

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 5/27/2024

What Membership Means

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

ONE AT ONE – *Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, May 28 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, offer prayers for those who are completing a year of education, both students and teachers. Pray for them as they reflect on the year past and contemplate a new year in a different grade or school, or a new chapter in their life. Ask that they recognize education as a gift from GOD that helps equip us to serve in GOD's name.*

I had a conversation this week about what church membership means. It seems it's a lot different than it was years ago. We have active members who worship regularly and support the congregation's ministry. We also have members who are homebound or otherwise unable to attend worship. A number of these still support the church financially. Then there are those who have gone elsewhere. They have become active in another congregation, but have not notified us so we can transfer their membership. A few feel it's important to maintain membership here even though they worship with us once or twice a year at most. Then there are those who no longer worship anywhere but want to remain on the membership roll of the church.

We live in an age where people are less likely to "join" but more likely to "affiliate." It is as if they want to be a part of things, but leave the door open in case something better or different comes along. They just can't or won't make that full commitment to the church they attend.

Years ago, the counting of members was very important. Benevolence given to the district/synod was based on the number of members a church had. Churches didn't want to carry folks who no longer had a connection to the congregation because it would cost them more. Today, we base benevolence on a percentage of our budget, determined by the church council and voted on by the congregation. The goal is to tithe ten percent of our budget to support the work of the larger church. In some ways, that has changed the focus on membership.

But what does membership mean? What do you get or what do you have to do if you are a member of a church? In one sense, not a whole lot. You can't vote in congregational meetings if you are not a member. (And how many of us so look forward to another congregational meeting?) You must be a member to be elected to the church council, but anyone can serve on our commissions without being a member. Other than that, what does membership mean?

Joining an organization, including a congregation, means committing to support that agency. People come to congregations because of the proximity to where they live and/or a relationship with others who attend. But membership says something about our faith. We, who call ourselves Christians, desire a relationship with the LORD JESUS CHRIST. One of the places we find that is in worship with other believers. As followers, we want to live more like JESUS, and congregational members work together to carry out ministries that we believe support JESUS' vision for the world. In a sense, membership means that you are saying, "I want to follow JESUS and this is the place I want to do that." Membership is a statement of faith and commitment. It also provides a sense of ownership in that congregation that is otherwise absent. When you are a member, what happens in the congregation matters more and leads to greater participation in the mission of JESUS CHRIST.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey