

**Report on Characteristics of Effective Church Membership**  
Presented to the Southwestern District Missionary Baptist Association  
*October 9, 2015*

According to our doctrine and faith, the only thing that is required for you to become a church member is to be a baptized believer. Upon giving your personal testimony of salvation, you are baptized by the authority of the local church body to which you are joining. There is much to be said about and a great deal to gain from discussing personal salvation and proper baptism. However, this report is about the characteristics of “effective” church membership. All our churches have a frustratingly large number of people with their names on our books that we would have a difficult time admitting were “effective” members. With that thought, there are also many things that can be discussed on how ‘not’ to be an effective church member. For the sake of brevity and clarity, we will focus on seven traits of an effective church member and what the Bible tells us in that regard.

The first and most obvious characteristic of an effective church member would be regular attendance. In my opinion, this would be the minimum effort of an effective church member. However, you could also consider it the foundation to which the other traits can rest more firmly. Regular attendance puts the church member right where they need to be in order to be most effective. No company has ever increased its profits by having all its employees stay home from work. No school has ever increased test scores by increasing the absences of the students and teachers. Being in regular attendance makes you a reliable and beneficial part of the church. Where two or three are gathered, He will be in the midst. But, how much more can He accomplish if everybody showed up. There is a great comfort in being reliable. The church needs people there and the most effective church members are on the pew Sunday after Sunday, service after service. The greatest compliment I’ve ever heard towards a church member was, “She’s there every time the doors are open.” The benefits to your soul and your relationship with God are innumerable. The benefit to the church of a regularly attending member is truly the foundation of effective church membership. (*Hebrews 10:25; Matthew 18:20*)

The second trait of an effective church member is to actively serve the church. We all have something to contribute. We don’t all preach and teach, but we can all say ‘amen’ and study the Sunday school lesson to be ready to contribute to the class. Saying ‘amen’ to a Baptist preacher in the pulpit is like siccing a coon dog. Pastors preach harder when they see the congregation is listening and engaged. Teachers are encouraged when they hear feedback and discussion on the topic. Song leaders do a much better job when everyone in the house is lifting their voice to God. There are many other tasks that can be accomplished from a willing church member. Just a handful of good examples are: cleaning the church, taking care of the regular maintenance of the building, sending out sympathy cards, bringing food to church meals, keeping an eye out for people that miss and checking on them, managing the sound system, keeping the parking lot clean, or even just greeting people at the door. An effective church member is willing to do whatever they have the ability to do to serve the church, whether it’s a big job or a small one. One of the most powerful things an effective church member can do to bless the church body is help with visitation. Every church has only one pastor. He can’t be everywhere and pastors have families, too. Deacons can help with this, but every member represents the church. An effective church member can run out to the hospital, stop by the home of a widow or pick up the phone just as easily as the next person. How many times has someone complained that their church wasn’t doing something when that very person had the ability to do exactly what they wanted to see done? (*1 Corinthians 12:12-29; James 1:25-27*)

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The third trait of an effective church member is to help the church grow. There were three thousand souls saved on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit did not look at that as a finish line goal and let the new members just sit back and relax. By the leadership of God, those new members immediately spread the Gospel to their friends, relatives and neighbors. As the Spirit moved, others were touched by the Word of God and "...the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (*Acts 2:47*) An effective church member still seeks to add to the church. They will invite their friends and family to attend and tell them exactly why they would benefit from being there. Sometimes it takes a great deal of courage just to ask someone to come to church. But, the best way to get someone to actually make the effort to come is to give them a great reason to do so. People are more inclined to visit a church that has happy members that can't stop talking about how great it is to be there every Sunday. It's okay to talk about your pastor behind his back, if you're telling your neighbor how great he is. Spread all the gossip you want about how your Sunday school class is the happiest time you experience your whole week. You can be forgiven for bragging about how your church has the best congregational singing that you've ever heard. Pastors come and go. If a person visits a church because of the preacher, what will they do when the Lord carries that man away? Permanent growth in a church comes from effective church members bringing people in and establishing a relationship with them that is lasting. (*Matthew 28:18-20*)

The fourth trait of an effective church member is to represent the church well in the community. Done well, this can be a great benefit to the previous trait of growing the church. We have all heard many times that every member represents the church. The most effective church members live their lives in such a way that it gives the church a wonderful reputation by association. We can discuss at length the teachings of Christ that should govern our behavior and attitude. An effective church member will seek to live for the Lord, abstain from sinful behavior and let their light so shine before their neighbors that they might be a beacon pointing the sinner to their church. Sadly, one of the main excuses people use to not attend church is the character of the ones that do attend. An effective church member will not be someone's excuse to avoid church. An effective church member will lead a life that causes others to say, "I'd love to sit on a pew with that guy." (*1 Corinthians 5:9-13*)

This next trait may be the least popular to mention. The fifth trait of an effective church member is to contribute to the finances of the church. This is a separate topic on the schedule this year, so there's no need to discuss it in detail. However, it must be noted that an effective church member recognizes the financial need of their church and contributes as much as they possibly can. Tithes and offerings are taught throughout the Old & New Testament. It is obvious that a church must have money to accomplish its work. Not only does the light bill have to be paid, churches have to be ready to fly to the relief of its members and neighbors in need. The only way the church can be equipped financially is with the contributions of its members. In the days after Pentecost when the church was growing rapidly and the Spirit of God was moving unimpeded in the hearts of God's people, they saw clearly that their worldly possessions served the whole of the body of Christ greater than keeping them to themselves. Ananias & Sapphira were church members, too. Their greed destroyed them and they couldn't take their money with them. (*Luke 11:42; Acts 4:31-5:11*)

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The sixth trait of an effective church member is to actively participate in the church business meetings. It would seem that this trait would be covered by the first mentioned trait of regular attendance. Unfortunately, some members will faithfully attend every church service except the business meeting. For churches that have their business meeting after morning worship, there are a significant number of members that will get up and leave, but would be happy to stay if there was a meal. If the business meeting is at a separate time, it can be almost impossible to get some to return for it. One of the unique qualities of a Baptist church is that we have a congregational form of government. Every member can vote and every vote matters. The government of our nation was based in part upon the concept of Baptist church government. If there's only a small number of members that are willing to attend the business meeting, the church is ruled by a committee by default. The most effective members are at the business meeting, staying informed, contributing their helpful opinions, and helping the church to decide matters based on collective wisdom and thoughtful consideration. All too often, business meetings become the most stressful time we spend in church. They don't have to be. An effective member not only interjects their own opinion, but they respect the opinion of their fellow members. Everyone votes their heart and conscience, but if you lose the vote you still support the church and the work trying to be accomplished. The most effective church members can vote differently and still love and respect each other after the votes are counted and the meeting adjourned. How can we ever expect Congress to get along if we can't even cooperate in the Lord's house? (*1 Corinthians 6:11; Matthew 18:15-22*)

The seventh & last trait to discuss may very well be the most important. An effective church member will contribute spiritually to the church. There are many different ways this can be accomplished. An effective church member will be familiar with the doctrine and faith of the church to which they belong. They will hold this faith securely in their heart and be ready to defend it with scripture and truth. An effective church member will not be satisfied with the milk or basic principles of their doctrine. They will seek to grow in God's word and be ready for the strong meat that will nourish them spiritually. Another spiritual contribution that can be made is to be a peaceful and prayerful member full of praise for God. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (*James 5:16*) The member who comes to church praying adds great blessings to the service. An effective church member prays not only for the pastor and church officers, but prays for every member, for the sick & hurting, for the lost and for the glory of God. (*Hebrews 10:23-25; Hebrews 5:12-14; 1 Peter 2:1-17; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34*)

All of us can think of someone in our church that fits some or all of these traits. The most notable part of this report, though, is that every one of us is capable of every trait discussed. How much better would our churches be with more effective church members? How far might the Gospel spread if our churches only had more effective members? How much better could our communities be if more believers sought to not just be a member, but to be an effective member of Christ's church?

Humbly submitted,  
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