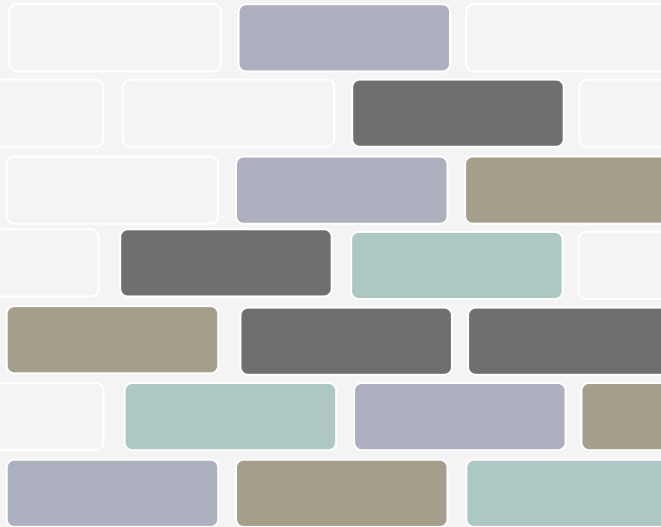


Church Membership

Double O Cross Church



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What is Church Membership?

Church membership is defined by many important aspects. We hope to expand on these aspects and provide a clear image of what church membership is throughout this booklet. Yet if we are to summarize these aspects, we can define church membership through understanding what church is and how church leaders ought to conduct themselves; exemplified in 1 Timothy 3:15, as follows:

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- The Household of God
 - The Church of the Living God
 - A Pillar and Buttress of the Truth
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According to the 3 key elements above, we believe that "church membership" is essential. Firstly it allows both church leaders and members to know "who are in the house of God." Just as every family has a definition of who is part of their family and who isn't, it is also important for a church to know who is part of the church family, and to whom leaders are responsible and accountable.

Secondly, members of the household of God are called to live in ways that display how God is alive and living among us. It is the church elders' responsibility to lay down their lives to care, guide, and protect their members. At times it is also the church elders' duty to lovingly rebuke their members, if necessary, as part of the calling of servanthood.

Thirdly, the duties above will not be possible if members of the church are not in agreement with the truth of the Gospel. Therefore, one of the most important duties of pastors and elders is to teach their church members sound doctrine, and to protect them from those who are not in agreement with biblical truths centered in the Gospel.

As you read this booklet, our hope and prayer for you is that you will grasp a healthy definition of God's intended plan of church membership, in accordance with the Bible. Our desire is that you will be able to commit to growing and becoming more like Christ, be accountable to Him as your head and serve Him, and walk with one another in His body in love, as a member of the household of God.

We understand that the topic of church membership can be very sensitive due to cultural and societal expectations. Moreover, many may have been traumatized by past experiences involving hurtful and non-biblical demonstrations of church memberships. We hope that this booklet can serve as an introduction to what healthy and biblical church membership is, and also as an invitation for us to dialogue with you and discuss any questions or concerns you may have. We appreciate your interest in committing to becoming a member of Double O Cross Church and your trust in allowing us to serve you.

We look forward to continuing together with you on this journey as followers of Christ.

Elders of Double O Cross Church

WHY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP IS IMPORTANT

Why is church membership important? After all, if we read the Bible and pray regularly, if we have good friends who are Christians and attend church regularly, do we still need to go through the formal process of becoming members?

The answer is a resounding “Yes.” Church membership is not just a good idea, it is a crucial aspect of the Christian life that cannot be separated from core Christian beliefs.

In the following section, we will discuss **four reasons** why we strongly believe in church membership at Double O Cross Church:

- I. It is an expression of something biblical**
- II. It is good for our spiritual well- being**
- III. It is good for other members of Double O Cross Church**
- IV. It is vital for the purpose of missions**



I. It is an expression of something biblical

Church Membership is completely assumed throughout the Bible. The people of God share a corporate identity.

In the Old Testament, God set apart for himself a people, a nation, called Israel. In the New Testament, this corporate identity is often assumed as God's people commit to being a part of a local church.

For example, in Matthew 18:15-17:

"If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Do you notice how the text assumes there will be other members involved intimately in a Christian's life? It assumes the individual Christian is accountable to a larger body. It assumes that those in the local church body are so intimately connected that there is a need to address sins and conflicts that would cause deep hurts.

What about key commands in the Bible that are simply impossible to obey alone—such as baptism and communion? Scripture passages on these ordinances simply assume that believers do this together, as part of church life. We can only obey these commands meaningfully when we are committed members of a local church. The idea of church membership is therefore an expression of something biblical and crucial for every believer.

