

## SESSION 1: MINISTRY PARTNERSHIP

**How many churches do you think exist in the world at present?**

*Trick question: Only ONE*

*The church is the entire people of God, the body of Christ; God's flock; his holy temple. There is only one true church, the church that Christ is building. There are not many churches, only many expressions of Christ's one church in various places.*

**Matthew 16:18 (ESV)**

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

**Ephesians 4:4-6 (ESV)**

*<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

**How might this understanding affect how we view and appreciate the role of each “local expression” of the church?**

**Romans 12:4-6 (ESV)**

*<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;*

*In the same way as individuals serve different roles in a local church, churches themselves have different strengths which impact the world in different ways. Because we have a variety of churches, we have a variety of ways of impacting this world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

**What are some ways various churches have unique strengths and impact?**

*(Either local churches in your area or denominations as a whole.)*

**Possible strengths of different churches:**

- Evangelism
- Ministry to the poor
- Prayer for the city
- Children's program
- Youth Program
- Single moms
- Men's ministry

**Examples of Denominational Strengths:**

- Salvation Army and Mennonite Brethren: Social justice
- Pentecostal: Emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit
- Presbyterian: Reformed theology
- Baptist: Evangelism & Missions

*Obviously, these are broad generalities and are not always accurate. There are many more denominations not listed here that also have strengths in these and other areas. This is merely a list to provoke thinking.*

**What do you think is the unique contribution your church offers?**

**How does one become a member of THE church?**

**Ephesians 1:13 (ESV)**

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...*

**1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV)**

*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.*

*One becomes a member of the church through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from one's works.*

*Baptism in this verse is referring to our immersion in Christ. It is not talking so much about "water" baptism, but more so what water baptism represents. When baptism is mentioned in most places in the New Testament, it refers to the spiritual reality of dying to self, being immersed in Christ, and rising to new life. Water baptism is simply an external picture of the true baptism we have already undergone in Christ.*

*The emphasis of 1 Corinthians 12:13 is that we are baptized into ONE BODY.*

*So regardless of our theology, traditions, or practices, if anyone has placed faith in Jesus Christ (apart from their works) and the Holy Spirit dwells within them, they are a part of the one church of Jesus Christ.*

**Ephesians 5:23 (ESV)**

*For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.*

**Colossians 1:18 (ESV)**

*And he [Christ] is the head of the body, the church.*

**1 Peter 2:25 (ESV)**

*For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

**What does it mean to say Christ is the head of the church?**

***Note:** Some will argue that the word translated “head” actually means “source,” implying Jesus is the source of the church. However, biblically speaking, whatever is the source of something also has a responsibility for what flows from it. In other words, Jesus, whether the head or the source, still holds responsibility for the church.*

**If there is only one church, and anyone who places faith in Jesus is a member of that one church, why do local churches have membership in addition to this?**

**Is there any biblical model of church membership apart from the larger corporate body of Christ?**

*Not really! If anyone was a baptized believer in the local churches, they were considered a member of “the” church. There was no biblical distinction between a believer who was a “member” and a believer who was “not a member.”*

**Every believer:**

- was considered under the authority and care of the church leadership
- had gifts they were to use
- gathered to pray for the Spirit’s leading for the corporate church

*There was no special class or privilege called the local “member.”*

Churches today often utilize membership for a variety of reasons, none of which are wrong in and of themselves. The church structure was rapidly evolving within the New Testament as the church grew in size and complexity. Therefore, there is no one model we are told to embrace. We merely see what the church did at each stage of its development. Churches are free to determine what structure they deem best for caring for and discipling people.

In many countries, charitable organizations are required to have a membership. Scripture tells us to respect and obey our country's laws, and the idea of membership has some advantages.

**Instead of the term “membership,” we recommend the concept of Ministry Partnership. What might be the differences between these two concepts?**

**Membership:** *In North American culture, membership is more often about perks and privileges than it is about responsibility. You can be a member of a store, a gym or club, and benefit from all they have to offer, yet have no personal responsibility for that organization whatsoever.*

**Ministry Partnership:** *Partnership implies that we are a team of people joining together for a common goal. We have all embraced the same mission and are committed to seeing it fulfilled.*

**What might be some of the advantages of a local church having a membership or partnership?**

- *Just because someone attends or even serves in a church does not mean they are committed to fulfilling that church's specific mission. Membership/partnership helps determine who truly embraces the mission.*
- *It is beneficial to give people the opportunity to express that they are committed to their local church family.*
- *When one embraces membership/partnership, it communicates to the others they are now a part of the team.*
- *It helps determine who should be in leadership and teaching positions. Though membership/partnership, in and of itself, does not qualify someone for these positions, it does help filter the possibilities.*
- *In congregational church structures, it helps filter which has authority to vote on major church decisions.*
- *It calls people to higher levels of responsibility.*

**What do you think should be the conditions for someone to be a member/partner of a local church?**

Church membership/partnership causes a person to reflect on their commitment to the mission of Jesus Christ. Below is a list of the things that a person declares as they become a member/partner. Discuss how publicly affirming each point might help a person grow in their walk with Christ and effectiveness for the kingdom.

**Membership/Partnership declares:**

**1) I am a Follower of Jesus Christ**

*This declaration is made through baptism and is simply recognized in membership/partnership.*

**2) I am Committed to Growing**

*Jesus commanded us to learn to obey everything he taught us.*

**Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

*We encourage churches to make small group discipleship as a condition of church membership/partnership.*

**You are never too old or too spiritually mature to continue growing as a disciple.**

**3) I catch the Vision of my local church**

*Every church has its unique role to play. God has called us to fulfill a very specific mission within his kingdom, and it's not better or worse than any other church's calling; it's just different.*

*Membership/Partnership declares that you catch the mission your church is here to fulfill. It excites you, energizes you, and makes you say, “This is worth living for!”*

**Do you know what your church is trying to uniquely accomplish?**

**4) I am Responsible**

*As a member/partner, I am saying that I understand that I am the church. It is up to me to help make the church become what we desire it to be.*

## SESSION 2: PARTNER COMMITMENT

*In the following document, we will refer to the concept of Ministry Partnership. You may prefer to substitute the words Church Membership instead.*

*We desire to be the type of community God intended us to be. The Ministry Partner Commitment below highlights some specific commitments we believe characterize the basic Christian life and responsibility to the local church. Each statement flows directly from scripture. It is important that anyone involved in any significant ministry or who influences the decision-making process is striving to align themselves with these principles.*

**TEACHER NOTE:** Below is a sample Ministry Partner Commitment. We recommend using your own church's documents regarding church membership and walk through those **INSTEAD** of using what we have provided. If you do not have such a document, then discuss the points raised below as a means to call people to a higher level of church commitment. Churches are welcome to adopt all, or portions, of the following commitment if they so desire.

### MINISTRY PARTNER COMMITMENT

Ministry Partnership implies that we are committed to seeing the kingdom of God grow through (*your church name*). It means that the church is not something we attend but something we are, and as such, we assume responsibility for helping it achieve its purpose and vision. We are all at different stages in our spiritual growth and, as a result, need to show each other great amounts of grace as we learn to bear with each other and our failings. This Ministry Partner Commitment represents my desire to continue growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ and see the community of (*your church name*) mature and fulfill its purpose.

- ☐ Jesus Christ is Lord of my life, and I have declared this through baptism.
- ☐ I am actively attending a discipleship small group.

**I accept and affirm the church's:**

- ☐ Statement of Faith
- ☐ Vision for this coming year

**Do you agree with these prerequisites for church partnership? Why? Would you add or subtract anything?**

I commit to:

Pursuing the Christ-like life wholeheartedly through:

**1) Spending time regularly in God's word and prayer**

**Joshua 1:7-8 (ESV)**

*<sup>7</sup> Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*If someone is not in God's word, they will not grow in knowledge, wisdom, or understanding. God primarily speaks to us through his word, and if we are not in it regularly, then we have cut ourselves off from whatever God may want to say to us. To live lives too busy for reading God's word is to have wandered off in our own spiritual direction, in our own limited wisdom, unaware of God's purposes for our lives.*

*If someone is not in regular conversation with God, they are not growing in their relationship with God. They will not grow in maturity and will lack spiritual vibrancy. If there is little prayer, there will also be little guidance and life impact. They will be limited to their own abilities, accomplishing very little for the kingdom of God. Kingdom growth requires much prayer.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**2) Surrendering my life daily to the control of the Holy Spirit**

**Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)**

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...*

**Romans 8:5 (ESV)**

*For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.*



**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*The Spirit-filled life is the “normal” Christian life. When the Holy Spirit is not in control, we become busy building our own little kingdoms and approaching life in our own strength. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us proper life perspective and the presence of the fruit of the Spirit. No Holy Spirit – no divine expressions of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Without the Spirit’s lead in our lives, we will inevitably wander into life patterns that rob us of peace and joy.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**3) Living in obedience to the word of God**

