

“Joining the Church” – a drama by Craig Mitchell

Brad: Excuse me... Brian, isn't it?

Brian: Oh hello, Yes, that's right. And you must be...

Brad: Brad.

Brian: Ah yes, Brad.

(enthusiastic hand-shaking.)

Brian: Err... sorry, you're new around here, aren't you?

Brad: Um... no I'm not actually.

Brian: Oops, sorry. I'm terrible with faces. And names. Names and faces. Doesn't leave you with much else to go on, really. Maybe we haven't met before.

Brad: We have actually. When you drop your son off for youth group. I'm one of the youth leaders here.

Brian: My son?

Brad: Michael?

Brian: Yes, yes, I know the name of my son. I... just... you just look different through the windscreen. (awkward pause) Anyway, great job you're doing with our young people. You know, keeping them out of mischief! And Cynthia and I LOVE having a Friday night to ourselves. Bit of a 'romantic night in'. Every week.

Brad: I wanted to ask you a question. I didn't want to trouble Rev Dunbar since he's new, and as you're the Church Secretary, you might know the answer.

Brian: Happy to help, Bob... err, Brian.

Brad: Well, I was thinking about becoming a member.

Brian: A member? A member of what?

Brad: A member of the church.

Brian: (puzzled, like putting 2 + 2 together) A "member" of the "church". (suddenly excited) Wait a minute. You want to JOIN the church?

Brad: That's right.

Brian: Aren't you already a member?

Brad: Well I'm not sure. But I don't think so.

Brian: Not sure. How peculiar? (starting to get official) Ok, let's start at the very beginning. Have you been confirmed?

Brad: I'm not sure.

Brian: Alright. Take a deep breath. Listen carefully. I'm going to give you another chance. Think again very carefully before you answer, because this is the critical question here. Tell me if you need to phone a friend. "Have you been confirmed?"

Brad: (pause) Could it have happened when I wasn't paying attention in church?

Brian: No. Well not usually... (doing a mental checklist) Are you a member-in-association?

Brad: I'm in the tennis association? Does that count?

Brian: (shakes head) Are you a member of another church?

Brad: We'll we've belonged to a few churches. We've moved around a bit.

Brian: (rolls his eyes) Yes, but were you a member of them? You know, an official, signed-up, card-carrying, envelope-giving, bona fide member.

Brad: (looks blank)

Brian: Have you ever been confirmed in any of them?

Brad: Let's see.... I don't remember the Baptists doing confirmation... or the CRCs... or the Salvation Army...

Brian: (Doing a checklist on his fingers) So, not consciously confirmed. Not a member-in-association "as far as we know". You certainly didn't come here by proper transfer, otherwise I'd know. OK, OK. Let's try another tack. Have you ever been baptised?

Brad: Oh yeah, sure. I was baptised at Booleroo Centre when I was a kid. Don't remember a thing, but I've seen the photos. They put me in a little white dress, for goodness sake. Can you imagine it?

Brian: (grimaces) Aha! Excellent! Now think carefully before you answer... There are bonus points riding on this one. (playing it up like a quizmaster) Was it a Uniting Church?

Brad: (thinks) Yes it was!

Brian: Yes! High-five! You're one of us! I kind of guessed it deep down.

Brad: Alright! So that's good is it? I'm a member?

Brian: Errr... Well, yes and no.

Brad: Yes and no? Really?

Brian: Well, we keep a roll of those who are baptised, and as far as I understand it, speaking in "layperson's terms", baptism is the sign that Christ makes us members of his church - not just this church, but the church everywhere!

Brad: Every church?

Brian: Yes indeed.

Brad: OK, so let me get this straight. Because I've been baptised, I'm already a member of this church and any other church?

Brian: Ah, yes... and no.

Brad: But you just said...

Brian: Well you're a "member", but you're not a "MEMBER" unless you've been confirmed.

Brad: What? So there are two kinds of members? What's that all about?

Brian: Well, pretty much anyone can be a "member", but only "MEMBERS" get to vote at meetings.

Brad: Hang on, when we have church meetings here, no-one asks "Who's a 'member'?" and "Who's a 'MEMBER'?" And even if we did half the people wouldn't have a clue what the difference is.

Brian: Yes, yes yes. We're all one big happy family. But say we had a REALLY important decision to make...

Brad: Like adopting the church budget, because I voted for that...

Brian: No, like...

Brad: Like adopting the new mission plan, because I voted for that...

Brian: No, like selling the church building...

Brad: (dismayed) We're selling the church building???

Brian: No! It was a hypothetical. Like when Rev Dunbar leaves...

Brad: Rev Dunbar is leaving??? He only just arrived!

Brian: No, no, no. He's not leaving. Relax. What I'm saying is that on really, really important decisions, we'd have to know who the proper members were. You know, the BIG decisions.

Brad: (shakes his head with bewilderment)

Brian: Do you remember when we almost decided to sell the pews last year.

Brad: Do I remember? Of course I do! All these people who I'd never seen before came along to that meeting and voted against it. And we all had to write down our names and whether or not we were members. It looked like most people were in favour of it, but then decision went against it. That's when I started getting confused. So that was a "big decision" for "proper members"?

Brian: Oh yes indeed. It took us ages to go through the roll and sort out the votes.

Brad: What roll?

Brian: The roll of confirmed members.

Brad: Hold on. So there's a roll of baptised members and a roll of proper confirmed members?

Brian: That's correct.

Brad: Which roll am I on?

Brian: Um... (perplexed, then smugly pleased) You'd be on the roll of baptised members... at Booleroo Centre!

Brad: And what about here?

Brian: Here? (thinking) um... Oh! You lead the youth group! That means you're on the youth group contact list!

Brad: The one that I make up each year.

Brian: Yes, exactly. And the church email list. EVERYBODY's on that, even some of the dear departed.

Brad: I see. Say if we wanted to make a really BIG decision like combining our youth group with the Anglican youth group at St Chad's. Would that be a decision for the 'proper' members?

Brian: Youth group? Good heavens no! You and that woman who helps you are doing a fine job. We're grateful to have anyone leading it, frankly. As long as you've had your police check. Just go right ahead. You have our complete trust.

Brad: "That woman"? You mean my wife Jenny.

Brian: Ah, I suppose so. Fine job you're doing. Marvellous. Wonderful couple. A great spiritual example to all of our young people.

Brad: Is this where I mention that Jenny hasn't been baptised?

Brian: (looks shocked and perplexed, then walking off and calling out) Rev Dunbar! Rev Dunbar!

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