

Why Church Membership?

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What picture comes to mind when you hear the word membership? Maybe it is Costco and the members only access to its massive warehouse. Maybe it is the library and the benefits of borrowing books and resources for your family. Maybe it is a fitness club and the access you gain to use their equipment through your membership. We're familiar with these kinds of memberships. They are transactional. Both parties benefit. We pay a fee. They get the money. We get the benefit of access to what they offer.

So when we use the term "membership" with respect to a local church community, we may apply the same template of our Costco or Library membership to the church. We may think it's all about paying a membership fee and then gaining the benefit of the services offered. Yet no one pays money to join the church in membership. We don't have a membership fee. People can access all our services and ministries without joining the church in membership. So what is this thing we call local church membership? Why do we do it? What might be some obstacles that prevent us from going forward with it?

Membership is a covenant before God to join with a specific community of Christians to grow together in Christ, support one another in Christ and join in ministry to advance the kingdom of Christ.

So church membership is communal. You can go to Costco as a member, do your shopping and barely talk to anyone but the check out person. You can go to the gym and work out alone or with one other friend. You can go to the library and get your books without talking to anyone. You might find a little community in these places. But the church is all about doing life together.

It's true that there are other social clubs or communities where you can do some life together. But another major difference about the church is that this community centers on Christ. The main reason we come together is Christ – not some hobby or cause or sports team.

So church membership involves this coming together under Christ to grow in Him together, do life together and do ministry together. Now many participate in our community in all these ways without becoming formal members of the church. I thank God for you. You have participated in our community and supported our ministries fully. We would not be who we are without you. You are part of us. I respect how many of you have prayerfully thought about this.

There are many reasons why people may not join formally in membership. One major reason is baptism. Currently, we only admit to membership those who baptized by immersion as you saw today. We believe that immersion has strong Biblical backing. But we also recognize that many of you come from other Christian traditions that practiced infant baptism or were baptized as a believer in a different way such as pouring or sprinkling. We recognize that those events in your life were significant spiritual markers. We don't want to minimize them. Yet some have joined us in membership and have come from other traditions. They have concluded after prayerful consideration that they can go ahead with immersion baptism as another piece of their spiritual journey with Christ.

Sometimes, we may struggle with church membership because we live in a culture that promotes personal autonomy as the ultimate value. We don't like anyone restricting our freedoms. Membership sounds like restriction and limitation.

Maybe some fear commitment. Or some fear that joining in membership may cause dissension in their family. Or maybe we don't want to limit our options when it comes to church. Today there are so many options for church both in person and online, that some have adopted a buffet approach to Christian community. We may take some from the church over there, and we like the speaker here and we enjoy another program there. So joining one community in membership seems restrictive. Or maybe we don't like some things about local church. We fear that if we join in membership, we will be associated with some of those things we don't like. All of these can contribute to hesitation regarding church membership.

But remember a definition of church membership - **Membership is a covenant before God to join with a specific community of Christians to grow together in Christ, support one**

another in Christ and join in ministry to advance the kingdom of Christ. Covenants can be very good for us. Think about the marriage covenant. It's very different than a Costco membership. A covenant binds us closer together and encourages us to persevere and work things out through tough times. Most often, we grow and learn the most through tough times. So when we covenant with a church community, we learn about dealing with different people. We hear other's perspectives. We actually have to work through things rather than run away from them. The potential character growth and development increases exponentially when we stick with a community where people begin to know and see us.

Covenants also allow us to align around a core set of beliefs. This ensures that our teaching must depend on those foundations and not one person's opinion. These beliefs also govern our behavior. They direct us to stick to the core essentials of the Christian faith. We are and want to continue to be a Christian community that comes under the Lord and His Word. These beliefs enable us to agree on the Gospel and the primary mission of the church. They remind us of why we exist and why we keep going.

Covenants also give permission to others to speak into our lives. The personal autonomy mantra says, "No one can tell me how to live my life." Yet we all have blind spots. We all have weaknesses. We all have growth points. If no one speaks into our lives about our need to grow and change, we likely won't. We will settle into only what we think is right. Spectacular failures of Christian leaders often result because of lack of accountability.

So these are some of the reasons we practice church membership – growth in our Christian life; a community that supports one another; a common set of beliefs that govern us; a commitment that encourages us to keep going when times are tough.

Our community at SVBC is imperfect. We have our strengths and good points. We also have our flaws and weak points. Yet we continue to pursue the Lord together to lead us and help us grow. I read a prayer this past week that maybe sums this up well – Lord, I praise you for what the church could be – an alternate human society that shows the world your glory. But I confess

I am part of what the church is – a flawed community far from reflecting your character. Give me the understanding and the love I need to become part of the solution, not the problem.”

So if you would like to explore membership a little more, you can scan the code on the membership booklet or in the bulletin. It will take you to a form where you can communicate your interest or questions. Or you can talk with the people who are about to join us in membership. You could ask them to share the journey that led them to today.

Scan the QR code for more information

