

The Hands and Feet of Jesus Christ

Article 6: The Church¹ - "A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its two scriptural offices are that of pastor/elder/overseer and deacon. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Matthew 16:15-19; 18:15-20; Acts 2:41-42,47; 5:11-14; 6:3-6; 13:1-3; 14:23,27; 15:1-30; 16:5; 20:28; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 3:16; 5:4-5; 7:17; 9:13-14; 12; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:19-22; 3:8-11,21; 5:22-32; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:18; 1 Timothy 2:9-14; 3:1-15; 4:14; Hebrews 11:39-40; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Revelation 2-3; 21:2-3.

I. The Foundation of the Church

- **1 Corinthians 3:11** - "No one can lay any other foundation than what has been laid—that is, Jesus Christ."
- See **Matthew 16:13-19**: Jesus establishes the church on Peter's confession that He is the Messiah. The church will endure against all forces.
- Church: The community of those who believe in and follow Jesus Christ

II. We are the Body of Christ

- **Ephesians 1:20-23, Colossians 1:18** - Christ is the head of the church, the body of believers.
- Ekklesia means "the ones called out" which represents local congregations as part of Christ's body.
- See **1 Corinthians 12:12-27**: The church transcends ethnic and social differences (v. 13). Each member belongs and contributes to the body (vv. 15-17).

- **Bible verses that reflect church membership:**
 - **Acts 2:41** – Those who followed Jesus were baptized and identified themselves with local believers.
 - **1 Corinthians 12:27** – The church is a body, and that body has members.

¹ From the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000>.

- **Ephesians 5:25** – Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for it; believers must be equally committed to the church.
 - **Hebrews 10:25** – The church must regularly gather together.
 - Scriptures that address pastoral leadership and oversight imply a recognized congregation (e.g., **1 Timothy 3:5; Hebrews 13:17**).
 - Scriptures that speak of church discipline suggest some type of formal list or association (e.g., **Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:11-13**).
- We want you to commit to membership at Mount Vernon for four reasons:
 - 1. A Biblical Reason: Christ is Committed to the Church**
"...Christ loved the church, and he gave his life for it." Eph. 5:25
 - 2. A Cultural Reason: It is an Antidote to our Society**
 We live in an age where very few want to be committed to anything...a job...a marriage...our country. This attitude has even produced a generation of "church shoppers and hoppers". Membership swims against the current of America's "consumer religion." It is an unselfish decision. The difference between "attenders" and "members" can be summed up in one word: **commitment**, which always builds character.
 - 3. A Practical Reason: It defines who can be counted on**
 Every team must have a roster. Every school must have an enrollment. Every business has a payroll. Every army has an enlistment. Even our country takes a census and requires voter registration. Membership identifies our church's family.
 - 4. A Personal Reason: It produces spiritual growth**
 The New Testament places a major emphasis on the need for Christians to be accountable to each other for spiritual growth. You cannot be accountable when you're not committed to any specific church family.

III. The Ministry of the Church

- Each church is autonomous, self-governing under Christ.
- Membership: Baptism signifies entry into the church community.
- **Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 12:30** - The Great Commission and Great Commandment guide the church's mission.
- Mission: Make disciples, baptize, and teach Christ's commands.
- Pastors: Role includes terms bishop, elder, and pastor.
- Deacons: Role involves service and supporting the church's ministry.
- The ideal structure is Pastor-led, Deacon-served, Committee-operated and congregationally-approved!

Actions to Strengthen Our Church

- **Join:** For the reasons listed above.
- **Pray:** For pastors, deacons, and church leaders.
- **Serve:** Identify ways to use your gifts in ministry.
- **Give:** Supporting financially the programs and ministries of the church.
- **Invite:** Bring others to the church and to Christ through evangelism and outreach.
- **Protect:** Defend the unity of the church by speaking positive and always taking criticisms to the lay leader, director, minister or pastor who is in charge of that area.

Christian martyr Jim Elliot once said, "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God." **Ephesians 5:25** tells us that Christ "loved the church and gave Himself for her..." If Christ gave up His life for the Church, His Body, we should be willing to not only associate with it, but also be actively involved in the mission of the Church – bringing others to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.