



Northland Reformed

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When to Stay and When to Go: Biblically Navigating the Choice of a Church Home

Since the founding of the United States of America we have been blessed to be a country with religious freedom. A direct result of this freedom has been the rise of many local churches and denominations. Because of this, no matter where you might travel in this country, you are virtually guaranteed to find a local church nearby.



However, not all churches are created equal. The days when each community had one or two main churches, with well-established doctrinal standards, are gone. Today, so many churches of various types exist that we might say we have the “Baskin Robbins 31 Flavors” model of church choice. The difficulty is not that we do not have a choice, but that we have so many churches from which to choose.

Since this is the case, this article is written with the hope of accomplishing the following goals. First, to remind us all of the necessity and importance of finding a good church home. Second, to guide our young people who move away (for college or career) on making a wise decision when looking for a church home. Third, to warn against unbiblical reasons for leaving a local church body. And finally, to provide advice to those who, for biblical reasons, might need to find a new church home. The first part of the article will cover the process of identifying and becoming involved in a local church. The material in the first part relies heavily on Chapter 7, “Community with Jesus as the Center,” in Rob Green’s book *Tying the Knot*. Where quotes are used the page(s) will be cited in the text. The second half will look at the reasons for and process of leaving a local church.

Advice on Identifying and Becoming Involved in a Local Church

Rob Green writes,

“The body of Christ is the universal church—that is, all believers in Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). Yet most every New Testament letter is written to an individual church or a group of churches located in the same city, including the letter of 1 Corinthians—that is, to local churches. Believers in Christ were expected to be involved in their local body or they were expected to start one. There were no other options.” (Green, *Tying the Knot*, p. 113).

Becoming part of a local church might be compared to joining a family (1 John 3:1-3), getting married (Eph. 5:25), becoming a citizen of a country (Phil. 3:20), or becoming part of a body (1 Cor. 12:12-14). The reason for this is that “God did not design us to live in isolation.” We are “designed to live in a community of believers where encouragement, friendship, one-another ministry and (sometimes) confrontation can occur.” (Green, *Tying the Knot*, p. 157).

Why get involved in a local church? Rob Green offers three primary purposes for church community:

“First, to encourage you to love and serve. It is so easy to think only about what I want. This focus on self feeds our inner ‘Me-Monster.’ The more we feed it, the worse it becomes. The church encourages us to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others (Galatians 6:9-10).” (Green, *Tying the Knot*, p. 115).

“Second, to equip you to mature in the Christian faith. Equipping includes teaching the Word. A pastor is to teach what the Bible says and how to understand it for oneself. Look for leaders who rely on Christ for strength. Look for leaders who pray, read their Bibles, and look for grace to help in their time of need (Hebrews 4:16), who know it is possible that hurt and hope can live in the same person at the same time (Psalm 42:5). Being a good example is not just about doing right things; it is about having a heart that is dependent on Christ. I have worked with young couples for a decade. Some of them prioritized camping, visiting family, and even sleeping an extra hour over being equipped spiritually. Unfortunately, the lack of equipping has resulted in a lack of Christian maturity. I personally encourage young couples to view faithfulness to church as attending forty-eight out of fifty-two Sundays a year.” (Green, *Tying the Knot*, pp. 116-119).

“Third, to provide others to care for you. Those who hold back from being connected miss out on the care available to them in the body of Christ, and we miss out on what they could bring to us.” (Green, *Tying the Knot*, p. 121).

How then are we to make a decision on which church to attend? One of the first things you must realize when looking for a church home is that *no church is perfect*. Groucho Marx is quoted as having said, “I refuse to join any club that would have me.” His point was that, by his joining, the club would automatically be less than desirable. In the same way, no church is perfect, simply because it is made up of sinners, including you and me!

“Finding a church home, if you do not already have one, can be a challenge. Here are three tips to make the process easier:

“First, attend a church three or four weeks in a row. It is difficult to understand a church until you have been there multiple times.”

“Second, visit whatever ministry the church uses to connect people to each other. The Sunday worship service is often the worst place in a church to get connected. Everyone faces a platform where all the action occurs, and the worship service is the most crowded event in the church. Take time to visit a small group or Sunday school class. In my church, we have observed that people are far more likely to leave the church within two years if they are not connected to our small groups.”

