

A MATTER OF MEMBERSHIP: AN ASSESSMENT OF ACTIVE
CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

“WELS has approximately 56,000 fewer members than it did 25 years ago.” (*Forward in Christ*, Volume 105, Number 5 - May 2018). For many years, church membership has been in decline. Yet Covid hang-over symptoms such as online worshippers and worship absentees provide the need to reassess the role of active membership in our congregations. The goal of this thesis is to analyze what it means to be a member of a church in the twenty-first century. By establishing scriptural and historical evidence of membership, the first half of the thesis will summarize current attitudes toward membership today. After sharing conclusions from interviews with church leaders of various backgrounds, the thesis will offer practical principles when examining their membership practice in order to strengthen and build up the souls entrusted to their care.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
PART I: A SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF MEMBERSHIP.....	3
The Church.....	3
The Invisible Church.....	3
The Visible Church.....	4
Public Confession.....	6
PART II: A HISTORY OF CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP.....	9
The Early Church.....	9
The Age of Constantine.....	14
The Reformation Era.....	18
Protestantism in America.....	21
PART III: MODERN MEMBERSHIP PRACTICES.....	24
Roman Catholic.....	25
Megachurches.....	28
PART IV: MEMBERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN WELS.....	33
PART V: PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS FOR CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP.....	37
A Relationship of Communication.....	37
Membership Expectation Forms.....	39
Church Discipline.....	40
CONCLUSION.....	42
APPENDIX 1. QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEW WITH CONGREGATIONS.....	43
APPENDIX 2. A COLLECTION OF MEMBERSHIP EXPECTATION FORMS.....	44

BIBLIOGRAPHY50

INTRODUCTION

He was a regular. He was a gentle man who was involved in the community. He and his family sat in their regular pew every Sunday. It wouldn't take a Welcome Home Sunday to see him in bible class. Throughout the week, a variety of circumstances would bring him to church. His daughter was in the preschool. His family was more involved than half of the congregation's members. Congregational leadership would approach him, "Logan, how about a membership class?" But this amicable question would be answered, "If I became a member, what would change?"

It's no secret: membership in churches across the nation is on the decline. The studies seem countless, and their findings provide a bleak outlook for the future of the church. A recent Gallup poll reports only 50% of Americans claim membership to a church, synagogue, or mosque, a drastic twenty-percentage-point decline since 1999.¹ Yet the same poll reported that over three-quarters of Americans identify with some organized religion. Why the discrepancy? What do these studies suggest about the current American view of membership in a church? One could excuse the declining numbers to a generational disinterest in religion. Or has the meaning of membership been confused and misunderstood?

1. Gallup Inc., "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades," Gallup.com, April 18, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>. Many similar polls have been conducted, and most provide similar data. The poll proposes a lower rate of religious preference among the younger generations, especially among Millennials, as a major factor for the decline in church membership.

As churches are looking for ways to manage Covid hang-over symptoms such as online worshippers and worship absentees, this unique religious climate provides the need to reassess the role of active membership in our congregations. What does it mean to be a member of a church in the twenty-first century? What is meant by the term and how is the concept taught and practiced? Why should a visitor want to become a member as opposed to one who attends church regularly? All these questions are summed up well: what changes, if anything, when an individual becomes a member?

Rather than proposing ways to stop the leak of members from our own congregations, this thesis will first seek to examine what is meant by the term 'member' and how it is understood. By establishing scriptural support for the practice, the thesis will examine the function of membership in dynamic times in history which have set the stage for the present religious scene. Finally, this thesis will examine membership practices in congregations of different backgrounds to propose solutions to properly teach both present and future members the meaning and importance of membership.

PART I: A SCRIPTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF MEMBERSHIP

The Church

Nowhere in Scripture is the terminology “membership” used or defined. Yet the concept of belonging, which membership implies, or a united gathering of believers is stated clearly in Scripture. In the spiritual sense, this gathering of believers is referred to as the doctrine of the church. Scripture also states the importance of a public confession from within the church. Because the church is the “something” to which a member belongs in this context, it is of first importance to maintain a correct, biblical understanding of how the church is established.

The Invisible Church

“Because there is only one way to heaven, namely, faith in Christ, there is only one holy Christian Church.”² In this way, Scripture speaks of one church (Ephesians 4:5–6). This we know also as the “invisible church.” Membership in the invisible church is determined only by the presence or absence of faith in the heart, which God alone can see (1 Samuel 16:7; 2 Timothy 2:19). The church is not detectable to the senses, just as the resurrected Savior and the Holy Spirit are invisible. Nor does an affiliation with any one body or the totality of membership of all

2. John Brug, “The Biblical Doctrine of the Church,” n.d., 1.

church bodies constitute membership in the church proper.^{3 4} It is the Holy Spirit who brings individuals into God's church as he works faith in hearts through the gospel.

All those who believe that Jesus Christ is their Savior from sin belong to God's church. In this way, no person can choose membership in God's church. Only God can claim and truly know every member of his church, for "the Lord knows those who are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). 1 Corinthians 1:9 gives us an example of the vertical relationship we have when it says, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful."

The Visible Church

Then what is the purpose of belonging to a visible gathering of people that we understand today as a church? While God's church remains invisible, God has given to his church activities, or marks, which only believers have an interest in employing.⁵ These marks are God's chosen means of grace, the gospel in word and sacrament, through which the Holy Spirit brings and sustains members in God's church. The church then is not "a mere illusion, a platonic idea, or something imaginary. It is real."⁶ Wherever visible gatherings of people meet to use the means of grace, they may be correctly identified as churches because of the true believers present in them. Membership to a visible church body is a way of letting the world know who represents Jesus.

3. "Church and Ministry," WELS, <https://wels.net/about-wels/what-we-believe/this-we-believe/church-and-ministry/>.

4. Jonathan Hein, "The Church and Her Members," presented at WLS *Symposium on the Church, 2008*, 1. For a thorough distinction between church *proper* and church *improper*, reference pages 2-3.

5. Heinrich Vogel, "The Doctrine of Church and Ministry," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 1976, 11.

6. Vogel, "The Doctrine of Church and Ministry," 11.

Paul lays out this truth in 1 Corinthians 1:2 when he addressed the “church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.” The visible church is then an assumption that believers are present wherever the gospel is preached, where baptism and the Lord’s Supper are correctly administered as Jesus instituted them.⁷ It is not a matter of a church’s locale that is most important, rather its identity as those who have been called out of spiritual darkness and presented as God’s possession⁸ for Jesus’ sake.⁹

Christian Freedom in Organization

While the essential marks a church holds do not change, at the risk of no longer being a true church, the manner in which believers congregate is left to Christian liberty to arrange. Faith in Christ will seek opportunities to express itself to serve other souls. In speaking of the outward structure of the church, Heinrich Vogel states “that these believers will want to express their faith to one another and to their fellowmen. For this reason, they will form a group of Christians which we also call a church or a congregation.”¹⁰ This thesis aims to focus on membership to such a local congregation and will be referred to as *congregational* membership.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul mentions the “psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit,” activities of the church which flowed as a result of the indwelling of the message of Christ. From

7. John F. Brug, *The Ministry of the Word* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2009), 34.

8. 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV11)

9. Dr. Brug indicates that Jesus refers to the church ἐκκλησία (ἐκ + καλέω = “to call out of”) by name only two times. In Matthew 16 he refers to the grand total of all believers, the largest church, while in chapter 18 the smallest church (a group of only two believers who have faith in Christ) is indicated.

10. Vogel, “The Doctrine of Church and Ministry,” 12.

this and similar passages (Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 Corinthians 14:26; Acts 2:42), we can deduce how early Christians met together to express their common faith. While far from an exhaustive list, Romans 16 acts as a “church directory” of sorts, identifying specific, identifiable people who share the bond in Christ.

Part II of this thesis will further address similar church externals, such being organizational practices, membership included, that are not essential to a church. Whether or not these practices are utilized does not affect the true essence of the church, nor should they. On the contrary, historic practices within the church have been a benefit to it. But all this being said, “the basic and simplest form of such a gathering of Christians has always been and still is the local congregation.”¹¹

In no way can we judge a person’s status inside or outside of the invisible church, nor has God called us to do so.¹² This is God’s matter. Therefore, this thesis will continue by examining membership within the visible church. In this matter, a person has a degree of choice. Yet God does tell his church of the importance of meeting together (Heb 10:24-25). Still, the question remains: “With whom?” The discussion then turns to the doctrine of fellowship. While this thesis will attempt to stay on the tracks of church membership, it is worthwhile to understand the role of public confession as it applies to an individual seeking congregational membership.

Public Confession

A confession of faith does two primary things: first, it unites a person with a group who lays claim to the same beliefs as that individual. Based on a common public confession, fellowship

11. Vogel, “The Doctrine of Church and Ministry,” 12.

12. Hein, “The Church and Her Members,” 1. Pastor Hein elaborates on the usage and history of the terms *visible* and *invisible* church. We do not speak of two churches, but two perspectives of the same Church – man’s perspective and God’s.

can be thought of in two ways. “The Bible speaks of a vertical fellowship that we have with God through faith.”¹³ Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians speaks plainly about this relationship: “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (1 Cor 1:9). As was previously established, the vertical relationship with God by faith in the heart cannot be seen. But a public confession can be heard and seen by humans.¹⁴ Based on such a personal confession, a horizontal fellowship is assumed to exist. Paul recognizes this natural correlation when he writes, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved” (Rom 10:10).

