

What Does It Mean To Be A Church Member?



Edmond's First Baptist Church

Sunday Mornings: Worship at 9:30 and 11:00 am
Connection Groups at 8:15, 9:30 & 11:00 am

Wednesday Nights: Meal at 4:45 - 5:45pm
Formations 6:00 - 7:15 pm
Awana Clubs 6:00 - 7:15pm

CONTACT US:

+14053410253 | www.fbcedmond.org
1300 E. 33rd Street, Edmond, OK 73013

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What does the word “Church” even mean?

The Greek word translated “church” in the New Testament is *ekklesia*. A literal translation of *ekklesia* would be “a called-out assembly.”

When the word “church” is mentioned in the New Testament, it refers only to the people who believe in Christ, and a different Greek phrase is used. Therefore, the church is an assembly of believers called out by God. Paul explained this understanding of “church” in 1 Corinthians 1:2 when he wrote, “To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.” The word “church” in this verse in the original Greek is *ekklesia*. Paul emphasized that his letter was meant for all who submit to Christ Jesus as their Lord. Thus, we are called out of the world to be together in Christ.

Why does the church exist?

Now that we have a basic understanding of the word “church” itself, let’s take a look at the purpose of the church. The church is a group of people unified (Ephesians 4:1-3) under Christ, who represent and reflect Him to the world (1 Corinthians 12:12-17). The purpose of the church is to advance the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the nations (Matthew 28:18-20). Through the church, people are joined from different cultures, ethnicities, and backgrounds. They are united in Christ as their head and commissioned with the gospel.

Acts 2:42 explains the internal function of the church: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Jesus entrusted the church with the task to teach the body sound doctrine. There are many influences in the world that claim to have the truth, but God entrusted His word to the church (Ephesians 4:14). So Christ himself “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV). Sound teaching leads to spiritual maturity, which leads to building up the body of Christ.

The natural result of sound teaching and a unified body is that the members of the church will take care of each other. The most powerful way to care for others is to pray for them (Acts 2:42). Just as the early church prayed for each other (Acts 12:5; Philippians 1:3-4), so we should bring each others’ needs before God (Philippians 4:6-7). Within the church we are also called to show honor (Romans 12:10), compassion (Ephesians 4:32), encouragement (1 Thessalonians 5:11), and love (1 John 3:11). And we are to meet each others’ practical needs. James 1:27 says, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before

God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” One of the primary purposes of the church is to provide for the needs of its members (Acts 20:34-35; Romans 15:26) and the advancement of the gospel through our tithes and offerings.

Externally, the purpose of the church is to fulfill the Great Commission as Jesus commanded in Matthew 28:18-20. There is no nobler purpose for the church than to introduce others to Christ. We do this in part by making sure we faithfully represent Him and become who He has called us to be. Philippians 2:15 exhorts us to be “blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation.” Whether we witness to people in our neighborhoods or send others to foreign lands, the church is called to manifest the Holy Spirit in us by embodying Jesus’ character and telling others about Him.

The purpose of the church is to be the believer’s spiritual family. It is through the church that God takes people with different personalities and gifts, unifies them as a single body, and equips them to care for each other and reach the world. We were not meant to live the Christian life alone; surrounded by the biblical teaching and loving community of the church, together we find our own purpose in life.

Is going to church important?

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul compares Christ-followers to a body—the body of Christ. Every Christian is a part of this body (vs. 27), every part needs the others (vs. 21), and every part should be concerned for the others (vs. 25-26). In addition, no part of the body—no member of the church—can claim to be a self-sufficient unit (vs. 15-16). Since the local church is the method God has chosen for us to join together and live like a cohesive body, church attendance is very important.

Although all Christians make up the universal church, God uses smaller local churches in very specific, important ways. The local church is where we learn about God (Acts 2:42). It’s also how we build each other up through encouragement (Hebrews 3:13), exhortation (Hebrews 10:24), service (Galatians 5:13), honor (Romans 12:10), and compassion (Ephesians 4:32).

Staying away from church is dangerous. When we avoid other believers and reject their encouragement, the world will influence our beliefs and thoughts more than the Word (Hebrews 10:25). In the church, however, God has provided people who can remind us Who He is and how much He loves us (Romans 15:14). Most importantly, we can grow in love for God and others (1 John 4:12).

Why should I become a member of a church?

Being a member of a local church is very important. Here are just a few reasons why church membership matters.

1. When you join a church, you are making a commitment to serve Christ alongside His people. It’s a way of drawing a line in the sand and saying,

"I will help propagate the gospel and advance His kingdom through this local church." Making a commitment like this makes a powerful statement, especially in a culture of low commitment.

2. Church membership is about making a decision and sticking with it. In our current society, people prefer to date the church-have her around for special events, take her out when life feels lonely, and keep her around for a rainy day. Membership is one way to stop dating churches and marrying one.
3. Church membership keeps us accountable. When we join a church, we are offering ourselves to one another to be encouraged, rebuked, corrected, and served. We are placing ourselves under leaders and submitting to their authority (Heb. 13:7). We are saying, "I am here to stay. I want to help you grow in godliness. Will you help me to do the same?"