At Double O Cross, seeking to obey the Bible is the most important reason we have a membership process. Church membership expresses how Christ has saved us and identified us as part of God's people.

II. It is good for our spiritual well-being

The book of Hebrews is full of warnings which are addressed to immature believers. This is why the writer exhorts them to 'go on to maturity' (Hebrews 6:1). The following passage contains one of these warnings regarding the fact that sin deceived. Hebrews 3:12-14 says,

"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today", that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."

Sin often starts from something small and subtle and then grows to become a major issue. We are often blind to our own sins, and risk falling away from God because of them.

The good news is this: God provides the means of grace to keep us faithful in Christ so that we do not fall away.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that this happens through biblical leadership and meaningful membership, which produces accountability in the local church.





As members of Double O Cross, we commit ourselves to being accountable to others within this church. We go out of our way to invite our fellow Double O Cross members to speak into our lives (especially areas where we struggle to submit to God), so that we may persevere together as faithful Christians. We spell out clearly our willingness to submit to the leadership and authority of the church. We give them permission to pursue us and call us back to repentance and faith when we stray away and find ourselves hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. We also commit ourselves to doing the same for other brothers and sisters within Double O Cross (being vigilant to exhort and guard one another, as long as it is called “today”).

This shows that church membership is good for our spiritual well-being as individuals, and as a church body. It is an expression of our dependence on God’s grace to us (through his people) to live out the Christian life.

III. It is good for other members of Double O Cross

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Making membership commitment explicit gains clarity in our relationships and helps us to relate with one another better. Without an expression of commitment, or clearly defining the relationship, it can feel like casual dating. After a while, it gets awkward and difficult to continue.

As a visitor of Double O Cross, we love and welcome you into our family as our guest. We want you to feel warmth, love, and hospitality every time you are with us. However, although you are a guest and we serve you with joy, like guests at our home who are not expected to do the dishes and take out the trash, the implications of being a part of our family would be missing. This means your experience with us is very limited. In fact, this lack of explicit commitment eventually hinders the depth of our relationship.

The membership process is designed to help you decide if you want to be a part of the Double O Cross family.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are different parts of the body of Christ. In our unity in the gospel, God marvelously gives a diversity of gifts and personalities to serve and build up the body. What are some of your gifts and talents that God can use to serve and strengthen the church? Steward them well and do not waste them. Exercise them by faith and in love to build up God's church.

Your commitment to membership with us is good for other members, as God blesses us with your presence, gifts, and talents to build up this church together.

IV. It is vital for the purpose of missions

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In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus says,

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

This great commission is given to all Christians, not just a select few. It is a command given by our Lord, not merely a suggestion or good idea. We, as Christians in the body of Christ, are called to make disciples of nations. Without faithful commitment and proper organization, it would be impossible for us to carry out this huge task of missions to the world.

That is why one of our values at Double O Cross is all about being ‘on mission together’ . This means we are both a family and an army. We love one another deeply as a family and pursue deep fellowship with one another. But we recognize that all this can happen because we share the same mission. As well as being a family, we are also an army devoted to God’s missional call to reach out to the nations.

In the words of Christ,

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”

– John 13:34-35

Our vision is for Japan to be renewed by people, churches and cities who have been transformed by the Gospel. To this end, we labor in the Lord. When you join us as a member you become part of the mission we share.

WHAT TO DO NEXT?

If you are unsure about making a commitment to Double O Cross as a member, here are some practical steps to consider:

- 1)** Get to know us well. Visit our services regularly for at least a couple of months. Listen to our sermons carefully to understand our gospel convictions and ministry philosophy. Visit our community groups to get to know other Double O Cross members and ask them about the church. Go to our website to read our vision, mission, values, and statement of faith.
- 2)** Arrange for a meeting with an elder as part of the membership process to seek clarity and ask any questions you may have.
- 3)** During the above two steps, if you see an area of belief or practice within Double O Cross that concerns you, we encourage you to engage with us. Give us the benefit of the doubt and seek clarification. Talk with an elder of the church, so that we have an opportunity to listen to your feedback and process any concerns with you.
- 4)** If you have done all the above and decide not to become a member at Double O Cross, we encourage you to look for another gospel-preaching church and commit yourself to another local body. Our desire for you is to flourish in Christ as a faithful and committed disciple, whether at Double O Cross or somewhere else.

