



READY FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP?

Becoming a member of a Bible believing church is a big step for a young person (or recently converted adult). I recall the process my two oldest daughters took to become members (so far my two oldest are the only ones who have become members). I remember their fear of going before the elders of the church and being concerned that they would answer questions incorrectly. I cherish the time our elders, my wife and I spent with them asking about and being assured of their understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what their relationship was to Him.

Sadly, my "confirmation class" was largely perfunctory. I had no discussions with my parents or leadership of the church about my personal relationship with Christ (I did not have one). I was not challenged to see the need of a Savior or to grow in my knowledge of the Word. I was only a "cultural Christian" which caused an eventual falling away from the church when I left for college. I did not seek church membership again until after conversion and Christian marriage. The confirmation class I attended at age 13 did not confirm my belief in anything, but only explained briefly some basic knowledge of the Sacraments and the government of the church. It would be interesting to see how many of the young people in that class are walking with the Lord today.

Most of us remember the first time we went through a "preparation for church membership" class either as an adult or a teenager. We might even remember the discussions we had with our parents, pastor and church leaders. Some of these questions might have been:



1. Are we convinced that it is God honoring to become committed to one church in the body of Christ. (Why do I need to be a member in the first place? Can't attendance and participation in the church's life satisfy my needs and still be honoring to God?). This is a basic question that many wrestle with in our "uncommitted society" where options are thought to be the most important feature of any decision.

2. What are the responsibilities of a member of Christ's church?
3. What do we need to know about the organization of the church; especially the roles and qualifications of the church's leadership such as the elders and deacons?
4. How should we look at church discipline, accountability, and submission in relation to church leadership and each other?
5. How does the church basically function?
6. What are the Sacraments and how important are they?
7. Do I have to tithe my personal income if I become a member?
8. What is the proper age and/or maturity level expected of a prospective member? How much influence should the parents have in the decision?

Of course, we could all add many more questions to such a list and some questions would be more important for some families than for others. Other factors that impact on the question of church membership are our own Christian backgrounds, maturity in Christ, our parent's' previous commitment to the church (our parent's' sincerity in living out their vows) and our preconceived notions of what church membership entails.

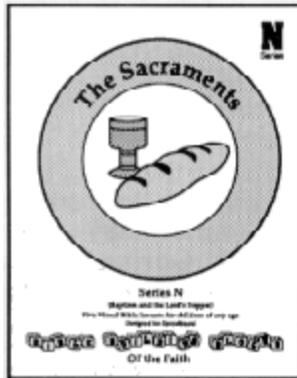
Your church probably already has some sort of process that takes a prospective member through a series of classes or meetings in preparing them for membership. Some churches have quite a detailed and lengthy period of instruction; others are very brief and concentrate on the basics.

Children's Ministry International (CMI) has done some work in this area and offers the church leadership educational materials that could be quite helpful.

Our "JUNIOR INQUIRER'S MANUAL" is set up specifically to help parents and teachers teach the basics and challenge the young person with their responsibilities for church membership. Materials found in the "Junior Inquirer's Manual" include:

1. A Sample Letter to the parents listing important guidelines to discern if your children are ready for this important step. Are they truly converted and display a personal relationship with Christ? Do they show a willingness to submit to authority; do they show an eagerness to serve the Lord in worship and service; do they love God's Word?
2. Six lessons covering Man's Need of Salvation, God's Plan of Salvation, Signs of the Covenant-Baptism and the Lord's Supper, Growing in Grace and a Class Project.

3. The second group of seven lessons covers: Writing a Christian Testimony, a sample interview by the elders, six examples from Scripture of the qualifications of elders (some positive and some negative).



The "Junior Inquirer's Manual" could be arranged to fit into a quarter system, if desired, or extended to take more time on specific topics.

If the elders determine that more knowledge on the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) is required, CMI has more material to supplement the course. Series N: "THE SACRAMENTS", is one of 14 topical series of the "Bible Building Blocks of the Faith". There are five lessons based on 15 questions and answers taken from "The Catechism for Young Children" (taken from the *W e s t m i n s t e r* Confession of Faith). The questions, answers, Bible Memory verses and Bible lessons are visualized for use on a flannelboard. All aspects of the two Sacraments could be explained in detail as part of the membership class. Although this series is not necessary to teach the "Junior Inquirer's Manual", anytime a theological concept is visualized we can more easily grasp its meaning and understand it.

Becoming a member of Christ's church is an important decision; one of the most important decisions we will ever make. The adequate preparation of the young person (or adult) is a serious process. May God grant your church's leadership great wisdom in preparing and encouraging young people for full membership in the body of Christ so that the Kingdom will go forward and the Great Commission will be completed.

Brad Winsted, Director

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