



BUILDING A STRONG
CHURCH TOGETHER

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WHY WE NEED AND LOVE THE CHURCH

Old school saint Cyprian once said the following:

“You cannot have God as your Father
if you do not have the church as your mother.”

A slightly-edited John Calvin said something similar:

“By faith in the gospel, Christ becomes ours, and we are made partakers of salvation and eternal blessedness. But as our ignorance, sloth, and vanity stand in need of external helps, by which faith may be begotten in us, and may increase and make progress until its consummation, God, in accommodation to our infirmity, has added such helps, and secured the effectual preaching of the gospel, by depositing this treasure with the Church. He has appointed pastors and teachers, by whose lips he might edify his people; he has invested them with authority, and, in short, omitted nothing that might conduce to holy consent in the faith, and to right order. In particular, he has instituted sacraments, which we feel by experience to be most useful helps in fostering and confirming our faith. These are housed in the Church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children. To those whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother.”

In other words, the church – her doctrine, mission, authority, relationships, sacraments and all – is a gracious and loving gift from our Father to us. And joining ourselves to a particular local church family is our way of receiving this gift.

When Jesus saves us, He doesn't save us by ourselves for ourselves. He saves us into the historical and global community of saints who have been justified by faith in His person and work. This community is what we call Jesus' Church. The Christian life is a “we” endeavor, lived out in real-life, flesh-and-blood, face-to-face community for the glory of God, the good of one another, and the good of those who we have been sent to. By God's grace, we are now members of Christ's body, dependent upon Him as our head, intimately and necessarily connected to one another.

One of the many implications of these truths is that we love the local church and want to be an integral part of her life and mission. Nothing could hold us back from loving her people, submitting to her pastors, benefiting from her means of grace, funding her work, and advancing her mission.

A CHURCH BUILT FOR BOSTONIANS

Here is what we are most excited about at Seven Mile Road: becoming a church that love and leads all-set, ungopeled Bostonians to Jesus.

- By “all-set” we mean decidedly secular, crazy busy, change-averse folks who are not following Jesus or actively seeking to be part of a church community.
- By “ungopeled” we mean folks who are living their day-to-day lives outside of any meaningful gospel influence. They don't watch Christian television, read Christian books, or have any Christian friends or family. And whatever gospel they have been exposed to is likely a fabrication or caricature.
- By “Bostonians” we mean anyone living near our Melrose space, whether they are born-and-raised, here-to-stay, or just-passing-through.

Our mission is to build a church that meets, loves, and gospels these specific people well together. We are not doing church for the sake of doing church, or for our own private benefit or comfort, or as retreat from the godless commonwealth that is Massachusetts. We want Seven Mile Road to be a force for gospel advance in our time and place.

This means that church membership here is about more than just being good church members. Yes, we need folks who are devoted to attending, giving, growing, serving, submitting, uniting, etc. But church membership here is also about learning to be good missionaries. This will look differently for each one of us of course, but we all need to be excited about every facet of our church life being informed by the mission Jesus has us on.

The good news is that we are eminently qualified for this work! We are just a bunch of recovering all-set Bostonians ourselves - ones who have been floored by the grace of the gospel and want to see its goodness, beauty, and truth known in our souls and our cities.

OUR 5 ESSENTIALS

There are five core values that drive everything about who we are and what we do together. It is crucial that you are both clear on and committed to these essentials if being a member of Seven Mile Road is going to make sense for you.

1: GOSPEL CENTRALITY

All that God is for us in Christ animating everything we are and do.

2: HOLINESS AND HUMILITY

Unwavering commitment to holy living without legalism or pretense.

3: ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

Scripture as the first and final authority for all our faith and practice.

4: RELATIONAL INTIMACY

Life shared long-term in tight-knit and transparent community.

5: MISSIONAL LIVING

Lots of meeting, loving and engaging ungodpeled friends and neighbors.

COVENANTING TOGETHER

The word “covenant” is not one that modern Americans are very familiar with, but God’s people have always lived together as a covenanted people. At its core, this means that we happily bind ourselves to each other around certain commitments that define our life together and enable our mission to thrive.

THE CHURCH’S COVENANTAL COMMITMENTS TO HER MEMBERS

AFFIRMATION OF GOSPEL PROFESSION

As a local church under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, Seven Mile Road affirms the member’s gospel profession through the administration of the sacraments.

