

Enews for 1/17/2024 Membership

The Clerk's Corner

As a reminder, the Annual Statistical Reports are due on February 9. Last week I wrote about why we prepare those and how that data is and can be used. This week I want to talk about one of the least understood categories the report asks you to track: membership.

The Book of Order is admittedly a little confusing on this point. The section on church membership (G-1.04) has four categories of which only three are actually members and only one can vote! Most participants in your congregations are probably *Active Members*, as they have been baptized, made a public profession of faith, and are now eligible to vote and be elected as deacons and ruling elders. Your congregation may also have *Affiliate Members* who are members of another congregation that have temporarily moved to your community and asked to be received as part of your congregation while still maintaining their original membership. This category is most often used by people who travel back and forth between two different homes like snowbirds, college students, and military personnel.

In my experience, *Baptized Members* is the least understood of the four categories, and I find that many congregations are not maintaining this roll properly or sometimes at all. The Book of Order defines this category as follows: "a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, whether in this congregation or elsewhere, and who has been enrolled as a baptized member by the session but who has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior" (G-1.0401). This category is largely made up of baptized children but may also include adults who have not made a profession of faith. Note that this is not a list of baptisms, but rather a list of those who have been baptized that are participating in the life of the congregation. It may include people baptized elsewhere and exclude some who were baptized there but are not participating (such as when a grandchild is baptized there so that the extended family can be present). The final category, *Other Participants*, is made of non-members. The Book of Order does not require that an actual roll of *Other Participants* be kept, but it is a good idea for sessions to maintain some kind of record of regular visitors, as this is actually a list of potential members! Indeed, the session should pay particular attention to *Baptized Members* and *Other Participants*; it is with these people with whom you have a unique opportunity to share the Gospel.

As a final note, you may notice that *Inactive Members* is not one of the categories of membership. Changes to the Book of Order several years ago did away with this category. However, some congregations have found it to be a convenient way to keep track of former members. If your session finds that it is helpful to maintain this list, you are certainly encouraged to do so. However, please understand that placing people on this informal roll is the same as removing them from the roll of *Active Members* and should be done according to G-3.0204a. Also, should someone on this informal roll return to the congregation, it would be done according to G-1.0303.

Last week I announced the formation of the Joseph Badger Award for evangelism and church growth. Congregations that spend some time this year thinking about these issues may receive that award next year!

May the Peace of Christ be with you,
Barry