

# Membership Matters

Principles and Guidelines For Membership at  
Aylmer EMMC Church

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# The Church: Universal and Local

For everyone who is a believing, born again, baptized child of God, membership in the body of Christ is already a full spiritual reality. When we believe in Jesus and accept his substitutionary sacrifice for us on the cross we become members of his church, which is made up of every believer in the world.

But God intends for us to be part of a local church as well, to identify with a particular group of people in a geographic region with whom we can worship and do the work of ministry to which we have been called and for which we are being prepared. This group of people, who are referred to in scripture as a church, is both an organism (a whole with interdependent parts, likened to a living being) and an organization (an organized body of people with a particular purpose). Kevin DeYoung explains this in his book *Why We Love the Church*:

“The church is a breathing, growing, maturing, living thing. It is also comprised of a certain order (1 Cor. 14:40), with institutional norms (5:1-13), doctrinal standards (15:1-2), and defined rituals (11:23-26). The two aspects of the church – organism and organization – must not be played off against each other... Offices and gifts, governance and the people, organization and organism – all these belong together. They are all blessings from the work of Christ.”

## Leadership in the Local Church

Organizations require leadership and a church is no exception. In Hebrews 13:17 we find the following instructions issued to church members:

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Obey your leaders; submit to them. It sounds like a perfect setup for some people in the church (namely the Pastors and

Elders) to exercise a lot of control and make a lot of demands of the members of the church.

But that is not the way that leadership works in the church. In Paul's words in 2 Cor. 1:24, "Not that we lord it over your faith," - not that we are your bosses or dictators but instead, the purpose of church leadership is this: "we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith."

Church leaders are God's gift to the church. This means that they serve the people in their care. It means that they do not to lord their authority over others or to use it to their advantage. They are not to be tyrants who dictate every matter of conscience to the people and demand that they do everything the leaders say.

Their overriding desire should be to use their authority to serve and not to be served. Leaders are given to the church to raise others in the church above themselves.

R.V.G Tasker puts this well in his commentary on the book of 2 Corinthians:

"He (Paul) is their minister and friend, not a despotic hierarch... But they cannot be isolated believers; they need to be helped to live that disciplined corporate life, whose characteristics are love, joy and peace. Paul's desire, and his duty, is to cooperate with them in promoting the conditions which would enable them to enjoy these blessings."

And that is how church leaders are fellow workers for the people's joy. They must confront sin, first in their own lives, but also in the lives of church members, sometimes in very strong terms and under very difficult circumstances. But it is not simply for the purpose of exercising power over people or for their own amusement or enjoyment. It is, ultimately, their way of working together with you for your own joy.

What is the greatest joy? The answer is: to be reconciled to God. To be reconnected with the one from whom we have

become disconnected by way of our sin. We do this by confronting sin and providing space and opportunity to repent of our sin and be reconciled to God.

Hebrews 13:17 forms the foundation for our belief in the need for both local church leadership and local church membership. Church leaders will someday need to “give an account” for the souls in their care. And, as Pastor and author Douglas Wilson explains, “One of the things that those who will give an account must do is actually count. If a father goes out to the park with the kids, when he returns, and mom asks him if he has all of them with him, she will not be satisfied with ‘more or less’ for an answer.”

While the Bible nowhere explicitly instructs churches to have an organized record of membership, caring for and accounting for the members of the church requires one. Elders/Pastors in the church will someday give an account for the lives of those in their care. That is a somewhat frightening prospect for those in church leadership! But it is also an honorable responsibility. To enable leaders to give an orderly account there must be order, and order involves organization.

A current and organized record of church membership enables those in authority in the church to give an orderly account of the lives in their care. Membership requirements provide church members with a clear standard of practice and belief. When leaders are unable to give account for the members in their care and when there is no clearly stated standard of practice and belief, the entire church suffers.

## Why Join a Church?

The Christian life is a life that is portrayed everywhere in scripture as lived in fellowship *with* other believers, not merely in isolated proximity *to* other believers. We are to live *with* each other, our lives intertwined, not just *near* each other in buffered pockets of isolation.

### **Dependence vs. Independence**

Our culture encourages independence in every area of our lives; independence is seen as a prime virtue. Why depend on someone else if you can do it yourself? Why entangle yourself with others? You may be a burden to them; they certainly may be a burden to you. “Put these tendencies together,” says Mark Dever in his book *9 Marks of a Healthy Church*, “and you get a culture that is fairly hostile to New Testament Christianity, and certainly not very comfortable with church membership.”

