

How is a person received into membership?

In a public service, the pastor will call the candidates forward and ask that they respond to the questions concerning the requirements for membership. He will then shake your hand as a symbol of welcome into the fellowship of the church.

And now what?

We strongly urge you to make an appointment with your pastor to talk about both baptism and church membership. Do not put it off too long.

After You Join...

After you have been received into the membership of the local church, here are some important things you can do:

1. Be faithful. Attendance at every service is a worthy goal. It may be argued that a person could make it to heaven without the church, but it would be extremely difficult. The church is here to help you.
2. Find a place of service in the church. The church needs you! God has no doubt given you abilities that He wants to use. When you have discovered what you have to offer, you have probably discovered how God wants to use you. The opportunities are limitless. Everyone should become involved in the operation or the ministry of the church. If you have the gift of singing, playing an instrument, teaching, administrating, decorating, doing secretarial work, etc. — or even to using a broom, mop, or hammer, use it for the glory of God.
3. Enjoy the fellowship. Get acquainted with your fellow Christians. Form lasting friendships with them. Get together to study the Bible, pray, eat, or engage in recreational activities. Share each other's joys and burdens. Be a blessing to them as you receive blessings from them.
4. Share your faith and try to bring others into the fellowship. If you have been recently saved, you may have many friends and relatives who are not Christians. As you have opportunity, you will want to share with them what has happened to you. You may be able to lead some of them to Christ. (A later lesson in this series will focus on helping you learn how to do it.)

Lesson Nine Taking a Stand (Baptism and Church Membership)

Introduction:

Baptism and church membership are two entirely different things. They are grouped together in this lesson simply because they are similar in the sense that they both relate to a public testimony and commitment. In baptism, a person gives public testimony to his/her identification with the Christian faith. By becoming a member of the church, a person identifies himself/herself with a local congregation of believers and the denomination of which it forms a part. Both of these acts often occur at approximately the same time in Christian experience. We will look at each one of these acts separately.

Baptism

How is a person baptized?

The most common form of baptism is by *immersion*. It is a solemn ceremony in which a person is briefly submerged in water. In special cases, it may be administered by pouring or sprinkling.

What is baptism?

The act of baptism is a sacrament. A sacrament is defined as an "outward symbol of an inward grace." It is a public testimony that symbolizes an experience in the heart of a believer.

What does it symbolize?

It represents the death and burial of the "old" self and a resurrection to new spiritual life. (Rom. 6:3-5)

Does baptism change a person?

No. It is a testimony to a change that has already taken place. If there are unforgiven sins in the life of the person, baptism only changes him/her from a dry sinner to a wet sinner. However, if a person properly understands its meaning, it will be a moment of rejoicing and blessing.

Why is baptism important?

Baptism is important because it is *commanded* by Christ (Mk. 16:16). To ignore it is to be disobedient. Ignoring a command can become sin.

It is also important because Jesus said a public acceptance of Him is a condition of His acceptance of us before His Father in heaven (Mt. 10:32).

The world does not understand a lot about Christian beliefs and practices, but when a person states that he/she has been baptized, it is generally understood to mean a serious commitment to Christ.

When should a person be baptized?

A person should seek to be baptized as soon as possible following his/her conversion (allowing for some instruction in the Christian faith in order to fully understand the meaning of baptism).

What are the requirements for baptism?

1. You will be asked to share your acceptance of a brief statement of some of the most fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith.
2. You will be asked if you acknowledge Christ as your personal Savior and if you realize He saves you now.
3. You will be asked if you are willing to obey God's will and keep His commandments the rest of your life.

Baptism in the New Testament.

It is interesting that, while it was not necessary for Him, Christ set the example for us by being baptized himself (Lk. 3:21-22).

In the New Testament, there are many examples of baptism following conversion. (See Acts 2:41; 8:13,38; 9:18; 16:33; 18:8.)

Church Membership

The visible vs. the invisible church.

When talking about church membership, it is important to distinguish between the visible church (a human organization), and the invisible church (true believers whose names are recorded in the *Book of Life* in

heaven, sometimes called the "body of Christ.") A church should do everything possible to ensure that only true believers are kept on its membership roll, but only God knows what is in the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Having your name on a church membership roll does not guarantee your salvation.

What are the benefits of joining a church?

There are many benefits:

1. Christian fellowship with those of like faith.
2. Helpfulness with brotherly care and counsel.
3. The care of pastors, with the teaching of the Word.
4. The inspiration of social worship.
5. Cooperation in service which accomplishes that which could not otherwise be done.
6. It also involves a commitment to fulfill certain responsibilities in the functions of the church as one is able.

What are the requirements for joining the church?

1. A testimony to a current experience of salvation. (Saying "yes" to the question asking if you know you are saved.)
2. Acceptance of a brief statement of basic doctrinal beliefs.
3. Acceptance of the rules of conduct of the church.
4. A promise to, "endeavor in every way to glorify God, by a humble walk, godly conversation (life), and holy service; by devotedly giving of your means; by faithful attendance upon the means of grace; and, abstaining from all evil, (to) seek earnestly to perfect holiness of heart and life in the fear of the Lord" (*Manual*, Church of the Nazarene).

When can a person join the church?

At any time he/she is ready to fulfill the requirements outlined above.

The pastor of the church may wish to give you some instruction in preparation for membership to ensure that you have a full understanding of what is involved.