“Third, attend the church’s membership class. They are often led by the senior pastor, or at least the senior staff. This is a great opportunity to get to know the church, what they believe, and how people can get connected.” (Green, *Tying the Knot*, pp. 113-114).

Once you decide to make a local church your home, you now must invest in that community of believers. But what does this investment look like? Again, Rob Green is helpful here, offering the following three aspects of Christian community:

“First, there is *loyalty*. We live in a day when people change churches almost as fast as they change their clothes. Without a measure of loyalty, commitment, and investment, personal growth and meaningful ministry to others do not happen. Second, there is *importance* and *value*. The Bible teaches that each of us has a part to play in the ongoing growth of the church. God gifted you with skills, talents, and abilities that are designed to function in his body. Third,

there is *dependence*. Each part of the body is dependent on the others. I encourage you to invest yourself in service to the church. I encourage you to enter its doors looking for ways to make a difference in another person's life." (Green, *Tying the Knot*, pp. 122-123).

Advice on Leaving a Local Church

Leaving a church is a big decision which affects not only you and your family, but everyone else in the church. Therefore, the hope is that this will be a helpful guide to any who are contemplating a move, that it might be done with wisdom, according to biblical principles.

If, as was stated above, becoming part a church may be likened to joining a family, getting married, becoming a citizen, or becoming attached to a body, then leaving a church might be compared to leaving a family, going through a divorce, moving out of a country, or the amputation of a body part. Anyone who has left a local church, even on biblical grounds, knows how difficult it can be for all involved.

There are a few things to remember when contemplating a move from your local church. First, you must recognize that God is sovereign and that he has placed you in your particular church, at this particular time, for a particular purpose. Therefore, if God wants you to leave, he will make it clear. Second, remember that the grass is never greener on the other side. It only looks that way because you are looking at it from a distance. Recall that no church is perfect, and therefore each church will have its particular struggles. With these things in mind, let us first look at some unbiblical reasons for leaving a local church, and then follow that up with biblical reasons and process for leaving a local church.

Unbiblical Reasons for Leaving a Church

The first unbiblical reason for leaving a local church is what might be called the "Goldilocks Method of Church Attendance." Remember the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears? Goldilocks sat in every chair, ate from every bowl, and lay on every bed until she found one that was just right for her. Don't be a Goldilocks Christian! Don't leave a church over personal preferences, such as the size of the church, the number of programs the church offers, the music that the church plays, etc. This is not to say that preferences do not matter at all, but if they are your only, or even primary, reasons for leaving a church, they are probably not good or biblical reasons.

A second unbiblical reason for leaving a local church is to leave due to personal problems. As sinners, when we are put in close proximity with one another, we are bound to sin against one another. But, as Christians, we are redeemed sinners called to work out our problems with one another, not walk out on one another. We are called to live in peace with all men (Rom. 12:18) and to do good, especially to those in the church (Gal. 6:10). Minor disagreements over inconsequential matters never ought to be a reason for leaving a local church. Rather, they ought to be reasons to bear with one another and to forgive one another as God, in Christ, has forgiven us (Col. 3:13).

Biblical Reasons and Process for Leaving a Church

The first, and probably most common, biblical reason for leaving a local church is due to providential circumstances, such as moving to a new residence far enough away to make attendance at your present church unfeasible.

A second biblical reason for leaving a local church is the presence of false teaching. If the church you are attending is clearly teaching contrary to the word of God, especially with regard to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ—that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone—then it is not preaching the gospel and therefore is not a true church.

A third biblical reason for leaving a local church is if that church fails to do what the church is called to do. The church is called to faithfully preach the whole counsel of God, to faithfully administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to faithfully exercise church discipline for open, unrepentant sin. When a church fails to do these things, there is biblical reason to leave.

However, even if you believe that you have a biblical reason for leaving, there is still a biblical process to follow before you decide to exit the church. After all, we can all be blinded by our own sin. The following are some recommended steps to follow before making a final decision to leave:

1. Evaluate your own heart. Is the problem with the church or with you? Pray for God to give you wisdom in this matter. Remember to look at the log in our your own eye before searching for the speck in your brothers (Matt. 7:1-5).
2. Express your concerns to the elders. They might be able to clarify your concerns and, if a doctrinal problem exists, you might be God's agent of change.

3. Expect the process to work. Be patient and remember that God is in control.
4. Extend grace to those involved. As Christians we are commanded to love others, even when they might not return that affection.

