

Printable Guide for Knowing When to Commit to a Relationship (With a Church)

Church Name:

Website:

These two pages are designed to get you started on the discernment process. Since the decision to commit to a church involves both discernment and process, you know it's not simple and it takes time! Use the church's website, their printed documents, what you observe while in their space, and tactful conversations with real people to help you check items off and answer the questions on the 2nd page. Don't try and answer everything in one visit, or use the questions like an interview—again don't miss out on really connecting with God and really connecting with other Jesus followers.

Any church you decide to pursue should meet these basic standards. If a church has a statement of faith on their website or in print, it will speak to many of these points. But if possible, also try and discern whether these beliefs and practices are demonstrated in the church's services and the lives of people you meet.

Beliefs—What do they believe about God and reality?

- God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is one. Is anything elevated above worshipping God?
- Jesus, the Son, is fully God and also fully human. He really died and really rose again to life so our sin would be forgiven and our relationship with God could be restored.
- The Holy Spirit guides us in following God, convicts us of sin, reveals God to us, comforts us, equips us, instructs us, and forms us to be more like Jesus.
- The church is designed to bring us together to worship God, grow in our individual and collective love for God and understanding of Him, and engage our world with words and actions that introduce others to God and His love and provision.
- We have all sinned and all need to receive God's forgiveness.
- Salvation is a free gift of God's—a gift that we accept through faith in Jesus, not a reward we somehow earn.
- We respond to God's gift of salvation with gratitude, which is worship, and the desire to live in a way that is pleasing and honoring to Him. We love and obey Him.

Authority—What is their foundation?

- The Bible should be the ultimate authority—is it treated with respect, taught, understood, and followed? Are other writings elevated above or equal to the Bible?
- The church leaders lead in a Christ-like manner. They should serve under Jesus's authority, not be the ultimate authority themselves. They should sincerely serve the congregation and community, not simply to benefit themselves. Leaders should balance influence with humility and confidence with listening.
- Do church members follow their leaders with a balance of respect but not adoration?

Relationships—How do they act?

- Relationships between people in the church should be marked by warmth, love, and service.
- There should be evidence of the church pursuing *both* the spiritual maturing of its people and the flourishing of its community (spiritually and physically speaking).
- What are they doing about the rest of the world? The church should not be self-serving but rather value and pour into the world outside its walls.

For a quick refresher on what Christians through the ages have believed see the Apostle's Creed and explanation at: http://www.digital-disciple.com/apostles_creed.html

Some Questions to Help You Get to Know a Church

The discernment process doesn't stop with assessing whether a church is reasonably healthy and holds to basic Christian beliefs. The next step is getting to know the church and beginning to discern your compatibility. That doesn't mean that the church you are most compatible with is best choice—it still comes down to following God to the place He draws you. That sense of being drawn to a place, though, is at least partially related a sense of compatibility. Just beware of being drawn to a place simply because it's filled with people just like you.

The following questions are meant to be asked casually as you interact or sleuthed from the church's documents:

Who is this church?

- Why did you decide to come to this church?
- How have you grown as a result of the church?
- What do you appreciate about it?
- What were some of the significant moments in the history of this church?
- Tell me about the personality of this church.
- How does the church have fun together?
- What are some of the traditions of this church?
- What is a typical Sunday like here?

What is important to this church?

- What does the church care about? How is that demonstrated?
- What are some of the things this church does or has done that people are proud of (in a good way)?
- What has become more important and less important to the church over the last several years?

The following questions are meant for you to think about and explore (i.e. don't ask these!):

How could you serve this church?

- What opportunities are there to get involved?
- How does the church support and grow the people volunteering?

What do they believe and practice?

- Many churches have a website that spells out what they believe. As you read these statements, does it seem like anything is missing? Anything seem over-emphasized? What excites you about what they believe?
- If the church has archived sermons, take a look to see what topics and scriptures have been preached on. If there are some sermons by people you haven't heard preach in person, listen for a little bit to get a deeper perspective on the people who lead the church.
- Does what you hear preached match with the church's belief statements? Are there aspects of what the church says it believes and practices that are absent from actual life and teaching of the church?
- Are there factions or divisions?
- Can you learn and grow from the teaching?
- How do people treat each other?
- Does the worship focus you on Jesus?

What is God telling you?

- How do your non-essential beliefs correlate to the beliefs the church has? Could you see yourself adapting in areas that don't match perfectly?
- What do you feel like God is telling about your involvement with this church? Should you continue to pursue the relationship?
- What, if anything, in the course of your time with a church focused your attention on Jesus?