



PARTNERSHIP
Better Together

Growing Together To Cultivate Community



THE SANCTUARY

As you make your way through this reader, be sure to look up and read through the scripture references, underline/highlight anything that stands out to you — you may want to even keep a list of questions you think of along the way, (there are a couple of pages for notes in the back) ...and once you're finished, be sure to get answers to those questions as well!



PARTNERSHIP at The Sanctuary

Growing Together to Cultivate Community

DEFINITIONS IN COMMUNITY

To fulfill our shared mission as Christians, we must realize that we're better together. We cannot be all that we were designed to be on our own -we need each other. As we Gather together, we Grow together; and it is from that place of maturity we Go together. In reviewing this reader, we will understand why, as God's family we function this way. If we do not function *interdependently*, we're not truly a family. The Sanctuary has made growing a community to reach a community one of our primary goals. We recognize that growing and reaching happen best through community. Together we are looking for and seizing opportunities to build bridges from our faith community (congregational family) to our civic community (neighborhood and city); and we're doing this on purpose. Jesus' goal was to come and save the sick and the lost (Mark 2:17). As individuals, we prioritize gathering together because we recognize our need for healing and mutual support. We are calculated in our efforts to bring others into loving relationship with Jesus and other believers (2 Corinthians 5:18). This doesn't happen by accident. We take the time to initiate relationships and cultivate community with others so that many will be transformed by the love of God.

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Cultivating community is an *intentional* process. Just as gardens are designed and maintained with planning and diligence, a healthy and functional community is a byproduct of much prayer, insight and purposed effort. When planning a garden, a gardener wouldn't say, "Let's just plant something green over in that corner." Right terminology is purposefully used to define our objectives, allowing everyone involved to share in understanding and then responding accordingly to produce the desired end result. The same could be said of a church community. Health and functionality begins with clearly defined terms that provide mutual understanding and the ability for individuals to purposefully contribute and find their place within a thriving community.

A term that is commonly used by individuals to describe affiliation or commitment in a church is "membership." At The Sanctuary, we use the word *partnership*. Let's look at

these two words and discover the contrast between them.

Membership (n) - *Entitled benefits and exclusive privileges in a particular association, usually made possible through a payment of dues, paid one time in advance or in consecutive payments, for agreed rights and limited access. Benefits are established prior and can be altered to include fewer or greater organizational liberties typically based on a sliding financial scale.*

Partnership (n) - *A cooperative relationship between individuals or groups that is characterized by mutual responsibility to furnish a part of the capital and labor for a venture, and by which each shares a fixed proportion of profits and benefits of the same activity; co-workers, associates or collaborators in an agreed upon endeavor.*

These definitions not only reveal the difference between these two terms, but also expose the necessity to change our vocabulary and our way of thinking regarding personal connection to and involvement within a faith community. A congregation that functions with a spirit and system of *partnership* operates like a garden co-op, where everyone comes to plant, water, weed, and harvest. Each person has deep value, playing a significant and irreplaceable role. A congregation that functions under a philosophy of *membership* is one that runs the risk of becoming like an exclusive country club, where commitment and involvement are determined by commodity. It's in understanding our interconnectedness and genuine need for one another that we come to define ourselves as partners, not members.

Just as membership and partnership differ, it is important to also understand the differences between the global Church and a local church. You'll see we differentiate between the two by giving a capital C to the global Church and a lower case c to the local church.

Church - The capital "C" church is every Christian, everywhere and in every denomination that believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one true Savior, Healer, Baptizer with the Holy Spirit and Soon Coming King. Based on Paul's writings, the Church is often referred to as either the "Bride" (2 Corinthians 11:2) or "Body" (1 Corinthians 12:27) of Christ. Anywhere two or more of Jesus' followers have gathered, He is there in the Church.

church - The lower case "c" church is commonly referred to as a local congregation or "flock" of believers, meeting together regularly in community. The church could be literally translated as individual persons; typically led by a pastor or "shepherd." Anywhere two or more of Jesus' followers have gathered He is there in the church.

Commonly and mistakenly, many use the word "church" to describe a building or campus ("I'll meet you at the church"). Other times we use it to define an event or

gathering (“Are you going to church?”). It is very important to note that, no matter the distinction, (capital or lower case) the proper and correct use of the term “church” is in relation to **people** - those who celebrate their relationship with the Creator made possible through the work of Jesus on the cross.

A church that functions with a spirit and system of partnership operates like a garden, co-op, where everyone comes to plant, water, weed, and harvest.

