

## **WHAT IS MEMBERSHIP AND WHAT DOES IT ENTAIL?**

In the NT church being in Christ and being in the body of Christ was thought of as one. Neither Old Testament or New has ever heard of a lone believer; it has always been the people of God. Faith in God through Christ is a community endeavor. Rather than being an abstract concept, the NT makes this commitment concrete. You join the body of Christ of all believers globally in and through a local church. In the NT, those local churches were in Ephesus or Corinth or Rome, ours is in Westchester County NY, called *New Hope Fellowship*. Membership therefore means more than just attending a church. It is a covenanting investment with others as God's people gathered here.

This means a sharing together of communal life in faith and practical means. The member both incurs the responsibilities of sustaining and building the body and enjoys the same support. This does not entail merely the upkeep of church property and spiritual and numerical growth. Those things are subsets of a more encompassing relationship. What we understand from the biblical word *koinonia* (literally, "fellowship") is a mutuality in all resources spiritual and material for the good of all unto the glory of God. In this way we give a visible picture of what the entire body of Christ looks like.

In order for this to be faithful to Christ, however his "horizontal" dimension of community must be thoroughly informed by a vertical vision. In the body there is a joining together as well as a growing up into the Head that is Christ. As, God speaks forth from His eternal Word, we believe that the vision of *New Hope* is a practical and specific application of what He wants us to do here and now. Therefore, becoming a member is not only a commitment to other believers it is understanding and aligning oneself with the vision of the church.

## **WHAT BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES COME WITH MEMBERSHIP?**

Membership brings with it both the benefit and responsibility of shaping the formation of the church. The member is accorded voting privileges in critical decisions as well as delegated roles and positions of leadership. There is a twofold nature to membership that both receives what care and guidance God is giving to us specifically and gives it away. This takes place among all who are involved in the ministry of *New Hope* but members take a special lead in both. The member should take part in this personally and spontaneously, but also in committed involvements. Members will be expected to be both active participants in a Care Group and a Ministry Team. A vital involvement in the body of Christ would be hollow without these basics.

Furthermore, as we desire to have one agenda—Christ's—and not many agendas, the church can only grow as led by ordained leadership. Committing oneself to the vision of *New Hope* means also a willingness to submit to the officially installed leadership of the church. As the leadership submits to the direction of Christ in striving to advance the vision, members are expected to coordinate with the direction of the leadership. This involves areas of ministry but also accepting the leaders as "those who watch over your souls." Becoming a member is assuming the benefit and responsibility to accept and gain the pastoral care of the leadership.

## **WHO CAN APPLY FOR MEMBERSHIP?**

This raises for us the preliminary question of, "aren't we already members?" There is a tacit membership that is implied by regular attendance and participation. However, there is a difference between that and an actual declaration of commitment. The difference can be loosely likened to dating and marriage. There is both a deepening and clarification of a relationship as it is made public and formal. Therefore any believer who desires to join together in what has been previously stated is invited to apply for membership.

There is an emphasis that needs to be placed however on "believer." As membership is not merely a joining of a club or organization but part of being in "the body of Christ," membership cannot be accorded to those who are not "in Christ." By, "in Christ" we mean one who has been renewed in the mercy of the death of Christ to live wholeheartedly in the life of Christ. (**Gal. 2.20** "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.") This involves a public declaration but that is a response to the work of God within. If you feel that you are not sure whether you are truly a Christian, we encourage you strongly to seek out the counsel of the leadership before joining the membership class.

**HOW DO I BECOME A MEMBER?**

Class does not commit you to membership

**WHEN CAN I APPLY FOR MEMBERSHIP?**

**WHAT IF I DECIDE NOT TO BE A MEMBER?**