At the same time, a public confession also separates a person from those who teach differently. Paul once again urges the Roman believers “to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Rom 16:17). We obey God’s command by distancing ourselves from those who hold different confessions of faith. Paul recognized this reality when he urged the Ephesian elders recorded in Acts 20:28-31,

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!

While not digging too deeply into church fellowship, it is important to establish a common understanding about which aspects of fellowship a congregation ought to occupy itself. Armin Schuetze summarizes three aspects of fellowship, who is at work and involved in each:

13. Daniel Olson, “Is Church Membership the Only Means by Which We May Judge One’s Confessional Stance?,” WLS Essay File, 1.

14. Olson, “Is Church Membership the Only Means by Which We May Judge One’s Confessional Stance?” 2.

1. fellowship as it exists among all believers and their God through faith in the Lord Jesus; 2. fellowship as it is recognized and known by the confession of the mouth; 3. fellowship as it expresses itself in joint activities. We can sum this up in three words: faith, confession, action. The first is worked and known and seen only by God. The second and third are also worked only by God, but recognized and done also by us. It is with these two latter aspects that we Christians are directly involved as we live together in the world.¹⁵

Therefore, claiming membership in a visible church body is a matter of confession of the mouth and an expression of activity evident among believers in united action. Membership in local congregations has been practiced in various ways as churches began to develop and establish organizational structure. However, in the following history of membership, one most important truth must be kept: Jesus Christ established the Christian church, and his basic interest was in the kingdom of God. The communities of believers we see are “outposts of heaven,”¹⁶ external responses, although imperfect, to the eternal member fellowship God has with us as confirmed and revealed by Christ.

15. Armin Schuetze, “Joining Together in Prayer and the Lord’s Supper: The Scriptural Principles of Fellowship Applied to Prayer and Holy Communion,” *WLS Essay File*, October 1995, 2-3.

16. Ray C. Petry and Clyde Leonard Manschreck, *A History of Christianity: Readings in the History of the Church*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1987), 2.

PART II: A HISTORY OF CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

The purpose of this section is not to offer a comprehensive overview of the organizational practices of the church. It is assumed that the essential elements of the church have remained the same. God and his church are present where the gospel is preached in Word and in sacrament. In this portion of the project, the discussion is about receiving members into our own visible congregations. The concept of membership in the visible church has served various functions throughout history, and a congregation's members have been identified based on various criteria. By examining certain historical eras in the church, it will become clear that the organization of the church and the role of membership within it have taken on many forms and functions.

The Early Church

For a casual observer of life in the first and second-century Roman Empire, the distinction between pagan and Christian was crudely evident. Cyril Richardson, in his book *The Church through the Centuries*, recognizes the key difference: the lifestyles of those following different “saviors.”¹⁷ It was a difference of two worldviews, two meanings of life. The lifestyle of a pagan was devotion to the worldly savior, Caesar. Pagans would not worship Caesar as a god himself, but

just as fascists and communists nowadays believe that social and political organization is life's ultimate meaning, so did the Romans. The emperor was the symbol of the divine

17. Cyril Charles Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries* (New York: AMS Press, 1979), 14.

power in the empire which was summed up in unity in him. This the early Christians clearly saw it, and the conflict of Christ and Caesar was very real.¹⁸

From the viewpoint of Roman pagans, the confession of a Christian was extremely visual, and therefore, easily identifiable by a lack of participation in certain areas of widely-accepted Roman society. To be a Christian meant they “could not engage in the accepted expressions of political loyalty, so they appeared as a threat to the Roman state.”¹⁹

The Christian Problem

The relationship between those who identified as Christians and the Roman government was widely attested by Roman leaders and church fathers alike. Everett Ferguson uses the exchanges of Pliny the Younger, who served as governor of Bithynia from 111-113 AD, and Emperor Trajan, ruler of Rome from 98-117 AD, to shed light on the legal ramifications brought against those associated with “the name,” that name being *Christians*.²⁰ After interrogating the accused whether they were Christians, Pliny identifies three distinct responses: 1) those who remained steadfast in their public confession, and thus executed, 2) those who denied any association with the Christians, and 3) those who had been Christians but had ceased to be such.

The crime often confessed was meeting together before daybreak, partaking of an oath to abstain from theft, robbery, adultery, and the like, then concluding with a sharing of food. At the time there was a ban on secret societies, which, because the Christian refused to participate in larger community events, were directly linked to the underground activities of Christians who

18. Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries*, 13.

19. Everett Ferguson, *Church History: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context*, Second edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 68.

20. Ferguson, *Church History*, 68.

regularly met in private homes.²¹ To prove their lack of association with the church, the accused would then be forced to recite a prayer to the gods, worshipping the emperor statue, and curse Christ—things that “those who are really Christians cannot be induced to do.”²² These examinations left Pliny both impressed with the willingness of some to be executed for this Christian association, but ultimately, because of others’ denial, that this group believed in nothing more than “a debased superstition carried to great lengths.”²³

Because of these circumstances and the relatively small size of the church at the time, one’s association based on their verbal confession to the faith was far more black-and-white, and thus far more meaningful, than it may be considered today. Such was the basis for the Lapsi controversy of the third century A.D. Under Roman law, all citizens were required to sacrifice to the traditional gods and carry with them a certificate of sacrifice upon completion. To carry such a document was a clear denial of the faith they had verbally professed. Thus, from an external standpoint, the marks of membership with the Christian church were varying degrees of persecution or even martyrdom for the faith.

Expectations of Early Christians

However, the writings of the early church fathers give extra insight into the activities and organization of the church from within its walls. Justin Martyr, among others, writes extensively about the community’s participation in Eucharist, prayer, the bond of a common hope, brotherly

21. Ray C Petry and Clyde Leonard Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 15. This specific citation is from a translation of the *Didache*, likely written in the early second century. This collection of translated letters, documents, and writings from numerous early church leaders proved helpful in understanding the mindset of early Christians, hearing from first person accounts how early Christians were identified and organized.

22. J.B. Firth, “Pliny: Letters - Book 10 (b),” Pliny the Younger: Letters, 1900, <http://www.attalus.org/old/pliny10b.html>.

23. Firth, “Pliny: Letters - Book 10 (b).”

discipline, and use of the “treasurechest.”²⁴ The outward persecution called for strict unity in teaching and belief. In an excerpt from one of Justin’s personal witnesses to Rusticus, a prefect of Rome, Justin does not identify any place of assembly or regular time, but a spontaneous willingness to communicate the doctrines of truth to whoever would inquire.²⁵

Despite intense persecution, whether organized corporately or intensely individual, the church grew. Baptism marked the official inclusion of converts to the Christian number but was preceded by a period of proper instruction. Catechumens (from the Greek meaning ‘oral handing down’) were expected to meet requirements: praying and fasting with established Christians while committing to live a moral life and a continued understanding of Christian beliefs.²⁶

Because of the oral tradition of examining the catechumen and the quickly flourishing number of believers, the process and concept of membership became increasingly codified. By 215 AD Hippolytus, an important Christian writer in Rome, described an extremely thorough process to become a fully participatory member of the church.²⁷ This process involved background checks of allegiances and occupation. Professions that were deemed unchristian included anything to do with prostitution, divination or magic, or those involved with theatre and the games because of their association with pagan ritualism. Those involved in the military were put under oath to refrain from executions, and painters and artists vowed to never make an idol. A three-year course followed the lifestyle examination to ensure thorough instruction and

24. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 23. Evidently, the early church used its money almost exclusively to help any of the poor and needy, a rare act of that era that was soon thought of synonymously with the Christian life.

25. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 45.

26. Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2006), 46.

27. Hill, *Zondervan Handbook*, 46.

fulfillment of oaths. Cyril of Jerusalem, who lived in the fourth century, wrote about the desired intentionality of learning and professing the faith. “For since all cannot read the Scriptures, some being hindered as to the knowledge of them by want of learning, and other by a want of leisure, in order that the soul may not perish from ignorance, we comprise the whole doctrine of the Faith in a few lines. This summary I wish you both to commit to memory when I recite it, and to rehearse it with all diligence among yourselves, not writing it out on paper, but engraving it by the memory upon your heart.”²⁸ The church was certainly not short on its expectations of those who called themselves Christians.

The Expanding Church

During those first centuries, the church outgrew its earliest incubator, the city community, and slowly moved into the rural country. The need for a more defined organization was necessary as the church’s geographical imprint grew. Already in 107 AD, Ignatius of Antioch repeatedly stressed the power of the bishop. Christians of a particular city had been regarded as belonging to a singular community, whether meeting in one congregation or many,²⁹ and were led by a single bishop. As Christians moved out of the city, the need for separate congregations or parishes, which would, in turn, constitute a diocese, was apparent. The role of the bishop could not be understated, as Ignatius put it, “Wherever the bishop is, there let the people be, for there is the Catholic Church.”³⁰ The power and, therefore, the responsibility of church organization was beginning to shift from the established members to a form of church leadership. This is not

28. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 131.

29. Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, fourth ed (New York: Scribner, 1985), 88.

30. Hill, *Zondervan Handbook*, 47,50.

inherently bad. Yet, as one history textbook puts it, “The church was beginning to take on the form of local parish ministry familiar in the Middle Ages and modern times... Church organization grew in two ways: by the development of the authority of church councils, and that of certain bishops over other bishops.”³¹ A hierarchy within the church was not-so-secretly forming underneath its rapid growth.³²

The period of the early church allowed for a lesser need for strict organizational concepts. Yet it was undeniable that Christians proudly bore their Father’s name³³ as God brought more into his church through their bold witness to the Word of truth. As it grew, so did its standing within the secular world, both a blessing and a curse to the preservation of truth.

The Age of Constantine

One of the most significant factors in the church’s early expansion was the reign of Roman Emperor Constantine. Although his men continued to march under the sign of the Christian Chi-Rho, Constantine did not make Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine’s objective was unity and prosperity.³⁴ In the Edict of Constantine, the precursor to

31. Tim Dowley, ed., *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity*, first American ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 190.

32. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 137. A letter entitled *The Church, the Clergy, and the Assembly for Worship*, written to an unnamed bishop, provides interesting details of the dynamics within the assembly of the church. The author uses the imagery of a ship to describe how important the role of deacons, presbyters, and especially the bishop were to the church, and how their worship space gave proof of such truths.

33. I think of Jesus’ prayer for his disciples in John 17:11-12, 20-21 – “I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to you. Holy Father, keep them in your *name, the name* which you have given me, that they may be one even as we are.... I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in me through their word; that *they may all be one*; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.” (NIV11) (italics mine)

34. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 112.

Constantine's co-authored *Edict of Milan* of 313 AD with Licinius Augustus, Christians were granted "full authority to observe that religion which each preferred."³⁵

Religious Tolerance

If Christianity were to serve Constantine's purpose of unifying the empire, the church itself must be one.³⁶ Christianity was unofficially sponsored by the Roman state. Sunday was made a holiday, and soldiers had to attend church ceremonies.³⁷ Christians no longer were confined to house churches, rather state-funded basilica churches sprang up through the empire. State tolerance of Christianity "led to far more people joining the church,"³⁸ so the buildings became correspondingly larger to fit them all in. Jonathan Hill also notes how these basilicas helped further define the roles of clergy and laity: the separation of the sanctuary (where the priest performed the Eucharist and other services) and the nave (where the congregation sat) would be a visual and psychological separation between the two.³⁹

Per the order of Constantine, all property, including land and churches, was to be restored to Christians, financial support was given to fracturing churches, and clergy were exempt from political duties.⁴⁰ A new synergism was forming between church and state, with a purpose Constantine clearly states: "Let this be done so that...Divine favor towards us, which, under the

35. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 57.

36. During this time, church unity was plagued by the Donatist schism in North Africa as well as the Arian controversy, all while attempting to maintain equity between the East and the West, both state, and now, church.

37. Hill, *Zondervan Handbook*, 73.

38. Hill, *Zondervan Handbook*, 75.

39. Hill, *Zondervan Handbook*, 75.

40. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 58.

most important circumstances we have already experienced, may, for all time, preserve and prosper our successes together with the good of the state.”⁴¹

The Constantinian Church

The general perception among Christians was positive for this empire-wide “Constantinian church,” an appropriate goal for a church with such humble beginnings. Great leaders like Byzantine emperor Justinian the Great, known best for his work in restoring Roman culture, especially in the area of law, took notice of the good the church provided. In the sixth century, he summarized the hopeful possibilities religious concord with the state would bring:

Nothing should be such a source of care to the emperors as the honor of the priests who constantly pray to God for their salvation. For if the priesthood is everywhere free from blame, and the empire full of confidence in God is administered equitably and judiciously, general good will result, and whatever is beneficial will be bestowed upon the human race.... We think that this will take place if the sacred rules of the church which the just, praiseworthy, and adorable apostles, the inspectors and ministers of the word of God, and the holy fathers have explained and preserved for us, are obeyed.⁴²

But not all believers of this period saw such unifying attempts under state sponsorship as beneficial. Such a union between church and state and its developments may have marked the beginning of the decline of the church “because of the decline of commitment among church members, the lowered standards of the Christian life, and the introduction of coercion as an aspect of religious profession.”⁴³

Throughout the following centuries, an allure to the church grew. The Roman church was the vessel that transmitted Roman culture into the Middle Ages. “In many ways, the Roman

41. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 57–8.

42. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 75–76.

43. Ferguson, *Church History*, 181.

church had taken on the shape of the Roman world in which it had grown to maturity.”⁴⁴ For many, especially young boys, the church became what the Roman military once offered “a way out of a life of agricultural toil and hearty coarseness.”⁴⁵ The most obvious example may be in the way church organization followed the pattern of imperial Roman administration. The hierarchy of officers⁴⁶ was “virtually the same as that of the Roman civil administration.”⁴⁷

Gerald Bray sums up the problematic nature that Christianity’s religion and values faced as a state accepted—and even promoted—entity:

The Roman Empire had long survived without any equivalent to the church, so when the church emerged on the scene a place had to be found for it. What role should the church play in society? What privileges should it have, what power should it be given, and what boundaries should there be between it and other organs of the state? Everything from the celebration of religious holidays to tax exemptions for the clergy had to be covered—and justified. If the church was necessary for the public good, then it would be relatively easy to make a case for giving it privileges and exemptions. But if it was just another religious cult of no particular value to anyone except its own members, it would be much harder to justify giving it any special consideration.⁴⁸

Over the course of the Middle Ages, the church faced an identity crisis. The church would continue in this general pattern of organization, as its growing involvement in the social order “was matched by its insistence upon spiritual rights in the temporal sphere.”⁴⁹ During the

44. Dowley, ed., *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity*, 195.

45. Paul Russell Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg, *A Global History of Christians: How Everyday Believers Experienced Their World* (Grand Rapids (Mich.): Baker Academic, 1994), 79.

46. The hierarchy consists of a priest along with presbyters/deacons for every church, a bishop for every city, with an archbishop for each province. Church canon law was modeled after Roman law. Church councils and papal decretals paralleled imperial edicts.

47. Dowley, ed., *Eerdmans’ Handbook to the History of Christianity*, 195.

48. Gerald Lewis Bray, *The Church: A Theological and Historical Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 137–8. This work was helpful in offering insight into the varying theological understandings of the doctrine of the church, and how they shaped its use in various historical periods.

49. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 497–8.

rise and fall of many nations around it, the church would replace its most important marks, the care for souls by the clear proclamation of sin and grace, with the marks of an organization that provided secular aid and carnal comforts. It had many questions it had to ask itself that demanded answers.

The Reformation Era

Even before the Reformation of Martin Luther, Christian scholars began to wage war against papal authority to reclaim the true definition of the church. Still, in the fifteenth century, the church was the pope and the institution of the Roman Church. The pope, as Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, had claimed this power as the visible source and foundation of all the faithful.⁵⁰

Early Reformers

French theologian Jean Gerson, who became instrumental in reconciling the splintering of papal power that resulted in the Great Schism,⁵¹ wrote against the church's long-standing claim that only by papal authority may a council be convened.

The essential unity of the church continues always in her relation to Christ her Bridegroom. For 'Christ is the Head of the church,' in Whom you're all one, according to the apostle, even if he has no vicar: that is, when His vicar is bodily or civilly dead or when there is no probability that Christians will ever show obedience to him or to his successors....For the mystical body of the church, most perfectly established by Christ, does not have less right and strength for the procuring of her own union than has any civil, mystical, or true natural body; for there is no provision in immediate and immutable

50. Catholic Church and Libreria editrice vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Revised in Accordance with the Official Latin Text Promulgated by Pope John Paul II.* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), 233–4. The Catholic church references Matthew 16:18 to lay hold of this claim still today.

51. Beginning in 1378 AD and culminating in 1417 AD, the Great Schism of the Western Church was a period where two, and later three, rival popes claimed papal authority, each with their own following and administration. Gerson, along with other great reformers Jan Hus and Pierre d'Ailly (among others) were those who rediscovered and refocused where authority in the church lay.

divine or natural law that the church cannot congregate herself and unite herself without a pope.⁵²

This is early evidence that the Holy Christian Church and the historic institution of the Catholic Church had become nearly synonymous. Only a few years later, the prolific German philosopher and theologian, Nicholas of Cusa, wrote concerning the primacy of Peter. He claimed that the superiority of Peter was not superiority over the church, but within it.⁵³ While he recognized that Jesus did desire men to make take up leadership in the name of the church, the right to appoint leaders was given to the members of God's church to call on such men to carry out the task.