THRIVING PARTNERSHIP

When membership enters the picture, things can get a little uncomfortable. This is often because either the church poorly communicates what membership is, or because some in the congregation see their membership as some sort of inclusion into a special club, rather than being “grafted in” to God’s growing family (Romans 11:17). This problem has plagued the Church from its beginning, as evidenced in the New Testament.

It took only eighteen short months after Paul founded the Church in Corinth for them to grow “cancerous” divisions: followers of Paul, followers of Apollos, followers of Peter, and even those who followed only Jesus (*physically*). Paul warned against all of this in I Corinthians 1:10-17. He thought such distinctions were both dangerous and unnecessary. In that day, it was an issue of *patronage*, a desire to honor those who had come before them and identify themselves by their accomplishments.

Today, in the American Church, Christians make a similar mistake of identifying and defining themselves by the church they’re part of, which is a clumsy extension of “lifestyle branding.” They believe that attending their church says something about who they are. This is done in ignorance of God’s Word. It is in Him that we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). Our identity, both individually and corporately, is in Him. Often in our churches, membership has the potential to reduce the collective value and appeal of the Body of Christ to something as superficial as choosing Starbucks over Folgers coffee.

Some churches display their members as trophies, “We have over 3000 members in our church...” Others compete like franchise sports teams, assessing loyalty by what jersey one is wearing. “We have the best worship in the Valley, you should come visit our church!” Unfortunately, churches have given people the understanding that our coming together is made better if certain amenities are offered. This has produced congregants who demand to know the benefits before they make any commitments. “You know, at my last church they gave special parking spaces for Sunday school teachers, do you have anything like that here?” As ridiculous as it sounds, these types of comments are not uncommon.

Before we go any further, let's establish our starting point: the Church is a "body" not a business; a living "organism" not a mechanical organization. We cannot function like a secular corporation which seeks the best market share in town by offering the best perks. The churches that are built on anything less than authentic relationships in Christ-centered community are a lot like shooting stars; they provide bright and inspiring moments and as fast as they appeared their temporary twinkle is gone.

the Church is a living organism, not a mechanical organization.

So, why then do we have Partnership at The Sanctuary? To begin with, we are under authority. The Foursquare denomination that we are proudly part of and the laws of the land require a system of management for various reasons. Beyond any of the earthly reasons for this kind of submission, we base our practice and tone of partnership on something far more important: The Bible!

Local church partnership is important in the life of a disciple because there is strength in fellowship (Ecclesiastes 4:12). It provides additional unity and power in prayer (Acts 12:5). As a congregation, we find strength against the opposing forces of the enemy (Acts 4:23:31). And on the practical side, it is with congregational participation that we're able to launch Kingdom projects, which bring blessing and healing to the world. Partnership *beyond fellowship* also provides the care of a pastor; an under-shepherd "accountable to God" (Hebrews 13:17). It is also foundational to the Christian life, providing a place of belonging with God's people and discipleship in God's Word.

When one's place in the Body of Christ turns into a matter of choice, based on benefits, it confirms just how far "off the mark" we can get. It is not uncommon to come across scores of Christians who "don't believe in church," "don't get fed in church," "don't go to church," and "don't need a church," to follow God. Such individuals have seemingly missed the point. Gathering the Church is not about us. Our place in the Body of Christ is about meeting to glorify God by growing in maturity, and going into the entire world with the Good News. If we fail to gather, we fail to realize that God's glorious plan of growing and going involves others. Is it any wonder the American Church is rapidly losing its impact? Any excuse we have for a lack of connection to the church, as properly defined as people, shows that we are unwilling to heed the warning of Hebrews 10:24-25, "do not neglect our meeting together." When we neglect the community of the church because we're looking to be comfortable rather than comforted, it becomes sadly clear that our main focus and "dis-ease" has become a search for *commodity* rather than for *community*.

Gathering the Church is not about us.

Still there are other fragments in the Body of Christ who choose not to associate with the “organized church” stating, “you only need to be a part of the global Church” or “membership isn’t anywhere in the Bible.” This line of thinking sounds a lot like those a lot like those the Apostle Paul talked about, as mentioned earlier in this reader. Critics maintain that “systems” or “methodologies” defining community, like membership or partnership, are not explicitly mentioned in Scripture. This is correct. However, throughout God’s Word, the tone and practice of **partnership** (mutual responsibility and interconnectedness in the Body of Christ, at every level,) is entirely inescapable. Unfortunately for those who bring this kind of division there is very little optimism. It is apparent that their problem is ultimately with authority and submission. They will only continue in their criticism of the Church; not finding one that does it the right way...which coincidentally is... their way.