Mark Dever, in his book *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, writes,

4. Church membership is our opportunity to grasp hold of each other in responsibility and love. By identifying ourselves with a particular church, we let the pastors and other members of that local church know that we intend to be committed to attendance, giving, prayer, and service. We allow fellow believers to have great expectations of us in these areas, and we make it known that we are the responsibility of this local church. We assure the church of our commitment to Christ in serving with them, and we call for their commitment to serve and encourage as well.
5. Joining the church will help your pastors and leaders be more faithful shepherds. Hebrews 13:7 says, "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority." That's your part as "laypeople." Here's our part as leaders: "They keep watch over you as men who must give an account." As a pastor, I take very seriously my responsibility before God to watch and care for souls.

To give just one example, we try to be diligent in following up with people who haven't been at our church for a while. This is a challenge. But if you never become a member, we can't tell if you are really gone because we might not be sure if you were ever here! It's nearly impossible for the elders to shepherd the flock when they don't know who really considers them their shepherds.

6. Joining the church gives you an opportunity to make promises. When someone becomes a member at Edmond's First Baptist, they are making promises to pray, give, serve, attend worship, accept the spiritual guidance of the church, obey its teachings, and seek the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. We ought not to make these promises lightly. They are solemn vows. And we must hold each other to them. If you don't join the church, you miss an opportunity to publicly make these promises, inviting the pastors and the rest of the body to hold you to these promises-which would be missing out on great spiritual benefit for you, your leaders, and the whole church.

Ten Biblical Reasons To Worship In Person

So unless you're someone who needs to stay home for health reasons, here are ten reasons to come back to church.

1. **You are not made for long-distance relationships.**

In recent months, we've seen the power of our online world. But we've also felt its limitations. No loving couple gladly accepts a "long-distance relationship" as ideal. Neither should a loving church family.

2. **You are made for interdependent relationships.**

The Bible consistently teaches that the church is Christ's body on earth (Eph. 1:22–23). Each believer is a different body part, but we're intricately knitted together (Eph. 4:15–16). We're not independent but interdependent. Our spiritual gifts are like eyes and ears and hands and feet that each play their part in the body's growth and mission. Yes, even at a distance, we're still Christ's body. But like any healthy body, we shouldn't want to stay dislocated.

3. **You are being drawn by the Spirit.**

Not only are believers one body; we also have one Spirit (Eph 4:4). The Holy Spirit—the third person of the Trinity—inhabits God's church, and he's always drawing us toward unity. God's Spirit can't be divided, so when believers are separated involuntarily, we feel the tension—like a rubber band stretched too far. The Spirit within us yearns for us to be together, like that same rubber band pulling us back in.

4. **You are a part of a spiritual family.**

In the church, God is our adoptive Father, so we're all spiritual siblings—God's "household" (1 Tim 3:15). But families aren't meant to be separated. Healthy families live together, laugh together, cry together, and help each other. All who are able should seek to gather together with their spiritual family.

5. **You are made to participate in the sacred preaching moment.**

Yes, it can be streamed and recorded and posted, benefiting both virtual attendees and future hearers. But for a local family of believers, God's word is best communicated live as the Spirit empowers or appoints pastor and trusted shepherd to articulate God's word personally in a moment pregnant with purpose and possibility. In these moments, our pastor shepherds his flock and sheep hear the voice of their shepherds. A feast enjoyed together is better than food eaten alone.

6. You are made to sing with others.

There's no experience on earth like congregational singing (Ps 95:1–2). Singing together glorifies God by re-enthroning him in the hearts of his people. Singing together brands our minds with truth and warms our hearts with grace. Singing together symbolizes our unity as we harmonize over the gospel. Singing together expresses our emotions to God (and we have lots of emotions right now). But we don't just sing to glorify God; we also sing to encourage each other (Col 3:16). And we can't sing to each other through a screen.

7. You are made to enjoy baptisms and communion.

Baptism and communion remind us that God communicates to us in sensory ways. In these two ordinances, we taste and touch and see and hear the gospel. Experiencing them in person is a vital part of overall church health and personal spiritual development.

8. You have a job to do, a ministry to fulfill.

If you're a believer, you have a job to do when the church gathers. The work of ministry isn't mainly for pastors and leaders. It's for every Christian. Every believer has spiritual gifts meant to be used, and every church body desperately needs every body part to be active (Rom 12:4–8; Eph 4:15–16; 1 Pet 4:10–11). There are many ways we simply can't serve or encourage or build up Christ's body unless we're physically present.

9. Your worship is your witness.

Each week our friends and neighbors and coworkers walk through the same broken world we do, but without our hope and our map. The unbelieving world also needs to see the gospel's transforming power embodied in a local family of Christians who love God and serve each other in the most gracious and gritty ways.

10. Your greeting of others changes lives.

It may seem strange to end with the act of greeting—a simple activity that's become so restricted and complicated. But all over the New Testament, the writers not only greet the churches but ask Christians to greet each other. These greetings aren't just an afterthought tacked onto the end of their letters. These greetings symbolize the reconciling power of the gospel and foster our family dynamic. The way we greet each other—and the fact that we greet each other—is central to the church's life and witness.

Conclusion

God's people can and must gather again, and I hope you'll join in. After all, our gatherings are ultimately a taste of heaven. The Bible's vision of heaven doesn't look like a quarantine, a livestream, or a Zoom call. It's a “face to face” encounter with the risen Christ and a worshipful reunion of both saints and angels (Heb 12:22–23; Rev 22:4)