



## My Engaged Church

This paper seeks to provide thoughts tips and tools in two parts.

- In Part One our purpose is to challenge each of us as Christians to examine our spiritual commitment and engagement in the life of our churches.
- In Part Two our purpose is to provide church leaders with discussion tools that could lead to enhanced congregational engagement and commitment to Jesus Christ and His mission.

### Part One

As Christians, our faith is centred on a relational God. He desires our intimacy and fellowship so He allows us to call Him our Father. He knows that our needs are satisfied when we are connected to Him and others so He gave us our natural families but even more significantly, He gave us the church that he calls His bride. This is another expression of the level of intimacy God desires with His people and why we each need to be engaged in the church.

In this paper, we will briefly examine the meaning of church engagement. What does it look like? How do we measure it? More importantly, how does it intersect with the Christian journey in developing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?

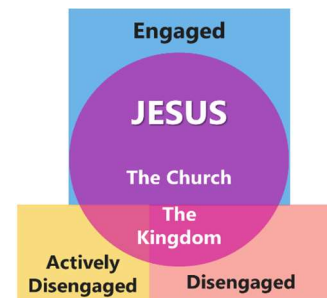
### What Is Engagement in the Church?

What constitutes the church and its people? In the Catholic church definition, the church people are all Catholics living within a geographical location defined as a parish. In some Protestant denominations, the church people are those registered as members and their extended family. Others define church membership as those who contribute financially to the ministry of the church.

However, the Bible gives us a much simpler and clearer definition. In John 10:10 we read, “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave **the right to become children of God**, to those who believe in His name.*” We can never lose sight of the truth that this is the primary definition of the church. It is demonstrated by a personal commitment to Jesus Christ and relationships in God’s family and His Kingdom.

In his book, *Growing an Engaged Church*, pastor and church consultant, Dr. Albert Winseman, places church engagement into three categories with different levels of engagement. These levels are defined by their relationship with Christ and the church family. To illustrate this, we placed them in the attached diagram highlighting their integration in the Kingdom of God as the

primary purpose of the church. To further explain, we will share stories of three people you are likely to meet in your church journeys.



### <sup>1</sup>The Engaged Mike

Mike was born in a part of the world where Christianity was illegal. His encounter with the claims of Christ came through a university friend. His hunger to learn more drew him to a welcoming church where he understood the truth about Jesus and accepted Him as his Lord and Saviour.

The security of the church family was a healthy place where he learned to practice spiritual disciplines that helped him grow in his love for Jesus. Further, his commitment to those who served with him as a member of the church music ministry gave him a sense of belonging that he cherished and longed for.

Mike says that his closeness with his church family is more than he ever experienced with his parents and siblings. He talks about his church with pride and invites friends and strangers to join him. Apart from his studies, his time with God and his church family has become his highest priority. Nurtured by the church family, in a short time Mike has become a very engaged member of the church.

Based on Gallup research, engaged members are:

- three times more likely to be satisfied with their personal, work, and family life
- ten times more likely to invite others to the church at least once a month
- giving more than 2.5 hours per week serving the church or community
- giving more than 4% of their income to church ministries.

### *The Disengaged Grace*

People in the church say that Grace is a very nice person. She grew up in a church-going family. Not going to church on Sunday was never an option. It was part of the family culture. Having her own family, she follows the same model and considers herself a member of

the church but not as fanatical as her mother. Unless her children's sports activities conflict, you will find her family in the same seat every Sunday. Yes, she will even volunteer to help at Christmas and is generous with extra donations at Thanksgiving.

Grace does not think she has anything special to offer the church. But when asked, she seldom turns down a request for help. Although she feels her efforts are taken for granted, she feels this is her duty as a member of the church. Grace's spiritual grounding comes from the interchurch Bible study group one of her close friends leads. This is the highlight of her week and where she finds her emotional and spiritual support.

### *The Actively Disengaged Bob*

Bob is a founding member of the church. As a registered member, he attends out of duty and makes sure one of the staff notes his presence. The truth is that Bob does not like the church anymore.

Bob says that things have changed since the younger generation took charge of the church board. The music has changed; the preaching is different; one of his church friends told him that he has become negative and critical.

Because he questions the priorities of the finance committee, he designates whatever donations he makes to specific projects. He would never miss the annual members meeting because this is the one place he feels free to share his concerns since this is his constitutional duty as a member.

Regretfully, Bob does not think the church needs him anymore. Those who know him consider him a strong Christian. He reads his Bible, prays regularly, and is very committed to the men's fellowship group he started years ago. He is on the board of a global mission organization where he gives the majority of his charitable donations.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples modified from true life experiences

**Question:** Which of these three stories is likely to describe your church engagement?

### What Is the Church?

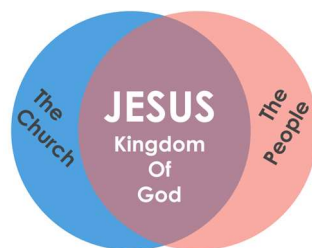
The church is not a man-made institution. The first-ever recorded reference to the word “church” is in Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said to Peter, “... ***I will build My church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it***”. Despite its varied structure and culturally distinctive worship style, the church is a Christ created body.

In teaching His disciples, Jesus instructs us to pray, “*May Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” God’s will is to restore the world He created to become His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

While the church is only a part of the Kingdom of God, the church is the best reflection of God’s Kingdom on earth. Its purpose and priority are that “*His kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.*” In changing times, the church may change its culture and its structure, but it can never change its purpose or functions. For this reason, it is important to understand the integration between the church and God’s people in what we will term congregational engagement illustrated in the attached diagram.

In examining this integration, Jesus goes further in highlighting the critical role He plays in each of our lives. If we are to be part of the church and if we are to play a role in making his Kingdom come, then the highest priority must be placed on our personal relationship with Him.

To illustrate this, he says, “*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing*” John 15:5. The attached diagram illustrates that the closer people and



the church are centered and aligned around a relationship with Jesus, the more likely the church will become His Kingdom on earth. This is the model by which we need to examine congregational and personal engagement in the church.

### What About Change?

In our changing world, some traditional beliefs and personal biases are often tested, challenged, and even changed. In such times we need to go back and reaffirm what should not change and redefine what may be adjusted in response to our cultural and personal preferences. Such a process of recalibration is personally healthy and profitable for the church and the Kingdom of God.

An example of this is seen in how COVID has upended church life for many of us. For some, our churches have thrived and for others, our churches have struggled. For some, COVID has brought us into a much closer personal relationship with God. For others, absence from our church community has led us to drift and grow cold.

On the other hand, some have found a new relationship in a global and virtually connected, fast-growing church family. This growth, while challenging for some, has opened the church doors to many who would have never come through its building or physical doors.

**Question:** Is your relationship with Jesus changing? What would you like to change?

### How Do You Measure Engagement?

For a long time, churches have used the most misleading tools to measure the health of the church or the impact of the church in the Kingdom of God. The impact of the church is not measured by the number of people in the pews or the health of its bank account.

In the search for numerical growth and financial resources, the church may be tempted to compete with other secular organizations and social services. This is a losing battle and may

not support the purpose or the mission of the church.

Other churches may use programs, outreach services, and even Bible studies as indicators of health and impact. These are all good and may lead to increased church membership, conversion, and even baptisms. While this is encouraging and central to the church mission, regrettably, these are not adequate indicators of engagement in the life of the church.

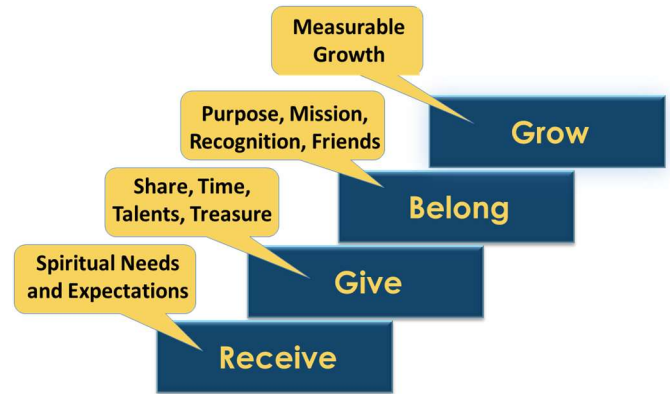
The truth is that faith in Jesus gives us entry into the family of God but does not lead to personal commitment or engagement in the church family. Further commitment to a personal relationship with Jesus may lead to spiritual growth, but does not automatically lead to engagement and investment in the mission of the church family or its purpose and mission.

