# WHAT ABOUT CHURCH MEMBERSHIP? IS IT BIBLICAL?



## The Blessing of Unity

Unity is one of the most beautiful aspects of the body of Christ. The Psalmist stated so eloquently, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" When it comes to "church membership," we must understand that there is a unity and oneness in Christ that supersedes church membership. That spiritual oneness is obtained immediately and fully at the point of salvation (Gal. 3:28) and is often referred to as "positional" unity or oneness. The other side of the coin is "operational" or "practical" unity. Confusion around church membership often stems from a misunderstanding of these two points. They are very important matters in the church because the church is not just "another organization"—it's God perfect design for local worship, growth, and ministry. We trust you'll find this brochure helpful in clarifying these two aspects of unity and why we find "church membership" to be so helpful.

*Positional* oneness in Christ is not to be confused with *practical* unity. You could look at it this way: there's *eternal* unity in Christ, like what Jesus prayed for in John 17, and there's *temporal, behavioral* unity for Christ, as is referred to in verses like Ephesians 4:11-13. "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the *equipping* of the saints for the work of service, to the *building up* of the body of Christ; *until* we all attain to the *unity* of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a *mature* man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ." (Italics added.) These verses speak of the ongoing, maturing, spiritual growth that results in a believer *behaving* more like Christ.



The term "church membership" can also be misleading. If you are a believer, you are already of member of the universal church of Jesus Christ. You are fully a member of the body of Christ. Whether you're a "member" of your local church doesn't change your position in Christ. It doesn't make you any more or less a Christian.

So why do we encourage organizational church membership? 1 Corinthians 14:40 says, "All things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." That is a broad, sweeping statement that simply lays it upon Christians to fulfill the work of the church in an orderly manner.

## 3 Practical Purposes

Church membership is nothing more than a *tool* that helps us to *efficiently* accomplish the work of the church, much like the "list" in 1 Timothy 5:9. There are many functions of this tool, but here are three primary ones:

**1) Membership identifies those who have testified of salvation in Jesus Christ.**
It affirms what baptism affirms and communicates this to everyone in the church.

**2) Membership identifies those who agree with our church's Statement of Faith.**
"I believe the Bible" means many different things to different people. Our Statement of Faith clarifies how we interpret Scripture, and membership identifies those who *agree* with that interpretation.

**3) Membership identifies those who agree to abide by the practical methods we utilize for church government and function.**
As much as the Bible clearly teaches, we strive to align with it. But the Bible doesn't specify the process for amending our church constitution. It doesn't specify how many weeks notice must be given before holding a church business meeting, nor does it specify who can and can't teach Sunday School or help in the nursery or vote on the annual church budget. The list goes on and on.

The other very real issue at play in this is the fact that your church leaders don't trust their memories. ☺ We need a running *list* for the sake of efficiency and accuracy. We are no longer a small enough church to operate by word-of-mouth. Membership is simply the

best tool we know of for identifying those who are like-minded in these three areas—and it's the best tool for communicating that to the rest of the church.

## *3 Practical Benefits*

**1) Membership is our means of deciding who can vote in the church.**
If we don't use the tool of membership, then how do we determine who gets to vote to elect leadership, take on a new missionary, establish the annual budget, expand our facilities, etc? Clearly we can't just let everyone who walks in the door vote. And operating off the subjective opinion of the church board (as to who gets to vote and who doesn't) would also be ineffective.

**2) Membership helps us know who we can call upon for the ongoing, regular teaching in the church.**
It's the list of those who are saved, affirm our beliefs, and agree to the functional guidelines of the church. At the heart of it, membership helps protect you, your children, and the teaching of the Word of God.

**3) Membership not only communicates like-mindedness to the church leadership—it communicates like-mindedness between the believers.**
We might ask it this way: Would you like the leadership to allow a non-member to teach your 7-year-old daughter's Sunday School class? We're talking about a person who for some reason has not affirmed that they are saved, or has not affirmed that they agree with our Statement of Faith, or has not affirmed to abide by our church constitution. Or all of the above. Or in the best-case scenario, they do affirm all those things—they just disagree with the whole concept of "membership" and our church's approach to practical unity.



As you can see, membership helps give us all a greater sense of knowledge and confidence in those who are teaching and leading in our church family.

## *Conclusion*

**These thoughts humbly beg the question: Why not participate in membership?** Why not affirm one's salvation to their whole church family—since we weren't all present for their baptism and haven't all heard their salvation testimony. Why not affirm one's like-minded belief and willingness to function by the practical procedures of our church?

Remember, if you ever decide to leave Discovery, you are free to withdraw your membership. This isn't like a marriage covenant… "till death do us part."

Consider this big-picture thought: some may take the position of not wanting membership, or not "believing" in membership, and that's okay. But note that if everyone at Discovery held that position, DBC would not exist. The body of Christ would exist, but this local, operational group of believers would not be able to function well together.

## *Next Steps*

If you believe God is leading you to be a member of this local church family, or if you'd just like to know more about what we believe and how we operate, we encourage you to prayerfully attend our *Discovery Class* where we share the history of the church, Statement of Faith, Constitution, etc. (You can indicate your interest in attending that class by joining the *Church Membership* group in our online Community.) If you've not yet been baptized, then you'll want to take that step of Christian obedience first. (See our "Baptism" brochure in the foyer.) Then prayerfully consider membership. As a member of the body of Christ, we need you functioning at full capacity, whether that be teaching, or voting and sharing your insights, or working with children, etc.

Membership helps us to better serve you, helps you to better serve your church family, and in the end, helps strengthen the spiritual unity and mission of the church.

If you would like to discuss this in person or have questions, your church leaders welcome the opportunity to visit with you. And if for any reason you're not inclined to becoming a member, we want you to know that we, of course, welcome you to continue worshipping with us. Membership is not "a hill to die on." It's simply our humble attempt to be functionally united as we proclaim the gospel and grow together in Christ!

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