

Church Matters

Week 7: Partnership > Membership

1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Loved spending time with Martha and hearing stories about the church. Over the span of 60 years, most were good, some, not so good. Like any relationship, the church you're a part of is filled with highs and lows. Good times and struggles.

And, even though Martha can't get out like she used to, she's still very active. She worships with us online, is a part of a Connect Group, and even continues to serve in a variety of ways. One of those ways is with Operation Christmas Child. Each year, Martha sets aside part of her fixed income and fills 50 shoeboxes, 25 for boys and 25 for girls. When I was over there, she showed me what she puts in the boxes, including some hand sewn dresses for barbie dolls and some crocheted items. It was incredible!

Martha's 50 boxes added to a record number collected this year. In all, we sent off 15,194 shoeboxes in 3 semi-trailers to go out to children around the world this Christmas! That's 1200 more kids that will receive a gift that went through our doors than last year. Incredible. Thanks to everyone who participated, whether by packing a box, volunteering your time, or giving financially. I especially want to thank Don and Penny Mole for doing a great job organizing it once again this year. (Pray for the gifts we sent out.)

All the way back in the '80's, or as my girls call it, "The olden days" American Express launched a new slogan. You know what it was? "Membership has its privileges." The idea was that, if you paid your dues, you would have access to certain privileges as an Amex card holder.

Since then, it seems like every company has some kind of membership program. Some you pay for, and some you just sign up for, but the idea is that, if you become a member, there's some kind of perk that comes with it.

For instance, earlier this year, Taco Bell launched the Taco Lover's Pass. For only \$10 a month, you can get a taco a day, which, I'm just saying, could be a good gift idea for the taco lover in your life. (Fun fact, Taco Bell ALSO turns 60 this year!)

It seems like every company wants you to become a member these days. And, if you do, you get some kind of perk. Become a member and get 3 cents off a gallon of gas. Become a member and earn points towards free food. Become a member and get free Wi-Fi. Unlimited access.

Just last week, we went out to eat and before the hostess seated us, she asked if we were reward members to their restaurant. We weren't, so I said, "Sell me on it. What privileges come with my membership?" She said, "Well, you get a free skillet cookie with ice cream for dessert" and I was like, "SIGN ME UP!"

For most of us, when it comes to membership, our first question is “What’s in it for me?” If I’m going to pay my dues, or give you my email address, and become a member here, what do I get in return? And, that kind of transactional relationship is fine in business, but unfortunately, I think that mindset has also crept into the Church. And, how could it not? We’re surrounded by the messaging that membership means perks and privileges. Membership means others will serve us and meet our needs or we get something in return.

So, it makes sense that this mentality might find its way into the pews and come out in comments like, “This is my church, so you should play the music I like, the way I like it.” Or, “The staff around here needs to remember who pays their salary.” Or, “I’m going to withhold my offering until you start going this or stop doing that.”

For this person, Church membership is just kind of lumped into every other kind of membership. They see their tithes and offerings as paying their dues that entitle them to a list of privileges and expectations.

But, that’s not what it means to be a member of the Church. In fact, when I look at what Biblical membership means, I think the word Partnership actually does a better job capturing it. The truth is, you won’t find anything in Scripture that lays out what it means to be a member of a Church, as we’ve come to understand it. What you will find, though, is a picture of individual members **partnering** together to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

One of the clearest pictures of this kind of partnership, and what it means to be a member of the Church, can be found in 1 Corinthians 12. Paul is talking about the different spiritual gifts we all have and how we all come together to serve one another and the world around us; like we talked about last week. And then he gives this great illustration in verses 12-27 to help us understand what he’s talking about. I’m going to read parts of it from the Message paraphrase...**(READ 1 Cor. 12:12-27 in MSG)**

“You can easily enough see how this kind of thing works by looking no further than your own body. Your body has many parts—limbs, organs, cells—but no matter how many parts you can name, you’re still one body. It’s exactly the same with Christ.

