

Fact Sheet for “Membership”

Romans 12:1-8

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What is our local church about? (evangelism, mission, teaching the Word of God, discipleship)
But in order to effectively reach these goals we need to pay attention to some of the more mundane things... things relating to ordinary life on earth rather than to spiritual things (vacuum cleaners, telephone and internet providers, software, building permits, paper plates, corporation law).

Take another look at our initial question, “What is our local church about?” Perhaps we should refine it by adding one word, “What is our local church *ultimately* about?” We would answer this question by stating our spiritual goals from the Bible. Then we should add a second question, “How should we get there?” We would usually answer this question with the mundane... things relating to ordinary life in Cottage Grove OR.

There is an area of the church where the spiritual and the mundane are discussed using similar verbiage but entirely different things are meant. That discussion revolves around membership.

What the Bible Says about Membership

Where is membership in a local church mentioned in the Bible? (nowhere) Let’s take a look at what the Bible *does* say about membership.

^{ESV 1} ¶ **I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

These two verses have long been favorites to memorize. And these two verses begin a new section of Paul’s letter to the Romans in which he writes about some highly applicational issues. They set forth the basic principle from which his following thoughts will flow. Most English translations (NLT “Because”) begin verse 3 with the word “For”. That word connects verses 1-2 with verse 3.

³ ¶ **For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**

Paul’s next sentence speaks of membership from a spiritual perspective.

⁴ **For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,**
⁵ **so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.**

When someone becomes a Christian they immediately become a member of the body of Christ! But don’t miss the second half... we are “individually members of one another.” We have a family responsibility to one another and Paul goes on to state what that responsibility is.

⁶ **Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.**

Think for a moment. This does have application to all Christians alive today, but it’s most central application is to the body of Christ expressed in a local congregation.

What Oregon Non-Profit Corporation Law Says about Membership

Look up the provisions of ORS 65 on the internet.

These statements about membership, and several others like them, have absolutely nothing to do with the biblical statements on membership. These are statements of non-profit corporate law that we live under. The Bible and Oregon corporate law use the same verbiage about "members" but they mean entirely different things.

How We Interface the Bible and Corporate Law

Every church in town is a non-profit corporation, and there are some clear legal reasons for that. We all fall under this law. However, we always need to keep in mind what are the spiritual implications of membership and what are the mundane. Our church Constitution has the following statements.

"We believe that the New Testament Church is composed of all persons who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit since the day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection. We believe that the Church is the spiritual body of Christ, of which He is the Head. We believe that this body expresses itself in local assemblies in which believers are in a covenant relationship. Biblically that relationship is expressed corporately through hearing the Word of God proclaimed, engaging in worship, practicing the two ordinances of believer's baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper, building up each other's faith, holding each other accountable through biblical love and discipline, and engaging in local and world evangelization. "

"The relationship of Christians with Jesus Christ and with each other is likened to the physical body when the apostle Paul says we are members of the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Every Christian is a "member" in this sense.

Membership in a local church, though not mentioned in Scripture, has value today for both spiritual and legal purposes. It encourages Christians to have a strong relationship with the Lord and a local church, and it legally defines who has a voice in the government of that church."

Under corporate law we have a defined membership and have also certain responsibilities, like an annual meeting. We elect officers under that law (whom we define as elders, commission members, and a few others). We vote on people nominated for those offices in September. Under that law all our members have a legal voice in the affairs of our church. But the legalities of membership are *only* a tool to help us achieve our biblical spiritual goals.

You will hear me talk about those who are "members of our church" *and* those who are "part of our congregation". The first is the legal list. The second is a spiritual list that includes every Christian who worships here.

Now here's one catch. Only our legal members can be elected as officers. It make no sense for someone to be elected to our Missions Commission, to help make missions decisions for our church, but not to let them vote at a business meeting because they are not legal members.

Paul in Romans 12 makes it clear that we are members of the body of Christ, and in that are members of one another. Our responsibility before God... in presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is our spiritual worship... calls for our service among other members of the body of Christ. This involves our spiritual gifting and is usually seen in the context of the local church. Legal membership is *only* a tool to help us achieve the goals of spiritual membership. It is never the goal in and of itself.

But our cultural context includes both the spiritual and the mundane, the biblical and the legal. The trick is to keep the legal down to what is absolutely necessary while we focus on the spiritual. For instance, I am actively praying for five specific members to leave our membership. I am praying that they will find a great church in the Portland area where they have moved. I will also encourage those who worship here to consider taking a leadership position as one of our officers. That means I will encourage people to become legal members.

We join other groups as members without much concern. Membership in a local church is good, but keep in mind that it is only one tool to achieve what the church is about.