Martin Luther

The questions these men raised came to a head in the work of Martin Luther. Luther did not think of himself as the preeminent scholar nor organizer of his era. But by a direct and deeply personal relationship with God by grace alone through Christ, Luther brought to the forefront “a confident salvation that left no room for the elaborate hierarchical and sacramental structures of the Middle Ages.”⁵⁴ Luther made such a confident salvation evident in his teaching of the church.

Even with Luther's rebellion against the hierarchy of the Roman church as it was commonly accepted at the time, Justo Gonzalez notes how Luther could not be rightly considered an individualist either. “Luther attached too much importance to the church to be classified as a true individualist.”⁵⁵ Luther's theology, especially that of the universal priesthood

52. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 525.

53. Petry and Manschreck, *A History of Christianity*, 539.

54. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 336.

55. Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity. Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation*, Rev. and updated [ed.], 2nd ed (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 52.

of all believers, did not solely teach an individual in direct communion with God, but an individual Christian life to be lived within a community of believers. “Rather than setting aside the need for the community of the church, the doctrine of the universal priesthood of believers strengthens it.”⁵⁶

Out of this teaching we come to understand Luther’s rightful emphasis on the proper administration of the sacraments in the native language to all of God’s church. Within the life of the church, the Word of God is made plainly evident in the sacraments. Luther recognized the prominence of these gifts to the church. Without them, in fact, a church fails to be a church. In no way were Luther’s actions regarding church order and practice revolutionary for its own sake.⁵⁷ But with an incessant curiosity as to what made a church or congregation *God’s* church, Luther among others after him recognized the vital importance of the Word and sacraments, correctly taught, preached, and practiced, as the heartbeat of such a gathering of believers.

Protestantism in America

Tracking movements and ideologies within the many splinter groups of the church in America is like tracking the movements of two dozen rabbits who have found holes in their individual pens. It is chaotic, messy, and nearly indistinguishable from the other. “Many combined the struggle for independence [within the colonies] with a rationalistic ideology that spoke of Providence above all as a principle of progress.”⁵⁸ The birth of new colonies and nations in North America

56. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 53.

57. For instance, Luther showed his conservatism in matters of worship by his preaching against the early radicalism of Karlstadt and Zwingli regarding the mass and the priestly office in Wittenberg in the spring of 1522. The focus of his preaching was based in the gospel of Christ, forgiveness of sins and love for one’s neighbor, rather than a squabbling over the “externals” of the church.

58. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 320.

provided a social, political, and religious playground that had never before been explored. “The new nation itself was living proof of human progress.”⁵⁹ Only the elements of Christian churches that could be understood in terms of reason or common morality were deemed necessary; the rest became “unnecessary ballast on the ship of progress.”⁶⁰

A few major events and schools of thought help historians categorize the religious scene in America: the first was the establishment of mission societies in America. The thirteen original colonies were peopled by immigrants, mostly from Great Britain, but also from Germany and other parts of Europe.⁶¹ Mission societies, whose influence in America peaked in the late eighteenth century, developed in Europe as a tangible effort to answer God’s call of making disciples of all nations. However, these efforts came with one major problem: some societies drew their membership from a single denomination, while others broke confessional barriers.⁶² Gonzalez recognizes these joint mission efforts were in the spirit of the times, where Unitarianism and universalism were the two great ideas that commonly emerged across colonial America.

The term “denominational” came out of the Enlightenment Age in Europe and spilled over into the religious scene in America. Cyril Charles Richardson defines the term within the Protestant church by recognizing its basic characteristic: toleration. Denominationalism recognizes the differences in other forms of Christian organization, but only by virtue of its own traditions and cultural background. At the same time, it was also churchly, “insofar as it claims

59. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 320.

60. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 320.

61. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 323.

62. González, *The Story of Christianity*, 418.

to carry on a traditional institution with dogma and the sacraments,”⁶³ and therefore a commonality, fueled by pietism and evangelicalism, existed between denominations.⁶⁴

Richardson correctly recognizes the awful consequences this widespread tolerance had on Protestantism in America. The historical elements of the church, once held in highest regard in some churches, were disregarded, leading to indifference among church-goers. “But indifference is the degradation of true tolerance.”⁶⁵

One event played a consequential role in the development of tolerant denominationalism in America: the Great Awakening of the early eighteenth century. In some ways, the Great Awakening was a revolt against Calvinism, as practiced by New England Puritans, in the same way the American Revolution was a revolt against Parliamentary constraints.⁶⁶ For approximately twenty years beginning around 1725, the Awakening movement was characterized by the conversion experience of those seeking God and spread rapidly to every part of the colonies. This revival had several pertinent results: 1) the groundwork for religious liberty in the New World was laid by a strengthening of smaller denominations around the revival’s interdenominational character based on a shared spiritual experience, and 2) as political relations with England were stretched thin, the revival fostered a sense of spiritual unity among American colonists.⁶⁷

63. Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries*, 197.

64. Hill, *Zondervan Handbook*, 374.

65. Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries*, 198.

66. Paul Russell Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg, *A Global History of Christians: How Everyday Believers Experienced Their World* (Grand Rapids (Mich.): Baker Academic, 1994), 260.

67. Robert Andrew Baker and John M. Landers, *A Summary of Christian History*, Rev (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 324.

Richardson recognizes likely the greatest development from the early awakenings, a development that has given American religion one of its most typical features. “Periods of apathy and irreligion have been superseded by extremes of religious enthusiasm and hysteria.”⁶⁸ Periods of disconnect from the church in America have been followed by periods of mass conversion, often for irreligious reasons. The desire for an enthusiastic religion based on experience and emotion explains the volatility of commitment and indifference to the church as a whole. A religion of direct experience presupposes neither the necessity of the church nor of any adequate theology.⁶⁹ The church then becomes “a stress laid upon the will of God’s personal and social holiness, which it is the Christian duty to establish in the world.”⁷⁰ It is a church associated with moral activism, instead of the place of the sacraments of Christ, which mediate the grace of God to his people.

68. Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries*, 226.

69. Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries*, 226.

70. Richardson, *The Church through the Centuries*, 229.

PART III: MODERN MEMBERSHIP PRACTICES

So how is membership in the local congregation perceived and utilized today? American history has demonstrated the general public's waxing and waning interest in its commitment to a church. Still today, membership in different churches emphasizes the priorities of a particular congregation. So what does it mean to be a member of a church today? What expectations ought congregations have for their members? What does membership to a local congregation communicate? By examining the practice of membership in various church bodies, much is revealed about a congregation's identity and what it treasures most.

The Research Method

In the initial research for this project, it became evident that in order to answer the research question of why membership exists in certain church bodies, statements on membership would not be entirely sufficient. What a church body teaches is only half of the equation. Rather, how membership was practiced would allow for a deeper insight into the thoughts, emotions, and practical reasons that individuals desire to associate with a particular church. The research question really seeks to answer how congregations define membership. Is claiming membership simply an acknowledgment of mutual principles and ideas, a status that is attendance- or participation-based, or a combination of the two? A logical follow-up question is then how membership is perceived by those who claim it.

A qualitative study suits this portion of the project well. It allows the observer to learn first-hand from leaders in various positions from different faith backgrounds concerning a widely practiced church concept. While admittedly far from all-inclusive, there were a few broad criteria in reaching out to the congregations selected. In general, the participating churches were large in membership number and located in densely populated areas. Another factor considered in the initial selections was the possibility for modern, innovative programs or viewpoints about how the concept of membership was used.

The interviewees also ranged in position within the churches contacted, from pastors to secretaries to coordinators. In no way were their statements meant to be evincive of the whole, but both official and personal insight that participants provided proved valuable.

A dozen non-WELS churches from the greater Milwaukee area were contacted with an initial request for more information regarding their church's membership teaching and practice. Of those twelve churches, seven replied with some degree of willingness to participate. Interviewees were asked a series of questions that pertained to the statistics, experience, programs, and additional literature that would relate to membership.⁷¹ A further study that expands outside of the Milwaukee area and into a greater number of churches would be beneficial, but the examples below will suffice and hopefully prove beneficial.

Roman Catholic

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines a parish as “a definite community of the Christian faithful established on a stable basis within a particular church.”⁷² In reaching out to individual

71. The interview questions are printed in the appendix.

72. Catholic Church and Libreria editrice vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 526.

parishes, many did not feel comfortable speaking on the matter. They all referred to the Archdiocese to receive any statements on the matter. Email correspondence was made with the Director of Evangelization & Catechesis (Childhood). In it, he stressed first and foremost a parish's role in relation to the Holy Catholic Church, (capital "C") that is, the united body of Christ. On the matter he states, "One is a member of the Catholic Church by being baptized in the Catholic Church or, having been baptized in another ecclesial community, having been received into the full communion of the Catholic Church. So membership is, first of all, a sacramental reality."

Understanding membership in the Catholic Church shapes how Catholic parishes organize and serve their members. The director made a point to clarify that the majority of Catholic parishes are territorial, meaning all the Catholics in a particular geographic area are part of that parish community. Simply by being a member of the Catholic Church, that is, having been received into the full communion of the Catholic Church through baptism, an individual is considered a member of the closest geographical parish. "They [the individuals in a particular geographic area] do not need to register to become members, they may not be 'active' and may not participate regularly in Mass...But they are members of the parish."

