

Church Partnership at The Gathering

September 11, 2016

"I Will Be a Functioning Partner"



This is the first message in a four-part series that we are starting today called CHURCH PARTNERSHIP. We're using the word PARTNERSHIP to describe what most of us know as local church *membership*. We have waited for over two years to introduce our church family to the idea of membership.

Our church began as a Bible study in the fall of 2013. We met on Saturday nights first as a Bible study, and then as a newly formed church. In May 2014 we switched our meeting to Sunday morning.

We started our Bible study with four people three years ago, and last Sunday we had over 240 in attendance. Getting to the place where we could talk about church membership has taken a while, because we really want to get it right. We have only one chance to do this right the first time, so we have taken our time, consulted other church planters and came up with a process that we think will work.

Membership in *our* church will be called PARTNERSHIP rather than MEMBERSHIP because we think PARTNERSHIP is a better word for several reasons. It's warm and welcoming. And it more clearly defines what a church member is and does.

So, when I say *I'm a church member* it means that I'm in a partnership with the pastors, the elders, the deacons, the other leaders, the Lord Jesus, and my brothers and sisters in Christ. We're in a partnership together for the glory of God! And there is not a two-tier system of members and non-members, the haves and the have-nots, the partners and the non-partners.

Together we are serving the Lord, partnering in ministry, so that God is glorified through lives that are changed in the process.

1. At The Gathering, Church Partnership Means We All Play An Important Role

There is no chapter and verse in the New Testament that says, “Thou shalt become a church member.” But the principles that support church membership, or *partnership* as we call it, are found everywhere in the New Testament!

One of those places is 1 Corinthians 12-14. All three chapters deal with partnership in a local church, but I’m not going to read all three chapters out loud this morning!

1 Corinthians 12:12-19 ESV

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴For the body does not consist of one member but of many.¹⁵ If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.¹⁶ And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body.

¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be?²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

There are many members, but one body. And every church partner has an important role to play in this body, this local church. You may be a foot or a hand or an ear or an eye. But every part plays an essential, strategic role in the functioning of the church.

You could not function at your best without your eyes. You’d be stumbling over things and groping your way through life. You could not function with ease if your hands were missing. Your big toes help you balance. Your thumbs help you grip things.

We need every part of the body. And that’s the point. Everyone in our church plays an important role.

2. At The Gathering, Church Partnership Means We Are All Different But We Still Work Together

1 Corinthians 12:28-30 ESV

²⁸And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

In addition to teaching on spiritual gifts, Paul is also making the point that not everyone is the same. We have different roles, different callings, different ministries, different personalities, but we all work together for the glory of God.

I know we have a lot of race fans in the audience this morning, so they might enjoy this:

In 1950, Indy car pit crews consisted of four men—including the driver! No one was allowed to get near the car except this small crew of specialists.



A routine pit stop to replace two tires and fill the tank back then took more than 60 seconds.

Today, a crew consists of 11 members! Six are permitted direct contact with the car. Five serve as behind-the-wall assistants. A full service pit stop that replaces all four tires, adjusts the wings, and tops off the tank now takes less than eight seconds!

When everyone understands his role, and when everyone on the pit crew does his job with purpose and passion, the team can do the job in record time!

When the work of the church is carried out by people who are devoted to doing their part and fulfilling a role, the difference can be amazing to behold!

We are all different, but we still work together for the glory of God and the advance of his church!

3. At The Gathering Church Partnership Means Everything We Say And Do Is Based On A Biblical Foundation Of Love

...or at least it should be. That's the ideal. That's the goal...right?! That's what we are striving for by God's grace and for His glory!

John 13:34-35 ESV

³⁴ *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.* ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Ernie Johnson Jr. is at the top of his game as a sportscaster for Turner Sports and CBS Sports. He's the lead TV voice for Major League Baseball (TBS), the host of *Inside the NBA* (TNT), and a contributor to the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball. He is also a faithful Christian and a father who has adopted children, one of whom has special needs, a boy named Michael.

When the Johnsons first met Michael, he had a physical disability and was unable to speak. Later, Michael was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, and now at 26 he is attached to a ventilator and uses a wheelchair. His care has been both extensive and expensive, but Ernie and Cheryl Johnson have not shrunk back because they love him.

