

Associates Degree

When we join a group, we are not only included in its privileges but in its prejudices as well. One of the greatest challenges of my career in ministry has been maintaining a non-partisan political stance. It has not been difficult for me to sustain personally because I believe that a person's integrity, experience, and intelligence matter more than his or her party affiliations. However, I have repeatedly found myself the target of various factions, political action groups, and special interests who become frustrated that I will not endorse Candidate X or Amendment Y on the ballot. I work hard to build bridges and find ways for all participants involved in an issue to have their side heard and their needs met.

Another reason I have avoided such political affiliation is because of the many assumptions and stereotypes that people would make if I came out and supported a Democratic or Republican candidate or platform. Whether it be a perception that I was looking for a way to protect the wealth of business owners or catering to the special needs of minority constituents, I would forever be misjudged—more than I already am!—because of such an association.

So as you consider committing your time, mental energy, financial resources, professional endorsement, or any other contribution to a group, you must be willing to accept their liabilities as your own. Many of them will require you to sign a contract which legally binds you to accept fiscal responsibility and personal liability for the group. You will be bound by their rules even if you disagree with them.

Before you move into that chic, exclusive neighborhood of the stunning homes you've always wanted, read the fine print on the community covenant contract very carefully. You may not be able to park in your own driveway, paint your house, or plant certain shrubbery without having the covenant board of directors' approval. Ask yourself if the prestige and quality of life you will receive in return is worth the price. For many people, the gain is obviously valuable enough that they don't mind submitting to the "group think." But recognize that you are giving power over certain areas of your life to other people who may or may not have your well being at the center of their agenda.

Choosing a Church

The decision to join a church is an important one. Our spiritual lives are the center of our existence, and belonging to a church can do a great deal to enhance our experience. When choosing a place to worship you must consider how well a church serves your needs and those of your family. If you want a more intimate experience, and to get to know your fellow worshippers then a smaller community church is probably a better fit for you than a larger urban or mega church.

Conversely, if your needs include many activities and programs for you and your family, community involvement and/or opportunities to serve on boards and committees, then a larger church is probably exactly where you need to be. Further, sometimes as our lives change and evolve, so do our church needs. Where are larger or smaller church may have served your needs when you were single, a different church might be better for you as a family.