It is at this point some will take one of two options. Either give up on the Church altogether or start what is believed to be a “correct” model, often meeting in a home in some kind of retort to unresolved interpersonal conflict with “organized religion.” Bad seeds that are planted this way either die on the vine, or bear ugly fruit. Home churches, in and of themselves are not necessarily unhealthy, however, they often become just that. All too often, they turn into no more than an intimate and ongoing Bible study or an internally focused and regular exercise of gray matter; where debates on theology and the problems of the world around them become the main focus, with little or no participation in the solution to the very problems they identify, thus becoming or remaining part of the problem.

Regarding those who have abandoned any form of church altogether; a good number of this self-marginalized group live out their secluded faith making the Church more of an antique to be refurbished than seeing it for what it truly is - a hospital filled with those in need of healing. God is fully aware of the problems with the Church. Jesus is depending on each of us to get close enough to work on the problems in the Church. The Church, like our character, can only be worked on from the inside out!

Many Christians (and many who could be called “Post-Christians”) have been hurt, mislead, and let down by the Church. For these “exiles,” we can only extend loving arms and continue to show care and encouragement, being ready to listen. God’s Word tells us He desires to restore those who are brokenhearted and crushed in spirit (Isaiah 57:15). God is looking for those who will stand in the gap (Ezekiel 22:30), and His word tells us to restore them back to the Father and community (2 Corinthians 5:18).

The Church, like our character, can only be worked on from the inside out!

For now, let's ask the big question: Why does God want us to gather as the church?

1. The church allows us to belong! Our world is falling apart. People everywhere are disconnected and need to know they are loved and accepted; that they belong. Each of us have "membership" in the Body of Christ the moment we are saved (Christ paid the price for our benefits!). It is in the context of church partnership where this acceptance becomes more tangible.

2. The church provides us with an opportunity for spiritual development! How well can we grow when we isolate ourselves from others (Hebrews 10:25)? Partnership offers accountability, affirmation and release of the calling (Romans 12:7) God has placed in our lives. It offers training (2 Timothy 2:2) for the ministry of the Good News of Jesus Christ to a hurting world (2 Corinthians 5:19).

3. The church allows us to model the Christian life to the next generation! At the same time we are called into this world, we are also told not to be **of** this world (John 17:16). Bringing our children into a consistent vibrant and focused spiritual environment outside of our home reinforces the truth that the Body of Christ is huge and diverse, revealing how much each person is vital to the overall plan in that body (Proverbs 22:6; Deuteronomy 6:7). Keeping our families out of fellowship ultimately tells our children (no matter their age) that God's Word is not to be taken seriously.

4. The church is committed to us! To be committed to a local church, is to show the world our love for each other. It was "committed love" Jesus referred to when He said, "The world will know you are my disciples when they see your love for one another" (John 13:35). It tells of a people who are willing to sacrifice their own interests for the benefit and good of everyone (Philippians 2:3).

5. The church provides us with spiritual covering! The Bible charges Pastors with the job of knowing their flock (Proverbs 27:23). These spiritual leaders, as well as many other non-pastoral leadership roles have been commissioned to actively care for those who are following Christ (Hebrews 12:15). It is a church leader's role to care for those entrusted to them; (John 17) in an overall commitment to those who are committed to Christ.

There are more reasons than even the ones mentioned here which would "justify" partnership within a local church, but the most important view is within the context of God's Word and heart. Partnering at The Sanctuary is simply saying to God and man:

“I am a committed part of the Body of Christ, and without neglecting the whole of that Body, I make partnership within this local church my primary point of connection to the global Church; serving, giving and living in God’s family.”

COMMODITY VS. COMMUNITY

An epidemic has swept the American Church where the main focus has become a search for *commodity* rather than for *community*. This malignancy, known as selfishness, is easy to grasp because its not-so-benign existence is in every one of us, if we call ourselves human. Self-centered thinking has caused more division among believers in recent years than ever before. Even now, it is fracturing congregations and leaving in its wake a path of destruction so devastating that many flocks never recover.

If we are to deal with this epidemic properly, an understanding of the differences between commodity and community is necessary.

