
Who Is A Faithful Member Of The Church?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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I attend many church meetings at which the subject of membership comes up. Maybe I am at a stewardship meeting, where "we want all our members to pledge for the next year!" I am at church staff meetings discussing recent visitors to the Cathedral. "Does this person want to become an official member and have their baptism recorded here?"

Or I hear, "That person should not be asking to have a wedding here. She is not even a member!" Or, "I am a member here, and I ought to receive some sort of discount on the purchase of my Cathedral lunch!" Or, "this person is a great member of the church because he is always at the church."

I am not sure that "member" means what folks think it does. Sure, there is an official definition of "pledging member in good standing." It means that one is a baptized Christian and has professed Christ, one's baptism is formally recorded here, one makes an annual financial pledge to the Cathedral, and one is known by the clergy to worship at the Cathedral in some regular way. That's a member in good standing.

But my definition of "member" goes way beyond that strict definition. A few years ago, for instance, I wrote a stewardship letter that took a reverse position from the definition of "membership as privilege." We are familiar with groups that use that definition. A credit card company says "membership has its privileges." A country club allows the use of its facilities only to those who are members. A store gives a discount to those who join its "membership club." Some special society bestows membership in a social club; a person is given all "the rights and privileges" of membership.

My position is just the opposite. Members of churches are not those who receive special privileges from church. Members of churches are those who agree to serve others in the name of the church. Church members are not recipients; church members are benefactors. We who join a church are agreeing to serve the world in the name of Jesus Christ!

Therefore, it really does not make much difference to me whether a person is a member of the church before I, a priest, decide to serve them. It is because I myself am a member of the church that I serve any person in need, whether that person is a member or not!

This is why some of the best and most faithful members of the church are not those who are at church all the time. Let me repeat that. Some of the most faithful church members are not those who are here every time the church opens its doors. Instead, they are out in the world, paying attention to their vocation, being Christian lawyers, being Christian husbands and wives, being Christian business people, being Christian teachers, and being Christian leaders. The world does not need people who simply come to church; the world needs people who are being Christian in the world!

Interestingly, it is the most faithful members of the church who actually do give generously. They know that ministry costs money, just like a good hamburger costs money. The restaurant workers must be paid, farmers and suppliers must be paid, and the building mortgage must be paid. They are not expecting some special favor or break because of membership; they are the ones paying for our service to all! Indeed, these relationships are where the grace of Christ is made real in the world. When we connect with people-at work or at home or at school-and when we have transactions with people-commercial or

financial or conversational-we have the opportunity to be a member of Christ's Body-the Church-in the world.

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