

# WHY JOIN A LOCAL CHURCH?

## CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AT GRACE

### THE LOCAL CHURCH

Jesus Christ created and established his church as the primary source of displaying his glory and advancing the gospel in the world.<sup>1</sup> Membership in the universal church is defined by saving faith in Christ. Ultimately, only God himself knows who are true members of this universal church, and their membership is the result of his sovereign grace.<sup>2</sup> However, God commands that membership in the universal church be expressed in the context of an identifiable local church.<sup>3</sup> The Christian life as God intends, assumes and demands meaningful local church involvement and commitment. The unique and comprehensive responsibilities, offices, ordinances, and authority of the local church are intended by God to provide the framework of our nurture, sanctification, equipping, and ministry.<sup>4</sup> One of the great blessings of the Christian is to be chosen by God to become part of the church, and thereby display the love of Christ in our relationships, so that people are drawn to the Savior.<sup>5</sup> This necessary relationship with the local church has very practical implications, and to be knowingly and intentionally outside of the care and authority of the local church is to be in sin.<sup>6</sup>

*“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”<sup>7</sup>*

Loving and caring for others is never limited to those in our church.<sup>8</sup> But practically, our first responsibility is to care for those in our church family.

*“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in love. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”<sup>9</sup>*

*“Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need.”<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Matt 16:18; Acts 19:28

<sup>2</sup> Matt 25:31-42; Eph 2:8-9

<sup>3</sup> Heb 10:23-25

<sup>4</sup> Eph 4:11-13

<sup>5</sup> John 13:35; 1 John 4:12

<sup>6</sup> We do not believe it is sin if someone intends to be a part of a local church but for some reason are still in the process of finding one or if there is currently no viable church where they live (Eg. the mission field).

<sup>7</sup> Heb 10:25

<sup>8</sup> Luke 10:25-37

<sup>9</sup> Rom 12:10-15; Cf. 1 Tim 5:1-21

<sup>10</sup> 1 Tim 5:3

Joyful obedience to God is to be expressed through obedience to elders of a local church, and the elders are to give an account to God for how they cared for the flock entrusted to their care.

*“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”<sup>11</sup>*

Elders are commanded to show godly compassion and humility as they lead their specific local church. They are to serve under the authority and Lordship of Christ who is the chief Shepherd.

Certainly, an elder at Grace will not have to answer to God for all the believers in the world, our Country, or California, or even town.

*“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”<sup>12</sup>*

Church discipline is one of the primary responsibilities of the church, and the ability to obey Christ’s way of dealing with sin is only possible if believers are clearly part of, and accountable to, an identifiable local church.

*“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”<sup>13</sup>*

All of these necessary dynamics of the Christian life require a clear understanding of who the committed members of a local church are. Many in our culture today are averse to commitment, accountability, dependence on others, responsibility, and self-sacrifice. There also seems to be a good number of Christians who are skeptical of institutional, formal, concrete expressions of the Christian faith. But our love for Christ must be real, daily, concrete, identifiable, and lived out within the local church. Through most of the history of the church it was fairly uncomplicated to discern who was a true part of a local church. Most Christians became Christians (as adults or children) through the ministry of the local church that they stayed in their whole lives. They were usually baptized, taught the basics of the faith, cared for, preached to, prayed for, married, and buried at their one local church.

Knowing who is a committed member of a local assembly is much more difficult in transient, contemporary, Cultural Christianity, especially in more urban areas. Everyone who may show

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<sup>11</sup> Heb 13:17; Cf. 1 Pet 5:5

<sup>12</sup> 1 Pet 5:1-4

<sup>13</sup> Matt 18:15-17; Cf. 1 Cor 5:1-12

up on a Sunday morning does not define a church. To take our responsibilities seriously, we must clarify our membership at Grace—those for whom the elders particularly care for and will answer to God for at the Day of Judgment.<sup>14</sup>

While the Bible does not prescribe the details of a formal membership process, we believe it seems wise and even necessary to have a clear process by which we determine the membership of Grace. This process is so that the leadership of Grace is able to discern the spiritual condition and beliefs of those seeking membership, and also so the potential member becomes well acquainted with the beliefs, commitments, and culture of our church. Then it will become possible for our church and its members to make knowledgeable and wholehearted commitments to one another.

We recognize that some who are not official members of Grace do feel committed to Grace, and faithfully fulfill all of the expectations of a member. We also realize that we will likely have official members who don't act like it. Our desire is for everyone in our church family to be members both officially and practically.

We want to be welcoming and hospitable to all who come to our church, while at the same time making it clear that membership matters. To this end, certain opportunities and responsibilities are normally limited to members (see below).

Our desire for clear and meaningful church membership at Grace is so that we are able to distinguish between those who are true believers and committed to Grace, so that discipleship can happen as God intends. The gospel creates redeemed individuals, so that they become a redeemed people, who live for God's glory. May we be a people set apart, unified, and reaching out to a lost world in love until every knee bows before our glorious Savior.