Commodity (n) - *Products, goods and services available for purchase or trade; unprocessed material available to buy and sell, principles of supply and demand are reinforced; something people value or find useful.*

Community (n) - *Residents or a group of people living interactively together in social, geographical, or emotional connection to one another; a supportive populace of individuals sharing life together in relationships and common unity or bond.*

Basically, commodity is a mindset of “what’s in it for me?” while a community outlook is “what is my responsibility to those around me?”

At The Sanctuary, what we’re trying to nurture is somewhat easy to *initiate* but much more difficult to *achieve*. Disappointment is the result of failed expectations and, so very often, those expectations are unspoken. It is our desire to bring clarity to our shared goals with a common knowledge and vocabulary in our church family; to “front-load” all anticipations in the hope that in their fulfillment, we are able to build a relationship of trust and true partnership between our church community and then our civic community. This is why we continually *gather*: to mutually grow and eventually go.

A community outlook is “what is my responsibility to those around me?”

Below are “Partnership Expectations” at The Sanctuary. Understanding the opportunities for interaction in this comprehensive list will prove invaluable for everyone who desires deeper community within The Sanctuary.

WHAT PARTNERS CAN ANTICIPATE WITH THE SANCTUARY...

- Passion for Father God, His son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.
- A safe place to fellowship.
- Intimate and personal worship of God.
- A primary focus on discipleship with the next generation.
- Relevant, impacting and accurate teaching through the Bible.
- Passion for reaching people for Jesus.
- Bold and caring leadership with integrity.
- Personal accountability, affirmation and assessment.
- Opportunities to serve God and others.

WHAT PARTNERS ANTICIPATE FROM ONE ANOTHER ... *(The support of all of the above, and...)*

- Participation in church ministries, particularly the discipleship of the next generation.
- Consistent giving of tithes and offerings (see the reader on Giving our Lives to Reach a Community).
- Submission to and consistent prayer for leadership.
- Increased Christ-likeness in personal life.
- Looking out for the needs of others first.
- Above all things, a Commitment to the ministry and Good News of Jesus Christ.

Once we can agree on what is expected of one another we are able to put our faith into action with one another. These opportunities for interaction cause us to become one. Jesus prayed for us because He knew our weaknesses and understood our struggles. *“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me because of their testimony. My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as You and I are one, Father – that just as You-are in Me and I am in You, so they will be in Us, and the world will believe You sent me”* (John 17:20-21). The world around us can’t help but believe in Jesus as they watch members become partners and the church find its place in the Church. They will see our peculiar “one another” focus and interaction:

- **Loving** one another (John 13:14, 34-35; Romans 13:8)
- **Being** devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)
- **Honoring** one another above yourself (Romans 12:10)
- **Accepting** one another as Christ accepts us (Romans 15:7)

- **Serving** one another in love (Galatians 5:13)
- **Carrying** one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- **Being patient with** one another (Ephesians 4:2)
- **Forgiving** one another (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13)
- **Teaching and admonishing** one another (Colossians 3:16)
- **Encouraging** one another (1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11; Hebrews 10:25)
- **Building** one another up (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- **Confessing** our sins to one another (James 5:16)
- **Praying** for one another (James 5:16)
- **Offering hospitality to** one another (1 Peter 4:9)

This is what true ministry looks like. Each one of us is responsible for it - our lives are a ministry. From the top of our **heads** (*the thoughts we have*), to the expression of our **hearts** (*the motivations we have*), to the work of our **hands** (*the touch we extend*), the way we live our lives is a ministry. All that is in our minds, our spirits, and our physical abilities - all of it is ministry.

We live to share our joy, our healing and our hope, so that others may experience the living God through us. We must serve with passion and compassion, loving without expectation and condition. Ministry is not about us. Ministry is about giving away the best of what we have and who we are so that everyone who finds us will ultimately find their way to an intimate relationship with Father God, and that's GOOD NEWS!

This ministry of partnership allows the Bride of Christ to enjoy interdependent relationships and, like a vaccine, eliminate the sickness that plagues so many. Then, in the end, we will be presented, just as Paul promised "...as a pure bride to one husband, Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2)."

All that is in our minds, our spirits, and our physical abilities - all of it is ministry.

Hopefully you have been both inspired and provoked to commit to the relationships that come with partnership in the Church and in seeing the reward of those relationships you will more fully embrace your family in the church, whether that is within The Sanctuary or wherever God has planted you.

Living as Loved!!



Pastor Marty Walker
The Sanctuary

Notes

COMMUNITY

We exist as a *community*
to be a *safe place* FOR

each person to grow in

God's love + truth.



thesanctuarychurch.com

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