

Membership

Belonging at Grace



When we make commitments in life, we attach ourselves to the blessings. Local church membership is one of those commitments with blessing. Throughout the New Testament, followers of Jesus aligned themselves with a distinct group of believers, people in physical and relational proximity to them.¹ No one thought that knowing and growing in Jesus was for Lone Rangers. Life with Him was meant to be experienced together. It was meant to be experienced in a recognizable, relational commitment to Him and to one another. The believers were family, and they distinctly knew who those family members were...and weren't.

What is the Church of Jesus Christ?

The Church of Jesus Christ is made up of every person who has been born again. Such individuals are marked by repentance of sin and trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. They receive new life and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They are placed into the Family of God. They are joined to the Bride of Christ. They become part of His Body. These realities occur instantaneously at salvation to anyone who is reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ. These are true regardless of location, age, gender, family, religious background, social status, or any other human distinction. Baptism is then the public affirmation of such faith, as people identify with Jesus and declare His salvation of their lives.²

What is the local church?

A local church is a community of people who belong to Jesus and are thus already part of His worldwide Body. A local church is an outpost or embassy of Jesus' "heavenly nation". It is an expression, limited by time and locale, of the universal Church. But, in the biblical picture, it is more. **A local church is a community of believers who have covenanted together around a common Lord, a common faith (doctrine), common leadership, common practices, and a common mission. They are a visible family of Jesus followers, submitted to Him and to one another.**

How does one become a member of a local church?

Membership in the worldwide Body of Christ does not automatically make one a member of a local church. However, in practice, believers seek recognizable identification with a distinct expression of the Body of Christ—a local church. Believers make explicit their commitment to each other and their loyalty to Jesus. In our setting, that involves an identifiable commitment to those believers, including both privileges and responsibilities.³ Local church membership offers mutual benefits to the individual and the church as a whole.

Is local church membership biblical?

The idea of local church belonging—the recognizable commitment of a believer to the local church and the local church to the believer—runs throughout the New Testament. It makes concrete the *who* of the "one anothers," the obligations we have to those in need, the family for whom we give, the community and leaders to whom we submit, the partners with whom we serve, etc. (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12)

¹ Note the many verses in New Testament letters and the common use of "brothers" or similar family language.

² See *Baptism at Grace* document for an excellent summary. (GracePolaris.org/Community/Christian-Walk)

³ See the Grace Polaris Church summary entitled *Membership Privileges and Responsibilities* (GracePolaris.org/Community/Christian-Walk) for our affirmations.

Admittedly, one will search in vain to find a verse that mandates local church membership in the same way one finds it for baptism (Matthew 28:19) or certain elements of Communion (i.e. John 13:14, I Corinthians 11:23–26). Yet local church membership is built into the fabric of Christian faith from the New Testament onward. “You simply cannot talk about a local church without talking about its members. It’s like trying to talk about a team, a family, a nation, or, yes, even a club without talking about its members. It’s what each of these things *is*.”⁴

What is gained by a formal affiliation with and allegiance to a local church?

Local church membership helps make the Church of Jesus Christ visible in one location. It identifies a community of Jesus followers with common commitments.

- *Shepherds know what sheep are under their care.*
(1 Peter 5:2, Acts 20:28)
- *Believers know which leaders to whom they submit and obey.*
(Hebrew 13:17, 1 Timothy 5:17)
- *Professions of faith gain public credibility through baptism.*
(1 Corinthians 1:13-16)
- *Believers are applauded and exhorted by other family members.*
(Philippians 1:27,28, 1 Corinthians 5:1–12)
- *Individuals are embraced and valued as vital parts of God’s family.*
(Philippians 2:1–4)

NEXT STEPS: How do I become a member at Grace Polaris Church?

- Visit GracePolaris.org/Community/Christian-Walk for info on church membership
- Attend an upcoming “Considering Church Membership” class
- Complete and submit an Application for Membership

Email Jodie.Adkins@GracePolaris.org or call 614-839-6849 with any questions.

We look forward to welcoming many more to the Grace family through local church membership!

⁴ Jonathan Leeman. *Church Membership* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 47.