



membership

church leadership resources

sbtexas.com/healthsurvey

Based on the Church Health Assessment you completed, meaningful membership may be one area of needed growth for your church and/or church leadership. We believe that local church membership matters. Sometimes church leaders need help evaluating or rethinking their membership processes. In the **Explanation** section below, you will find several important biblical foundations for meaningful membership as it relates to church health. Subsequent sections of this report will include **SBTC Resources/Tools**, **Other Recommended Resources** and **Contacts**. All of these are designed to help strengthen your church in the area of meaningful membership. Please take time to read through this report and to share it with some key influential leaders in your church.



explanation

“For just as the body is one and has many parts, and all the parts of that body, though many, are one body—so also is Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and we were all given one Spirit to drink. Indeed, the body is not one part but many... God has arranged each one of the parts in the body just as he wanted...there are many parts, but one body.” – 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

Churches exist where baptized believers in Jesus Christ gather in local, covenant community. A church is the Body of Christ in as much as its individual parts come together spiritually and functionally to form the whole. These parts are covenanted together as one: “many parts, but one body.” God arranged them this way to be mutually dependent on the spiritual giftedness he has entrusted to each one for the effective advancement of the Great Commission in every generation.

Believers in Christ can be Christians all by themselves, but they can only be the church when they are gathered in covenant community. For this reason, church membership matters.

Members of the body are to be held accountable by each other (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:5-11). They are to exercise some form of congregational government (Acts 1:21-23, 15:22). Church leaders are affirmed and supported by the church membership (Acts 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14) but will ultimately be held accountable by God (Hebrews 13:17). If churches are to exercise the kind of internal, Holy Spirit filled accountability the New Testament demands of them, they need some way to know who is part of their covenant community and who is not.

Unhealthy churches do not have clear next steps for those desiring membership. They often devalue membership by accepting some into their covenant community before actually knowing whether or not they are saved. They may ignore the issue of church membership altogether. Some unhealthy churches have clear lines for membership but create an imbalance of authority by allowing disgruntled members to usurp the God-given leadership of the church. Conversely, it is also unhealthy for church membership to fail to hold leadership accountable when there is a clear violation of biblical, moral, or ethical standards unbecoming of a Christian minister.

However, healthy churches value meaningful membership. They exhibit this high value of meaningful membership, at a minimum, through membership process, membership responsibility, membership followship and membership removal.

Membership process.

Churches that value meaningful membership have a well-defined and clearly communicated series of next steps for those desiring to join the church. Such processes take on different forms in different local churches. But in the healthiest churches, it usually includes some form of a membership class, a meeting/interview with one of the pastors in which the person’s salvation testimony is heard and celebrated, and an act of official approval by the membership according to the church’s governing documents. In healthy churches, membership meetings sometimes result in the salvation of those who have attended. These processes give church leadership an opportunity to hear the individuals’ stories, help them understand the direction and core values of the church and plug them into the church’s discipleship pathways and

ministry opportunities. Healthy churches give potential members a clear picture of the expectations of the church and a well-defined series of next steps toward becoming a member of the local body.

Membership responsibility.

In healthy churches, membership means something. It carries with it a covenantal commitment to the rest of the church members and to the church body as a whole. Peter instructed each person to use his or her spiritual giftedness to be good stewards of those gifts by serving others in the church body (1 Peter 4:10). Utilizing one's spiritual giftedness for the benefit of the body is non-negotiable in biblical ecclesiology. Members do not have to be given positions or titles to serve the body. Rather, in healthy churches, leadership clarifies on-ramps for involvement in various ministry areas according to the giftedness and passions of church members. In healthy churches, members understand that along with membership comes the expectation of being involved in congregational decision-making, to be active in some area of ministry in the church and to be present in worship gatherings as often as possible. Membership is devalued when it does not come with clear expectation. In healthy churches, membership comes with clearly communicated expectation and responsibility.

Membership followship.

In the biblical model, God gifts local churches with called and qualified leadership (Ephesians 4:11-13). The membership of the church is to govern itself congregationally in major decisions that affect the entire church body, but the God-given leadership of the church should set the tone and the direction for the whole. Church members follow their spiritual leaders in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. They offer advice, share opinions and speak their minds, but always in appropriate contexts displaying a great deal of respect for the spiritual leadership God has put in place. In unhealthy churches, pockets of membership work against the direction of their spiritual leaders. But in healthy churches, spiritual leaders lead with integrity and church members follow in faith.

Membership removal.

In order to keep accurate records of who is part of the local covenant community of faith and who is not, healthy churches have appropriate, biblical systems in place to remove from church membership those who have relocated to another geographic area, died, fallen out of fellowship with the church or are living in unrepentant sin. When members relocate to another geographic area, church leadership should help them find a new local church to join in covenant membership. When they are promoted to glory, they should be removed from the membership rolls. When they fall out of fellowship with the church through failure to attend regularly, inactivity in the ministry of the church or active public discourse against the church, their membership should be revoked or not renewed. When a person is living in unrepentant, unconfessed sin, the church leadership should follow the appropriate steps as outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 for correction, reconciliation or removal (with clear guidelines for future reconciliation if desired). In healthy churches, reasons and processes for removal from membership are clearly spelled out for those who choose to join, and they are carefully and lovingly followed through when the need arises.

In unhealthy churches, membership is a commodity. In healthy churches, membership is a privilege and a responsibility.

sbtc tools & resources

Bylaws/Constitution Review

Fill out this short form to request a review of your church's governing documents for the purpose of evaluating current membership processes and leading toward a more meaningful membership pathway.

A Church is More Than Just a Crowd

SBTexan article by Dr. Gary Ledbetter on the importance of church life, church membership, and the soul care that only a biblical community of faith can provide.

other recommended resources

Recommended Books/Articles:

Church Membership

by Jonathan Leeman and Michael Horton

I am a Church Member

by Thom S Rainer

"7 Reasons to Avoid Church Discipline and Why They're All Wrong"

article by Southern Seminary

"On Regenerate Church Membership and Church Member Restoration"

2006 SBC resolution

Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus

by Jonathan Leeman and 9 Marks

meaningful membership contacts

Please do not hesitate to reach out to one of your SBTC staff members for encouragement, consultation or direction. It will be our joy to come alongside you as you lead your church to reach your community for Christ.

Jeff Lynn – jlynn@sbtexas.com

Senior Strategist for Church Health & Leadership

Chuy Avila – cavila@sbtexas.com

Lead Associate for SBTC en Español

Calvin Wittman – cwittman@sbtexas.com

Associate for Church Health & Leadership (Preaching and Leadership)

[Ministry Request Form](#) (www.sbtexas.com/help)



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