

What Does Church Membership Mean to Me?

By Maddie Lewis

If you were here on Children's Sunday, or, let's face it, any Sunday that I have had the opportunity to say what's on my mind, you have heard me speak of my dynamic image of God. This is not a new or original view, in fact, it is as old as humankind itself.

God is in me. God is in you. We give breath to God's presence when we are in fellowship with each other.

I can make the decision to experience God's love in community with you and live into that decision by coming to church, singing along to the hymns, chatting with you at coffee hour, perhaps lending a hand with a church event or mission project. These things bring God to life for me. I am behaving in a way that says to the world, people matter to me, and God's love is real. I am called to live by the example Jesus set for me. The example I set for others when I do that is powerful, for sure. But something even more moving and impactful happens when I name it...when I bear witness to my belief and my practice.

Our church covenant begins like this: "God calls us together as the Noank Baptist Church so we may witness and experience the good news of Jesus Christ."

When I walked through those doors out there for the first time, I began to experience the good news of Jesus Christ in community with you. As that experience began to become a part of me, to shape me in my daily life in this church and in my daily life out there, it became important to me to name my truth. For me, that meant bearing witness by becoming a member of this beloved community of Christ.

I'll admit that I had some trepidation. I am a single mom with sole financial responsibility for myself and my daughter, and I have all of the challenges around time and energy that come with that. How could I sign on for another thing when I could barely manage the responsibilities I faced every day as it was?

I was confusing commitment with obligation. They are very different things.

Committing myself to becoming a member of this congregation did not mean I was suddenly obliged to be on this or that committee, it didn't mean that I was suddenly obliged to show up every Sunday. It didn't mean that I was suddenly obliged to make a financial pledge. These are all important things that the church needs me and you, to participate in. They are commitments, to be sure, but they grow out of my personal interests and my personal choice. They utilize my gifts and talents. They give me a sense of ownership that helps to complete my identity as a Christian. But beyond this, what membership meant to me, was that I was ready to stand up and be counted. To speak the truth of my experience of Christ in the midst of this gathering. To name my commitment to walking with each of you along the path Jesus paved for us.

Our covenant goes on to describe how we, together, respond to God's call by gathering, by serving, by encouraging, by welcoming, by sharing. The good news for us as Baptists who enjoy soul liberty, is that we get to define what each of those things means for ourselves.

If you have been transformed by your experience of a loving God in this community, I invite you to name it. To stand up and be counted. Without fear, and without reservation. We welcome service. We need people to take an active role in church governance. As members, however, it is important to know that the only expectations of you are those you set for yourself.

Mother Teresa said that one of the problems with this world is that we don't draw our family circles wide enough. Everyone here is seated at the family table. I hope you will consider becoming a member, and joining us for the meal.