Registering to formally join a parish is helpful for parish leaders in serving the needs of an individual, in addition to the promotion of stewardship through volunteer recruitment, financial support, and pledge drives. But registration alone does not constitute membership.

Catholics are, however, permitted to register with a parish that is not their local parish. The transfer may be for many reasons, including worship preferences, particular programs offered (e.g., a school), family or friend connections, or simply for a more comfortable atmosphere.

Major Themes from Roman Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church welcomes members into their number much in a similar way that we do. Baptism is the rite of initiation, and they certainly hold the Eucharist in highest regard. It is the reason that members of the church should want to gather together.⁷³ While we believe the sacrament is first and foremost given to God's church for the forgiveness of sins, it is also beneficial in declaring a unity in Christ. It is because of the sacrament that we can genuinely speak of a real bond of fellowship shared with one another.

Two takeaways are worthy of note: the first is the Catholic Church's teaching on how members of a parish are characterized. "They do not need to register to become members, they may not be 'active' and may not participate regularly in Mass. But they are members of the parish, simply by virtue of being members of the Church in that area." This requires no commitment on the part of a parishioner. It also lessens the possibility of the church losing members, because members are then only lost due to official disavowal of the Church, and not for a gradual fall from interest on the part of the individual.

Secondly, in applying to one of the area Catholic parishes, it is required to fill out a form of parish ministry/organization interests.⁷⁴ The individual is also asked to provide their particular talents/skills. The information on the form gives the parish meaningful feedback in order to get parishioners involved in their areas of interest while allowing prospective parishioners to recognize all the opportunities for service within the particular parish.

73. Catholic Church and Libreria editrice vaticana, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 537–8.

74. Appendix 2.

Megachurches

The commonly held definition of a megachurch is a church that has over two thousand attendees each weekend.⁷⁵ This definition has been limited to attendees at one single campus. Because of the recent shift toward multi-campus churches, the definition has morphed to include multi-site congregations.⁷⁶ Yet this definition speaks nothing to membership requirements. The aspect of this paper, analyzing membership practices outside the WELS, had these types of churches specifically in mind. The research gathered from interviews with and publications from megachurches are included in this project.

Megachurch 1 (M-1) has approximately 9,000 in-person attendees each weekend. M-1 touts nearly 3,500 officially recognized “partners.” Although partnership is not promoted publicly from a pulpit, the term partnership has the same “home/belonging” concept as membership with a shift in emphases. Baptism is not a requirement for partnership, and an “open communion” is celebrated once a month for anyone who has professed faith in their Lord and Savior Jesus. Only partners of M-1 are able to vote at the annual meeting, where visionary and budgetary items are proposed and discussed; yet the decisions made are communicated to all who worship or participate at the congregation. Partners are required by M-1’s by-laws to annually renew their membership. This has recently taken the form of electronic communication, review, and reaffirmation of personal faith and commitment to M-1.

M-1 has made a concerted effort in promoting “the next step,” nurturing the emotional relationship instead of the formality of partnership. Partnership at M-1 revolves around a

75. Andrew P. Bauer, *A Lutheran Looks at - Mega Churches*, A Lutheran Looks At (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2012), 1.

76. This widening of the definition is not intended to include “synods” as WELS Lutherans understand synods, rather multi-site congregations are often clones of itself that share a specific organizational structure, such as constitutions, pastors, or church leadership.

“mutual, deeper commitment” to the vision and activities of the congregation with one’s use of time and talents. This commitment becomes tangible in the church’s investment into small groups. The small group concept is used for discipleship in addition to interested persons looking to more formally join M-1. Nearly 700 partners are in some sort of leadership role, part of M-1’s formula of fostering a greater commitment. If an interested person desires formal partnership, the church uses a NEXT program, offered three times a year, to review with the prospect M-1’s core beliefs, mission statement, and church property and organizational structure. During the program, a seasoned leader takes the prospect through a formal application, reviews their personal faith journey, and presents a partnership covenant to sign. Most importantly, the individual is asked to make a faith commitment to Jesus as Savior and cannot be a partner without such a commitment.

Megachurch 2 (M-2) is organized as one church in five locations across Milwaukee, one being an online campus. M-2 counts nearly 2,000 attendees across all five campuses with 156 partners in its record. The congregation is transitioning to the use of the term partnership, as membership implies “a one-time deal.” Thirty-one staff members are employed at M-2, including pastors, directors, secretaries, and assistants. M-2 also practices an “open communion,” where only those who have accepted Christ and consider themselves disciples of Jesus may take part. But unlike M-1, a “believer’s baptism,” which also consists of a credible confession of faith, is required to enter into partnership.

Much like M-1, partnership is not promoted in the congregation. Yet because of its relatively low number of partners to attendees, M-2 is looking to “close its back door” and promote an attitude of long-term commitment, investment, and involvement with the church and its surrounding community. So then, even before becoming prospects for partnership, individuals

must have been around M-2 for more than two years, been involved in a small group for more than twelve months, in addition to having been baptized as a believer. During that two-year “screening” period, church leaders also take into account “consistent giving.” The interviewee stressed that it is not a matter of dollar amounts, but a desire to support the church ministry long-term through giving.

Once the pre-prospect period is up, congregational leaders will reach out to those who meet the qualifications to invite them to a partnership course. The course is offered two times a year, and attendees must be present for three consecutive classes – an attempt to keep the bar high in communicating the desired degree of commitment the congregation is looking for in its partners. Once those three weeks are up, a membership team recommends names to the elders, who in turn approve their partnership in the congregation.

M-2 has recently put together a committee to “reanalyze the qualifications” for partnership every two to three years. This would also create the need within M-2 to organize a yearly partnership renewal. At the time of the interview, the only concrete difference that becoming a partner would make is the ability to vote at the yearly vision meeting. Instead, M-2 desires to shift focus toward the practical meaning of partnership, entertaining the possibility of requiring some aspect of involvement or service in connection with M-2, whether that be a small group, congregationally-run volunteerism, or pursuing necessary degrees to fill open positions within the congregation. In an effort to first model a service-focused attitude, M-2 will host “covenant member dinners,” where the staff will service its lay partners. Such an effort and those like it hope to strengthen the relationship between employed staff and partners of the congregation.

Major Themes from Megachurches

The megachurches considered here certainly prioritize a high degree of commitment from their partners. Besides the churchy aspects, a congregation and its partners are, at its core, an organization that strives to meet the needs evident in the community around them. They accomplish this through volunteerism and social charity. In turn, the ministry, or activities, of the respective congregations are heavily reliant on the lay partners. This framework shapes the identity of the church. It ensures that if the congregation is to continue making a difference in the lives of those it comes into contact with, participation is required. The emphasis is on the practical, asking how partners are willing and able to show what they believe. A major role of the churches, then, becomes providing its lay partners with opportunities to put faith into action.

A commendable aspect of their practice and teaching of membership is their patience in encouraging prospects to commit to their congregation. “Membership” or partnership is not the end goal. Both churches stressed the importance of personal *growth* instead of the importance of partnership. However, from an external standpoint, the question must be asked how these required encouragements or prescribed steps of growth are perceived. Without a correct, biblical understanding of the sacraments and how God receives souls into his church, the occurrence of legalistic teaching is likely.

A pastor of M-1 noticed the positives and negatives of being a self-proclaimed non-denominational church. At the time of the interview, a major emphasis shaping the church’s identity was its volunteerism and partnership. But this emphasis varies from “senior pastor regime to senior pastor regime.” Their annual meetings play a vital role, where the senior pastor is to be most transparent in communicating the vision for the congregation in the coming year.

The change in terminology from “membership” to “partnership” is intriguing and worth a conversation; it is a topic that is explored further in Parts IV and V.

PART IV: MEMBERSHIP PRACTICES WITHIN WELS CONGREGATIONS

So how have WELS congregations sought to answer similar concerns and questions regarding membership? Much like Part III, eight WELS congregations were asked to participate in this project. Most congregations were large in membership number and located in densely populated areas. By word of mouth, three congregations were contacted for their unique membership practices, caused by the congregation's method or locale, and the research is included below.

Interviews were conducted with the pastors of the congregations. Thus, these men had a more thorough handle on the congregation's approach and process of welcoming individuals into fellowship. Interviewees were asked nearly the same questions as the participants in Part III. Part IV is written to address WELS parish pastors and lay leaders to review and possibly reconsider the form and function of their congregation's membership practice.

Congregational Study #1

WELS congregation 1 (W-1), by definition, could be considered a megachurch, caring for nearly 2,000 partners. Over 2,000 people worship over W-1's three campuses, one of which is entirely online. In speaking with a pastor at W-1, the change from membership to partnership was made with biblical footing. He referenced Philippians 1:5 where Paul thanks God for the Philippian congregation, ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.⁷⁷ The word κοινωνία can be translated as

77. B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C.M. Martini, and B.M. Metzger (Eds.), *The Greek New Testament - Fifth Revised Edition*, (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014).

a “fellowship/partnership” in the gospel, that being its ministry. The pastor noted that the term “membership” often carries with it “consumeristic overtones,” an attitude the congregation wants to avoid. In publications, W-1 speaks of itself as a “ministry,” rather than a church that distinguishes itself as “Lutheran” or “Evangelical.” While maintaining the conviction that doctrine does matter, the exclusion of terms is done in the spirit of “looking for ways to be heard – looking to gain an audience” for the “doctrinal meat” the congregation highly values.

Partners with W-1 are encouraged to serve in one of the congregation’s many capacities, and attendance in a Bible Class is required. Nearly 1,000 individuals participate in one of W-1’s Bible class offerings. Among all the congregation’s programs, which include a food pantry, counseling services, and multiple levels of schooling, W-1 staffs thirty-eight workers, nineteen of which exclusively serve the church.

W-1 uses a model for welcoming and educating partners that is very similar to what was described in the non-denominational churches mentioned previously. After requesting information about partnership and initial contacts from the congregation, a visitor is encouraged to attend a Starting Point course. The four-hour course is for everyone, including WELS transfers, who want to become a partner of W-1. Participants also fill out a Spiritual Gift Assessment so that the congregation may more easily plug them into a fitting role.

New partners are encouraged to join an introductory class called “First Oasis” to discuss W-1’s small group ministry. Over six weeks, small group participants work through Thom Rainer’s “I am a Church Member” in addition to reading through the life of Jesus using the Zondervan-published “The Story” Bible. Every third year, partners are asked to renew their partnership agreement in W-1’s “All In” process. The process is clear communication that an individual desires to continue recognizing W-1’s ministry as their ministry. A review of the

doctrinal agreement is conducted, including providing partners with resources that they may continue expressing kingdom advancement by their service to the congregation and God. This process also serves as an opportunity to ensure the congregation has its partner's most up-to-date contact information

Another fascinating aspect of W-1's ministry is its youth confirmation program. In following a biblical model, parents of the students teach portions of confirmation. A pastor is involved in teaching the parents, who in turn teach their children. The pastors at W-1 recognize the power of equipping parents, who already share a special relationship with their children, to do this important task. Due in large part to this model, W-1 possesses a 78% retention rate of young partners after confirmation.

Congregational Study #2

WELS congregation 2 (W-2) cares for nearly the same number of souls as W-1. While Covid has skewed the numbers, attendance at weekend services peaked above 1,000 souls and meets at one campus each week. W-2 holds the traditional terminology of members for those who formally recognize a mutual association. W-2 runs a Lutheran elementary school and an active Spanish ministry. Nearly twenty adults are confirmed every year.

W-2 puts forth a concerted effort to use congregational strengths to cover possible weaknesses. One aspect is their philosophy towards their school. The pastor communicates the message to parents upfront. "If you use our school, you need to become a member. It doesn't have to be today or immediately; we want to teach doctrine and plant its seeds." The pastor made it a point that in no way is a child's enrollment called into question if membership is declined, but the purpose of the classes is clearly communicated, and high expectations are set to show

non-members the congregation's passion to connect people to Christ. M-2 also relies on friendship evangelism. For a congregation of 2,500 people, the pastor recognized that even if only 1% casually speak well of M-2 and invite friends and neighbors, that results in twenty-five new prospects. According to the pastor, this organic form of evangelism is a constant refrain in their preaching and teaching.

Prospective members are encouraged to attend an orientation meeting, scheduled three times a year at the end of a Bible information class. Both members and non-members often attend this all-morning event. All pastors of M-2 are involved, and many practical topics are discussed: liturgy, hymnal, sermon prep, offerings and budget, tours, and history of the campus. No formal expectations are set of M-2's new members, except those which are covered in the congregation's constitution, simply summarized as "Scripture and Sacrament." The pastor was in favor of incorporating a document on which these expectations are laid out.

PART V: PRACTICAL APPLICATION FOR CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

A Relationship of Communication

“What does it mean to you to be a member of this congregation?” How would members of our congregations respond? What aspects of church life would they emphasize? “What does it mean to you that this individual is a member?” How would our church leadership answer this question? Membership has been an important program in church polity as we strive to take seriously Jesus’ one command to his church: love one another as Christ loved his Church.

To be a member is a privilege and a responsibility. This concept of *belonging* to something presupposes a relationship, a commonality between individuals. But how is that relationship expressed? What are members’ prevailing attitudes towards its church and its church toward them? If it is true that the church is built on Jesus Christ, the Son of God, membership in our congregations means that the commonality is in Christ. Congregational membership, a commitment of word and of life, is an important aspect of a Christian’s life of sanctification as it is built on Christ’s foundation.

Should congregations embrace a change from the possibly implied consumerist terminology of *membership* to activity-implied *partnership* lingo? For some, it may simply be an argument of semantics. There is good argumentation for such a change. Partnership implies a sense of equality, which reflects how Scripture speaks of those who are one in Christ.⁷⁸ Less

78. Galatians 3:28. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (NIV11)

likely might the church again fall into the church hierarchical mindset of the Middle Ages. All God's people are partners in the gospel. To a church facing the oft-arising apathy that plagues sinful hearts toward the spiritual life, such a change of focus is certainly valid. So in Christian freedom, church leaders are exactly that - free.

But freedom also allows Christians to say 'no' – especially in a case where such terminology may confuse others. Perhaps a switch may imply a connection with those who, in teaching or practice, do not agree with Scripture. It is true – membership may imply a consumerist mindset. Yet such a mindset is exactly what ought to be at the heart of a Christian life. The Christian amounts to nothing without the reception of the gospel of sins forgiven in Christ. Lutheran worship, which denotes so much more than one hour each week, is first a receiving of God's grace in Christ, after which all the principles of Christian life and worship fall into their correct place and role.⁷⁹

What may be needed most of all in matters of the church is what James White calls “The Three E's of the Twenty-first Century” – explanation, experience, and example.⁸⁰ The emphasis today is not necessarily *what* we do (although vitally important), but also *why* we do it. When the *why* finds its rightful home in the *what* of the gospel, we may talk of an experience of the faith – a life lived for Christ. This in turn creates models and mentors who are meaningfully connected to God's Word and beacons of truth to those exploring the Christian faith.

79. Johnold J Strey, *Christian Worship: God Gives His Gospel Gifts* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2021), 45.

80. James Emery White, *Rethinking the Church: A Challenge to Creative Redesign in an Age of Transition*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 59.

Membership Expectation Forms

Membership to a congregation that proclaims the gospel is an absolute privilege. But let us not forget it is also a responsibility. The membership relationship is a *both/and*, not an *either/or*. Any responsible man or woman knows clear communication is key to a growing relationship. The use of a prepared membership expectation form may solve issues of clearly communicating both the privileges and responsibilities of membership.⁸¹ By shifting the focus away from growing membership and towards growing those already under spiritual care, opportunities for outreach and growth beyond the present number may increase. Although admittedly outdated, Edward Rauff observes in his 1979 book *Why People Join the Church* a truth that still holds relevance. “Christian people, intentionally or casually or without even realizing it, are a force drawing people to the churches. Their witness was made by silent example or by verbal testimony.”⁸²

If a congregation sees a need for such a tool, how can leadership communicate both aspects of privilege and responsibility that membership declares? The unveiling process of such a system would take thoughtful pastoral tact, but here are a few points to consider. The means of delivery is important. Pastors using similar tools have all emphasized face-to-face communication in rolling out their programs. This also allows the opportunity for explanation. It lays the groundwork for open communication between the pastor and parishioner. Terminology is also important. Many terms communicate the concept of membership, but how are terms like “covenant” and “partnership” used and understood in society? What assumptions may your community make about your relationship to other area congregations by using such terms?

81. Appendix 1 contains a few examples of membership expectation forms.

82. Edward A. Rauff, *Why People Join the Church: An Exploratory Study* (New York: Washington, D.C: Pilgrim Press; Glenmary Research, 1979), 63.

A popular way in which churches are turning the focus toward discipleship is their emphasis on small groups. While the small group concept can accomplish its intended purpose with plenty of work and effort, Richard Schowalter recognizes an unintended but common result. Using the example of the popular Women's Group, whose emphasis is often fellowship and support, "they become exclusive and fail to truly welcome the stranger or the visitor."⁸³ Schowalter instead recommends such emphases can be maintained more meaningfully by fostering fellowship and support within the family.⁸⁴ Whatever the solution may be, a congregation is responsible for nurturing the souls of its people. Nurturing does include giving its members opportunities to put their faith into action, whether it be service, fellowship, or personal growth.

Should congregations require their members to periodically renew their membership? This system is practiced within our synod, albeit uncommonly. The caution is that such systems could lead to legalistic impressions if the understanding of membership remains that of a box to check rather than a commitment to growth. The expectation of renewing one's membership may also benefit a congregation in keeping up-to-date contact information, and a means of communicating the importance of growth and service opportunities in a healthy Christian life.

Church Discipline

Another use of implementing a member expectation form is when matters of discipline arise. Clear communication at the beginning of a membership agreement gives church leadership a concrete document to point to as it carries out its responsibility. It also may take some of the

83. Richard P. Schowalter, *Igniting a New Generation of Believers*, ed. Lyle E. Schaller, Ministry for the Third Millennium (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 61.

