

Dear Friends in Christ,



Sociologists have described our current society as being in a transition from what some have called the Age of Association to the Age of Authenticity. In the Age of Association people found meaning for life by membership in organizations and participation in communities. In the Age of Authenticity people are finding their life's meaning in highly personalized journeys. Organizations and institutions are losing their importance. Instead, people are seeking a life free of commitments and full of personal expression.

A recent survey found that for the first time ever, less than 50 percent of Americans have an affiliation with a church, synagogue, or mosque. People still see themselves as spiritual, but they no longer think that a church helps them discover and express their spirituality. Or if they attend a church, they attend as a consumer rather than as a member.

I have heard plenty of people say that they are spiritual but that they don't care for organized religion. My typical response in my head is: What is it about disorganized religion that you find so attractive?

In fact, some churches no longer have members. They have contacts and regular attenders, but no members. They are governed by a board of directors recruited by a leader. People are encouraged to give and to volunteer but only as it meets their personal needs and desires.

No one gets to vote on this. It is just how society is evolving today. We cannot change the way that people seek meaning in their lives. The Church will have to adapt to reach people in this new way of thinking. Denominations are dying. Institutions are shrinking. Congregations are closing.

I don't want to give up on the idea of membership. It is a Biblical world. It comes from the apostle's description of the Church in 1 Corinthians 12 as a body with many members. The New Testament invented the idea of membership.

But why join a church as a member when you can just be a consumer and come whenever you want and participate however you want? There really is only one reason to join a church as a member: to make yourself available to serve the community. Members are those people who have said, "I am committed to this family of faith. Call on me when you need someone. Depend on me for support and participation." Consumers come and expect others to serve them. Members come and expect to take a turn serving.

In the past 18 months we have missed out on that aspect of membership. We haven't asked our members to serve as greeters, altar guild, ushers, greeters, Communion assistants, coffee hosts, acolytes, and so on. And of course, we have survived. But we are less connected to one another. It is time for us to get back to inviting all our members to take a more active role in our worship gatherings.

So we are again assigning duties for Saturday evening and Sunday morning. Every member is asked to serve as a sign of our continuing membership in the Body of Christ. If you are unable to serve on your assigned date, please try to trade with someone else.

We have asked every member to fill out a "Servant Survey" that gives the church office an idea of your preferences in serving roles. If you haven't filled one out yet, please do so.

Serving will look a little different these days until Covid is less a concern. Greeters may just wave. Ushers may direct you to pick up your own worship program. But the act of serving with a smile is still a sign that we belong to each other as members one of another.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen