

Christian Behavior -- Membership

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Over on the right, you see a picture of membership card of an individual who belongs to the National Rifle Association. That membership card means that the individual named has certain benefits belonging to the organization.



What about membership in the local congregation? When is it received? Are there any responsibilities that come with membership? Can membership ever be terminated? If so, under what conditions?

Personally, after examining the Holy Scriptures, I find the following areas where an individual has membership in the world or in the Church.

- Birth (being born of the flesh) – All men are sons of Adam.
- New Birth (being born from above) – The Sacrament of Holy Baptism
- Marriage
- Confirmation
- Worship
- The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper
- Death (final termination of membership in all cases)

When the individual was Baptized in the Name of the Father and + of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, the parents and sponsors, and maybe even the individual if they were old enough, made promises to God before His Bride, the Church. They vowed to confess the Holy Name of the Trinity even unto death. They vowed to come and worship their King. They vowed to receive the Lord's Supper. They vowed to hear the Word of God. So, why are congregations closing?

Congregations are closing because Christians are not acting like members. People today have forgotten what it means to be a Christian. Christianity is a daily vocation, a daily tasking given by God to you, His child, to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to people around you. Christianity also means nourishing the soul. The soul will starve to death with out the Word of God. I remember something one of my members told me. Membership is all about the BIG THREE: Baptism, Marriage, and Death.

Membership is more than coming into God's House on Sunday morning to warm the pew and look good in front of your friends. Membership is more than "punching the clock" on Sunday morning in order to say you went to church and did your duty for the week. People will make all kinds of excuses for not going to church. I have to work. I don't have a ride. I can't stand up that long. The service is too long. I don't like the sermons. I don't like the pastor. Excuses. There are as many excuses in this world as Carter has pills.

Christians have one thing to do one Sunday: GO TO CHURCH! It's what Christians do. Now, when Christians misbehave, they need to be disciplined just any other child. How else are they

going to learn that what they're doing is wrong? Take a look at the graphic below. I selected this congregation as an illustration of membership and also because I grew up in this congregation and attended Lutheran School for nine years.

Saint Matthew Lutheran Church		View Map	View Statistics
2040 S Commerce Rd, Walled Lake, MI, 48390-2412			
MAILING ADDRESS		CONGREGATION DETAILS	
2040 S COMMERCE RD WALLED LAKE, MI 48390-2412		<i>Organized:</i>	12/31/1948
		<i>District:</i>	Michigan District
		<i>Circuit:</i>	026 : Kensington
		<i>Designation:</i>	LCMS MEMBER
CONTACT INFORMATION		<i>Weekly Worship Attendance:</i>	889
<i>Pastor(s):</i>	Rev John Merrill Rev Paul Moldenhauer Rev Robert Nelson		Alyssa Bornheimer Rebekah Kurien Matthew Olsen
<i>Phone:</i>	(248)624-7676		
<i>Fax:</i>	(248)624-0685	<i>Rostered Staff:</i>	Samantha Schroeder Matthew Topel John Welte Amy Weston
	churchoffice@st-matthew.org http://www.st-matthew.org	<i>Baptized Members:</i>	2371
		<i>Confirmed Members:</i>	1549

As the pastor of the congregation, I would begin by inviting the 660 "members" to come and see me or ask if I could come and see them to discuss their worship life (Communicant Members - Average Attending = LOST)! So, 1549 - 889 = 660 souls starving to death. This is the beginning of a process that might take 2-3 years. It is a tasking that is done because the pastor loves the people.

In the end, if the people just won't come to church, then they need to be excommunicated. Yes, that's right. You heard me. Excommunicated. No more of this silly "self-exclusion" stuff either (although I am guilty of using this terminology myself). But, why doesn't this happen in the congregations? Why are the roles of the church so disheveled?

The roles of the local congregations, districts, and Synod are a mess because no one wants to be accountable. No one wants to stand up for God the Father nor His Son Jesus Christ. Are you a Christian if you reject hearing the Word of God and the reception of the Lord's Supper for a year or more? I stand with Martin Luther and say NO! Membership means something. It means living under the cross of Christ. Is it always easy? No. Jesus didn't ever say Christianity was going to be easy.

To read the complete paper I wrote on Membership, go here:
<https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/3133970/Membership.doc>

We'll look more at accountability and some other subjects in the near future.

Blessings,

+ Pastor Wurst