

Church Membership

grace church position papers

From the inception of the evangelical church, the doctrine of membership has been a prominent and often controversial issue. Depending on custom and tradition, the expression of membership may take a variety of different forms. Today a number of different modern church movements are rejecting the idea of church membership all together by stating it is a human idea and unnecessary addition to the Christian faith.

At Grace we are fully aware that our members, regular attendees, and guests are coming from many of the various traditions mentioned above and have strong opinions regarding the doctrine of church membership. As a church we believe this is an important issue and one that needs to be thoroughly addressed.

An increasing number of people at Grace Church are plugging in to the “day-to-day” function of the church without becoming members. At Grace Church we desire for all people to feel welcomed in our community. Our front door is wide open; non-members can attend, take communion, be a part of groups, go on trips, and even serve in a variety of different roles. In fact, by function alone, it can be almost impossible to distinguish between a member and a non-member. While we want to provide an environment that is inviting to all, we also want to clearly communicate our stance and our imminent desire for all Christians in our community to be moving towards membership in the local church.

Many people are hesitant to join the church. Some of the most frequent oppositions to membership are:

- I am already serving and am in a community group, why do I need to join?
- I don't understand how it will benefit me.
- There are too many “hoops to jump through.”
- I don't think it's biblical.
- I don't understand the importance.
- It seems too worldly, corporate and restrictive.

Church membership is a means by which we mark the boundaries of the church. Throughout the Scriptures,

God goes to great lengths to distinguish between His holy people and the world. This is evidenced by God distinctly making man and woman in His own image, by calling out Israel as a distinct and holy nation and by His launching of the New Testament church. Although there is not a single book or verse that details the idea of church membership, a closer look at the New Testament shows that local church membership is assumed over and over again. Here are just a few examples:

- Numerical membership is recorded (Acts 2)
- Leaders are elected over a specific, local body (Acts 6)
- The practice of church discipline shows the public knowledge of who is inside and outside of the church (1 Corinthians 15, 2 Corinthians 2:6)
- Leaders have authority over specific local bodies (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Timothy 5:17)
- Records of widows that are church members (1 Timothy 5)
- An awareness of members (Romans 16)

WHY SHOULD CHRISTIANS BE MEMBERS OF A LOCAL CHURCH?

1. **Biblical Obedience** – Although there isn't a chapter or book of the Bible designated to local church membership, as noted in the scripture references above, the idea permeates the pages of the New Testament. As Christians we are to personally submit to the local authority of the elders appointed by God. All Christians should be members or moving towards church membership.
2. **Covenant Commitment** – Church membership communicates a visible commitment to both God and the body of believers in the church. It is an expression of interconnectedness that states you are committed to the body and the body is committed to you. This covenant declares that you are in agreement with the church and submit to the authority and direction it provides.
3. **Dependent Accountability** – As a member, you show that you understand that Christianity is a

movement of gospel community in which you offer yourself to the church. You make yourself open to reproof, correction, discipline and training that is necessary for spiritual maturity. In an age where independence is ultimate, church membership communicates a message of gospel dependence as you identify your true need for the church.

4. **Protective Blessing** – By aligning yourself with the local church, you enter into a fellowship that serves to protect you. Peter warns us in 1 Peter 5, that our spiritual enemy is ready to devour us like a lion. The training, equipping and fellowship found within the community serves as a shield of protection that cannot be duplicated anywhere else. In Nine Marks of a Healthy Church, Mark Dever writes:

“Church Membership is our opportunity to grasp hold of each other in responsibility and love. By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastors and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed in attendance, giving, prayer, and service. We allow fellow believers to have great expectations of us in these areas, and we make it known that we are the responsibility of this local church. We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve and encourage as well.”

WHAT IS THE MEMBERSHIP PROCESS AT GRACE CHURCH?

The membership process at Grace Church consists of:

1. **Discovery** – Discovery is a one-time program that provides prospective members the opportunity to hear staff and elders articulate the history, beliefs, and mission of the church.
2. **Foundations** – Foundations gives an in-depth look at the church’s core values and provides opportunity for membership.
3. **Completing a Membership Guide** – A membership guide is a tool that helps the church’s leaders shepherd potential members in a more efficient manner. The guide is not an application but rather a compilation of resources, which helps give a more complete understanding of the member. The guide includes:
 - **Covenant Agreement** – A formal statement

that communicates each persons’ covenant with the body towards the common goal of spiritual growth under the authority of God’s Word as directed by the Elders.

- **Gifts Assessment** – A tool that helps provide clarity and direction in how each person can best benefit the body with their gifts, talents, and resources.
- **Testimony** – Each person’s story is different. Not only does this help the leaders understand you more fully, it also allows us to worship God as you give accounts of His saving grace through your unique experience.

[Note: Often, we are asked if we will accept a transfer letter from a perspective member’s previous church. While we welcome information from other churches, we ask that all members of Grace go through the process laid out above. We do not claim that our process is perfect but we do believe it helps accomplish our mission by allowing us to get to know the prospective members personally, and granting them the opportunity to learn more about our church before making a commitment.]