

THE  
**DISCIPLESHIP**  
PLACE

Exploring Nazarene  
History and Polity



**SESSION 7**  
Becoming a Member

# Becoming a Member

## SESSION OVERVIEW

**Membership Class**

**Membership Requirements**

**Ritual of Membership**

**Application**

**Exam**

**Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant**

## LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- understand the process of bringing people into membership and be able to do that

## INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on the process of becoming a member and how to help someone prepare for membership.

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## MEMBERSHIP CLASS



### NOTES

One of the bases for membership is for candidates to be informed as to the purpose and identity of the Church. The *Manual*, (paragraph 107.1) states: The pastor shall explain the privileges and responsibilities of membership in the church, the Articles of Faith, the requirements of the Covenants of Christian Character and Conduct, and the purpose and mission of the Church of the Nazarene.

One usual form of preparation for membership is the membership class. One feature of the class is to provide a selective history of the denomination. The purpose for relating the history of the Church of the Nazarene is to indicate its particular mission or why it exists today. History provides the opportunity to consider the church's identity and mission. Both identity and mission are closely connected to the doctrine of holiness and entire sanctification. Local history of a church should also be studied to indicate any special dimensions of its present mission. Another function of the membership class is to consider the requirements of membership (detailed in the next section). One significant issue would be the discussion of what it means to be saved and entirely sanctified.

Since the church requires a testimony of being regenerate, a membership class provides an opportunity for every prospective member to consider their own personal spiritual condition. The class can become part of an evangelistic strategy. We can present the gospel of what it means to be a Christian and explain how to become a Christian. The class should also begin to outline several models of spiritual development. This would be a good place to set forth expectations of what it means to be a Christian as well as a member. Within this context, the class can inform and discuss the issues concerning the General Rules and the Covenant of Christian Conduct of the church. New members need to understand the expectations of what it means to live within community. The class can also introduce areas of service available within the local church.

## MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS



### NOTES

The requirements for membership are laid out in the *Manual* in both The Church section of the Constitution and the section on the local church. The *first* requirement is that the person seeking membership must “declare their experience of salvation.” This stipulation agrees with the statement on the church that membership begins with those who are regenerate.

Some churches ask membership candidates to provide a written account of their conversion. The question arises as to what to do with those who cannot remember a specific moment of change or transformation. Certainly, this provides an evangelistic opportunity to share the understanding of the gospel message from the perspective of the Church of the Nazarene. A person could pray and make a confession of faith. However, the issue of salvation is not to be handled as a recollection of a past memory. The more pertinent question is whether God saves the individual at the time they are seeking membership. (*Manual*, paragraph 107)

The *second* requirement is that candidates have “belief in the doctrines.” While joining the church is not based upon passing a course in doctrine, expectations do exist for being in harmony with certain doctrines. The question is to what extent is doctrinal conformity expected. The general concepts of the Trinity, salvation through Jesus Christ, and belief and practice based upon the Bible are basic beliefs discussed in a previous session. An important emphasis of the Church of the Nazarene would be that an individual can decide to respond to God’s offer to become a Christian. Evangelism is based upon the individual having the ability to respond to the gospel message. Nazarenes are in harmony with the Wesleyan-Arminians who argued for free choice. The primary doctrinal issue is belief in holiness both in terms of spiritual development and entire sanctification. The question here becomes, does the candidate have understanding of holiness and whether he or she is seeking to have God be in the center of his or her living. This becomes a vital point to maintain the identity of the church. (*Manual*, paragraph 107)

The *third* point in the *Manual* calls the candidate to “willingness to submit to its government.” Does the candidate have an understanding of how the local church functions?

All these issues relate to the demand in the *Manual* that the candidate be indoctrinated and oriented into the church through a membership class or other form of education. This becomes important in terms of a denomination that

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has an identity aligned with religious experience and a particular doctrine like holiness and entire sanctification.

These expectations also raise the question of membership as to what these candidates are joining.

Are they joining a local church or a denomination? For most people, they are primarily joining a local church that only happens to be part of a particular denomination.

So, what responsibilities do the local churches have to explain fully and demand adherence to being a part of the denomination itself? Do you think most people really care or understand the significance of being part of a denomination? (*Manual*, paragraph 107.1)

In addition, the *Manual* also lays out the procedure for accepting a candidate into membership. One important requirement is that the prospective member be approved by the Evangelism and Church Membership Committee. The process of membership begins with communication with the pastor. There should be a period of information and orientation, followed by approval of the Evangelism and Church Membership Committee. The final act would be the public reception of the new church member during a church service.

## RITUAL OF MEMBERSHIP



### NOTES

The *Manual* ritual for membership provides additional insights as to the membership process and requirements. (*Manual*, paragraph 704) The membership statement begins with a listing of specific doctrines, actually a reduced version of the Agreed Statement of Belief. The statements include the focus upon holiness “that there is the deeper work of heart cleansing or entire sanctification through the infilling and the Holy Spirit.” The candidate is to make his or her affirmation of these beliefs. Next, the candidate is asked to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior. The question goes further and asks whether he or she can testify to the fact that his or her experience is current. These two commitments reaffirm the significance of personal experience and the doctrines that make the experience possible. The last portion of the commitment section of the ritual refers to the ethical requirements that are an expectation in a community with a shared vision of holiness. The candidate is making a covenant with the other members of the church. Special reference is made to the Covenant of Christian Character and Covenant of Christian Conduct of the Church of the Nazarene. In essence, the call is to whether the person is making a commitment to a holiness lifestyle.

The meaning of membership has been addressed by the Board of General Superintendents in the publication, *Membership Search, Audit, and Care*. The publication of this work stems from a 2001 General Assembly action that called for an accurate account of membership within the church. In this document, the board sets forth a philosophy of church membership as:

- an expression of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior
- a covenant relationship between member and the church
- a sense of identity with the Church of the Nazarene and holiness doctrine
- a place to offer and carry out our service to God
- the legal right and responsibility to vote on church business
- the potential to serve on the church board or hold some other church office
- the potential to serve on district and general boards, committees, and conventions

Church membership qualifies the correct aged member to vote in church elections and to serve as church officers. The Church of the Nazarene allows for different forms of membership. A district may allow the creation of fellowship membership. This category of membership allows an individual to be a member

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without the privileges of voting or holding office. A member may also be declared inactive if he or she has moved and in a year's time have not requested a transfer of membership, or have been absent for six successive months and attempts have been made to restore him or her to active status. Inactive members shall not be able to hold office or vote in annual or special church meetings.

Fellowship and inactive membership categories suggest a commitment to be involved in membership within a local church. One important reason for the *Membership Search, Audit, and Care* document is to provide guidance to the local church as they deal with the situation of removing people from the membership. (*Manual*, paragraphs 108 and 109).

The ceremony for membership is to be conducted within a local church service. Candidates come to the altar of the church to make their vows of membership. This could also be a time when someone gives a personal testimony of his or her faith. It might be more appropriate for another person to speak of the Christian character of the one joining the church. Since the candidate is joining a community, the vows are made within the community.

The congregation should also be asked to make commitments to the person joining. A reception should be held to welcome the new members. New members should be encouraged to involve themselves in some ministry and a small group within the local church. Accountability should be provided to help the individual grow in faith.

In considering the process of an individual becoming a member, it should be noted that a significant part of the process is for the candidate to be informed fully and examined to make certain he or she is ready and qualified for membership. The membership class becomes a forum in which a person's religious status can be discussed. This is also the forum in which the requirements and expectations of members can be considered.



## APPLICATION

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### NOTES

1. Read the *Manual* sections on Membership (paragraphs 23, 28, 107-112.3, and 704).

See: [http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/EN\\_manual\\_2013-17.pdf](http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/EN_manual_2013-17.pdf)

2. Write a list of requirements for becoming a member of the Church of the Nazarene.
3. Explore the policy and status of membership classes in your local church.

See: *Following Jesus*. <http://whdl.org/en/browse/resources/8921>

A Journey in the Right Direction. [http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/journey\\_read\\_english.pdf](http://whdl.org/sites/default/files/resource/book/journey_read_english.pdf)

## EXAM



### NOTES

1. A candidate for membership will have explained (*Manual*, paragraph 107.1) \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. the privileges and responsibilities of membership
  - B. the Articles of Faith
  - C. the requirements of the Covenants of Christian Character and Conduct
  - D. the purpose of mission of the local Church of the Nazarene
  - E. all of the above
2. The purpose of a membership class \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. is to provide a selective history of the denomination
  - B. is to consider the requirements of membership
  - C. is to give an opportunity for every prospective member to consider his or her own personal spiritual condition
  - D. all of the above
  - E. none of the above
3. The *Manual* requirements for membership include \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. the candidate declares his or her experience of salvation
  - B. the candidate indicates he or she are in harmony with the doctrines as outlined in the Articles of Faith
  - C. the candidate expresses willingness to submit to the government of the Church of the Nazarene
  - D. all of the above
4. The process of membership begins with \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. baptism of the candidate
  - B. communication with the pastor
  - C. the candidate joining a Sunday School class
  - D. a member recommending the candidate to the church
5. The candidate for membership must be approved for membership by the Evangelism and Church Membership Committee.
  - A. True
  - B. False
6. The community nature of church membership is reflected in a candidate being taken in as a member during a church service.
  - A. True
  - B. False

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7. The candidate for membership needs to agree with the *Manual* statement, “there is the deeper work of heart cleansing or entire sanctification through the infilling of the Holy Spirit.”
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
8. The Church of the Nazarene allows for different forms of membership that allows an individual to be a member without the privileges of voting or holding office.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
9. Church members can be removed from the membership of the church for the following reasons \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. he or she has moved
  - B. he or she has moved and in a year’s time have not requested a transfer of membership
  - C. he or she has been absent for six successive months and attempts have been made to restore him or her to active status
  - D. he or she has been absent for six successive months
  - E. B, C
  
10. Membership in a local church qualifies a member to \_\_\_\_\_.
  - A. preach in the local church services
  - B. vote in church elections if of a voting age
  - C. serve as a church officer
  - D. all of the above
  - E. B, C

## DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

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NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. What does it mean to make a covenant to join a local church and a denomination? Provide a rationale as to why someone should join any local church and the Church of the Nazarene in particular.
2. Why does a church need to designate members?
3. When is a person ready for membership? Is there an age consideration? What expectations can be placed upon those who are members of our congregations?
4. What are the *Manual* requirements for membership?