SPIRITUAL OVERSIGHT

Seven Mile Road gives oversight to her members, including:

- Prayer for members and family
- Faithful guarding and proclamation of Biblical, Apostolic doctrine
- Pastoral care and counsel as appropriate
- Discipleship of members through multiple avenues over time
- Discipline of members for habitual, unrepentant sin
- Honest and diligent management of the life and mission of the church

THE MEMBER'S COVENANTAL COMMITMENTS TO THE BODY:

CONFESSION OF FAITH

"I am a Christian, having been born again spiritually by believing the gospel and publicly baptized as a sign and seal of my belonging to Christ."

PURSUIT OF HOLINESS

"I will strive to live all of my life in response to the gospel, seeking faithful obedience as my glad response to God's grace."

THEOLOGICAL ALIGNMENT

"I am in overall agreement with Seven Mile Road's doctrinal convictions which emerge from the pages of Scripture and are in harmony with the testimony of historic Christianity, and I will not be divisive over secondary theological issues."

PHILOSOPHICAL ALIGNMENT

"I am clear on and committed to our mission, our distinctives, and our primary rhythms of church life."

SUBMISSION TO PASTORAL AUTHORITY

"I recognize that certain called, gifted and qualified men will serve the body as elders, and I will submit myself to their leadership and to their loving discipline should I embrace habitual, unrepentant sin."

WORSHIP ON JESUS' DAY

"I will gather regularly on Jesus' Day with Jesus' people."

SERVICE TO JESUS' PEOPLE

"I will happily serve where there are needs that I am able and gifted to fill."

GIVING TO JESUS' WORK

"I will give joyfully and sacrificially to the work of God at my local church, with 10% of my income as my benchmark. I understand that my local pastors will be aware of my giving patterns as a means of encouraging my discipleship."

QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Here are the qualifications for covenanting at Seven Mile Road Melrose. All of these should be true for you as you step into membership with us.

- Professing Christian
- Baptized
- Living in close enough proximity to the church to be discipled and make disciples
- Clear on and committed to our:
 - Statement of Faith
 - Essentials
 - Rhythms
 - Polity
- Committed to attending, serving, giving, submitting
- Signed member covenant

ON GIVING TO THE CHURCH

Seven Mile Road works because our members give generously. We are a young church with no endowment, no rental income, and no sugar daddy in the background - and that's ok. What we do have is a community of people who love the gospel, value the mission of their local church, and trust God with their money.

As a general rule, Seven Milers are committed to living on 90% or less of what the Lord enables us to earn so that we can give 10% or more to the work of the church and the advance of the gospel.

Here are some basic principles to consider as you begin to give:

IT'S NOT YOUR MONEY

It's God's, and it's given to you so that you can show off the surpassing worth of Jesus and His gospel. What an invitation!

ALL OUR GIVING SHOULD BE GOSPEL-DRIVEN

Over and over again in Scripture, the motivation given for Christian generosity is NOT legalism or guilt but rather freedom and joy. We give our money away for others because gave Himself for us.

YOU CAN LIVE ON 90% OR LESS THAN WHAT YOU MAKE

We encourage everyone at Seven Mile Road to "tithe or more," which means giving away the 10% or more of what Jesus lets you make in a given year. Doing so would require you to live on 90% or less of your annual income. You can do it.

GIVE FIRST AND MOST TO YOUR LOCAL CHURCH

First be sure that your local church - which is the epicenter for fully-formed discipleship happening in your own life - is amply funded for her work and that you are doing your part to get her there; then give to other worthy gospel works, of which there are many!

THERE ARE ALWAYS EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

Scenarios sometimes arise where someone ends up in very difficult financial straights that effect their capacity to give well. We need gospel wisdom and the Spirit's counsel in assessing particular, exceptional situations as they arise. This is where community, accountability, and talking-things-through with the pastors and the saints come in, and where humility and love and patience and faith can emerge. We never want to be the church that fights, condemns, or attacks about money, but rather encourages one another in the good work of giving.

ON LEAVING A CHURCH

While church membership is not a life-long covenant like marriage, it is serious nonetheless. When we become members of a local church, that church is publicly – before God and man - affirming our profession of faith. By accepting us into membership, the church is saying, “You are now in the family of and under the authority of God – Father, Son, and Spirit.” Because of this, a member cannot unilaterally terminate his or her membership in a church. Transitioning out of membership is always to be done in conversation with and submission to the authority of the church and her elders.