## **MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS**

**Love is a commitment.** We see this in the way God loves us. God makes commitments to us, saying: "Nothing will be able to separate you from my love." "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." And "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Throughout the Bible God compares his relationship with his people to a marriage. Love in marriage is a commitment "for better or for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part." Within the security of this marriage covenant, true love is grown, nurtured, and sustained for a lifetime.

So how does this play out for a church? What commitments does a loving church make? On any given Sunday we see hundreds of people walk through our doors and attend our worship services. We're thrilled and want to help and serve as many as God draws to us. And yet we want to help and serve with wisdom.

Even though **the Bible does not prescribe the details of a formal church membership process**, we believe **church membership is wise** and necessary in order to love people better.

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<sup>14</sup> Heb 13:17

Membership is our effort to clarify and communicate. Church membership clarifies and defines what it means to be a part of our church family. Any church has limited resources in the midst of never-ending needs. Our membership commitments do not give us permission to care less; they give us discernment to care best. Church membership helps our leaders express their intentions toward our church family, and at the same time articulate their opportunities and responsibilities with us. Here is what we mean:

## ELDER COMMITMENTS TO YOU

1. To submit to Jesus Christ and follow his lead <sup>15</sup>
2. To oversee the church under the authority of the Bible <sup>16</sup>
3. To live as servant leaders, like Jesus, who are examples worth following <sup>17</sup>
4. To remain devoted to prayer and the Word of God <sup>18</sup>
5. To lead with sincerity and eagerness, avoiding greed and the love of money <sup>19</sup>
6. To joyfully care for your souls <sup>20</sup>
7. To help you become more like Jesus <sup>21</sup>
8. To give instruction in sound doctrine and godly living <sup>22</sup>
9. To correct you in matters of life and doctrine where we see unhealthy patterns and sin <sup>23</sup>
10. To support you in times of celebration and crisis, through gains and losses <sup>24</sup>

## YOUR OPPORTUNITIES WITH US

1. **Growing**  
Our first priority for discipleship, counseling, and care is for our members.
2. **Serving**  
Certain roles are limited to members.
3. **Going**  
Sending missionaries all around the world and supporting them long term is a primary passion for Grace and a privilege usually only available to members.
4. **Voting**  
The members of Grace contribute to the future direction of the church by voting on various decisions, budgets, and leaders.

## FORMAL MEMBERSHIP PROCESS

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Pet 5:4

<sup>16</sup> 1 Pet 5:2; Titus 1:9

<sup>17</sup> 1 Pet 5:3; Mk 10:42-45; 1 Tim 3:1-7; 1 Cor 11:1

<sup>18</sup> Acts 6:4; 1 Tim 5:17

<sup>19</sup> 1 Pet 5:2; Tit 1:7; 1 Tim 3:3, 6:6-10

<sup>20</sup> Heb 13:17

<sup>21</sup> Rom 8:29; Matt 28:20; Col 1:28

<sup>22</sup> Titus 1:9, 2:12; 1 Tim 4:8, 6:3

<sup>23</sup> Matt 18:15-17; Titus 1:9

<sup>24</sup> Rom 12:10-15

Complete our formal membership process, which includes the following:

- Attend every session of our membership classes
- Complete and submit our application for membership
- Be interviewed by a leader at Grace
- Submit a signed copy of our Membership Covenant
- Receive the recommendation of the elders
- Be received into membership through vote of affirmation by the members of Grace

## **MEMBERSHIP AND MINISTRY**

It is vital for us to know the people who represent Christ and our church in ministry. Some ministries at Grace are usually limited to those we know and have committed themselves to Grace through the membership process.<sup>25</sup> (Discerning where these limitations are is still an ongoing conversation among the leadership but we want to let you in on the conversation).

Opportunities Usually for Only Members of Grace

- Elders
- Deacons
- Primary worship leaders
- Grace Group Shepherds
- Trustees
- Standing Committee members
- Funeral Officiant
- Baptism Officiant
- Receive commissioning as a missionary or minister
- Preaching
- Adult and youth Sunday School teachers
- Receive official church discipline
- Enable a quorum for member's meetings and decisions
- Vote at congregational meetings
- Affirm or deny new members
- Affirm or deny the annual budget and budget revisions
- Communion servers

Areas for Further Consideration

- Child dedications
- Ushers
- Musicians
- Non-standing committee members
- Men's & Women's retreat speakers
- Women's Bible study teachers
- Scripture reading, praying, etc. from up front on Sunday morning

Opportunities for Anyone Who Attends

- Attend our corporate worship services

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<sup>25</sup> There may be occasional exceptions to these stipulations at the discretion of the elders (eg. a godly father wanting to baptize his child or a guest from outside Grace).

- Attend our Sunday school classes
- Attend our Lord's Super Services
- Attend our Prayer Meetings
- Receive prayer after the service
- Serve at the Food Bank (in non-counseling roles)