

1 Corinthians 12:12-31.

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- **What are you a “member” of?**

(Check your wallet!)

- **What does it mean to be a “member”?**

(Feedback)

To become a member, there’s usually a cost.

If you want to be a member of the Sydney Swans,

It will cost you \$900 a year per person

And what do you get?

A membership Card, a cap, a key ring a bumper sticker,

Reserved seating

Free Parking

And what do you get being a member of a church? Nothing like that!

But what if church was like that?

You pay \$900 a year. And maybe you get a shirt? A key ring? A seat, free parking... on the street, a name tag, free tea and coffee after the game...

Over the next 3 weeks we’re looking at what it means to be a member of church. So let me begin with this question:

- **Are you a member of this church?**

Lots of people are members of this church. You can call yourself a member just by coming along regularly, supporting the work we do, some people commit time and money. And it’s great to be a community like this at Waitara Anglican Church. But today I want us to think about something much deeper than that. I want us to think about what it means to be a member of God’s Church, of what Paul calls, in 1 Corinthians, “**the body of Christ**”. The challenge for us, as members of Waitara Anglican Church, is “what does it mean to be a member of this **bigger** body – this body of Christ, which is much bigger than just us. What’s the difference? What does it mean for me?”

1 Corinthians 12 is about membership in Christ’s body – what it means to be a member, and what the benefits of membership are.

Membership: UNITED IN THE SPIRIT

And the first, and most important thing, is this: members of God’s church, of Christ’s body, are **united** with one another. Not in any old way. But by the Spirit of God.

Paul talks about us being ONE BODY. And that body is the body of Christ, united by the Spirit of God:

Verse 13: For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Our unity in Christ comes by committing our life to God and having his Holy Spirit in our lives. No matter who we are, it is the Spirit of God in us who makes us members of the body of Christ. There is no other way to be a member of the body of Christ.

You can join our meetings without having the Spirit of God. You can come every week and learn about Jesus, and be a part of what we do every week. And that makes you an important and valuable part of our community. But membership in the body of Christ is about faith and commitment.

You can join a football club and not care about the team. You don't have to turn up to games or cheer them on. You don't have to put the bumper sticker on your car. But to be a member of God's church requires commitment – to have our heart OWNED by God. Unity in the body of Christ depends on the Holy Spirit living in us.

And this is the **only** requirement. So what are the benefits of membership?

1. NEEDED

The first benefit is that we are needed.

There are many parts, but only one body, and every part of that body is important and necessary, because we have been placed here by God for his purposes.

15Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ...

17If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? ...

18But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, **just as he wanted them to be.** ...

21The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"

In God's body, once we make that commitment, once the Holy Spirit lives in us, God places us where he wants us to be. That's a great comfort. If you are a member of Christ's body, a member of this church, God places you where he wants you to be. And you are NEEDED there. Not ONE person can say to another: "I don't need you." Every part is important.

And the human body is a great example. If every part of our body was an eye, how could we hear?

If you were to lose one part of your body, you would notice it!

Being a member of God's church means that you have an important place - wherever God has placed you.

2. INTER-DEPENDENT

The second benefit is that, wherever God has placed you in this body, we depend on you and you depend on us. We are all equal and ***inter-dependent***.

There are no divisions of wealth or status or skills. There is equal concern for each other, and we all rejoice and suffer together.

So there is not an **option** to assist those in need. We don't have the luxury of **not** being involved in each others lives. YOUR suffering is MY suffering. "I don't have time to help" is not an answer.

For example, if you cut your toe off mowing the lawn, you wouldn't say: "Well, I just don't have time to go to the hospital". It's part of your own body. You look after it. If you are sick, I am there with you. And when you celebrate, I celebrate.

We are mutually inter-dependent on each other. And we all need to really believe that and commit to that and be ***accountable*** to that.

You may not feel important. Why? Maybe you don't feel you're able to do much or give much. Maybe you don't feel your job is as important as other people's jobs. Maybe you think you're dispensable. Maybe you feel redundant or unnecessary. And don't we all feel like that sometimes.

And aren't there sometimes people who think they are SO important because of the position they have and what they do. And aren't there people we think are SO important because of what they do.

But we must not think like that. Verse 22:

*22On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,
23and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor.*

If you sometimes feel a little unimportant or a little bit useless, Paul is writing this letter to you. He's saying to you – "Don't **ever** feel like that! God has placed you here in **this** place at **this** time as part of **this** body **for his purposes**. We are all equal before him and before each other. We are each an indispensable part of this body. To be a member of God's church means that you are indispensable because God has placed you here.

3. GIFTED BY GOD

The third benefit of membership is that you are gifted by God. Being a member of God's church is about equality in the body and commitment to the body. Whether God leads you to assist with kids ministries, or church maintenance, or preaching or morning tea or supper or flowers or music or prayer, wherever God has lead you to serve in this body, we are equal – we are UNITED in the one Spirit, NEEDED where God has placed us, and DEPENDANT on each other.

Paul finishes the chapter by mentioning particular gifts. But first he says:

27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

He reaffirms that whatever gift we have, we are part of this body. UNITED, NEEDED and INTER-DEPENDENT parts of one body. He lists some particular ministries that God has established in his church – he talks about the foundational ministries of the apostles, prophets and teachers – essential gifts that God has appointed people for in his church. But the purpose of him making this short list at the end is to simply say: there are MANY gifts. And God has appointed different people with different gifts. Are all apostles? No. Are all miracle workers? No. Yet we are all gifted BY GOD for HIS PURPOSES in HIS CHURCH.

That's what being a member of God's church is all about – it's not about doing what we WANT to do, or what's EASY or what roles seem to be more IMPORTANT. But doing what GOD appoints us to do.

EVERY PERSON is equal and is equally important. Every gift is purposed by God. Every person is placed by God. Membership in God's Church and in this body here at Waitara, means that you are NEEDED. If you're not sure where you're needed, please ask. We don't want you to fill a gap in a roster. We want you to serve where God has called you to serve. We want you to find the place that **God** has for you in his body. Whether you're a toe or an ear or a leg – a food preparer, a visitor to the sick, a teacher, a musician – God has an important and necessary place for you, and we need to find that place together.

But when you think of church membership, think wider than this community here at Waitara. Think about what it means to be a member of something much larger – a member of the worldwide body of Christ. Think of the unity that extends beyond this community here. And think, in THAT context, where God is placing you – where you are needed, how others are depending on you, and how God has gifted you to serve. Not just HERE, but wherever God calls you to as a member of the body of Christ.

Prayer.