

Finishing What We Started

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What does it mean to be a “member” of something? The word itself, member, seems almost an antiquated term. One pastor recently told me that few people become members of churches any more. His comment makes an interesting observation, and it is deeply rooted in our Western culture. I am told that in the East or in the Asian part of the world a much greater sense of “community” is emphasized while in the West we emphasize a much greater sense of “the individual.” The former value puts aside individual interest in favor of the common good, while the latter discounts the common good for the good of self. These two focal points could hardly be more divergent. There’s the rub.

Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary defines “member” as:

1. a body part or organ . . .
2. one of the individuals composing a group
3. a person baptized or enrolled in a church
4. a constituent part of a whole . . .

Intrinsic to every one of these definitions is a connection to something greater than the member—be it the physical body, the group, the people of the church, or the whole. One of the key questions is how vitally integrated is the member to that to which it is connected? It is obvious that all parts of my body are vitally connected, but not all are equally vital to the body. My little finger is as vitally connected to my body—as is heart. Take either part out of the body, and both will cease to live and function. But take my little finger off of my body: it will hurt and I’ll miss it, but I probably won’t die. On the other hand, take my heart out of my body, and I will die along with my heart! In short, my heart is way more vital to my existence than is my little finger. Which kind of member would you rather be, and which are you?

Allow me to tell you my story as a member of CMF, but if you read it, don’t stop in the middle; go all the way to the end. When I was asked to join the Board of Directors of CMF, I was asked to come along in the role of a consultant. I am a pastor by vocation. My total direct involvement with the military was taking an initial test given by a recruiter at my college for me to be considered for a fighter pilot, being picked up by the Marine Corps and put up in a hotel overnight, going through a physical exam, and then being told that my eyes were not good enough to qualify for the job. I had enjoyed indirect association with the military. I had met many quality military personnel, had spoken on marriage to military families at a Cadence International Hospitality House near Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, visited the Camp Hansen Marine Base there, and had been invited to an Anniversary Ball for the Marine Corps by one of the retired Marines in my church. But that hardly qualifies as military experience, so I was wary of being on the Board of a Mission whose primary focus was equipping those in the military to reach and disciple others within the military and encourage them to do the same. Still, they solicited my advice. I was a pastor, seminary-trained with many years of experience in ministry; and that, I was told, was what they wanted. So I joined the Board of CMF. I would say that my involvement was more of a “toe in the water” than that of “jumping in.”

My first impression of CMF was that it is a small mission. At the time it had a handful of office staff along with a few Field Staff (i.e., missionaries) and a group of “local reps” who were those who had agreed to actively minister within the military as a representative of CMF. Not a lot seemed to be happening that I could readily tell bore fruit, so I was reluctant to give financially to a ministry that I didn’t immediately see produced “results.” In fact, I initially told our now President/CEO, Bob Flynn, to take my name off the “member” rolls on which he had kindly placed me as a Board member, because CMF asks their members to make certain commitments that I was not yet ready to make—specifically, “. . .to participate actively and prayerfully in the ministry of the Christian Military Fellowship with my time, talents, spiritual gifts and financial resources.”

The Bible says to “let your yes be yes,” and I believe in spiritual integrity. I was willing to make the first three commitments, but I needed to see that investing some of the limited financial resources God had entrusted to my family was warranted by the ministry I was seeing. To be honest, I wasn’t so sure that was the case, and uncertainty was why I asked Bob to remove my name from the member rolls. In fact, at one point I submitted a lengthy letter of resignation to the Board that stated my concerns as well as my sense that what the Board needed and what I could provide were not the same.

Thankfully to God, the Board reaffirmed the value of what I brought to the table and they strongly asked me to reconsider my resignation, so I continued on in that role. Over time, I began to see much more in CMF. I had the opportunity to meet our Field Staff and see their heart for ministry to the military, to see the significant global prayer ministry, to see the resources and books made available to the membership, and to see the Board’s efforts as well as those of our Office Staff. Over time, other ministries became evident as well—conference ministries for those in the military and also for churches trying to minister to military families, people encouraged by the monthly newsletters, financial aid as funds have been made available to help families heavily impacted by deployments, a growing number of local reps working with chaplains and with others in the military, care packages being sent to deployed troops, and more. My reservations were eventually replaced by an earnest enthusiasm for this ministry and by the confirmed belief that God is working in a significant way through CMF and that people of integrity at every level were doing the work of the ministry.

Why did I tell my story? I needed to gain a greater ownership of the commitments I made a few years ago, and God did a work in my heart. I have given more of my time, talents, spiritual gifts, and yes, more of my financial resources. I am happy to continue to do so. Last year, the CMF Board spent two-and-a-half days at a Pray and Plan retreat. Two major goals came out of that as a consensus of our meeting – 1) that we needed to find another Board member to replace one who had moved away and 2) that we needed to help our members gain a greater ownership of their commitment as members of CMF. God gave us our Board member. So the first goal was accomplished to His glory. And what about the second?

Many of you, our readers, have made the voluntary commitment to be members of Christian Military Fellowship. That membership came with commitments that are detailed on the link to CMF’s Home Page on the Web (www.cmfhq.org). Most of you who are members of CMF are also members or have been members of the military. All in the latter group have made commitments. When those commitments are met, it does not guarantee the success of the mission, but the likelihood of success in the mission is significantly increased. When the commitments are just partially met, the opposite is the case. The same is true of CMF. We believe that God wants to use CMF to “encourage men and women in the United States Armed Forces, and their families, to love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.” We ask you to do so in many different ways. First, we ask you to pray for CMF. Second, as primarily an indigenous ministry (i.e., one in which those within the military minister to those in the military), we ask you to become local reps who establish local ministry fellowships where you seek to reach, to disciple, and to equip those in the military to do the same. You don’t have to know everything in the Bible, and you don’t have to have a seminary degree. Just learn, live and teach what has been taught to you from God’s Word. If you cannot teach in a formal setting, do it sitting across the table from someone with a cup of coffee or find someone who can, and come along side them. (Many resources to help you may be ordered or downloaded from CMF’s website to help you to that end!) Thirdly, we ask for your consistent financial gifts. Did you know that if 100% of our members gave just \$10 per month, CMF would be fully funded to meet its current ministry need? All of us can afford two less Starbucks per month or one less fast food meal. In fact, I think most of us could afford more.

I am pleased to say that, even in the current struggling economy, it looks like CMF will “break even” for the current year. But “breaking even” simply means that we have not spent more than we took in; it does not mean that our entire ministry budget was met. Imagine what would happen if each of us gave, not just \$10 per month but even more sacrificially! How many more lives would be reached for Christ? How many more would grow in their relationship with Christ? How many more resources would be made available? How many Field Staff could be hired and how many more military establishments would have a CMF presence? I can assure you that CMF is focused on ministry and that its leadership works to maximize every dollar spent.

The Apostle Paul charged us to let our “yes” be yes! If you are a member of CMF, I also urge you, as he urged Archippus, “Fulfill your ministry!” I can’t wait to see what God is going to do!