

1. Jesus commands his followers to join a local church

If you are looking for the exact verse in the Bible where Jesus says, “Thou Shalt Join a Local Church,” You aren’t going to find it. You will find Jesus giving instructions for all disciples to be “baptized into the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This implies that every person who becomes a Christian needs to find another Christian to baptize them. He also instructs Christians to take the Lord’s Supper (communion) which also implies the need to interact with other Christians. As we read the rest of the New Testament we find that the place where these things happen is the local church. In addition to this the New Testament letters are written to local churches and Jesus addresses local churches in the book of Revelation. Even a surface reading of the New Testament reveals that Christians are supposed to be committed to a local body of believers. Membership is the tool that we use to help facilitate the joining together of believers in a local congregation.

2. I will commit myself to loving well the Bride of Christ

Jesus loves the church. He loves it so much that He calls her his bride. He loves His Bride so much that He died for her. He says that when we love our brothers and sisters in the church it’s like we are loving him (see Matthew 25:31-46). When you refuse to become a member of a local church but continue to attend, you are like that boyfriend or girlfriend who refuses to commit. Dating the church will never lead to the most intimate/growing/mature relationship with Christ. Getting married to the church (joining in covenant with other brothers and sisters in Christ) will lead to intimacy/growth/maturity. In a word you’ll be able to love Jesus’ bride to the utmost and that is really important to Jesus.

3. I will get support from other brothers and sisters in Christ

Joining a local church is more than loving the church well. It also involves being loved. Just as you are committing yourself to love your fellow brothers and sisters in the church, they too are committing to love you. This is the essence of what are often called the “one another” verses. The people within the church are commanded to love one another, pray for one another, confess our sins to one another, etc. We all need this and joining the church will help provide this in some significant ways.

4. I'll be joining a community that is hearing the gospel on a weekly basis and seeking ways to put it into practice

Even though you are a Christian, you need to hear/sing/see the gospel on a weekly basis. You'll get this when you hear the weekly sermon, sing songs, and take communion. You'll also get this in your weekly small group. You can get this as an attendee but by becoming a member you are committing to do this no matter what. You are also giving the church permission to speak into your life if you start lagging in your participation. As was mentioned earlier, you are going from dating the church to marriage. You will find yourself participating at times when you would have rather stayed home and you will be glad that you did.

5. Other believers in Christ will vet my testimony

Part of the membership process is verbally professing your faith to a few other Christians in the New Member's Class. Your story of how you came to understand the facts of the gospel and trusted in those facts as your only hope for salvation. We often have the experience in our membership class where people either don't understand the facts or haven't moved from merely assenting to the gospel to actually trusting in it. This is an excellent opportunity for you to get that settled and get clarity on what the gospel is and how we are called to respond to it in faith.

6. My spiritual gifts will be more easily joined in the working of the Body of Christ

All Christians are gifted with what are known as spiritual gifts. The Bible describes the working of these gifts as a body with different parts (See Romans 12). One of the most exciting things for the Christian is to find out what their gifts are and discover how to employ them in the body of Christ. Membership can help with this. For one, you will get some teaching about what the gifts are and opportunities to put them to work in the church. Fulfilling one's calling in the body is one of the most life giving experiences in the life of the Christian.

7. I will place myself under the protection of church leadership

Local churches have leaders in them who are called by God to be shepherds (see 1 Peter 5). These shepherds work hard to lead, teach, support, and protect their flock. Local churches try to do their best to care for anyone who comes in the door, but when push comes to shove, they take care of those who have committed themselves to their local church. By becoming a member, you become an important priority to these shepherds and will be cared for and can reach out to them for care as well.

8. I will place myself under the authority of church leadership

Authority is a dirty word in our culture, but not in God's kingdom. Authority not only leads but also provides and protects. That said, the leadership given to the elders and other leaders in the church is real and they have been sanctioned by God to speak into the lives of their flock when they are sinning against God and the other members of the church (See Matthew 18:15-19). This is sometimes called "Church Discipline". This may not sound fun, but all of us go off the rails at one time or another and it's best to be encouraged back on course before consequences get any worse than they have to. By joining a local church, you are giving the leaders of that church the permission to call you on your sin for your own good and the good of the church.

9. I will go from being the mission to the missionary

Every Christian is called to be a missionary (See the end of Matthew 28). The mission of every healthy church is to make disciples which is what you are commanded to do. Part of being a disciple is committing to a local body. If you aren't committed to a local church, you are lacking in your life as a disciple. You continue to be the "mission" of that church in trying to get you on the road of discipleship. Stop being the mission and get on the mission with a local church by becoming a member and committing to the mission of that church. It will grow you as a disciple and grow others as you participate in the disciple making systems of the church.

10. I will become more a part of the prayer support of MERCYhouse

One of the things that you will commit to if you become a member of a healthy church is to pray regularly for the mission, the leaders, and the members of the church. This is so vital for the ongoing evangelism and discipleship that goes on in the church. As an attendee, one is able to be an observer and pray when you feel like it. As a member you will be covenanting with your other brothers and sisters to pray regularly for the church. More prayer means more opportunities for God's Spirit to move in and through our church.

11. I will become more a part of the financial support of MERCYhouse

Another thing you will commit to if you become a member of a church is generous giving. The mission must be prayed for and must be funded. This is so vital for the ongoing evangelism and discipleship that goes on in the church. As an attendee, one is able to be an observer and give when you feel compelled by a need or have a few extra bucks lying around. As a member you will be covenanting with your brothers and sisters to give regularly to the church. More money means more opportunities for God's Spirit to move in our church.

12. I will mature more as a disciple

Just like marriage creates the environment for a much more mature relationship to develop as opposed to dating or engagement, church membership creates an environment for a more mature relationship with God. As a covenant member, you commit yourself to ongoing intake of gospel truth, worship, prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and outreach. These all serve as a means of growing the disciple in his or her intimacy with Jesus that results in a more mature disciple. Just going with the flow, attending a church service on a whim, listening to an exciting podcast or two, just doesn't set you up for becoming a fully formed disciple.

13. I will obey Jesus' command to be baptized

If you haven't been baptized as a believer by immersion then you haven't followed one of Jesus' commands (see end of Matthew 28). Jesus is clear that those that profess faith in the gospel should be baptized as a way to profess that faith and join a local body of believers. Baptism role plays the facts that you are believing (his death, burial, resurrection), lets friends and family know that you are serious about your faith, is a means for inviting those friends and family to consider placing faith in the gospel, is a sign of your joining the local body of believers that is baptizing you. If you have already been baptized in a church of like faith and practice then you can join by statement that you have already been baptized and want to transfer your membership to a local church where you now live. All who want to join, either by through baptism or statement, need to attend the New Member's Class.

14. I will come to understand more fully the vision and mission of MERCYhouse

Every healthy church should have a similar mission, that of making disciples. That said, every local church has a unique disciple-making mission in the particular context where God has placed them. By attending the New Member's Class, you will hear more about our unique mission and whether or not that mission fits your own gifts and calling. If it does, then you have the opportunity to participate more fully in that mission and be a more fruitful disciple.

15. I will get a free lunch and hear some great teaching about the gospel and the church

Okay, so if none of that has convinced you, New Member's Class is a really great experience. You'll hear some great teaching about the gospel and the church. You get to meet some new people. You'll even get a free lunch out of the deal. We hope you'll join us for our next New Member's Class. If you have any questions or want to RSVP, contact Lois at lois@knowmercy.org.



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