Dever goes on to explain that the church is, “primarily a body of people who profess and give evidence that they have been saved by God’s grace alone, for His glory alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone... The collection of people committed to Christ in a local area constitute a church... [it is a] local, living, and loving collection of people who are committed to Christ and committed to each other.”

**“In becoming a member of the church, we are grasping hands with each other to know and be known by each other. We are agreeing to help and encourage each other when we need to be reminded of God’s work in our lives or when we need to be challenged about major discrepancies between our talk and our walk.”**  
- Mark Dever

## **Five Purposes of Belonging to a Local Church**

### **1. To Assure Ourselves**

We ask others to hold us accountable to live out what we claim to believe. We are to encourage each other, sometimes by noticing the grace of God in our lives and at other times by lovingly drawing attention to an area of weakness in a fellow believer's life.

### **2. To Evangelize the World**

Together we can better spread the Gospel at home and abroad. Coordinated effort is often required in order to make a significant impact.

### **3. To Expose False Gospels**

As we covenant together and study God's word and then live by what we believe we expose false notions that Christians are insufferably self-righteous people who believe in their own goodness.

### **4. To Edify the Church**

Building up others by using complementary gifts is part of church life. Following Jesus is a decision made by an individual to commit to live life in a less individual way. Following Jesus involves how you treat other people, especially the other people who are members of your church. Discipleship is both an individual endeavor and a corporate activity as we follow Christ and help others to do the same.

### **5. To Glorify God**

According to Matt. 5:16 God will get the glory for our good deeds. This is true of our lives individually and it is also true of our corporate life as a church. The way we love each other identifies us as followers of Christ.

# Responsibilities

There is mutual responsibility involved in church membership, but the heavier burden is on those who serve as leaders since they are the ones who will give account for those in their care and not the other way around.

## The Responsibilities of Church Leaders

In Eph. 4:11-16 Paul speaks about the privilege of carrying the responsibilities that have been placed upon the shoulders of leaders in the church:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, **for building up the body of Christ**, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Church leaders don't always do this well. Sometimes they allow the people of the church to languish in anonymity, unprepared for the work of ministry. Sometimes they are more interested in "keeping a good thing going," in maintaining the status quo instead of engaging the more difficult work of building the body. At times they are frustrated with the apparent immaturity of the people around them without acknowledging that it is their responsibility to point them toward Christ – the ultimate source of sanctification and maturation.

A wise older pastor once said that, “if your leaders will live transparent, godly lives in front of the congregation and the community, you will move mountains. If they cannot, or will not, then whatever you attempt will surely fail. The congregation will not be able to rise above the holiness standard of its leadership.”

When leaders live this way and lead this way we will see a unified, growing, and coordinated body that is under the direction of Jesus Christ. Joined and held together by him, and being equipped and in proper working condition, the church body will grow and continue to build itself up in love. This is the way the church was designed to function.

### **The Responsibility of the Member**

Of course there are responsibilities on the part of church members as well. Our current membership application requires that the following statements be affirmed:

- *Do you believe that the Bible is our authority and guide for how we should live?*
- *Are you willing to give and receive instruction from the Word of God and be our companion in living a life of joyful obedience to Christ?*
- *Are you willing to undergo church discipline in the event it should become necessary?*

And upon acceptance, a new member is asked to publicly affirm the following:

- *Have you repented of your sin and do you renounce the evil powers of this world?*
- *Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord?*
- *Do you accept the Word of God as your guide and authority for life?*
- *Do you desire to be baptized and received into the fellowship of this church?*
- *Are you willing to give and receive counsel and participate in the mission of the church with your gifts and abilities?*



# **Five Commitments of Members of AEMMC**

In addition to the affirmation of those statements, we expect the following five commitments to be taken seriously by our members.

## **1. Attend Services Regularly**

We affirm the importance of attendance at worship services (Hebrews 10:25). Members of the church are expected to regularly attend times of corporate worship.

## **2. Attend Members' Meetings Consistently**

As a congregational church, the members' meeting is an important event in our lives together. It is a meeting of the members of the church for the purposes of communication, information, discernment and the building of consensus in decision-making.

Members of the church are expected to attend these meetings in order to communicate with church leaders in a public forum, receive the information provided, and participate in discerning God's future plans for the church.

## **3. Pray Regularly**

Prayer is foundational to both our individual and corporate lives as Christians. Members of the church are expected to pray regularly in both personal and corporate times of teaching, study, and worship.