Further and most importantly, responsibilities and activity are not a good indicator of a healthy relationship with Jesus or others in the church family. Focus on hyperactivity and increased involvement is a recipe for discontent, resentment, and burnout. With the insight gleaned from the book, *Growing an Engaged Church*, we would like to consider a new church engagement model. We suggest that healthy church engagement is a result of an intentional, observable, and measurable process.

### What Are the Steps to Engagement?

My wife and I have had more than 80 years of combined church life in different congregations and denominations. In our own lives and the lives of many others, we have observed how we and others have become engaged, disengaged, and actively disengaged in the church family. And yes, we have personally experienced with regret some of the pitfalls we outlined earlier.

Reflecting on our own experience, as well as the research conducted by the Gallup organization, we will use the following diagram and text to explain the **four steps that lead to member engagement in the church family**.



### Receiving: Can My Needs Be Met?

One pastor complained that people come to church with a consumer mentality of “**What’s in it for me?**” This is accurate and true. People seek the church for two interrelated and specific needs:

- **Spiritual needs:** People may come to church seeking entertainment, fellowship, emotional or material support. These needs can be satisfied by many other agencies and social settings. Meeting spiritual needs is different.

Blaise Pascal, the renowned scientist and philosopher, said, “*There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of each man which cannot be satisfied by any created thing but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ.*” All other needs can be filled by other sources, religions, and agencies outside the church; the church is the natural source of meeting the spiritual hunger in the world today. This is central to the church’s mission.

- **Clear Expectations:** While the grace of God is free, spiritual growth has a cost. In return for meeting our spiritual needs, we all need well-defined expectations required in meeting our spiritual hunger. Ambiguity is the most destructive cause in any relationship. Expectations that are clearly communicated enhance a sense of commitment.

For fear of losing people, the church often fails in setting reasonable expectations of its members. It is interesting to note that one of the fastest-growing churches, the Mormon Church, sets very clear expectations of its members. Setting high standards of conduct and commitment for its followers, Islam is often called the fastest-growing religion.

### *Giving: What Can I Contribute?*

Healthy relationships are reciprocal. We all have an innate desire to give back and invest in what we believe. While it is easy to measure and track financial giving, this could be the worst indicator of member engagement. The story of the widow's mite or the widow's offering (Mark 12:41–44) highlights that God looks at our heart, not our pocketbook. In our North American culture, money is a cheap commodity. A more appropriate yardstick is based on the parable of the talents in Matthew 25. We will discuss this in more detail in the section about “Talent Stewardship” later.

### *Belonging: How Do I Belong?*

We all have a deep need to belong and identify with people. Present social dynamics have played havoc with our extended family structures. There is a growing hunger for meaningful, supportive relationships such as these offered in the church family. Many factors contribute to a clear sense of belonging:

- **Purpose:** Jack Welch, the ex-chairman of General Electric, said, *“People work for money, but would give their life for a purpose.”* Church leaders must continually communicate and reaffirm a clear purpose that ignites the vision and passion among its members.
- **Mission:** Mission gives direction and helps church members define objectives as well as life and ministry goals. For many, it is hard to find their mission in the day-to-day jobs. The church has a very unique role to

play in reigniting a sense of passion in the life of seekers and its members.

- **Recognition:** From early childhood, we have a need to be recognized and appreciated. We need to belong to a people or a team where we are noticed and appreciated for our contributions. While it is a personal responsibility to seek out such teams, leaders have a responsibility to create a culture of inclusion, appreciation, and recognition.

More importantly, each of us has a responsibility to play affirming roles in the life of others in the church family. Yes, you are your brothers’ keeper.

- **Friends:** Friendship is the comfortable space where openness, transparency, and support flourish. We all need friends. Christ identified this need and provided a wonderful model through His relationship with His disciples. *“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends...”* John 15:15

### *Growing: Am I Developing?*

From early childhood, deep in the heart of each of us is an instinct and desire to grow. Life in all of its aspects does not stand still. If we are not growing, we atrophy and diminish.

