



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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MEMBERSHIP: THE REASON WHY & PURPOSE FOR

Over the last 20 years the church has seen an incredible shift in Christianity as a whole. According to research done by Gallup, prior to 2000 almost half of all American's belonged to a specific Protestant denomination. Today, this number has dropped to just 30% with the Southern Baptist Convention losing a million of its members in just 15 years.

In 2010, the Hartford Institute for Religion tallied more than 35,000 nondenominational churches in the US, comprising of more than 12 million attendees. Today, 1 in 6 Americans claim to be nondenominational Christians. It's clear the shift from denominations to a nondenominational structure has been drastic and dramatic.

Roger Olson, professor at Baylor University George W. Truett Theological Seminary, remarked that this, *"shift toward nondenominational identity is so strong that even denominational churches downplay their affiliations to avoid the negative connotations now associated with religious hierarchy and structure."*

While this move away from the divisive nature at the very root of the denominational concept is a healthy development for the church, the fact remains that the unintended consequences of the explosion of the nondenominational church movement and subsequent departure from a formal denominational structure has yielded two negative phenomena specific to our day and age: consumer-Christianity and church-hopping.

Today, when deciding where to attend, it's a shame that many Christians make their decision based solely upon what they hope to get out of the experience. This is why it's simply logical that when a person eventually tires of their current experience they see no harm in leaving one local church to attend another across town promising a better product.

To this point Barna Research Group reports that every year 1 out of every 7 Christian adults change churches — with 1 of 6 attending two or more churches on a rotating basis. The simple fact is that most growing churches in America are simply reshuffling the deck.

The fundamental problem with this growing trend is that in no way did Jesus institute the local church to be a place you simply attend or come to be served. Instead, Jesus designed the church to be a community of fellow Christians you belong too!

While it's true we're all members of the universal church, **joining a local group of believers has always been an essential component of the larger Christian experience.**

As you examine the first church in the book of Acts the word "fellowship" consistently emerges. We read in Acts 2:42 that the church *"continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."* In the Greek this word for "fellowship" is koinōnia which described communion and joint participation.

In fact, the word *koinōnia* was so strong in nature it could even be used to describe marital intimacy. In this context the local church was not founded by Jesus Christ to be a place to go to or a service one attended. Rather, **the church was instituted to be a collection of Christians committed to living life together.** The church was to be a Holy Spirit community that naturally yielded both accountability and real discipleship.

Instead of leaving one church for another the moment things became difficult, one's feelings were hurt, or an interpersonal conflict arose — the original vision for the church created the framework whereby relationships grew deeper because people had to tough it out, work through their differences, and remain committed to one another. It's true that **no genuine friendship has ever existed without a healthy measure of endurance.**

Tragically, much of what Jesus desired the church community to be has been lost by these unintended consequences of the new nondenominational structure. **Consumer-Christianity and the Church-Hopping culture it has created has warped our understanding of what the church was designed to be.** People attend church when they're supposed to be apart of the church. People seek to be served at church instead of looking for a practical avenue to serve others. People show up on Sunday when they should be connected all week.

One of the main reasons this particular perspective has developed in this growing nondenominational environment has been the abandonment of church membership. In order to combat the divisions caused by these traditional denominational structures, the early pioneers of the nondenominational model emphasized one's universal membership of the larger church with the goal being to bridge divides and restore Christian unity.

And yet, while this was a noble aim and the abuses of formal membership obvious, something else sadly manifested. You see **what resulted from this countercultural approach was the de-emphasizing of the importance of becoming a member of the local church.**

Again, a negative repercussion from this shift in approach is that **most pew-sitters are free to be nothing more than observers who have little to no sense of personal responsibility for the church they attend.** To this point it shouldn't be a surprise that roughly 10% of those who attend church on Sunday actually tithe — and even fewer tithe 10% of their income!

Though it's true Calvary316 has no denominational affiliation and that won't change, in light of what's happened in our culture, **we are convinced a simplified church membership based on basic Biblical ideals is vitally important to combat these growing trends.**

Not only does the very concept of church membership fundamentally oppose this rampant consumer mentality we see all around us, but **we believe membership challenges a Christian to see a local church as being much more than a place to attend by creating a practical mechanism whereby a person can choose to belong.**

In considering the concept of church membership from a Biblical perspective we believe there are two areas denominational churches went awry. **First, the Bible is clear that if you hold to enough essential beliefs to be considered a Christian you should be able to join a local church.** It's a travesty when someone can be a follower of Jesus, but be excluded from joining a local church over minor theological disagreements with the leaders.

As such, the statement of beliefs we've crafted for our church membership is only designed to insure you're actually a born again believer. **From our perspective, if you are a genuine follower of Jesus, we welcome you to be a member of Calvary316.** Within the local church there should be room for a diversity of thought and perspective.

The second area we believe denominational churches missed the mark was in their overemphasis on financial giving as being a requirement for membership. Again, it's a fact that over the years membership became the mechanism to coax more consistent giving.

Members were required to pledge a yearly amount, and in even more extreme cases submit a W2 to prove they were indeed tithing 10% of their income. Beyond this, almost everyone who's been a member of a denominational church can recall how they received mailer after mailer wanting money years after leaving. How terrible!

While our statement of beliefs will ask that a member affirm the importance of generosity as being a response to God's grace, we believe **tithing should not be a prerequisite for membership.** Though the Bible has much to say on the topic, **it would be inappropriate to demand something for church membership that isn't a requirement for salvation.**

With all of this in mind, we believe **membership boils down to two basic conditions: First, are you a Christian? And secondly, do you want Calvary316 to be your church home?** If you answer yes to both questions, we'd welcome you as a member of Calvary316!