If, after you have done these things, you still believe you must leave, then:

1. Inform the elders of your decision.
2. Allow the elders to guide you in your selection of a new church, if possible.
3. Leave without animosity. Seek to maintain fellowship in the bond of peace.

Christians are not called to live solitary lives, but to live in community with one another. This community provides the opportunities to serve God and others in love, to be equipped to mature in the faith, and to receive care from others. Therefore, it is important that you identify and become involved in a local church.

Praise God for the religious freedom he has given us in this country which has resulted in many churches from which to choose. But remember that not every church is created equal. We must be wise on how we choose which church to attend. Three practical tips for identifying a Christian community are to attend church at least 3 or 4 weeks in a row, visit a ministry outside the regular Sunday worship time, and attend the church's membership class.

Once you have found a church home, it is important to remember that you are to be loyal to the place God has put you. Don't be a "Goldilocks Christian." Second, it is important to know that you have value in the local church. You have a part to play for the good and growth of the church. Finally, remember that you are dependent on others just as others are dependent upon you.

Therefore, do not be hasty in leaving a local church, but evaluate your reasons for doing so. Unbiblical reasons for leaving a church include personal preferences or personal problems. Biblical reasons one might leave the church are providential circumstances, presence of false teaching or the failure of the church to be the church.

And if you believe you must leave, don't do so quickly. Talk to the elders, talk to other mature Christians. And if you do leave, do so in peace, not sowing discord in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. Christopher Campbell

Congregational News

Welcome New Member Courtney Waggoner



On March 24th we rejoiced with Courtney Waggoner, her family, and the Termorshuizen family as Courtney became a communicant member of Northland Reformed Church through public profession of faith. May God continue to bless Courtney and Sam as they prepare for life together.

Baptism of Henry Mark Griess

On March 31st we had the great privilege as a church family of witnessing the sacrament of baptism applied to Henry Mark Griess. His grandfather, Rev. Scott Henry, who is pastor of Hope Reformed Church in Sutton, NE, administered the sacrament. Please continue to pray for this family and for all our covenant children.



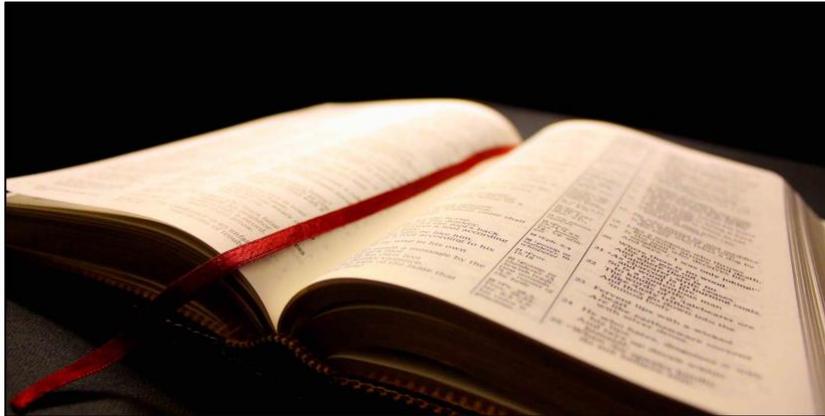
Looking Ahead to April

REGULAR MEETINGS

- Sunday Worship | April 7, 14, 21, 28 | 9:30AM & 5:00PM
- Men's Morning Fellowship @ Cracker Barrell Tiffany Springs | April 6, 20 | 7:00AM
- Friday Night Fellowship | April 12, 26 | 6:30PM | We will meet for a meal and lesson
- Prayer Meeting | April 17 | 7PM

SPECIAL EVENTS

- Joint KCARC Worship Service | April 7 | 6PM | For our evening service, we will meet at Shawnee RPCNA (6835 Pflumm Road Shawnee, KS). Pastor Campbell will be preaching at this service.
- Good Friday Service | April 19 | 7PM
- Easter Service | April 21 | 9:30AM | Following the morning service we will have an Easter fellowship brunch.



Scripture Memorization

“Your word I have hidden in my heart,
That I might not sin against You.” – Psalm 119:11

April 7

Ephesians 2:6-7

April 14

Ephesians 2:8-10

April 21

Romans 5:8

April 28

Romans 5:9-10