84. Schowalter, *Igniting a New Generation of Believers*, 62.

stigmas away from church discipline by instilling a culture of spiritual process and growth, rather than a failure of meeting requirements for membership.

Given the new virtual opportunities for community and communication, there is reason to reassess how we gauge member involvement in church activities. While the importance of corporate worship with fellow believers remains central to the congregation's life, the validity of health concerns in a larger setting is cause for consideration. This all the more highlights the importance of offering events to deliberately engage both members and visitors as an exercise of fellowship and volunteerism.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, it is God who brings growth and vitality to a local congregation. The implementation of the perfect program promises nothing for our members without God's blessing.⁸⁵ But in an age where the question "Why do I belong to a congregation?" can receive many different answers, what is our answer? How are the members of our congregations marked as followers of Christ? Membership provides opportunities for fellowship among believers, the proclamation of praise in word and song, and discussion of God's truths for the building up of God's people.

Declaring membership to a congregation is marked by an individual's personal and public confession of faith. At the same time, membership establishes expectations. It becomes a tool which helps foster mutual encouragement and admonishment between an individual and a congregation. Those who seek membership desire to walk their lives of faith with those who share a common confession.

Yet at its essence, God's church is marked by his grace, given in the Word and sacraments of Jesus. Although its function has changed over the course of history, membership to a local body of believers still serves the purpose of allowing God's church to publicly confess the forgiveness of sins that will forever mark God's people.

85. Thom S Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church: Returning to God's Process for Making Disciples* (Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 273.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWS WITH CONGREGATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

Statistical -

How many people are considered official members of your church?

How many staff do you employ?

Experiential -

Why might guests/prospects be turned away from membership?

Why might an individual pursue membership in your church? What's the draw?

How would you describe the fellowship/togetherness of your congregation? Are there any particular reasons for your answer?

Programs -

Explain your congregation's *process* of inviting people into membership.

Do you have a membership rite used in a public worship context?

Does your congregation have a clearly defined statement on your teaching and practice of membership?

Does your congregation leadership lay out *continuing expectations* for membership? If so, how are these expectations communicated with potential or current members?

Literature -

Do you recommend any books/articles/websites I would benefit from reading regarding this topic?

APPENDIX 2: A COLLECTION OF MEMBERSHIP EXPECTATION FORMS

CENSUS DATA CODES

PARISH MINISTRY/ORGANIZATION INTEREST

28 Eucharistic Adoration	28 Eucharistic Adoration
29 Cantor	29 Cantor
30 Choir (Adult)	30 Choir (Adult)
31 Choir (Children)	31 Choir (Children)
32 Choir (Funeral)	32 Choir (Funeral)
33 Alumni Association	33 Alumni Association
34 Home & School Association	34 Home & School Association
35 School Volunteer	35 School Volunteer
36 CARE Program	36 CARE Program
37 Christian Formation	37 Christian Formation
38 Confirmation Program	38 Confirmation Program
39 RCIA Program	39 RCIA Program
40 Young Adult Ministry	40 Young Adult Ministry
41 Youth Ministry	41 Youth Ministry
42 Bible Study	42 Bible Study
43 Secular Franciscans	43 Secular Franciscans
44 Knights of Columbus	44 Knights of Columbus
45 Special Event Volunteer	45 Special Event Volunteer
10 Basilican Seniors	
11 Christian Women's Guild	
12 Elizabeth Ministry	
13 ESL Program	
14 Holy Name Society	
15 Needy Meal Program	
16 Respect Life Committee	
17 SHARE Program	
18 Saint Vincent de Paul	
19 Saint Vincent de Paul Food Pantry	
20 Docent	
21 Altar Server	
22 Extraordinary Eucharistic Minister	
23 Lector	
24 Usher/Creater	
25 Liturgy Committee	
26 Liturgical Environment	
27 Homebound Ministry	

Talents/Skills

The Arts	
100 Creative Writing	
101 Dancing	
102 Drama	
103 Floral Arranging	
104 Interior Decorating	
105 Musician (Specify)	
106 Painting	
107 Photography	
108 Singing	
Business Skills	
109 Accounting	
110 Advertising	
111 Data Entry	
112 Development/Fundraising	
113 Filing	
114 Financial Consulting	
115 Graphic Arts	
116 Marketing	
117 Miscellaneous Office (Mailings, Bulletin Stuffing)	
118 Tax Consulting	
119 Typing	
120 Word Processing	
121 Writing	
Education	
122 Coaching	
123 Library Skills	
124 Scout Leader	
125 Teaching (Specify)	
Health Care	
126 Childcare	
127 Counseling (Specify)	
128 Dentistry	
129 Doctor	
130 Nursing	
Miscellaneous	
131 Bilingual	
132 Computer at Home	
133 Cooking	
134 Gardening	
135 Housekeeping	
136 Needlework	
137 Public Speaking	
138 Sewing	
139 Singing (Deaf)	
140 Snow Removal	
Trade Skills	
141 Auto Mechanics	
142 Carpentry	
143 Carpet Installing	
144 Electrical	
145 Janitorial	
146 Locksmith	
147 Masonry	
148 Painting	
149 Plastering/Drywall	
150 Plumbing	
151 Roofing	
152 Sheet Metal	
153 Tuck pointing	
154 Woodworking	

MEMBERSHIP AT

For those considering membership at _____ Church, we would like to give you some guidance as to what membership means for us.

Our Membership to the Wider Body: By making a decision to follow Jesus, you automatically become a member of his wider church, thus connecting you with millions of other believers across the globe.

Regular Attender: By choosing to make _____ your church home, you are part of this local expression of the global church. This is someone who is intentional about attending weekend services, seeks to get to know others and be known through a Life Group or class, and one who uses their skills and interests to serve the church body. The leadership at _____ commits to teach, encourage, counsel and equip you to live your Jesus mission.

Members: Members are those who have a deeper commitment to the _____ family,' and, as a member, the church also makes a higher commitment to you. Your input will be solicited whenever we make big decisions, including our annual budget, hiring senior/lead pastors and changes to the church constitution. As a member of this family, you are saying you are 'all in.'

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. -Ephesians 2:19-20

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching. -Hebrews 10:24-25

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

FOR VOTING MEMBERSHIP AN INDIVIDUAL IS REQUIRED TO:

- Profess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ
- Give evidence of living a life that demonstrates a relationship with Christ
- Be 18 years of age or older
- Live close enough to an _____ location to participate regularly
- Agree with the Covenant of _____ Church, as follows:

We confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and our sincere desire to serve Him faithfully in the fellowship of His Church.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we will order our lives according to the Scriptures and we will endeavor to set a Christian example at all times and to witness to others that they may believe.

We promise to make diligent use of all the means and opportunities for spiritual growth.

We promise to promote the Lord's work at this church by our gifts, prayers and service, to preserve the unity of the Spirit, to encourage one another to love and good works, and in all things to give our Lord Jesus Christ the preeminence.

Church Membership at

The Privileges and Responsibilities of Christian Church Members

The Holy Scriptures teach us (1 John 4:9-10): "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." Since God so loved us, we love him and one another. We show our love in many ways in our Christian congregation. Lutheran Church. The exercise of such love we acknowledge as both a privilege and a responsibility.

Our God has given us his Word, the one thing needful (Luke 10:42), which alone can save our souls and tell us how to live a God-pleasing life (2 Timothy 3:15-17). Consequently, members of his church will consider it a distinct privilege and responsibility to:

1. Hear and receive the Word of God by faithful attendance at public worship services (Hebrews 10:25; John 8:47; Psalm 122:1).
2. Study God's Word regularly through personal Bible reading and study, and through group Bible study. (Colossians 3:16; Luke 11:28; 1 Peter 2:2).
3. Bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Our God has given us two sacraments: Holy Baptism and Holy Communion. These are the means which the Lord uses to bring his grace to us. Consequently, members of his church will:

4. Have their children baptized early in life, for "baptism now saves you also" (1 Peter 3:21).
5. Regularly receive Holy Communion (1 Corinthians 11:23-26), if they are recognized as people who can properly examine themselves (1 Corinthians 11:28).

Our God has given us the privilege and responsibility of being managers over a certain portion of his estate and assures us that he will graciously bless such a faithful management (2 Corinthians 9:6). Therefore, members of his church will, by his grace:

6. Utilize God's gifts for Christian ministry and works of service to the Lord and to others (1 Peter 4:10-11; Romans 12:6-8).
7. Strive to share the Good News of the work of Christ with unbelievers through personal outreach, friendship evangelism and the support of world mission work (Mark 16:16; Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 8:4).
8. Cheerfully and regularly devote a generous portion of their possessions, time and abilities to the Lord for use in carrying out the work of the congregation and of the synod (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 9:6-11).
9. Stay informed about congregational events, actions and decisions; lend the congregation their counsel and aid (Hebrews 10:25).

