

Thinking of changing church?

Changing church is a serious matter. It's not like changing supermarkets! The church is the household (or 'family') of God (1 Timothy 3:15), and so the members of your church are your brothers and sisters. It should be painful to part from them, and it is not something to be done lightly. The local church where you're committed is the place where the pastors are 'keeping watch over your soul' (Hebrews 13:17). It is also the family who should get to know you, share your burdens, encourage you as a Christian (including noticing when you're not there!), and who you will serve in the same way. This can't be done by drifting between churches, and needs to be started from scratch when you change church.

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian – but if you are a Christian, something's wrong if you're not committed to serving and being served in a local church

Reasons to change church

It is probably necessary to change church if your leaders teach serious false doctrine or are guilty of significant ungodliness – and if they are not willing to repent, or the church to discipline them. It may be necessary to change church if you move away (although your commitment to church should make you reluctant to move without good reasons). You may decide to move church if you realise that over time you are not being trained in Christian maturity or service as you should be. You might decide to move – with your leaders' support – to be involved in a new initiative such as a church plant.

Poor reasons to move church include finding some people difficult to get on with (you are likely to find that in any church! – godliness means working through those difficulties with patience); wanting a different style of church or music; or just 'wanting a change.'

How to change church

Don't leave your church without saying anything! Talk to your church leaders. If your reason for leaving is due to a problem with their leadership, they need an opportunity to address your concerns. If you are simply moving to another area, they will want to help put you in touch with another church. Your leaders will also need to know that they are no longer responsible for you.

If you must change church, do so decisively by setting a 'goodbye' date – don't just drift away. Do so maturely, too – not in bitterness or trying to unsettle others remaining in the church. And make sure you join a new church quickly – try a few, by all means, but don't drift between churches for an indefinite period. Once you've chosen a new church, tell the leaders of your new church that you intend to commit to that church as your new family.

How to choose a new church

Perhaps the single most significant factor in choosing a new church is what kind of leaders they have. They need to be faithful in their teaching and practise what they preach. The wider congregation may not have caught up yet, but might need your help! You will want to find somewhere convenient enough to attend regularly on Sundays, as well as home groups, prayer meetings, etc – and to invite neighbours to. If you are blessed with a number of possible churches that meet these requirements, you might want to think about where you can best serve, as well as personal preferences such as style of service, convenience of location, etc.

It's an important decision, though, and one that you will want to think about prayerfully, with the help and advice of your current pastors and wise Christian friends.