

Church Membership Letter

Why Are We Talking About This?

There is no other organization on Earth like the Church of Jesus Christ. There is a priority placed on the church by Jesus Himself during His ministry and additional throughout scripture, are laid out the guidelines for what a healthy, functioning church should look like. It's compared to a breathing human body, with different parts and functions. It's called a building of living stones, a royal priesthood, a flock of sheep and ultimately as a bride who is getting ready for her wedding day. The church is important in God's eyes.

Creation Church is a nondenominational church that has by the grace of God weathered through two very radical pastoral transitions since its humble beginnings in 2007. Within our most recent leadership structure we've never had a formal membership process for those who call Creation Church their home. We've worked as a leadership team to create a process that follows the biblical model that in God's infinite wisdom allows a mutual blessing to flow between the members and the leadership of the church.

One of the beauties of being a nondenominational church is the freedom & fluidity of the church; people are always able (and will always be able) to come in and be loved and encouraged in the Word of God and the fellowship of believers. And yet one of the challenges of being a nondenominational church is that sometimes it may be too loose, in the regard that people can slip through the cracks and the burden of ministering to the church attenders and visitors, rather than the faithful saints who gather every week. This can lead to an unachievable expectation for the leader. With this membership process we are seeking to establish who are the members of Creation Church or in other words those who should receive the priority attention of the spiritual leaders of the church, as well as allow specific time and attention of the leaders to be given to evangelism and the visitors of the church..

We're excited for this process! And believe that God will bless us as we go forward.

Why Does It Matter?

"I attend the church regularly, doesn't that make me a church member?" Church Membership matters for a number of reasons both to the members as well as the leaders of the church. One of the main reasons is that Church Membership is included as an article in our church governing By Laws (our By Laws are available to all members upon request). This structure has always been there, and it has looked very different over the years. There are God-given roles for both the member and the leader to ultimately become The Church. There is a blessing and righteousness that comes from church membership when the leaders are aware of and enabled to care for the specific flock that God has drawn together. And in response, the flock is not only

allowed to have a say in who their leaders are but are also protected and nourished by healthy leaders who have submitted their lives to the great Shepherd of our faith, Jesus Christ.

Another main reason for church membership is found in our churches Mission Statement: *Our mission is to lead people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ by creating environments where people are encouraged and equipped to pursue a loving relationship with God, have fellowship and community within and influence throughout.*

This language is intentional and drenched with the idea that WE (the church) are in this together! Words like environment, community, fellowship, these terms all speak to a collective group pulling in the same direction under the authority of Jesus. Leaders are members of the same church that they are appointed to lead. We will get into the appointment process below but the design of God is that neither member nor leader are to act independently or selfishly, rather work together harmoniously for the sake of The Gospel.

Another way we like to express this sentiment is: Love God & Love People.

Why Does It Matter To Leaders?

Focus - you will hear this word over and over from our leadership team but in particular from Pastor Chris. You may not be aware but our Pastors, Elders & Deacons are part-time and/or unpaid positions. In the passage of scripture where the role of Deacon was created (Acts 6) the reason for the creation of the office of Deacon was to allow the apostles to be able to focus on the spiritual needs while other leaders are empowered to administer to the physical needs of the growing church. The source of conflict in Acts 6 was trying to make sure that everyone in the church was cared for and at the same time allowing the ministry leaders to focus their time and energy and ultimately resulted in raising up other leaders. We are at a similar place now at Creation Church. The Pastors are in a position where they need to have more time to preach the word and attend the spiritual needs of the church as well as prayerfully train & appoint leaders to cover the operations of a living and growing church. The current state of our church does not allow enough resources for this to happen effectively. We'll discuss more in the members section below.

Creation Church believes strongly in a plurality of Elders (or Pastors), meaning that we work as a team, sharing the load, as it is nearly impossible for one man to be a gifted preacher, scheduling planner, financial guru, have time to visit the sick, be a husband and father, communicate all the church events, champion the causes of the ministries of the church, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, all while preaching the Gospel. And so we do it as a team. Within that team we have specific focuses: Worship music, preaching, youth ministry, ect, and for all leaders the primary focus is twofold: preaching the word of God and shepherding the spiritual well being of the people of Creation Church.

Deacons are also of immense importance to the church in this regard. They have been given the charge to oversee one portion of the church (a focus if you will) whether its Grounds &

Maintenance or Safety or Missions work and to love and shepherd the church folk in the sphere of those areas. Creation Church could not survive without the deacons and it is a role to be held in honor.

Effective Ministry Inside & Outside the Church - If the leadership team is able to shift focus onto their specific areas of need, the result will produce healthier leaders with more time and energy to devote to Loving God & Loving People, both in the church and without. One of the elders will be assigned to Focus on welcoming and shepherding new or potential members and all the members who complete the membership process will be assigned to a pastoral group under an elder. Again, all the Elders (or Pastors) are of equal standing and will be responsible for the care and spiritual growth of those within their pastoral group. Conversely this will free up a lot of time, energy and resources to preach the Gospel and fulfill some of our church slogans: “Love God, Love People” and “Reach People Far From God”.

Why Does It Matter To Members?

Healthy Leaders - There is a top down trickle effect in any organization. We want healthy leaders who are, as our mission statement says: encouraged and equipped... to encourage and equip the church members. Properly sharing the work load of ministry will allow the Pastors to better pastor those who are under their supervision. It's been said: a shepherd needs to know who his sheep are before he can shepherd them. Knowing who are members of Creation Church will allow the leaders to focus on the people and preaching the word.