At The Gathering, we want people to feel like they belong and know they are loved, regardless of who they or what sort of social, mental, spiritual or physical disabilities they may have. So we must be devoted to loving one another, just like Jesus has loved us!

By this all men and women and boys and girls will know that we are followers of Jesus, if we love one another.

4. At The Gathering Church Partnership Is A Functioning Partnership

The apostle Paul reminds us of something very important in

Galatians 5:13 ESV

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Let's use our freedom to serve one another! Christ has set us free so that we might operate as members of the body of Christ and serve one another. That's what it means to be a functioning partner of a local church.

Peter also exhorts us in 1 Peter 4:10 ESV

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace...

A few years ago, my youngest daughter and I had the chance to visit Spain. I spoke at a conference and she led worship and provided special music. After our commitment to the conference ended, we took a few days to explore the magnificent city of Barcelona. We became tourists...and we love it!

On that trip we got our passports stamped, exchanged currencies, learned a few key phrases, and – off we went!



Kristin and I wandered through the outdoor markets, visited museums, and sampled the local cuisine. We'd exchange a few words with the locals, sit on the steps of the cathedrals, and sample the local cuisine. We'd take a picture or two, take in a flamenco show, buy some souvenirs, and of course, sample the local cuisine.

We had a wonderful vacation in the city of Barcelona. Our hearts weren't changed in any significant way by our visit to the city, but they weren't meant to be. We were just tourists. We were just having fun!

It seems to me that what I've just described is very close to some people's understanding of the congregational life of the local church. On any given [weekend], tourists can be found in church. They pop in for forty-five minutes or an hour, sing a song or two, and exchange words with the locals They drink a coffee, buy a book, and then race over to Swiss Chalet to sample the local cuisine...

Too many people, in too many churches, in too many places are just tourists when it comes to church life.

And....*we want to change that!* We actually want people to *function* as partners in the work of the Gospel. We actually want people to *operate* as if the future of the church depends on them. We actually want people to *work* in the ministry so that more lives can be changed. We actually want people to become partners in the transformation of life!

1 Peter 2:4-5 ESV

⁴As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

So the plan is not for us to be tourists at church. The plan is for you and me to become part of the structure, part of the spiritual house of God, and to function as a holy priesthood, helping people get to God!

Orthodox Church officials in Russia discovered in 2008 that one of their church buildings had disappeared. The 200-year-old building had gone unused for a decade, but the Orthodox Church, which was experiencing growth, thought about reopening the church building, and that's when they discovered their building wasn't there.

Eventually they found out that villagers from a nearby town had taken the bricks from the building and sold them to a businessman for about 4 cents a brick. The bricks had been chiseled out one by one, over a long period of time, by lots of different people. And eventually, the church building disappeared.

In the same way, some churches are decimated over time when Christians, one by one, choose not to function in the way God has designed; when they choose not to be involved in the life of their church. Every time a believer decides not to serve, not to give, not to pray, not to get involved, not to function...it takes a brick out of the building of God. One less living stone is available for God to build with. And in the end, the church, intended by God to be the display of Christ's glory, is chiseled away.

We have a partnership with God in building the Kingdom!

And our partnership in the local church declares to the seen and the unseen worlds that we are *devoted* to Kingdom values, and we are *committed* to this local expression of the church.

And so, if someone is interested in becoming a partner at The Gathering, we simply ask them to attend this 4-week sermon series, or listen online, or read the sermons on the website.

Second, we ask you to read the articles and watch the short videos on our church website, and then,

Third, attend a Partnership Seminar.

Doing the work and coming to the seminar does not commit you to anything. You may decide this is not for you, and that's okay. But in order to become a partner, you have to do the work and come to the seminar and have been baptized as a believer.

If I was planning to ask you to sign something today (and I'm not) – if I was going to ask you to commit to something at the end of this message – here's what it would look like and sound like:

I like the metaphor of Partnership. Because I am a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), I know that I must be a functioning member, where I am an "eye" or a "ear" or a "hand." As a functioning partner at The Gathering, I will give. I will serve. I will minister. I will share my faith. I will use my spiritual gifts. I will study. I will be part of the life of our church! I will seek to be a blessing to others, and "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26).

This makes Partnership attractive to me. To frame it like this makes it appealing.

I'm already a functioning member of the body of Christ. So why not become a functioning Partner at The Gathering.