## **4. Give Regularly**

Everything we have belongs to God and we are stewards of his good gifts. Members of the church are expected to willingly give of their time, energy, and material possessions in order to equip and enable the work of the church.

## **5. Serve Regularly**

Spiritual gifts are given to every believer for the building of the body. When these gifts are not utilized the spiritual life of a believer will become stagnant and eventually toxic. Members of the church are expected to discover their spiritual gifts and humbly exercise them as God provides opportunities.

## **Accountability**

If commitments are made and we intend to take them seriously, then we will need to determine how best to ensure that there is accountability on the part of both leadership and membership.

So, what about accountability? To succeed in a commitment, accountability is required. Making a commitment and knowing someone will hold you accountable for it is far more effective than making a commitment that you know will never be measured or challenged. So the question is, how can we best ensure that these commitments are upheld?

Are we going to take attendance at our corporate worship gatherings? No.

Are we going to ask you to fill out a form each week reporting your prayer activities? No.

Are we going to publish your name, income, and the percentage you gave to the church last year? No, or course not.

Are we going to demand a certain number of “service hours” from you each week? No.

The church is not a military regiment. The church is a place where people who have committed their lives to Christ voluntarily gather to challenge and encourage others and expect the same in return.

Are we going to work hard to help you discover your gifts and plug you into an area of ministry? Yes, we are!

While it would be possible to monitor some of the five commitments, a better way is to establish our identity as a church, determining together that these are our common values, and then regularly remind each other of the commitments we have made.

## **A Statement From Our Leaders**

As leaders in this local church known as AEMMC, we feel the weight of the responsibility to shepherd those whom God has put into our care. We take very seriously the words of Paul in Heb. 13:17. We are keeping watch over your souls and will someday give an account to God.

This is an awesome and fearful responsibility, but it is one that we have accepted as church leaders. Therefore, we would like to be able to do what is necessary to enable us to give an orderly account of the souls in our care when that day comes. The health of our church and the individual souls that call it their home depends in large part on our faithfulness and obedience to the duties we have been assigned.

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Pastor

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Pastor

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Head Elder

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Assistant Head Elder

# Confession of Faith

## Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference

**1. God:** We believe in the one holy and loving God, filled with glory, power and wisdom, who lives in eternal Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, who created and sustains the physical and spiritual universe, desires a relationship with us.

**2. Creation:** We believe that all persons are made in the image of God with a capacity to make moral choices, and given the responsibility to manage creation. God desires all human life to begin in families where husband and wife are covenanted together under God for life.

**3. Sin:** We believe that sin is a rejection of God's rule, beginning with the rebellion of Satan and followed by Adam and Eve's deliberate choice to disobey God. Because of sin everyone has fallen short of God's will, creating a conflict with God, self, and others. The penalty for sin is physical and spiritual death.

**4. Revelation:** We believe that the Bible is the inspired and infallible Word of God, the final authority for faith and life. God's revelation in the Old Testament through creation and the covenant was a preparation for the supreme revelation in the New Testament through Jesus Christ.

**5. Jesus Christ:** We believe in God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, fully God and fully human, who proclaimed the rule of God, lived a sinless life, died on the cross as payment for our sins, rose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven, and reigns as Lord of all.

**6. Salvation:** We believe that salvation is a gift of God's grace, received through personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Believers have assurance, forgiveness of sin, salvation from sin, reconciliation with God, and eternal life as they live in faith and obedience.

**7. Holy Spirit:** We believe in God the Holy Spirit who gives new life to all who have placed their faith in Christ. The Spirit, who indwells believers, continues to comfort, empower, gift, guide, and unite them to fulfill the mission of the church.

**8. Discipleship:** We believe that following Jesus as Lord in all of life means that the Christian life is characterized by love, integrity, purity, and simplicity. The believer's commitment to Christ and the global church becomes the standard for discerning the level of participation in society.

**9. Church:** We believe that the Church is the visible body of believers, the global community of those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. Members of this body are covenanted together in local congregations and participate in the ordinances of water baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**10. Peace and Reconciliation:** We believe that God offers peace and reconciliation to all humanity through the work of Christ on the cross. Followers of Christ's law of love affirm the sacredness of life as they make peace in personal, social, and international situations.

**11. Mission:** We believe that the mission of the Church is to make disciples in all the world by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ in evangelism and compassionate ministries.

**12. Christ's Final Triumph:** We believe in the return and reign of Jesus Christ, the final resurrection, the judgement of the unrighteous in hell and the eternal reward of the righteous in heaven.