A CLOSING THOUGHT

As we continue in the tasks of the gospel ministry, we are trusting God to keep adding to our numbers those who are saved.

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“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account”

Hebrews 13:7

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As elders of Double O Cross Church, we take this responsibility to care for our members very seriously, as men who will be called by God to give an account. Therefore, at almost every elders’ meeting, we talk about our members, especially those who need special care or prayers. This is hard enough to do in a growing and diverse church like Double O Cross (where there is constant turnover), but it is even harder when we are unsure of who is, or is not, a part of this flock.

Help us by taking the next step towards membership at Double O Cross.

<https://www.oocross.com/home-eng>



1. Doesn't membership or an exclusive membership system have the risk of ruling or controlling members involved in the church in a wrong way?

Answer: Yes, that kind of risk does exist. At the same time, I can assure you that a similar kind of risk would still exist without membership. Just as any good thing can be abused, the concept of membership itself is not dangerous. Rather, we believe that God has given us a God-ordained concept of membership, which is shown in the Bible for us. The best thing we can do to avoid such dangers that accompany membership is to operate the church by constantly checking the biblical concept of membership without any biases. In order to do this, it is crucial that you can judge whether the church deviates from biblical concepts based on the authority of the Bible, which is the Word of God. We must not make the authority of leaders and pastors the foundation of our lives. Please understand that Double O Cross Church's absolute authority is not the pastors or the elders, but Christ Himself, the Word of God.

2. Why wasn't membership introduced from the beginning when the church was planted?

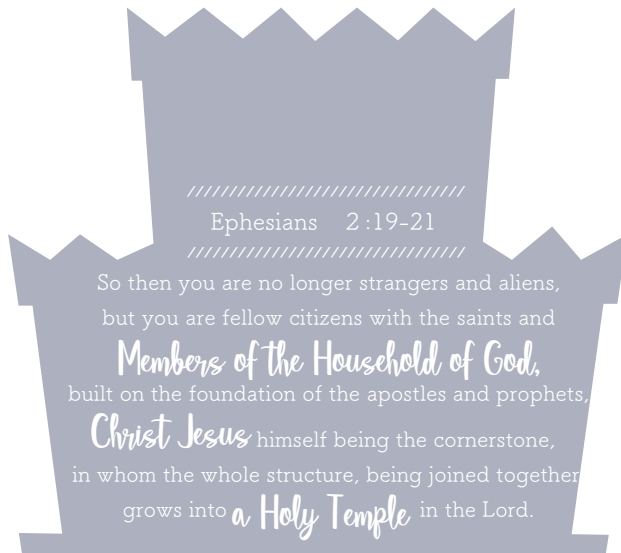
Answer: A concept that is almost always necessary to introduce a healthy membership is the formation of healthy leadership by the elders or pastors. In most cases, churches that have just been planted do not have a group of united leaders, who share the same understanding of biblical values and the way of the gospel. We also believe that a church does not belong to a single pastor but must be led by a group of elders (a minimum of 3), just like the early church. For this reason, Double O Cross Church has taken the time to build Gospel-centered values as the foundation of our church. We are introducing a membership system only after being convinced that the foundation is beginning to be complete.

3. Can I be involved in Double O Cross while continuing to be a guest forever?

Answer: Of course, you can. However, as we have explained in this booklet, not deciding to belong to a church means that you still have a half-hearted commitment towards the way you live as a Christian. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you become deeply rooted in a local church somewhere. As long as that determination is ambiguous, there will be situations at Double O Cross Church where we have no choice but to limit your involvement in serving that accompanies important responsibilities. This is why we believe that it is a natural and common-sense step for you to decide to become a member someday if you want to truly live for God and serve the body of Christ.

4. Is it possible to quit being a member?

Answer: Of course, it is possible. Being a member is by no means compulsory or binding. Becoming a member is only possible if the positive determination of the person and the judgment of the church is in agreement. Therefore, we will not force anyone who wants to quit. Of course, it is sad to lose a family member whom we have lived life together, although it may depend on the reason. Even in such cases, we hope that the church you will moving to will be a healthy church. We will also do our best to help you find such a healthy church through our network. Conversely, there are rare situations in which the leadership may ask you to stop being a member. These situations include cases written in the Bible, such as outright rebellious opinions and attitudes towards biblical doctrine and refusing to repent of a particular sin, although you have been corrected many times. This is especially true of sins and criminal acts that intentionally and maliciously hurt other members. However, even in these rare cases, the church will always try to make such decisions for that person and all church members.



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