I want you to think about how all this makes you more significant, not less. A body isn’t just a single part blown up into something huge. It’s all the different-but-similar parts arranged and functioning together.

If Foot said, “I’m not elegant like Hand, embellished with rings; I guess I don’t belong to this body,” would that make it so?

If Ear said, “I’m not beautiful like Eye, limpid and expressive; I don’t deserve a place on the head,” would you want to remove it from the body?

If the body was all eye, how could it hear? If all ear, how could it smell? As it is, we see that God has carefully placed each part of the body right where he wanted it.

But I also want you to think about how this keeps your significance from getting blown up into self-importance. For no matter how significant you are, it is only because of what you are a part of.

An enormous eye or a gigantic hand wouldn't be a body, but a monster. (*Had pink eye in both eyes last week. Awful! Eyes swollen up really big. Norah – "Daddy, you look like a monster!"*) What we have is one body with many parts, each its proper size and in its proper place. No part is important on its own.

Can you imagine Eye telling Hand, "Get lost; I don't need you"? Or, Head telling Foot, "You're fired; your job has been phased out"?

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't.

If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every other part enters into the exuberance.

You are Christ's body—that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything."

Did you hear the partnership language here? Many parts coming together as one. That's what partnership means and it's a beautiful picture of Church membership. We are better together. We need one another to be the part of the body that only we can be. That's why I believe partnership better captures this idea of belonging to a Church than membership does.

- Membership is about perks. Partnership is about sacrifice.
- Membership is about being served. Partnership is about serving.
- Membership is about rights. Partnership is about responsibilities.
- Membership is about the individual. Partnership is about relationships.

When the Church body comes together as partners on mission, we look for what we can give to each other, not just get. We look for ways to support one another, not just look out for ourselves. When the Church body partners on mission together, it stops focusing on the perceived weaknesses of individual members and instead learns to value their unique strengths.

So, what does it mean to partner with the Church, specifically with us here at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church? There's a variety of things we could talk about, but I want to quickly hit on four things today. And, I'm going to frame them as "I will" statements because being a partner

requires action. We've probably all been on teams or worked on projects where one person just loafed around and didn't do anything. That's not a partner. A partner is a person who is engaged and running shoulder to shoulder with everyone else. In Scripture, there's no such thing as an *inactive* member because every part of the body is living and active, adding to the other parts.

So, what does it mean to partner with the Church? Well, first, it means **I will view myself as a partner, not just a member.** It means that you'll make the mental shift, if necessary, from being a member that *gets* to becoming a partner that *joins* together with other members on mission.

My favorite part of talking to Martha a couple of weeks ago was when she told the story of her family buying a second car so they could have more room to pick up students from IU and take them to church. That's the partnership mentality that Sherwood Oaks has been built on for the last 60 years and it's the partnership mentality we need to drive us into the next 60 years and beyond.

It's each one of us who call Sherwood Oaks our church home asking, "What can I do to partner with the mission of the Church?" And, if you're unclear on our mission, Jesus gives it to us in **Matthew 28:19-20. He says...(READ)**

We contextualize that to our mission statement as a church, which is **People helping people grow Christ-led influencers.** It takes all of us partnering together to make disciples who make disciples and show Jesus to the world around us and point people to him. And we partner together by giving our tithes and offerings. Being sacrificial in our giving so others may know, love, and follow Jesus as others were for us. We partner together in serving others with our gifts, not just being served by the gifts of others.

Partnership means coming together to give and serve and love one another abundantly and cheerfully not just being a member that fills a pew.

Second, partnership means **I will uphold the unity of the Church.** It's believing that we're in this together, not against each other, but for each other. We saw this call to unity in our text last week. Paul said in **Eph. 4:2-3...(READ).** Jesus emphasized our unity by saying in **John 13:35...(READ)**

In other words, the world will know if we are Christians or not by the way we act towards one another. That doesn't mean we'll agree all the time. Won't happen! It means our greatest concern will be to protect the unity of the Church, not get our way. I think we protect the unity of the Church by making this one simple commitment that's not always easy...**We will talk to each other, not about each other.**

Nothing kills unity, or the work of the Holy Spirit, in a church faster than gossip. Partners in a Church work hard to protect and uphold that unity so they refuse to gossip or entertain the gossip of others. So, here's my challenge to you...don't be a source of gossip. If you have a

concern, talk to the person you have that concern with, not about that person to others, even if it's masked as a "prayer request." Everyone sees right through that.

