

## Meaningful Membership

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*Fountain of Life Covenant Church*

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### **I. What is the Church?**

*The Local Church*

What is the role of membership in the local church? The Apostle Paul teaches us in Colossians 1 that his life goal is to present mature believers to Jesus. Paul lives in the reality that when we stand before Jesus, one's life must bear testimony of Christian maturity and bearing fruit in the world. To that end, Jesus gives us each the gift of the local church, giving us fellowship, leadership and mission to attain spiritual maturity.

In our secular world, any team that is successful helps each member of the team know their role, what is required, and motivates members to reach the goal. What is true of the secular world often proves truer as we consider the spiritual world.

What is the church? The church is not a building. While Christians meet in buildings that are called churches, the church is far more than a building. The first Christians did not own their first property until 300 years after Jesus. In the New Testament, while there are references to the universal church, the overwhelming majority of references to the church are to the local congregation.

The church is a body of people who profess and give evidence that Jesus has saved them by grace and through faith alone. This community of people covenants together to be Jesus' presence to one another and to the local community, testifying that Jesus has risen from the dead and will return soon to end history.

Our church, *Fountain of Life Covenant Church*, is a community of people who God has been rescued by grace and through faith. Like the countless numbers of local, living, and loving churches that have come before us, we stand at the doorstep of membership. This fall, our church we take the big step of founding membership. We want every one on the FOL team to know their role, their contributions, and most of all, our goal...which is eternal fellowship with Jesus in the Holy City. And in laying the foundation of membership, we lay a foundation of health for our church.

We want every member to stand confident in their walk with Christ, affirmed of their maturity in Christ.

### **II. Where Is It Written?**

*Is Membership Biblical?*

As an Evangelical Covenant Church, one of our favorite sayings is "Where is it written?" We are a church that is about one book. If it isn't Biblical, we are not interested in

incorporating the concept into the life of our church. While it is important to be relevant to our context and cultural, especially in regards to evangelism and welcoming unbelievers into FOL, being Biblical is absolutely central to our life together in FOL. So where is membership written in the Scripture? Where are the expressions of core membership in the teachings of the Old Testament, Jesus, Paul, and the Revelation?

1. **The Old Testament:** The Lord thought it most important to set aside his people from the rest of the nations who did not know God. He led his people into this outward reflection of an inward relationship through the dietary law and the sign of circumcision. Once Jesus began his ministry, the Lord declared all foods clean and installed baptism in the church.
2. **Jesus of Nazareth:** In his teaching about the coming of the Kingdom of God, Jesus taught us about the church. In Matthew 18:15-17 the Lord assumes there is a core of believers who have committed to a common standard of spiritual life together. If a brother or sister will not repent of his sin, even brought before the church, they are to be removed from fellowship. This teaching would make little sense if there were not a core standard.
3. **The Apostle Paul:** In the letter to the church at Corinth, Paul deals with a dark issue of discipline. A believer will not repent from sexual sin with his father's wife. Paul insists the brother be removed from fellowship in the church and exhorted of his dire spiritual plight (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). Again, if there was no common understanding of membership in the earliest church, removal requests from Jesus and Paul would be unintelligible.
4. **The Revelation:** In the final scene, before the unveiling of the Holy City, the Apostle John sees the throne of God and the multitudes standing in judgment. The Lord opens two books. The first book reveals our deeds resulting judgment (Revelation 20:12). The second book is the book of life and those whose names are written in this book do not receive the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). The last book of the Bible gives a most compelling description of Jesus' "heavenly membership roll" (Luke 10:20). Membership in the local church is a but a sign of the heavenly membership that will one day be read.

From each Biblical era, we see God's intended design of working through his people to bless the nations. Church membership is a Biblical concept that provides a strong foundation so that the local church to make gospel impact in the community.

### **III. Five Reasons to Join a Local Church**

What are the reasons to join your life in a formal way to a local church? Here are five compelling reasons to become a member of FOL...

1. **Witness:** One of the primary reasons we started FOL was to create a church for our friends to make their own. We long to see unbelievers mature into

deep and authentic disciples. FOL is a place where the gospel is preached, relationships are central, the Bible is taught and sin is fought. Membership will insure that our collective witness will be full of character, power, and authenticity. It is a great gift to have a church that unbelievers can relate to and find their way in Jesus. As a core of committed believers join membership, our witness will be sincere and passionate.

2. **Younger Christians:** One of the greatest gifts a believer can give is to pass on faith to another. As strong Christians commit to be members the younger Christians in the church are given a model of mature faith. In joining the local church, young Christians can run the race with those who have experience and a strong life in Christ.
3. **Mature Christians:** In many ways, stronger Christians need to join the local church more than younger believers. Stronger Christians, with many years of experience in following Jesus, need brothers and sisters to help them point out blind spots. In doing life together, the stronger Christian is challenged to deeper servanthood, care for the poor, submission to the Lord in suffering, and walking with others through thick and thin. In the local church, love is lived out to challenge and grow the stronger Christian.
4. **Gifts and Leadership Development:** Join a church to help move ahead the vision of the local church. The leadership team of the church cannot know where to move the church if it doesn't know who is committed to the church. Discipling believers into leadership and the development of spiritual giftedness can only take place with a committed core of believers.
5. **A Light and Ark:** The church is to be a light on a hill for the dark world. And it is to serve as an ark insuring the security of those inside the confines of the church. Without membership, both are light on a hill and the security of the ark, are questionable. With membership, a believer is given the affirmation of the local church of God's work of salvation in the life of the believer and the family. Without membership it is very challenging for a church to know and affirm the authentic and saving work of Christ in the life of the believer.

#### **IV. Our Life Together**

##### *Priorities*

As a church, we will focus on seven core commitments as we consider membership. As members, we will commit to affirm, grow in, and together live out these commitments in the context of our local church:

1. **Meeting Together:** We are committed to meeting regularly together for prayer, fellowship, encouragement, and the Word of God.

2. **The Inner Person:** We are committed to personal study of the Word of God, prayer, and a learning posture that we might mature in Christ.
3. **Effective Witness:** We are committed to learning the gospel and sharing it in a compelling and relevant way that our friends might gain salvation in Christ.
4. **Giving:** We are committed to the New Testament standard of “giving with glad and generous hearts” knowing being rich towards God is the best earthly investment one can make.
5. **Direct Relationship to Poor:** We are a multi-class and multi-cultural church. We want to be a church that follows the Lord’s vision in Luke 4.16-21 to proclaim good news and minister his healing to the poor.
6. **Spiritual Giftedness:** We believe that God has put spiritual gifts into each one of us. One of the main responsibilities of the church is to make sure each person develops their gifts for the kingdom, rather than bury their talents.
7. **The Local Church:** Our final commitment is to the model of Bible-centered local church that is engaged in evangelism. If the Lord were to call a person or family to move from Long Beach, we commit to finding another church that is Bible centered and committed to reaching lost people in the new city.

It is our deepest conviction that God is on our side. While we were yet sinners Jesus broke into our lives and said, “Follow me.” We have become his children and he promises much grace ahead. As we lean into Jesus, and relying upon him moment by moment for our faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit, each of us can fulfill these commitments.

Kingdom Workers is our vision. The gift of membership in the local church will be a great friend who spurs us on and will help us to finish the race.

In Jesus’ Grace Upon Grace,

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