

Partnership vs. Membership

The following short paper is to describe why we are making the switch from calling being committed to a local church Membership to Partnership. This will be of interest to you if you have been a member of our church since the beginning, have come from a church that practices membership, or are just interested in why we call membership, partnership.

Membership is meant to describe what it means to belong to a local church. It is simply trying to communicate what it means to be a Christian. If you were to try to look up what a member is in the Bible, you wouldn't find it. The Bible doesn't use the language of member. It uses a different word to communicate what membership is trying to communicate. It uses the word, "Partnership."

Partnership comes from the word Christians use for "Fellowship." If you've grown up in church, you might think of what Christians call getting together, "Fellowshipping." If you haven't grown up in church, you might think of belonging to some kind of professional training. Doctors, for example, go through a medical fellowship — A training a Doctor goes through in order to become a specialist in their chosen field. They become a fellow to another specialist they are training under to deepen their knowledge and experience in their area of specialty. These ideas come close to how the Bible thinks about Fellowship, and Christianity, but it's not the same.

Fellowship in the Bible is the idea of sharing in something together. You have the same thing in common. The same values, the commitments, the same life-style. What drives you is what drives those you are in fellowship with. The thing Christians have in common is Christ. The values they have come from Christ. They are committed to Christ together. They are committed to the same life-style, which is learned from and comes from Christ. Fellowship isn't just something Christians do when they are together, it defines their relationship to Jesus and each other. It defines their obligations and commitment.

Partnership comes from this word fellowship. It's the word the Letter to the Philippian Church uses. One of the reasons the Apostle Paul writes this letter is to urge that church to strengthen their bonds of commitment to each other as a church. He uses Partnership, but he also uses the word "Partaker." Partaker comes from the same root word as Partnership. Look how Paul uses those words:

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.— Philippians 1:3–5, (ESV)

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.— Philippians 1:7, (ESV)

¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.— Philippians 4:15, (ESV)

There are other places where the Bible uses the word partnership, partner, partaker, or the idea of Fellowship.¹ They all communicate participation, whether that is active or passive.

As you read through the Letter to the Philippian Church, what you will realize is that Paul is describing what it means to be a Christian.

- You Partner together with other Christians to advance the gospel.
- You partake of the same gospel of grace as other Christians, so you believe the same things.
- You suffer together while believing the gospel.
- You serve one another.
- You seek the interest of the Christians in your local church, and not just your own. So, you are committed to your local church², the people and not just it's leadership.
- You are committed to obey God together.
- You are committed to Christ-likeness, living out of your salvation together.

As a church, we want our life and practices to communicate as much as possible what the Bible is communicating. First and foremost, the gospel. But, secondly, what it means to be a member of a local church. That's why the switch to the term Partnership. We are partners in the gospel. Partners in:

- Loving and enjoy God together.
- Pursuing the Spiritual growth of each other.
- Serving and Caring for one another.
- Engaging in Culture and Community with the gospel together.
- The Advance of the message of the gospel.

¹ Cf. Romans 11:17, 1 Corinthians 9:23, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 3:6, 5:7, 1 Peter 5:1, 2 Peter 1:4, Revelation 1:9

² The church is the people not it's leaders. Ekklesia is the word used for church. It means the gathered saints, believers.

Formally Pursuing Partnership

The Summary of what's just been said, is that formally committing to Partnership at Restoration Hope Church will look as follows:

Partnership within a local church carries both privileges and responsibilities. Partners of the Church are held accountable to the responsibilities of general Christian obligations comprehensively though not exhaustively outlined within the Church's Partnership Commitment. These responsibilities include praying for and pursuing both corporate health and individual holiness.

In signing the Partnership Commitment, Partners attest that they have completed the partnership process as instructed, read the Partnership Commitment, and are willingly committing to the following:

- I am in agreement with the doctrinal beliefs and the Values, Mission, and Vision of Restoration Hope Church and will not be divisive as to what it says. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace ([Ephesians 4:1-3](#), [Hebrews 13:7 & 17](#)).
- I promise to view Scripture as the final authority on all issues.
- I promise to pursue a maturing relationship with Jesus by means of reading the Bible, prayer, and fellowship with the church body. My relationship with Jesus will be evident through my participation in weekly worship, communion, service, and living a life that seeks to glorify God in our community ([Psalm 105:1-2](#), [Psalm 119:97](#), [Acts 2:42-47](#), [Hebrews 10:23-25](#), [2 Peter 1:3](#)).
- Out of gratitude to Jesus for all He has done on my behalf, I will steward my time, talents, and treasure ([Proverbs 3:9-10](#), [Romans 12:1-2](#), [Galatians 5:22-26](#), [Ephesians 4:1-16](#), [Ephesians 5:15-18](#)). This stewardship includes regular financial giving, volunteerism, and participation in the community that is sacrificial and cheerful ([Romans 12:1-8](#), [2 Corinthians 8-9](#), [12:7-13](#), [1 Peter 4:10-11](#)).
- I will not function as an active member in another church (some exceptions may apply).
- I will strive to believe the best regarding the motives of the elders and deacons of the church knowing they are human and capable of making mistakes.
- I promise to submit to discipline by God through the Holy Spirit, to follow biblical procedures for church discipline in my relationships with my brothers and sisters in Christ, to submit to righteous discipline when approached biblically by brothers and sisters in Christ, and to submit to the discipline of church leadership if the need should ever arise ([Psalm 141:5](#), [Matthew 18:15-17](#), [1 Corinthians 5:1-5](#), [2 Corinthians 2:5-8](#), [Galatians 6:1-5](#), [1](#)

Timothy 5:20, 2 Timothy 2:25, Titus 1:9, 3:10-11, Hebrews 12:5-11, Revelation 2:5-7, 2:14-25).

- I agree, by God's grace, to walk in holiness as an act of worship to Jesus Christ, who saved me from my sin and gave me new life (2 Corinthians 5:17). From this point forward, I agree to confess my sins to Christian brothers and/or sisters and seek help to put my sin to death (Romans 8:13, Colossians 3:5, 1 John 1:6-10).

What this looks like in weekly practice is to agree to engage in our church life in three ways:

- Connect Relationally
 - Participate in and be a part of a Gospel Community
- Grow Spiritually
 - Pursue the Spiritual formation of self and others through individual and communal worship
 - Be Equipped through Discipleship Opportunities
- Engage Missionally
 - Give of your time, talents, and treasures to advance the gospel in partnership with others in this church
 - Invite others to know and enjoy Jesus with us

Conclusion

I believe that doing life this way as a Christian will produce joy for Jesus, the good of others, and the fun pursuit of advancing the gospel with God together.

If you are interested in Partnership, here are the following steps:

1. Connect with the Pastor
2. Fill and Sign Partnership Application
3. Go through a Partnership Interview
4. Communicate who New Partnership candidates are at a Partnership Meeting — Vote to Receive new partners (once approved in Interview).
5. Formally Commit to Partnership and receive new Partnership