Our God has implanted within us who are Christians the new man, who desires to live righteously (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24). Consequently, members of his church will:

10. Not live in obvious acts of the sinful nature (Galatians 5:19-21), but lead a Christian life. (Galatians 5:22-25).
11. When they have erred, permit themselves to be lovingly admonished and corrected, according to Matthew 18:15-18.
12. Refuse to hold membership in any organization whose teachings and practices conflict with the Word of God (John 5:23; 8:31,32; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

The Responsibilities of a Christian Congregation Toward Its Members

As a member of this Christian congregation, you declare agreement with the teachings and practices of this church. You also declare your desire to receive the ministry of this congregation.

It is the will of God that Christians gather together for mutual edification and spiritual growth (Hebrews 10:24,25) and for carrying out the Lord's Great Commission (Mark 16:15). It is the solemn obligation and intent of this congregation to minister to its members with great love and Christian concern. Among the responsibilities of a church's ministry to its members are to provide:

1. Regular and ongoing opportunities for orderly worship, and the encouragement and strengthening which these worship services offer.
2. Christian baptism in the name of the Triune God and in accordance with Christ's institution.
3. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, offered on a regular and ongoing basis, in accordance with its institution by Christ.
4. Christ-centered and Bible-based classes for all ages to enable each member to grow in faith and in the knowledge of the truth through group Bible study.
5. Varied opportunities to serve the Lord in accord with the gifts he has given for Christian service.
6. Careful and accurate handling and stewardship of all offerings and congregational finances in the interest of God's kingdom, with full accounting to all members.
7. Visitation and ministry of comfort when sick, hospitalized, unable to attend worship, or at the loss of a loved one.
8. Christian counseling for the family or individual.
9. Assistance with each member's personal devotional life by offering Scripturally-sound devotional materials.
10. Ongoing information about the entire work (including ministry and finances) of the Lord through the congregation and the synod.
11. A Christian wedding service in accordance with good Christian order and the guidelines of the Holy Scriptures.
12. A Christian burial in accordance with the guidelines of Holy Scripture.

Lutheran Church Membership Privileges and Responsibilities

*As a redeemed, Spirit-filled, member of Christ's body,
a member of the Lutheran Church is committed to:*

Feeding their Faith

1. **Growing in the Word** with fellow Christians in worship, group Bible classes or small group Bible studies, and through a personal devotional life.
(1 Peter 2:2-3) Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.
2. **Glorifying God** through regular attendance in worship services.
(Hebrews 10:24-25) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
3. **Making faithful use of the sacraments** of Baptism and Holy Communion.
(Matthew 28:19) Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
(1 Corinthians 11:23-26) For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing their Faith

4. **Sharing Christ** with unchurched through personal evangelism and mission work.
(Acts 1:8) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Living their Faith

5. **Acting in love** toward other members by speaking well of one another and refusing to gossip.
(Ephesians 4:29) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

6. **Discovering and using spiritual gifts** and talents for service in the Body of Christ.
(Romans 12:6-8) We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.
7. **Partnering with the church for the Christian education** of children.
(Ephesians 6:4) Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.
8. **Supporting** the congregation with thank offerings that are planned, regular, proportional, faith-filled, first fruits.
(Proverbs 3:9) Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops;
9. **Praying** for New Hope's leaders and fellow members.
(Ephesians 6:18) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.
10. **Refusing to hold membership in unscriptural organizations** such as lodges and Scouts.
(Romans 16:17) I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.
11. **Refusing to live in obvious acts of the sinful nature.**
(Galatians 5:19-21) The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.
12. **Accepting brotherly admonition** when clinging to false doctrine or ungodly living.
(Matthew 18:16-17) But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

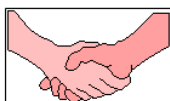
Our Covenant of Membership Lutheran Church

As you enter our fellowship, your fellow members expect that you will:

- Daily flee to the cross for the forgiveness and help Jesus graciously provides;
- Make use of regular opportunities to be strengthened through worship;
- Take spiritual nourishment at the Lord's Table often as we gather for His Feast;
- Strive to strengthen your relationship with Christ through the educational programs of the congregation (Bible classes);
- Use your Spirit-given gifts for the building of the Body of Christ; and
- Set aside a portion of the monetary blessings given to you by God for the financial support of His Word in this place and around the world.

As you enter our fellowship, you may rightly expect that your fellow members will:

- Provide you with every feasible opportunity for Growth – both spiritual and personal;
- Share with you the resources God has entrusted to us for use in the Kingdom;
- Be by your side in times of decision or crisis, as well as in times of joy and celebration; and
- From your Pastor, you may expect sincere preaching of the Word, informed teaching and a willingness to listen.



Membership Covenant

"Having been received into God's family through baptism and desiring to continue to grow in faith and godly living through the Word and the Lord's Supper, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

- ✓ I will protect the unity of my church.
- ✓ I will share the responsibility of my church.
- ✓ I will serve the ministry of my church.
- ✓ I will support the testimony of my church.

I WILL PROTECT THE UNITY OF MY CHURCH

- By acting in love toward other members
- By refusing to gossip
- By following the leaders
 - "So let us concentrate on the things which make for harmony, and on the growth of our fellowship together." Romans 15:19 (Ph)
 - "Live in complete harmony with each other – each with the attitude of Christ toward each other." Romans 15:5 (LB)
 - "Have a sincere love for your fellow believers, love one another earnestly with all your hearts." 1 Peter 1:22 (GN)
 - "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs..." Ephesians 4:29
 - "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you." Hebrews 13:17

I WILL SHARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MY CHURCH

- By praying for its growth
- By inviting the unchurched to attend
- By warmly welcoming those who visit
 - "To the church...we always thank God for you and pray for you constantly." 1 Thessalonians 1:2
 - "Go out into the country...and urge anyone you find to come in, so that My House will be full." Luke 14:23 (LB)
 - "So, warmly welcome each other into the church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified." Romans 15:7 (LB)

I WILL SERVE THE MINISTRY OF MY CHURCH

- By discovering my gifts and talents
- By being equipped to serve by my pastor
- By developing a servant's heart
 - "Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you..." 1 Peter 4:10
 - "God gave...some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of ministry, so that the body of Christ may be built up..." Ephesians 4:11-12
 - "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Jesus Christ...who took on the very nature of a servant..." Philippians 2:3-4,7

I WILL SUPPORT THE TESTIMONY OF MY CHURCH

- By attending faithfully
- By living a godly life
- By giving regularly
 - "Let us not give up the habit of meeting together...but let us encourage one another." Hebrews 10:25
 - But whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the gospel of Christ." Philippians 1:27
 - "Each one of you, on the first day of each week, should set aside a specific sum of money in proportion to what you have earned and use it for the offering." 1 Corinthians 16:2

New Member Information Sheet

Help us get to know you better!

Name: _____ Birth date: _____

Address: _____ City & Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Employed at: _____

E-mail: _____ Job Title/Description: _____

What I enjoy most about _____ is: _____

Opportunities

To help us better serve you, to give you opportunity to serve others, and to provide you an opportunity to get involved - please indicate if you have an interest in any of the areas below.

You are not signing up for anything but just indicating your areas of interest.

WORSHIP

- Ushering
- Setting up for communion
- Playing an instrument: _____
- Singing in a choir
- Lead kid's choir/musicians
- Worship recording - Stream team

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

- Sunday Morning Bible Class set-up team
- Sunday School teacher
- Sunday School assistant
- Teen group teacher

FELLOWSHIP/EVENTS

- Coffee shop barista
- Building supervisor at church or _____ events
- Great Hall set-up team
- Greeter at church events
- Assist on committee to plan/organize events
- *Women of _____ (service & activities for women)
- Playing a sport _____
- Preparing meals for church suppers
- Youth group leader
- Youth group planning/assisting
- Lead a special interest group: _____
- _____ - community service

ADMINISTRATION

- Helping in the church office at church
- Helping with church office work from home
- Data entry
- Church finance accounting or planning

COMMUNICATION

- Writing (newsletter articles about _____ events, etc.)
- Creating, designing, and doing art work/graphic design
- Photography or Videography
- Assist with postcard mailings
- Newsletter
- Marketing
- Social media team

MEMBER CARE

- Talking to people on the phone
- Text team
- Praying for those in need
- Sponsor a student
- Providing for the needy (money, food, rides, etc.)
- Meals for new moms or post-trauma
- Visiting elderly and hospitalized
- Sending greeting cards to the sick

TECHNOLOGY

- Easy computer data entry
- Computer setup and support
- Audio/visual setup and support
- Website

MAINTENANCE

- General repair, maintenance, or grounds care:
Specific gifts _____
- Sunday morning sidewalk clean-up

OTHER SKILLS OR SPECIAL INTERESTS

How did you hear about _____ ?

Please check all that apply

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> From a friend/relative/co-worker/neighbor | <input type="checkbox"/> Live/work in neighborhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Drive by |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Media/Online Advertisina | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ website | <input type="checkbox"/> Internet search |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Customer at C. _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Printed advertising | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Event at _____ Church <input type="checkbox"/> Event at _____ Center Which event? _____ | | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

+ OFFICE USE ONLY +

- WELS Transfer
 Profession of Faith
 Bible Information Class

Green Sheet Pastor: _____ Date: _____

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