

What Is a Non-Denominational Church, and Is It Right for You?

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On any given Sunday morning people will gather around the world in all different types of churches. Included in this menu of churches is what are known as non-denominational churches. In short, non-denominational means they are not connected to a specific denomination. Some may find this appealing, and others may find this confusing, but regardless, let's learn more of what non-denominational really means.



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What Is a Non-Denominational Church?

If you want a more technical definition, a non-denominational church or person is not tied to any specific religious organization, leadership, or hierarchy. This does not mean that a non-denominational church has no oversight – that would be disastrous – but they are not locked into a specific organization.

These organizations are what we know as denominations. For example, I grew up in a church that was under the Assembly of God denomination. This means that the church was formed under the structure and order of the Assembly of God. The church followed their set of doctrinal beliefs and their system of organizational structure.

In a non-denominational church, there are a set of beliefs, but they are not tied to any one denomination and therefore they are not uniform across the board. Since there is no set denominational belief structure to fall back on, you must consider the doctrinal statements of each non-denominational church you are considering, because there is no guarantee they will all be the same.

Even though a non-denominational church is not tied to one denomination, what I have found is the way they believe and structure their services is usually closely associated with a denomination. Most of the time, if you attend a service, it will remind you of a denomination you may be familiar with. One of the non-denominational churches I attended had core beliefs that were very similar to the Assembly of God. When I learned the history of the church, it made sense because the senior pastor came out of the Assembly of God church.



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But What Is a Denomination?

A denomination is a way that you classify things. You can have different denominations of money, cards, or even churches. When you classify a church under a denomination, you are identifying a group of churches that all gather under the same belief system or doctrinal identity. I know what you are thinking, don't all Christian churches believe the same thing? You would think the answer is yes, but there can be some doctrinal differences which cause people to separate into different denominations. Let me give you an example.

Some people believe that the gifts of the [Holy Spirit](#) are in operation just as they were in the first century church. These tend to be churches that are labeled as charismatic. Among

these denominations are Assembly of God, Pentecostal, Church of God in Christ, just to name a few. This does not mean that charismatic believers are limited to these denominations, because that is not true, it just means that these denominations are typically identified as charismatic. This is just one example, but there are other types of denominations such as Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, and many others. Even within these you will find smaller denominations that will form around a teaching that may be different than the teaching of the larger organization.

If this all sounds confusing, it doesn't have to be. Just note the main difference between denominations is going to be primarily some difference in doctrinal belief.

Where Did Non-Denominational Churches Originate?

The history of non-denominational churches ties back to the 18th century with a movement known as the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement. This was a movement that sought to remove many of the labels that identified and separated different Christian groups, and sought to identify Christians as they were identified in the first century church.

In case you are not aware, God does not see denomination. You are either believer or unbeliever, saved or unsaved. You either belong to him or you don't. In the book of Acts, they were originally called followers of the Way, and eventually they were called Christians in Antioch. The non-denominational movement's goal was to encourage people to identify more with the [Bible](#) than with their denomination.

What is fascinating about this movement as it has progressed over the years is that the exact opposite has happened. As the years have passed, people have again gathered themselves around doctrinal differences and opinions, which means they ended up behaving like churches in denominations anyway.



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What Are the Pros and Cons of a Non-Denominational Church?

There are pros and cons of attending every type of church, whether denominational or not. However here are three differences that I have personally experienced as someone who has spent a good number of years in both types of churches.

1. Governance/Leadership

One of the main differences is that typically a non-denominational church has a less defined level of oversight or governance. In a church that is tied to a denomination, it is usually clear how the oversight of the church runs. However, when the church is not affiliated, you often are not aware of the governance, and in some instances there may not be any.

If you are going to attend a non-denominational church, you should find out how the oversight of the church and the senior pastor is structured. The purpose of oversight is accountability, and if that doesn't exist, it doesn't mean the church is bad, but it is something you must be aware of.

2. Voting

One of the things that you usually find absent from non-denominational churches is voting rights. Many churches give its members a voice in the church and the right to vote on issues and things that will affect the church. This does not usually happen in a non-denominational church, at least not with the members.

Whatever is the leadership structure of the church, that is where the decisions are made and then those decisions are passed down to the members. Again, this does not mean a non-denominational church is bad, but you want to make sure, as with any church, that there are solid leaders.

3. Transparency

In the churches that I attended that were associated with a denomination, we would have annual business meetings. During these meetings the books were opened, there was accounting given of the financial statements and records of the church. You knew how much money came in, where it went, how much was left over, how much was saved in the bank.

In short there was a much higher level of transparency and information as to where your donations went. This was done because it was usually a requirement of the denomination the church was formed under. In a non-denominational church, no such requirement exists. They can choose to do it, or they can choose not to do it. And even if they do, the amount of information they share is up to them. Again, this does not make this type of church good or bad, it is just simply a reality of how the church is run.



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How Can I Decide if a Non-Denominational Church Is Right for Me?

The process for choosing a church is the same regardless of what type of church you go to, whether it is tied to a denomination or not. Let me give you some simple steps to help you.

1. Pray and ask God to lead you to the church he wants you to go to.
2. Visit a church, or a couple of churches, and experience the church culture, the atmosphere, the worship, the preaching, the teaching, and what they believe.
3. If you like the visit, pray and ask God if this is the place he wants you to attend.

When you are looking for a church, the denomination or non-denomination of that church should not be the most important factor. Whether God is leading you there or not is what matters most.

There are some people who say, “I was a Baptist the day I was born, and I will be a Baptist until I die.” All of that is fine, unless God is leading you to go to a different church that might be of a different denomination. (By the way I am not picking on Baptists this is just an illustration). At the end of the day, where God is leading you is what matters more than anything else because he typically leads you to a church where he wants to develop you and use you.

I will put it to you in this language – there is something you need in the church God leads you to that they will provide for you. Likewise, there is something the church God leads you to needs that *you* will provide for *them*. When those two things align, then you are in the place God wants you to be, whether it is tied to a denomination or not.

Go Where God Leads You, Regardless of Denomination

There is nothing inherently good or bad about non-denominational churches. As with all churches there are some good ones and some bad ones. Some of the good ones are non-denominational and some of the bad ones are tied to a denomination and the reverse of this is true as well.

I guess the bottom line is simply this, go where God is leading you. At the end of the day, what matters most is do they teach the truth of God's word, are they in alignment with [Scripture](#), do they pray, and is the [presence of God](#) truly in that place? I believe these things are a good foundation for any church.