Biblically-speaking, there are three ways in which one’s membership in a local church can end:

1: THE CHURCH DISQUALIFIES HERSELF

If heresy is introduced and embraced in the church, or if Christ-dishonoring and people-harming sin is tolerated in leadership or membership, the right thing to do is to humbly but clearly call attention to these things. If the church refuses to repent and reform her ways, we are given no choice but to remove ourselves and find a faithful church. May these things never happen here!

2: THE MEMBER IS GRANTED RELEASE

Release should be the norm for anyone who ever leaves a local church, with the member being released into the care of another true church. Ordinary reasons for release are many, including things like geography changes, marriage or other new family situation, church planting opportunities, another church becomes a more appropriate fit for you and your family, etc.

That said, it is important to note that church-membership-for-the-long-haul is not easy and there will be seasons where we are tempted to seek a release from membership because of the difficulties inherent with church life. Any collection of sinners brought together in close proximity for an extended period of time will run into relational conflict. In addition, things change over time in any institution, and sometimes we feel like we are on the outside looking in at those changes. In these cases of conflict or change, leaving the church should be seen as a last resort. Church-hopping is an awful American invention that short-circuits opportunities for the Spirit to work lasting change in us for God’s glory.

If a member does begin considering seeking release from the church, it is expected that he or she will not isolate themselves from pastoral authority or Christian community in the process. The worst thing ever for a pastor, church, or gospel community is to get notice from someone that they have been “thinking and praying for a while” about leaving the church and are now doing so, all without ever having communicated their concerns to anyone. A high view of the church compels us to lean into prayer and honest conversation in these cases.

3: THE MEMBER IS REMOVED

A third and final means of terminating covenant membership is for the member to come under church discipline for outward, serious, and unrepentant sin. Church discipline, when practiced biblically, is a loving implication of the gospel that promotes health throughout the church and insures that our witness to the world is clear and the reputation of Jesus Christ is protected. When it is apparent that a member has become hardened and unwilling to repent of sin, or that obedience to sin rather than obedience to Christ is characteristic of their life, then, in love, the church may remove their membership and ask them to abstain from taking the elements of the Lord's Table.

THE SEVEN MILE ROAD FAMILY OF CHURCHES

Seven Mile Road Melrose is a part of a family of churches that exist to make Jesus known by planting gospel-centered churches among distinct people groups in the greater Boston area. We believe that we can do more and healthier gospel work together than apart. In addition to providing obvious economies of time, expertise and scale, this family model allows local churches to concentrate on the essentials of their local, missional ministry while benefiting from the hard work and collective wisdom of an Executive Board and Unified Team. One day we hope to see 1500 folks believing the gospel, being discipled and living on mission for Jesus' glory and our joy.

THE NAME "SEVEN MILE ROAD"

Nope, you wouldn't be the first person who needed a helpful explanation about our name.

Seven Mile Road emerges from the text of Luke 24 and the story of the Emmaus Road. This road - where Jesus came alongside two disciples in their quest to know the truth, where the huge realities of Jesus and His Gospel were heralded, where the Scriptures were illuminated, where grace was extended, where their hearts burned and their eyes were opened, where they sprinted back down on a mission to tell others this amazing gospel - ran "seven miles from Jerusalem" to Emmaus.

Get it now?

Our hope is that the story of this road is the story of our churches ... Malden, Melrose, and many more to come. We long to be about coming alongside Bostonians, extending grace, living and declaring the wonderful and surprising truth about Jesus and His gospel that has come to us in the Scriptures, seeing souls redeemed for His glory and their joy, and watching those whom God has graced being sent on mission back to the places they are from and beginning the redemptive cycle all over again.

STATEMENT OF FAITH

Seven Mile Road receives Scripture as the inspired Word of God which alone stands as the final authority for our faith and our practice. Working from there, our hope is that our theology would always reflect a humble orthodoxy as we pursue God's truth together. In solidarity with the saints that have gone before us, we happily confess with the universal Church the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

For a detailed Statement of Faith, visit:

<http://sevenmilerose.com/about-us/statement-of-faith/>

BYLAWS

To read the entirety of Seven Mile Road's by-laws, contact Pastor Justin Gottlieb at justin@sevenmileroad.org.

POLITY

Jesus loves His church. He died for her, and He is preparing a new, perfected, sinless, infinitely happy heaven and earth for her. In the meantime, He has gifted her with leaders and sacraments to build her up toward maturity in Him in a Spirit-driven and orderly fashion.

“Polity” is just the fancy word for how a church is led and governed. We describe our polity at Seven Mile Road as being elder-governed with high congregational involvement.

JESUS

Jesus is the Chief Shepherd and Senior Pastor of Seven Mile Road. By His Spirit and through His Word, He lovingly cares for and commands us. He is our greatest treasure, highest authority, and deepest joy.

PASTORAL TEAM

In love, Jesus has given His church elders to oversee His people. Elders are graced and so godly men, called by Jesus to serve the church by praying and preaching the Word, administering the sacraments, exercising church discipline, and governing the church. Since the members of Jesus’ body represent Jesus to the world, elders are responsible to see that the individual saints under their care are pursuing holiness and unity in accord with the clear commands of Scripture and the covenantal commitments they have made as members of the local church. As with fathers in the home, our elders are the responsible leaders of our church family.

DIACONAL TEAMS

In love, Jesus has also given His church deacons to come alongside elders in handling a variety of practical ministries for the good of the church and the advance of her mission.

CONGREGATION

All of us function as members of the body of Christ gathered at Seven Mile Road. The church is its members. As our elders lead carefully, prayerfully, and transparently, they do so in constant communication with the membership, particularly around decisions of great magnitude for our life together, such as affirming officers, excommunicating unrepentant members, stepping into large financial commitments, etc.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR AUTHORITY

It is important for members to know how officers are appointed at Seven Mile Road.

Potential leaders must meet the following qualifications:

PASTORAL TEAM (ELDERS/OVERSEERS/PASTORS)

- Member in good standing of Seven Mile Road
- Called, gifted, and qualified by Jesus
- Completed Ox Track
- Recommended by Local and Executive Pastoral teams
- Affirmed by congregation
- Open ended call/commitment, subject to evaluation regularly

SERVE TEAM (DEACONS)

- Member in good standing of Seven Mile Road
- Called, gifted, and qualified by Jesus
- Completed diaconal training
- Recommended by Local Pastoral team
- Affirmed by congregation
- Open ended call/commitment, subject to evaluation regularly

THE SACRAMENTS

Jesus has given the church two sacraments, or means of grace, that serve to publicly affirm and spiritually strengthen Jesus' people in their confession of faith and believing of the gospel. The sacraments are to be administered by and under the authority of the officers of the church.

BAPTISM

WHAT IS BAPTISM?

Baptism is the initiatory, one-time sacrament that affirms our entrance into the fellowship of the church, signing and sealing us as having repented of sin and trusted in Jesus for salvation.

WHAT IS THE PROPER TIMING OF BAPTISM?

When baptism should happen has been debated for a long time by Jesus-loving saints. Here at Seven Mile Road, we believe that baptism is best administered when evidences of new birth (repentance and faith) are present in the believer.

WHAT DOES BAPTISM DO?

1. Baptism strengthens and affirms our faith

"I really am cleansed from my sin" -
- 1 Peter 3

"I really am dead to my old life and alive to a new one."
- Romans 6

"I really am united to Christ."
- Matthew 3

2. Baptism declares our faith to the world

"I confess, love, and follow Jesus."
- Matthew 28

THE LORD'S TABLE

WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER/COMMUNION?

The Lord's Supper is the perpetual sacrament that continually marks us as belonging to Christ. What a magnificent grace Jesus has given to us in inviting us to eat at His table! This meal is the ongoing sign and seal of our faith.

WHAT DOES EATING AT JESUS' TABLE DO?

When we share this meal together, we are:

- renewing covenant with Christ
- proclaiming His death until He comes
- remembering the sacrifice that He made for us
- identifying ourselves as belonging to Him
- displaying our oneness as His humble, blood-bought people
- getting a taste of the feast that awaits us in His kingdom

WHO IS THIS MEAL FOR?

This meal is not for everyone, but only for those who have responded to the gospel with repentance from sin and faith in Jesus and are baptized members of His church, living in glad submission to the pastoral authority that God has given them.

WAS CHURCH MEMBERSHIP PRACTICED IN THE EARLY CHURCH?

