LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The following is an attempt to treat the issue of whether or not there is a biblical basis for actually having a church membership role. It is the position of Sagecreek Church that the functions of the local church necessitate the existence of a church role, identifying those people who consider themselves called of God to be a part of a particular local Body of Christ. We do believe that anyone “in Christ,” 2 Corinthians 5:17, is by necessity a member of the “universal” Body of Christ. However, we further hold that each local church is a complete expression of the that Body, as seen in the use of the Greek word for “church,” ***ekklesia,*** being used in the plural, Acts 15:41; 16:5, and many other places. Please note that most, if not all, of these references are open to disagreement as to some aspects of their interpretation. However, we believe that the interpretation presented is a reasonable one, and it is the view that Sagecreek Church holds.

1. Acts 2:47. A reasonable translation of the latter half of this verse can be, “and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” It can be said that the saved people already described were added to the membership of the first local church. Key word: ADDED.

2. Colossians 3:15. “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.” Paul was speaking to the church of the Colossians, and instructing them to let the peace of God be the “umpire” in their hearts in their relationships to fellow church members who had been called to be part of that local Body. Key word: CALLED.

3. Philippians 1:27. Paul wanted to hear of their affairs, that they would “…stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;”. “Striving together” is the Greek verb, ***sunathleo,*** and depicts a **team** of athletes competing against the opponent. Knowing who is, and who is not on the team would necessitate local church membership. Key word: TEAM.

4. Acts 15:3,4,22. These verses describe a specific local Body of Christ functioning as a body. If there were not a specific membership, these verses could not make any sense. Key word: FUNCTION.

5. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. The Corinthian church, 1 Corinthians 1:2; being told that they were a Body of Christ, 12:27; were given principles and instructions that would have no meaning outside of the relationship with specific people, in a specific place, who were clearly identified as to who they were. See this especially in 12:25&26. Key word: RELATIONSHIP.

6. 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Without a church membership this entire chapter could make no sense. The phrases, “…that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from you.” 5:2; “…when ye are gathered together…”, 5:4; “Therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person.”, 5:13; necessitate once again a church membership from which a person could be put away. Furthermore, without a church membership, there could be no such thing as church discipline described here or else-ware. Key word: ACCOUNTABILITY.

7. Hebrews 13:7,17,24. Along with many other references to local church leadership, who is whose Pastor? Who would a Pastor be responsible for? When a local church has God given, God called, and qualified Pastors/Elders/Overseers, and the local church has a membership role, both the Flock and the Pastors know who they are responsible to and for. This most wonderful arrangement is beautifully described in Ephesians 4:11-16 with Christ-given leadership being used of God to bring each member of the flock they are responsible for to maturity in Christ. Key word: LEADERSHIP.

This magnificent creation, bringing special glory to God, Ephesians 3:10,21; cannot be prevailed against by the gates of hell, Matthew 16:18. It is the pillar and ground of the truth, 1 Timothy 3:15; and was the recipient of all of Jesus’ admonitions in The Revelation 1-3.

Alternatives to the local church membership model will, of necessity, lack most, if not all, of the above seven points. Note:

1. The individual believer would have no sense of being “added’ to anything. They would be part of the whole, but of nothing local.

2. When peace is broken, with no sense of being called to a specific Body, one could simply “move on.”

3. The entire team concept is made moot.

4. The “ruling board,” whoever that may be, would take the entire place of the Body.

5. No one would normally know another enough for this to happen consistently and meaningfully.

6. Discipline would be inoperable.

7. A spiritual “free-for-all” would aptly describe the Body of Christ making it a roving group of spiritual infants with detached, irresponsible leadership.