian faith community elsewhere; or members who request to be lapsed because they are attending a Christian faith community to which membership transfer is not possible.
- iv. "Professing-suspended from privileges" members are professing members suspended from the privileges of professing membership by a meeting of the pastoral elders because they "persistently reject the admonition of the pastoral council."

D. Procedures

- i. Every monthly meeting of the pastoral elders will be open to changing the status of church members, e.g., from "professing" to "professing-inactive" or "baptized" to "baptized-inactive." Changes in status are to be recorded in the minutes of the pastoral elders.
- ii. The status of "inactive" is a temporary status. Membership for those who have moved out of the area will be reactivated when they relocate back to our area or, upon their request, transferred to another congregation. The status for those who have not participated in church activities will ordinarily be changed to active, lapsed, resigned, or excluded within two years of the initial designation as "inactive."

- iii. The status of "*professing-suspended from privileges*" is also a temporary status. Upon repentance the member shall be restored to "professing" status. If there is no repentance, then, within a reasonable amount of time, and after approval is obtained from classis, the membership will be terminated by exclusion.
- iv. Memberships will be terminated by one of these means: lapsing, acquiescing in a resignation, acquiescing in a deemed resignation, and exclusion.
- v. The clerk of council will review the minutes of the pastoral elders, note the changes and forward them to the appropriate administrative personnel.
- vi. The membership status of professing members will be reviewed especially carefully in September so that the number of professing members can be reported accurately to CRCNA and presented in time for our fall budget-making processes.
In particular for pastoral elders whose terms are nearing completion, it is advisable over the course of February, March, and April for the elder to make diligent efforts to contact those in their district who have been moved to the inactive list (that is, they have been inactive for two years or more by this time).
- vii. The clerk of council will remind the pastoral elders of the importance of the early October meeting.

E. Synodical Background

Inactive members are those baptized or confessing members who are declared by the pastoral council to have a relationship to the congregation which has ceased for one year or who for one year have not made faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the Lord's Supper, unless there are extenuating circumstances (e.g. military service, residence in a nursing home) that make such faithful use impossible.

i. Those outside the vicinity of the church:

- a. Baptized or confessing members who move to localities where there is no Christian Reformed church may, upon their request, either retain their membership in the church of their former residence, or have their certificates sent to the nearest Christian Reformed Church" (Church Order, Art. 67). If it's known that they are attending a certain church, that church shall be notified and requested to take up contact with them.
- b. If they fail to make such a request, and do not transfer to a church near them, the pastoral council (the pastors and elders), having made serious attempts to rectify the situation, may declare their membership lapsed after a period of two years from the date of their departure. The member concerned shall be notified by the pastoral council of its action if at all possible. This rule shall not apply to those whose absence from their home is temporary (C.O. Suppl. to Art. 67).
- c. Should members in either one of these cases rejoin our fellowship, their membership shall be reactivated. It shall be left up to their discretion if they would like to make or reaffirm their public profession of faith before the congregation.

ii. Those within the vicinity of the church:

- a. "With respect to baptized or confessing member who, for a period of at least two years, has not moved but fails to attend and support the congregation that holds the person's membership, the

pastoral council may declare that person's membership has lapsed. This may be done when all the following conditions are present:

- The person claims to be still committed to the Christian faith.
- The person claims to be worshiping elsewhere.
- The pastoral council is not aware of any public sin requiring discipline

Appropriate announcements shall be made by the pastoral council to the congregation regarding such lapsed memberships and the person involved shall be notified" (C.O. Suppl Art. 67). Should such persons wish to rejoin our congregation, their membership shall be reactivated and it shall be left up to the person's discretion if they would like to make a public profession or reaffirm their faith before the congregation.

- b. Those who do not meet the conditions for lapsing** and who are not under church discipline, shall be contacted by way of visit, telephone call or pastoral letter(s). They shall be encouraged to resume active membership in our congregation. Failing that, they shall be encouraged to take up active membership in another congregation. If they agree, pastoral council shall send a transfer of membership or a statement of membership to that church. If they do not do so, then, after sufficient attempts to restore the member, pastoral council shall deem their membership to have been resigned and shall acquiesce in that resignation. Notification may or may not be made to the congregation as a whole, at pastoral council's discretion. But family members within our congregation will be notified. In these cases, restoration of their membership will require a public profession or reaffirmation of their faith.
- F. Erring members** who "persistently reject the admonition of the pastoral council shall be suspended from the privileges of communicant membership. A person may be excluded from membership only after the pastoral council has secured the approval of classis" (C.O. Supp. Art. 78-81, c. & d.). Restoration of their membership will require a reaffirmation of their faith.
- G. Administrative assumptions pertaining to Georgetown CRC:** When the pastoral elders pass an elder's motion, the Treasurer (for ministry share counts), the Membership Clerk (for transfers), and Office Administrator (for the directory) shall be informed.
- Inactive members will not be counted for ministry shares, will not have their membership transferred without comment, and will not be included in the directory. They will remain on district lists. Inactive members will be noted in district lists by a symbol. They remain under the pastoral care of the elders and pastors, and attempts to provide that care will be continued.

March 2018

Article 66 – CRC Church Order

- a.** Confessing members who move to another Christian Reformed church or to a church in communion are entitled to a certificate, issued by the council, concerning their doctrine and life. When such certificates of membership are requested, they shall ordinarily be mailed to the church of their new residence.
- b.** Baptized members who move to another Christian Reformed church or to a church in communion shall upon proper request be granted a certificate of baptism, to which such notations as are necessary shall be attached. Such certificates shall ordinarily be mailed to the church of their new residence.
- c.** Ecclesiastical certificates shall be signed by the president and clerk of the council.