

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania

Membership or Discipleship?



A diocese is a community defined in part by a geographical area in which there are missionary outposts charged with making disciples of Jesus.

When we take this charge seriously, we change the world.

The Diocese of Central Pennsylvania has 66 missionary outposts. As a diocesan community, we work together and pool our resources so that each can accomplish the work set before them.

The church exists to help people grow in their relationship with Jesus - to become his followers or disciples. When Jesus is our focal point, our lives will naturally show forth acts of kindness and generosity and ministry becomes a way of life. For the Diocese of Central Pennsylvania, our parishes are part of the larger community of people with whom this relationship is lived out and nurtured. It is important to remember that the parish is not the end - it is the means to the end. Sometimes people focus more on their relationship with the parish than with Jesus - sometimes, because of the ways parishes work, this is encouraged.

What follows is a brief outline of some of the distinctions between *membership*, which tends to focus more on the parish, and *discipleship* which focuses on Jesus. What kind of diocesan and local community do you want us to be?

Membership

The **Member** of a congregation is expected to:

1. Give money to support others who do ministry. Ministry is done by professionals - people like the priest, a missionary or those engaged in social service.
2. Maintain the institution. Members are expected to give enough money to keep the building cooled and heated, lit, and maintained, and to make sure that enough people take their turn on committees.
3. Live an upright life and be a good citizen. It is important, and expected, that members of congregations contribute to the larger good in the community and don't become public scandals.

Some assumptions inherent in the paradigm of membership...

1. The mission field is elsewhere.
2. The goal of the congregation is to get and keep members. In many congregations, the death rate far exceeds the birth rate - so it is important to get members and keep them.
3. Congregations have low expectations of members. The reason for this is obvious: if we expect too much of members, people probably won't join, and if they do join, they won't hang around for long.

Discipleship

The **Disciple** is expected to:

1. Do the ministry. Disciples don't rely on the priest to do the ministry needed—they understand that ministry belongs to all God's people.
2. Be transformed through daily prayer, scripture reading, weekly worship, growth in giving to the tithe or beyond, serving others in Jesus' name, and sharing the faith story with those who need to hear it.
3. Live in community. The larger community is the congregation. In many cases, a smaller community is a small group that gathers for prayer, study and service.

Some assumptions inherent in the life of discipleship...

1. The mission field starts at the front door of the church.
2. The goal is to make disciples for Jesus Christ. It is not that membership in the congregation is a bad thing; it just isn't enough.
3. There are high expectations of disciples. The traits of discipleship listed above are understood to describe the life of followers of Jesus, and all disciples are expected to be diligent in their practice of them.