Clearly Defined Roles & Expectations - In New England there are many forms and methods of church background and church membership. With this, our membership process, members can count on a defined and generous amount of attention and servanthood from their leaders. As well as healthy boundaries put in place with love and wisdom. Not everyone who attends Creation Church will share the same level of pastoral attention. There is a priority that is put on church members, as they submit to the core values of our church and to the process of shepherding. And again, we will have a pastor with a specific area of focus to love and encourage visitors and evangelism.

What Does It Actually Mean?

So beyond Mission Statements and By Laws, what does Church membership actually look like? What are the tangible benefits of church membership and what does it mean for both leader and member? First and foremost comes a responsibility from both leader and member. Both roles have a responsibility to mutually care for the other and therefore become The Church.

What Does It Actually Mean To Leaders?

Responsible - Church leaders are held to a higher standard both by the church and by God Himself. Everyone of our church leaders will one day answer before God for how they loved and ministered to the people of Creation Church. The pastors, elders and deacons are responsible

for the spiritual health and wellbeing of the members of Creation Church. They are the little shepherds who lead their sheep to The Shepherd, Jesus Himself. It's not about numbers, it's about being faithful with what God has entrusted to the church leaders.

Church leaders are also responsible for adhering and rightly delivering The Word of God, preaching the bible truths regularly and correctly.

Defense Of The Flock And The Gospel - The Pastors, Elders & Deacons are to protect the flock not only physically but spiritually as theologically. There's a verse in The Book of James that 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. James 1:27 ESV

This is what your leaders as well as all christians should be striving for! If the church is the bride of Christ it is the church leaders job to present "her" pure & spotless for the Lord Jesus. We are to stand up for those who are suffering as we endeavor to live lives that please God. How do we do this? Be meeting together regularly as the church and to be constantly immersed in the Word of God, the bible. Again, Love God & Love People.

What Does It Actually Mean To Members?

Responsible - A church member is responsible for four very distinct and important roles in the church: faithfully providing money for the needs of the church and its Pastors, a faithful witness to the installation process of its leaders, to pray without ceasing for the church and its leadership and ultimately to be mutually submissive to that leadership. Let's expand on these four roles.

Faithful Giving: As stated before, as a nondenominational church there is no larger trust fund type home office as in other denominations. This body of believers is 100% self-sufficient. It is a group effort which relies very much on God's provision, not of money, but of faithful people who give with a cheerful and generous heart. By the grace of God, Creation Church has never been a church with deep pockets. To our knowledge there are no rich uncles waiting to leave the church an inheritance or endowment. It has however always been a church that rises to the occasion and listens faithfully to the Lord on how and when to give. With this membership process we are casting the vision for the future of Creation Church; a debt free church able to support a full time pastor. A church that reaches people far from God, with His message of Hope. The faithful giving through the church is for the Gospel to go out to the ends of the earth, whether that's a pastor's salary, a meal prepped and served with love to those in need, or supporting our missionaries.

Faithful Leadership Process - Spiritual leaders all must meet the criteria set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 before they are put before the church body for examination. At that time if there is any reason why they wouldn't fulfill the biblical guidelines, the members have the responsibility to bring that info to the elders. It has happened before and has always borne good fruit. While the church members do not propose or appoint the leaders, they do have a strong and

important say in the character of the leaders being put forth. When the leaders put in place are healthy and marked by integrity, the financial giving portion becomes easy, as it's trusted that the money is being dispersed wisely all to the glory of God.

Pray Without Ceasing For The Church & Its Leaders - this one almost goes without saying, but in reality this is one of the most important functions of the church. Prayer works! And it's powerful. We cannot forget the truth that God promised to hear us when we call to Him in prayer. Prayer changes things, Prayer moves obstacles, Prayer protects a church because Prayer brings God's people close to God's heart. We pray with bold assurance that God hears our prayers and that He is working all things out for good.

Mutual Submission - This is the true beauty of church membership. This word submission is not a popular word in our society but it is not only a very important tenant of our faith, it is also very much misunderstood. Over and over in scripture the church is challenged to submit to one another out of love and a holy reverence for God. Submission does not mean lording power over another person for selfish or cruel gain, in a church context it goes both ways for the church leader and the church member. Leaders submit to God and submit to loving and caring for ALL the members of the church. The messy and the broken, the rich and the beautiful are all the same at the cross and as people they have honor and dignity in the sight of God. Church members will willingly submit to church leaders to love and care for them spiritually. That submission looks like checking in on members with an illness or a surgery; it looks like a bible study, it looks like a meeting for coffee and marriage counseling. It also looks like respectfully and boldly calling out areas of a member's life that needs to submit to Christ. This is not a cold and judgemental, unless the situation calls for that dramatic intervention, this is the beauty of it; Submission looks like love. It looks like loving someone enough to have the bravery for a difficult conversation, with the hope and prayer to restore a brother or sister to continue in their spiritual journey of faith.

The main way we will move forward in this area will be through Pastoral Groups and through our serving Teams throughout the church.

What Does The Process Look Like?

Step 1: Fill out a connect card & visit our Next Steps Table in the Fellowship Hall

Step 2: Attend a Next Steps class with one of our Pastors where you will receive

- A presentation of the church history, structure, mission, vision, core values, an overview of membership & theological beliefs.
- Receive a Next Steps packet for Step 3
 - Step 3 Packet
 - Membership Application
 - A copy of our church Core Values
 - A copy of the church By Laws
 - A copy of the Annual Church Budget

Step 3: Meet One on One with a Pastor to walk through the Step 2 Packet specifically:

- Membership Application
- Verbalize personal testimony
- Discuss baptism
- Determine the integrity of faith and desire to be committed to the body of Creation Church.

Step 4: Public confirmation before the church