Even a casual reading of the New Testament shows that Jesus' Church was marked by a beautiful, messy, holy intimacy. These saints knew each other's names, stories, sins, strengths, weaknesses, issues, dreams, fears, all of it. They shared life together, and they had identified leaders leading them in that life.

Was all of this possible with only a loose, informal association, or was there a more formal awareness of who was and wasn't a part of a given church community?

In the early church, coming to Christ was coming to the church. The idea of experiencing salvation without belonging to a local church is foreign to the New Testament. When individuals repented and believed in Christ, they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). More than simply living out a private commitment to Christ, this meant joining together formally with other believers in a local assembly and devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

The epistles of the New Testament were written to churches. In the case of the few written to individuals—such as Philemon, Timothy and Titus—these individuals were leaders in churches. The New Testament epistles themselves demonstrate that the Lord assumed that believers would be committed to a local assembly. There is also evidence in the New Testament that just as there was a list of widows eligible for financial support (1 Tim. 5:9), there may also have been a list of members that grew as people were saved (cf. Acts 2:41, 47; 5:14; 16:5). In fact, when a believer moved to another city, his church often wrote a letter of commendation to his new church (Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1; Col. 4:10; cf. 2 Cor. 3:1-2).

In the book of Acts, much of the terminology fits only with the concept of formal church membership. Phrases such as “the whole congregation” (6:5), “the church in Jerusalem” (8:1), “the disciples” in Jerusalem (9:26), “in every church” (14:23), “the whole church” (15:17), and “the elders of the church” in Ephesus (20:17), all suggest recognizable church membership with well-defined boundaries (also see 1 Cor. 5:4; 14:23; and Heb. 10:25).

12 REASONS WHY MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

(Thank you, Jonathan Leeman, for this helpful list.)

1 - It's Biblical. Jesus established the local church and all the apostles did their ministry through it. The Christian life in the New Testament is church life. Happily, Christians today should expect and desire the same. What a gift to walk in step with the saints throughout history.

2 - The church is its members. To be part of "a church" in the New Testament is to be one of its members. And you want to be part of the church, because that's who Jesus came to rescue and reconcile to himself. Christ is our head, and we are the members of His body, connected to Him and to one another.

3 - It's a pre-requisite for eating at Jesus' Table. The Lord's Supper is a meal for the gathered church; that is, for gospel-believing, sin-fighting, neighbor-loving, authority-submitting, happily-baptized members (see 1 Cor. 11:20, 33).

4) It's how to officially represent Jesus. Membership is the church's affirmation that you are a citizen of Christ's kingdom and therefore a card-carrying Jesus Representative before the nations. This is big!

5) It's how to declare one's highest allegiance. Your membership on the "team," which becomes visible when you wear the "jersey," is a public testimony that your highest allegiance belongs to Jesus. Trials and persecution may come, but as a member of Jesus' church your simple response get to be, "I belong to Jesus."

6) It's how to embody and experience Biblical images and metaphors. It's within the accountability structures of the local church that Christians live out or embody what it means to be the "body of Christ," the "temple of the Spirit," the "family of God," and so on (see 1 Cor. 12).

7) It's how to serve other Christians. Membership helps you to know which particular Christians you are specifically responsible to love, serve, warn, and encourage. It enables you to fulfill your Biblical responsibilities to Christ's body (for example, see Eph. 4:11-16; 25-32).

8) It's how to submit to pastoral authority. Membership helps you to know which particular pastor/elders you are called to obey and follow, allowing you to fulfill your Biblical responsibility to them (see Heb. 13:7; 17).

9) It helps pastor/elders lead. Membership lets Christian leaders know which particular Christians they will "give an account" for (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).

10) It enables church discipline. It gives you the Biblically prescribed place to participate in the work of church discipline responsibly, wisely, and lovingly (1 Cor. 5).

11) It gives structure to the Christian life. It places an individual Christian's claim to "obey" and "follow" Jesus into a real-life setting where authority is actually exercised over us (see John 14:15; 1 John 2:19; 4:20-21).

12) It builds a witness and invites the nations (or in our case, Bostonians) to the kingdom of God. Membership puts the alternative rule of Christ on display for the watching world (see Matt. 5:13; John 13:34-35; Eph. 3:10; 1 Peter 2:9-12). The very boundaries which are drawn around the membership of a church like Seven Mile Road yields a society of people which invites Bostonians to something better.