Providing a structure that supports measurable sustainable growth enhances the sense of belonging. **We value what we measure.**

While it may be hard to measure spiritual growth, we are responsible to measure what we can and let God measure what we can't. This creates a culture of clear expectations.

### *What Is Talent Stewardship?*

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Most pastors find it hard to preach about tithing and giving. One pastor told me, *“We do not want people to think that we are always after their money. The church has been seen in the past as hungry for people’s money.”*



I understand how pastors feel; money matters are one of the most awkward topics to preach about. But the need today is to teach about talent stewardship. It is not about money anymore. It is about the stewardship of life. The truth is that when people give their lives to Jesus and the church family, obedience to the biblical giving of their finances is the natural and joyful outcome.

In Matthew 25, the parable of the talents, Jesus highlights that we each are stewards of the life and talents we are given. We each will give an account on two clear measurements:

- **First, the master will ask whether we know what we are given.** In Matthew 25, when the master returned to the servants each of them was able to clearly articulate what he was given. This is very important because if we do not know what we are given, we will not appreciate it or use it and we are likely to devalue it. Also, if we do not know it well enough to clearly articulate it, others will assume our talents based on their needs and expectations.
- **Second, the master will ask you whether we invested your talents where they bring the greatest return.** You may recall that the master reprimanded the servant who buried his talents saying, “...you ought to have (*at least*) invested my money with the bankers.”

**In other words** the question the master is asking each of us is, “Are you investing the talents I have given you where they are developed, where they grow and bring the greatest return for the Kingdom?”

This is not a selfish request on the part of the master. It is for our good. Based on research by the Gallup Organization, people who use their talents and strengths every day are **300%** more likely to report having an excellent quality of life, **600%** more likely to be engaged at work, and **8%** more productive.

Regretfully, only **17%** of those surveyed have an opportunity to use their strengths at work. The

church is the best place where God’s people can use their strengths in high-value, purpose-driven roles that can energize them so they can cope with the demands of life. **This could be the greatest driver of congregational engagement.**

What if your local church does not have the opportunities or need for your talents? Does this release you from your talent stewardship responsibilities? While your first priority is your church family, your talents were given by God for the Kingdom of God. Prayerfully search out serving opportunities with the many God-honoring missions and ministries.

**Question:** Would you like to compare your engagement to others who have a strong relationship with God and the church? “My Church Survey” is confidential and follows the four steps outlined above. Try it.

<https://nomoreoverload.com/church/>

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### May We Help?

**Question:** Do you know your Strengths? Are you Living Your Strength?

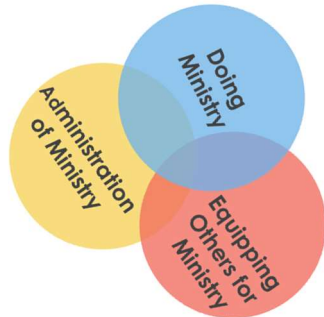
The Strengths Workshop is designed to help you discover your God-given talents and apply your strengths in fulfilling life calling at home, at work and in the church.

Based on Mathew 25, and using the world-renowned StrengthsFinder2.0 as an assessment tool, this workshop is a stewardship and leadership development. See <https://nomoreoverload.com/strengths/>

**Question:** Are you over 55? If you are, your best years are ahead of you and we call them the freedom years. **The Freedom Years Webinar** is designed to challenge, encourage and provide practical thoughts and tips to help you live life to the fullest and finish well. See <https://nomoreoverload.com/strengths/>

### Part Two – For Leaders

Lance Witt has seen it all. He has pastored small churches and large congregations. He was the executive pastor of one of the largest churches in North America. Out of great concern, he started Replenish <https://replenish.net/>, a ministry for pastors and leaders.



In the introduction to his book, *Replenish*, he paints a very sad picture of the state of pastors. He writes that:

- 1,500 pastors leave the ministry every month.
- 80% feel discouraged in their roles.
- 50% would leave the ministry if they could find another way of making a living.
- 71% state they were burned out and depressed.

