

Text: Various
Title: Church Membership, Part 4
Truth: Every Christian should be a church member.
Date/Location: August 10, 2025 at FBC

We believe that church membership means to be a connected, meaningful part of the local community of believers.

One More Illustration about Church Membership

J. Compare and contrast. Is church membership like that of a club or civic organization? Yes. Is it different? Absolutely yes. How is it different?

Club or Organization	Church
Membership often initiated by payment of dues.	Membership not initiated by dues. Offerings are not dues. They are used for the upkeep of the organization and its ministers.
Regular meetings, even weekly like in Rotary.	Regular meetings for worship, instruction, fellowship.
Outreach to grow itself	Outreach to grow the church but mainly to add to God’s family.
Member care	Member care
Only members can vote on business	Ditto
Members and non-members have a voice, members more-so	Ditto
Concerns temporal matters	Concerns temporal matters and eternal matters

We are speaking of membership in a local church. The local church is a small scale-model, if you will, of the universal church of all believers in Jesus Christ.

Details

- A. We believe for practical reasons that members can be classified according to certain circumstances.
1. Active members: the basic everyday church partner like we have discussed above.
 2. Inactive members: those who are in process of being removed from membership due to non-attendance.
 3. Junior members: those who are involved in the church but are young enough that we deem their decision-making capacity not developed to a full-enough potential to be participating in church decision-making. In our constitution, that age is 21.
 4. Christian workers. We may have one or more members who are “remote” in that they are working overseas. They are still part of and under the accountability of the church but are in special circumstances that do not permit us to see them regularly.
- B. Legal matters. Getting back to the question as to “why membership?” there are some other picky issues as well. One has to do with our status as a Michigan non-profit ecclesiastical corporation. Someone has to be officially associated with the organization for it to be a valid institution.

We also have to protect ourselves in the area of church discipline and lawsuits. For instance, when someone joins the church, they agree to be bound by the conditions of the constitution regarding membership. That means if they commit adultery, and a witness confronts them, and they do not respond, and then they also refuse the counsel of one or two other brethren, then it has to be brought before the church. However, the person may say “I don’t want my personal business brought before the church.” However, the person forfeited that “right of privacy” when they joined the membership of the church because they agreed to submit to the oversight and accountability of the church.

By the way, sin does not give you a special right to privacy. Sinning against a spouse, as in the example above, is not a private matter. It affects other people.

Such a person could sue on the allegation of slander or libel, but if they have joined the membership that lawsuit will not be successful because the person agreed to join. Remember also the Bible tells a person in that situation, presumably a professing Christian, not to go to court against their brother.

C. Is there an “out clause” for church members? Indeed, there is. Our church is not a cult that does not let you escape! There are several ways to change your membership status:

1. **Death.** You get to go straight from the church to Heaven.
2. **Transfer.** If you move to a new locale or there is another church nearby that has a need for your gift or that fits you better, you can transfer. In that case, the historical practice of churches is to issue a letter of transfer to let the receiving church know that the member was in good standing. It is a problem if the church is not of sound faith or practice.
3. **Discipline.** This is not recommended.
3. **Resignation.** This is also not recommended and is only applicable in very limited circumstances. In fact, the circumstances are so limited that we have never used it, mostly because people who get angry enough to leave are not thinking straight, are not patient, and often shut down communication. I consider whether we should remove the clause from our constitution now, despite our putting it in there some years ago.

D. I do not believe there is a fear of church membership. I think it is a rejection of commitment and accountability. Whatever the reason or excuse on the surface, it boils down to a desire to not maintain commitment and accountability. After all, who likes being called out for their sin or being expected to do something (for the Lord)?

Conclusion and Summary

Why should I become a church member? It is Biblical. It is a way to show submission to the church. It offers accountability so that you can be protected from sin.

How do I become a church member? Just ask! Follow the church’s procedure. First make sure that you are born again and baptized by

immersion in water in a church of like faith and practice. If you are not, it is easy to become baptized.

What is church membership? A committed relationship of mutual accountability.

When should I become a church member? As soon as practicable after you move to a new locale.

What is in it for me? Church membership is way more than being listed on a piece of paper. It means full participation in the life of the church, with all of the “intangible religious benefits” that come with that. The blessing of being part of a body of believers is incalculable.

We are on firm ground to say that if you have not made a commitment to a local church (however that church practices membership), then you should do so. Do not let excuses get in the way.

There is a spiritual reality to voicing your union with this body. It arises from our living connection to Christ and to one another.

MAP

References

[1] Jamieson, Bobby. *Committing to One Another: Church Membership*. Edited by Mark Dever. 9Marks Healthy Church Study Guides. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Main ideas, quoted from Jamieson:

Christians need to be members of a local church so that, through a church’s accountability and exhortation, we are protected from sin’s deceiving, hardening effects.

Is church membership biblical? Yes!

We see church membership in a number of passages in the New Testament which teach that:

- Churches have an “inside” and an “outside.”
- Church members are expected to know who does and does not belong to the church.

- Christians are under the authority of the church, such that if they persist in unrepentant sin, they are to be excluded from it.
- Christians are told to submit to their leaders, which means giving up our autonomy and putting ourselves under the church's authority.
- Leaders will give an account for those entrusted to their care, which means that they have to know who those people are.

The goal of church membership is that every single church member would help the whole church grow to maturity in Christ.

Leeman, Jonathan. *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*. 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

Every member of the church is called to overcome divisions and pursue unity in the church in order to reflect the church's union with Christ.

The members of a local church are *interdependent*. We all need each other. No one should say that the church doesn't need them, and no one *can* say that they don't need other church members.

As church members, we have the duty to imitate and submit to our leaders, to regularly assemble with the church, and to love and serve our fellow members. All of these duties are means by which we grow in godliness and help others to grow.

Church membership—and the activity of regularly assembling with the church which it entails—should offer a foretaste of the glory of heaven.

[2] Leeman, Jonathan. *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016.

[3] Leeman, Jonathan. *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God's Love: Reintroducing the Doctrines of Church Membership and Discipline*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010.

[4] Rainer, Thom S., and Carey Nieuwhof. *Where Have All the Church Members Gone? How to Avoid the Five Traps That Silently Kill Churches*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2024.

[5] <https://www.richmondhillbaptist.org/biblical.html>

What is Church Membership?

Membership is a joint commitment from an individual to the church and the church to the individual.

Church membership signifies a church's corporate endorsement of a person's salvation.

Church membership signifies an individual's commitment to grasp hold of the others in our church family in mutual love and discipleship.

I would add that membership is a commitment of the church to the individual to faithfully carry out the principles of God's word in the framework of the doctrine and constitution of the church, and for the member to faithfully support the church in its worship, ordinances, ministry.