

CHURCH @ CHURCH

Membership

Our vision is to 'REACH THE CITY, REACH THE WORLD' with the Gospel of Jesus.

CONNECT to God through trusting in Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, and connect to church.

GROW in your relationship with Jesus and others following him, especially through a Growth Group.

SERVE Jesus and others according to their needs, especially a Ministry Team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is designed to help you think about membership

Have you heard the story of John Stephen Akhwari, the Tanzanian distance runner? In 1968, Akhwari was competing in the Olympic Marathon in Mexico City. His run that day is one of the most famous in Olympic history. It's famous not because he won the race. It's famous for how he ran the race.

Just under half way through the 42 kilometre race, there was some jostling between the runners and Akhwari fell badly. He wounded his knee, badly bleeding, possibly dislocated. His shoulder slammed into the pavement. He looked unlikely to continue. Medical staff urged him to withdraw.

Stunningly, Akhwari got up and kept running – or walking – or limping. Akhwari finished last out of 57 who completed the race – over an hour after the winner. The sun had set. Only a few thousand fans were still in the stadium to see it.

The sight of Akhwari's agonising finish is awesome. Yet it's what he said after finishing that we really need to hear. He was asked why he ignored the medical advice to pull out of the race. He was asked why he continued running. Here is Akhwari's answer:

"My country did not send me 10,000 miles just to start the race; they sent me to finish the race."

75 athletes started the 1968 Olympic marathon. 18 others did pull out, they're names forgotten. The gold medal winner that day, indeed, is rarely remembered. We remember instead John Stephen Akhwari because he finished a really tough race, counting it a privilege to represent his country.

The Christian life is the privilege of representing Jesus, even through tough challenges. It's a marathon not a sprint. It's not how you start the race that counts. It's that you finish.

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. – 2 Timothy 4:7

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. – Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. – Hebrews 12:1-3

There is something challenging to hear in these verses: the Christian race can be tough and there are times when it's tempting to lose heart. Yet there is something beautiful and encouraging to hear in these verses also, as we face that challenge: we do not run this race alone. We run the race together. Count up all the "let us" statements in the verses above. Not me. Not you. Us. Unlike John Stephen Akhwari's story – we don't limp along alone. We finish the race together. More beautiful still – we run the race in Jesus' strength – who has run the race before us.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. – Romans 12:4-5

The gospel of Jesus takes a bunch of individuals and turns them into one body. We are one body, one family. We belong to each other. It's very counter-cultural. In Jesus we no longer view life as a 'me' but as an 'us.'

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. – Philippians 1:3-6

Paul thanks God for the Philippians because they are not just gospel spectators. They are gospel partners. They are ministry partners. They are in the race, counting it a joy to represent Jesus.

Being a Ministry Partner, of course, is not what makes us Christians or members of God's family—only the cross does that. But the cross certainly teaches us the importance of sacrificial service, commitment and devotion to each other.

Kent + Belinda's story

"It's the call to actually put something to action...to say yes we can sit here on a Sunday, we can learn a lot and there's great biblical teaching...but then what are you going to do about it? What does that mean for you every day? How are you going to serve? How are you going to show love?"

"Membership was then a case for us of...saying publicly that we are followers of Christ...and we are here to help, to serve, and to be held accountable."

"It's not about me. It's about getting up and planting my flag for him..."

This reality of belonging together as the body of Jesus is what membership is all about. It's how we partner together to 'Reach the City, Reach the Word' with the gospel of Jesus. It's not another step along the 'Connect, Grow, Serve' Pathway but the reality that holds all the steps together.



Connecting, Growing and Serving aren't just steps we need to take for ourselves. They are ongoing steps in how we serve others. They embody what it means to be a members – ministry partners.

CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

While we have a Connect Team who greet people and follow up newcomers, we are all the Connect Team. We all have a part to play welcoming newcomers among us on Sunday. We all have a part to play sharing the gospel with unbelievers in our lives. We can all just ask our friends and family to come along to church

Questions asked of new members

1. Who is Your Lord and Saviour?
2. Do you trust in Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins, bought by his blood, so that you now belong to him?
3. As we live out our 'Reach the City, Reach the World' vision together as a church, will you commit to connecting, growing and serving with us – giving of your very self as we partner together in the gospel of Jesus?

to hear the gospel any Sunday. Ministry Partners serve through connecting with others.

GROWING WITH OTHERS

We are all the grow team. Growth Groups are a key part of how we live out belonging to Jesus together. We have a vision for being a church of great Growth Groups, where we really commit to growing together and sharing life together. We have a vision for continually planting new Growth Groups as we welcome in new members to our groups and then see new groups needing to start as a result. Ministry Partners serve through growing with each other.

SERVING WITH OTHERS

We are all the serve team. Ministry Teams are another key part of how we live out belonging to Jesus together. Serving is a great way for you to grow. Serving in a Ministry Team is a great way for you to develop relationships with others beyond your Growth Group. Serving is a great way to grow your connection and appreciation of our whole church family. Ministry Partners grow their Servant Hearts through serving Jesus together.

GIVING FOR OTHERS

Membership holds all the 'Connect, Grow, Serve' steps together – expressing the huge reality of belonging to Jesus together. Giving is like that also. Having a heart for giving sums up what our Connect Grow Serve pathway is all about – as we give our time, give our money, give our very selves in service of Jesus. Giving is a privilege and responsibility of members as we walk in the steps of Jesus together.