**James 1:22 (ESV)**

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*It is one thing to read the Bible; it is another to live it out. That will always be a challenge. We want to know that ministry partners are committed to the Bible as being authoritative in how they are to live. Our goal is that everything in our lives aligns itself with the perspective of God as laid out in scripture.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**4) Worshipping corporately, faithfully, and regularly**

**Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)**

*...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*Church is community; church is family. We don’t just “go” to church; we “are” the church as we gather together. When we meet, the focus should be on worshipping God and building up others, as opposed to self-gratification. Come to church for the opportunity to serve others, and in the process, you will be blessed.*



*Community is only built through consistency. The less consistent someone is, the less they feel a part of things and the less impact they can have on relationships and people's lives. Authentic community looks for and seizes opportunities to meet.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**Helping the church fulfill its mission by:**

**1) Praying for the church, its ministries, its ministry partners, and its leadership**

***Ephesians 6:18 (ESV)***

*...praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*Ministries will only be as effective as the amount of prayer we put into them. Without prayer, ministries will lack the power and impact of God.*

*Ministry is hard. People are not always encouraging, and Satan strategizes ways of trying to render us ineffective. We need prayer! It is essential that the leadership be bathed in prayer, for if they go astray, the whole local church is in trouble.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**2) Developing and using my abilities, talents, spiritual gifts, and resources within the church or its extension ministries**

***1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)***

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

***Deuteronomy 16:17 (ESV)***

*Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that he has given you.*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*God has given every believer special effectiveness in some area of strengthening the body of Christ. God expects us to use whatever resources he has given us for his purposes. This statement acknowledges that we are to be actively serving in the church in the areas of our strengths and abilities.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

*If anyone holds back their area of unique contribution, the entire church becomes hindered and less effective. The church was designed in such a way that we “need” each other in order to mature and become like Christ.*

**3) Sharing with others about God’s purpose for their lives**

**Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*The mission of the church is to connect people to God. This isn’t something the “institution” of the church does; this is something every believer does. God called people to make disciples, not programs. When everyone in the church understands that God has placed them in unique environments where they can connect with others, then the church will truly begin to grow.*

*The goal here is that people will understand who God is and that God wants a relationship with them. Once they discover God, they can then begin to see the wonderful purposes he has laid out for them. This is where true life-change and freedom begin.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**Protecting the unity of the church by:**

**1) Refusing to gossip and disrupt the unity of the church**

**2 Corinthians 12:20 (ESV)**

*For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder.*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*Gossip destroys relationships and unity. We need to make a commitment to try and guard this area of our lives.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**2) Resolving tensions quickly by lovingly applying Matthew 18:15-17 and Galatians 6:1****Matthew 5:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, <sup>24</sup> leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

**Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*Tensions will always occur when you bring a bunch of diverse people together. The concern isn't the tensions; the concern is how we resolve the tensions when they arise. Jesus calls us to be proactive in bringing about reconciliation. He went to the cross to resolve all of the tensions that we created. How far will you go?*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**3) Being patient with and encouraging others within the body****Ephesians 4:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**Colossians 3:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, <sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*The key to church unity is GRACE. Grace can be defined as "undeserved favour", but it essentially means you show love even when it has not been earned or deserved. God's love can never be earned. This is why we are called to love even our enemies.*

*Even with this Ministry Partner Commitment, there will be times when everyone fails certain parts at different times. We need to show great amounts of grace with one another when we fail. As long as there is repentance and a desire to work things out, there is always the possibility of restoration.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**Submitting to the church leadership with regard to:**

- Spiritual and moral matters
- Church vision and direction
- Church discipline

**Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)**

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.

**Why is this commitment statement important?**

*Church leadership is not an easy task. There are so many people with so many different perspectives, preferences, and degrees of spiritual maturity. Sometimes leadership is called on to do the hard things, make difficult decisions, and bring in church discipline whenever it is required.*

*Church leaders need to rely heavily on the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit, and this is why prayer for them is so critical. They are responsible to God for how they teach and lead and will one day stand before him accountable for all they have done.*

*God calls the rest of the church to listen to the spiritual direction they give and to place themselves under that authority. This does not imply church leaders are always right, nor should members submit in areas that are in clear disagreement with the word of God.*

*Ultimately, Jesus is the head of the church. Church leadership is responsible for carrying out Jesus' will for the church.*

**What might be the implications for the church if someone in ministry leadership/influence did not embrace this goal?**

**Are there any areas of this Ministry Partner Commitment that create tension for you?**

**A team of people committed to seeing the local church accomplish its mission is an incredibly exciting thing. Nothing on earth can hold it back.**

**We encourage you to take seriously the purpose  
of the church in this world and to realize  
YOU ARE THE CHURCH!**