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As you examine the fundamentals of the early church two realities are unavoidable. On one end of the equation **the people recognized who their leaders were.** There was clearly a governmental structure to the local church with defined roles like Elders and Deacons, as well as a list of qualifications for the men who filled these positions. In a sense, the people knew who their teachers and leaders were and to whom they were accountable.

On the flip side to this, there is also ample evidence **the church leaders knew who they were responsible to care for and accountable too.** In some parting words to the Elders of the Ephesian church recorded in Acts 20:28 the Apostle Paul admonishes them to *"take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."*

Writing in the same vein the Apostle Peter encouraged pastors to (1 Peter 5:2-4) *“shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.”* Clearly these leaders knew who their flocks actually were!

In a Christian culture where people are prone to come and go on a whim, **the point of church membership is that it not only enables a person the ability to choose their leaders, but it helps those leaders know who's under their authority and care.**

The easiest place this becomes apparent is in matters of church discipline. Because of the ideas of Biblical authority, submission, discipleship, and accountability the expectations leaders have for members should be radically different than they are for attenders.

While the church should welcome anyone to come on Sunday morning free of judgment, a member has chosen a different context. By joining you've given the church leaders not only the platform to teach you the Scriptures and encourage your walk with the Lord, but you've given them the important task of holding you accountable to live worthy of that calling.

Aside from the benefits of membership already articulated, there is no question as to the practical advantages. First, by providing an easy mechanism to collect contact information, membership affords a church greater organization and ministry effectiveness.

Secondly, in a very practical way, a formal membership process allows someone who's been attending to take an official step aimed at plugging into the larger church family. Membership gives the attender an easy way to articulate their commitment and feel more apart of the work God is doing. **Membership always fosters a greater sense of ownership.**

The act of joining a church helps morph one's perspective from a “them mentality” to a “we psychology.” No longer is this person just a beneficiary of the work or an observer. A member becomes a contributor and a participant. In a sense we hope that when a person decides to formally join Calvary316 they'll become vested in what happens here!

Third, church membership establishes an easy way church leaders can vet those who want to plug into ministry. While non-members are free to attend all church events and even serve as Ushers, in the Hospitality Center, or Media Department it simply makes sense that any teaching capacity or role involving children would be restricted to only our members.

With all of this in mind, membership at Calvary316 will also grant an individual access to a special password protected section of Calvary316.tv. Because of the private nature of the page, this will allow us to provide a prayer list of needs specific to only our church family, issue quarterly financial statements, as well as create a members directory.

What about children? From a practical standpoint, children 10th grade and under will be included with their parents. However, once that child enters the 11th grade and is formally transitioned from our youth ministry into the adult service on Sunday, they will be given the opportunity to make their own decision concerning membership.

What are the grounds to have membership revoked? Obviously, if you choose to leave the church, we will immediately remove you from the membership rolls. Additionally, if the church has to administer discipline in accordance with the Scriptures over blatant, unrepentant sin you will also be instantly removed by the church leaders and asked not to attend.

It should be pointed out that the singular difference between this person being asked to no longer attend and a visitor welcomed without preconditions is that the individual has already given the church the authority to enact discipline when they originally became a member.

Aside from these two obvious situations, we're also going to set up a re-enrollment period every year with the intention of combatting the natural entropy of people who simply stop attending or those who move out of the area. We also see this re-enrollment period as being critical to insuring our contact information and database remains current year after year.

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Before you consider joining remember you do not have to be a member to come to Calvary316, participate in any of our social events, or serve in certain capacities. That being said, we do hope you'll consider making this important step by joining Calvary316. Not only do we believe this will help you connect in a more meaningful way, but we believe this will help us minister to you and your family as God has called us to.

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How do you become a member? Now that you have a copy of the application and have reviewed our positions concerning church membership, please read over our statement of beliefs on the following page. If you agree, sign the application, fill out the family information, and return the last two pages to the information center any Sunday morning.

The following week you'll receive an email from Pastor Zach welcoming you to the church and a password granting you access to the members section of the website.

MEMBERSHIP: STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

I affirm the following set of beliefs:

- I have accepted the atoning sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross as the only payment for my sins and have chosen to place my complete faith in this work for salvation.
- I believe my righteousness before God and ultimate justification were afforded through the bodily resurrection of Jesus who now acts as my High Priest and Advocate in heaven.
- I realize salvation is only a manifestation of God's grace and that no human work can add to or take from the holy standing afforded to me by Jesus.
- I believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible as God's Word.
- I believe in the triune nature of God presenting Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- I believe the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is essential for regeneration and transformation.
- I believe Jesus was supernaturally conceived of the Virgin and is fully God and fully man.
- I believe God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things.
- I believe in an eternal judgment by Jesus of the wicked.
- I believe in the future, physical return of Jesus to the earth.
- I believe marriage is defined as a union before God between one man and one woman.

Aside from these beliefs, in choosing to become a member, I recognize Calvary316 to be my church home and choose to place myself under the Biblical headship of the ordained leaders.

Furthermore, I understand generosity is a natural manifestation of God's grace, and that tithing is therefore an important component to being a member of a local church.

Finally, I acknowledge the importance of regularly attending Sunday service as an essential aspect to being a member of the local church.

Signature: _____ **Print Name:** _____

Spouse: _____ **Print Name:** _____

MEMBERSHIP: FAMILY INFORMATION

Home Address: _____ City: _____ Zip: _____

Name: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____ Age: _____ Birthday: _____

Spouse Name: _____ Cell: _____

Email: _____ Age: _____ Birthday: _____

Children Information (If Applicable):

Name: _____ Age: _____ Birthday: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____ Birthday: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____ Birthday: _____

Name: _____ Age: _____ Birthday: _____

Explain how and why you (and your spouse) came to know Jesus as your personal Savior: _____

Explain how your family started coming to Calvary316: _____