And, if you find that someone is gossiping to you, if that person is a brother or sister in Christ, Scripture gives you permission to **lovingly** rebuke their sinful behavior. Encourage them to talk to that person, offer to meet with them if it would help.

As partners in this mission together, we have got to humbly work out our differences together. We've got to practice, or learn how to practice, having healthy, Biblical conflict so Satan can't get a foothold and cause division. Let's not run to conflict, but let's not run from it, either. Let's practice confession and forgiveness and peaceMAKING, not just artificial peaceKEEPING. Let's have the hard conversations and work things out. Let's make a commitment, as partners in this together, to uphold the unity of the Church.

Third, being a partner means **I will hold onto my preferences loosely**. And you may think, "Well Shawn, that's easy for you to say because you have a lot of say into what goes on around here." And to a degree, you're right. But let me tell you a little secret...keep this just between us, okay? *I'm not a fan of everything we do around here!*

Do I think it's wrong? No. It's just not always the way I'd do it. Even when it comes to worship, there are some songs that we sing, or some sets that I'm like, "That's just not my style." But, I hold onto those preferences loosely because, while it may not be for me, it's exactly what someone else needs to connect to the Father.

If everything in a worship gathering or every church program is exactly the way I want it and for people like me and my generation, then the church is well on its way to dying with me. And so, I hold onto my preferences loosely because I know not every opinion is worth sharing and not every hill is worth dying on, especially when the Church is full of people who are not like me. Partnership in the Church means we will refuse to make demands to get our own way. Instead, we will honor and respect one another. We will sometimes make sacrifices for each other.

The Apostle Paul points to Jesus as our example of this. In **Philippians 2, he writes...(READ)**

If Jesus, God in flesh, was willing to lay down his rights as God, certainly I can be willing to lay down my preferences for the sake of others, just as others will sometimes need to lay down their preferences for my own.

Finally, Church partnership means **I will pray for my Church and leaders**. There is a spiritual battle taking place all around us, and the enemy attacks when we move on the offense. We are moving. Over 60 baptisms since the beginning of June. Ministry happening every day of the week. Lives being transformed by the Gospel, hope being renewed and restored. People being set free from things that held them in bondage. Our enemy is well aware of what's taking place at Sherwood Oaks Christian Church and he wants nothing more than to thwart it.

Partnership means praying for your church family and for its leaders. Praying for protection and provision. Praying for physical and mental health. I can't tell you how much it means to get a card or to be stopped in the hallway to be told that someone is praying for me and for the Church. Without ongoing, intercessory prayer, our Church will not be healthy and stand strong in the battle taking place around us.

So, those are the four biggies when I think about what it means to be a Church Partner within the body of Christ. It means...

I will view myself as a partner, not just a member.

I will uphold the unity of the Church.

I will hold onto my preferences loosely.

I will pray for my Church and leaders.

If you want to learn more about what it means to partner with Sherwood Oaks, or you're interested in baptism, we have a class for you coming up this Wednesday night...[\(show Explore Class details\)](#)

When we place our faith in Jesus, incredible things happen!

- Receive the gift of salvation
- Adopted into God's family
- Filled with the Holy Spirit
- Become a part of the body of Christ.

Membership in the body of Christ and partnering with others in the Church is a gift from God. It's not about a legalistic obligation. It's not about perks. It's not a license for entitlement.

Membership to the body of Christ and partnering with others in the Church is a gift from God.

May we cherish that gift and may the world know, love, and follow Jesus because of the way they see us partnering together to serve Him and one another.