If this is the state of pastors who set the culture in the church family, what is happening to the rest of the staff and other church leaders?

While ministry may have its joyful experiences and energizing moments, this sad picture of overloaded stressed lives grieves the heart of our heavenly Father. Through our consulting and coaching practice, we have seen the negative impact of overloaded lives in both the secular world as well as in the church.

Based on 50 years of work in the field of organizational change management we have learned that the culture of overloaded lives often starts at the highest level of any organization. It starts with leadership priorities, modelling, and effective oversight. With this in view, we encourage pastors and leaders to consider some **key leadership questions**:

1. Who is monitoring the risks of overloaded lives among pastors and church leaders? And what tools do we use for this very important role?
2. What role can the level of congregation engagement play in managing the risks of overloaded lives in the church?
3. In light of the following passages, **how do you set ministry visions, objectives, and goals?**

- **Luke 10:2** Jesus speaking to the future leaders of the church said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."

**Question:** Based on this passage, what drives the ministry priorities? Is it the harvest or the available labourers with their talents and congregational engagement?

- In **Matthew 20** Jesus gives the parable of the master who went to the market looking for workers. At its heart, this parable talks about the rewards and wages a worker gets for his labour. In verses 6-7 it says, "*It was nearly five o'clock when he went to the marketplace and saw some other men still standing there. 'Why are you wasting the whole day here doing nothing?' he asked them. 'No one hired us,' they answered.*"

**Questions:** In light of this passage:

- ✓ Are we like the master on the lookout for labourers or do we simply wait for volunteers?
- ✓ Are there labourers in the church who today would say that no one hired them?
- We addressed the **Matthew 25** parable of the talents from a view of personal responsibility and accountability. How does it apply from a leadership perspective?

**Questions:**

- ✓ As leaders, do we know the un-tapped talents God has placed in the church?
- ✓ Are we using these talents to bring the greatest return for the kingdom?
- In **John 21: 15-17** addressing Peter, Jesus says, "*Do you love me... Feed my sheep.*" He

spoke these words in His most precious final moments with His disciples, a time when people want to say the most important things that need to be said. It is at such a moment that Jesus sets His highest priority for Peter.

His message is not about *"I will build my church"* but about *"Feed my sheep."*

The attached diagram illustrates 3 areas where we are likely to invest our time and resources. We all play roles in each of these 3 areas. This diagram can apply to everyone paid or unpaid, volunteer or conscript in the Kingdom of God. These three areas are all good, important, and equal in value.

How we allocate our time depends on the roles each of us is called to play at a given time in our life and ministry. Individually and collectively as stewards of God-given time and resources, we are urged to take inventory.

### Question:

- ✓ What % of our time and resources do we presently invest in each of these three areas?
- ✓ What realignment and change would Jesus desire?

### *May We Help?*

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As a ministry of Integrity + Consulting we are pleased to donate the following:

- **The Engaged Church Seminar.** This is a facilitated discussion for pastors and leaders. It is based on John 10, Matthew 9 and 20, and John 21. This discussion seeks to build a

bridge between biblical truths, a purpose-driven church, and common sense principles supported by more than fifty years of experience in organizational change management. See

<https://nomoreoverload.com/church/>

- **The Freedom Years Webinar:** As I write these thoughts, I am almost 80 years old. Today, the greatest ministry capacity lies among those in the **"freedom years."** These men and women have talents, strengths, and wisdom gained from many years of service in the secular world. They have discretionary time that can be invested in meaningful life and ministry. Today's leadership challenge is to identify these talents and create engaging motivating ministry opportunities where these talents can bring the greatest return for the Kingdom.

**The Freedom Years Webinar** is designed to challenge individuals to live life using their talents where they may have the greatest impact. Therefore, it serves as an outreach and recruiting tool for the Kingdom of God. see <https://nomoreoverload.com/freedom/>

- **My Church Survey.** This online tool is designed for personal ownership of the individual relationship with God and engagement in the church family. As a byproduct of the congregational input, the consolidated reports serve as thinking, discussion, and planning tools for pastors and church leaders. See a sample report at <https://nomoreoverload.com/church/>