



### **Membership, Commitment and Community**

Church membership is a complex intellectual and emotional idea. Our personal definitions of “membership” are shaped by our histories, experiences and beliefs. Membership means many things to many people. At minimum, our understanding of membership is shaped by our beliefs about belonging, commitment and who we can unconditionally embrace and count on as “our people.” How we define our ‘membership’ within Grain of Wheat Church-Community is an exciting, challenging, and critical part of our year of ‘adventurous experimentation’.

In this Servant Leader Report we invite you to continue the journey of exploring what has shaped GoWC-C’s definition of membership and how you believe GoWC-C should define membership. As we have reflected, we have identified that commitment, belonging, acceptance and accountability are major themes that shape our personal and corporate understanding of membership. As a starting point, we offer a dictionary definition of each idea, we then attempt to offer some exploration of our corporate historical understanding of the word and how we have interacted structurally with each idea.

In reality, the definition and exploration of these concepts are different, yet inter-connected conversations. That makes this more difficult to tease apart, but also reminds us how simple, yet complicated this all is.



## **Member**

Dictionary definition: Any one belonging to a social group.

*GoW: It is our commitment to Jesus and to each other that makes each one of us members in the Grain of Wheat Church-Community.*

Historically, people have become members when they felt ready to commit to GoWC-C's priorities and values and to give their time to structures and tasks that are necessary to keep our church and community thriving and functioning. This system has worked well for some and has created the feeling of 'in' and 'out' for others; particularly for those who feel able to commit to GoW's values but do not feel able to give much time or commit to regular attendance at a variety of community events.

## **Commitment**

Dictionary definition: 'an agreement or pledge to do something in the future, an obligation'.

*GoW: It is our desire to serve and emulate Jesus that creates our sense of care and duty to each other, to Grain of Wheat Church Community, and to the larger world around us.*

Our community has been built around highly valuing and expecting high levels of commitment to each other and to "Grain of Wheat." When Grain of Wheat began, members were asked to make a life-long commitment and to live within a small geographical area; people's lives centered around the church and the people in the church. As time has passed we moved to a system where people were asked to commit to membership on an annual basis. The shift to annual membership commitment allowed people to accurately reflect their ability to make time commitments but for many was an inaccurate reflection of their commitment to Grain of Wheat's values/priorities and the people who form our community.



## **Belonging**

Dictionary definition: 'possession, having a close or intimate relationship'.

*GoW: It is our desire to be disciples of Jesus and we believe that deep sharing, vulnerability and speaking into each others lives are critical pieces of being a discipling church.*

We are a community that has strongly valued creating an intentional space where individual lives are highly integrated with one another. Concretely, this has meant living close together, spending substantial time in each other's homes; sharing meals, homes and childcare and creating space to share and speak into the intimate and vulnerable parts of our lives. As our community has grown and changed many of us have entered into

additional communities. For some, being a part of additional communities has led to an enriched life, for some this shift has made it difficult to be as intimately involved in GoWC-C', for some this shift has brought questions or tensions around where to commit time and energy. As a community, we are exploring the relationship between belonging and participation.

## **Accept**

Dictionary definition: 'to receive willingly.'

*GoW: It is our desire to welcome each person who comes to GoWC-C as a beloved child of God and to walk alongside them as they journey through life.*

In the beginning all of GOWC-C structures, actions and "policies," were based on the belief that acceptance, commitment and membership were inextricably linked. The founders of GoWC-C believed that discipleship and lives of faith were best lived in intimate communities. Individuals were asked to commit to devoting their time and energy to other community members and to the needs of the Grain of Wheat Church-Community. In turn, the community committed to journey with community members through the joyful and hard places of life and to offer support and love. Today, we are exploring what types of connections or commitments we want and need to have between individuals and our structure as an organization.



## **Accountability**

Dictionary definition: a state of being accountable, answering for, an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility.

*GoW Covenant: We desire to freely submit ourselves to one another in our decision-making as a means of becoming liberated from individualism, in order to contribute and receive according to God's unique gifts in each of us.*

Corporate and mutual discernment has been a cornerstone of our community development. Historically, it was typical for individuals to ask for a group to meet with them to discern major life decisions. Our desire for discernment is also reflected in our commitment to consensus decision-making. Currently, discernment practices are a much smaller part of our collective consciousness and are used with substantially less frequency. Accountability in smaller groups and in more informal settings remains an important part of many relationships within GOWC-C.

## **Structure, Commitment, Membership**

Historically, GOWC-C's organizational structure was tightly tied to commitment and membership. When individuals committed to membership it was assumed they were committing to participating in community life and giving time and energy to GoWC-C's structures. Our community events (i.e. Sunday morning worship, common meal, seed group, The Gathering) give structure to our corporate spiritual lives and to the deepening of our relationships. Among other things our membership system has given structure to questions such as who can be a Servant Leader, who can participate in the Decision Making circle, who can contribute to leadership searches and evaluations and who can lead worship, teach Sunday School and give homilies.

For some time the connection between membership and participation in community events and the roles has been explored and has changed. While there may have been some gains from this dilution it is extremely important that each of us acknowledge our communal movement towards structurally requiring and asking for less participation. We all need to assess whether we believe this the direction we want to continue on.

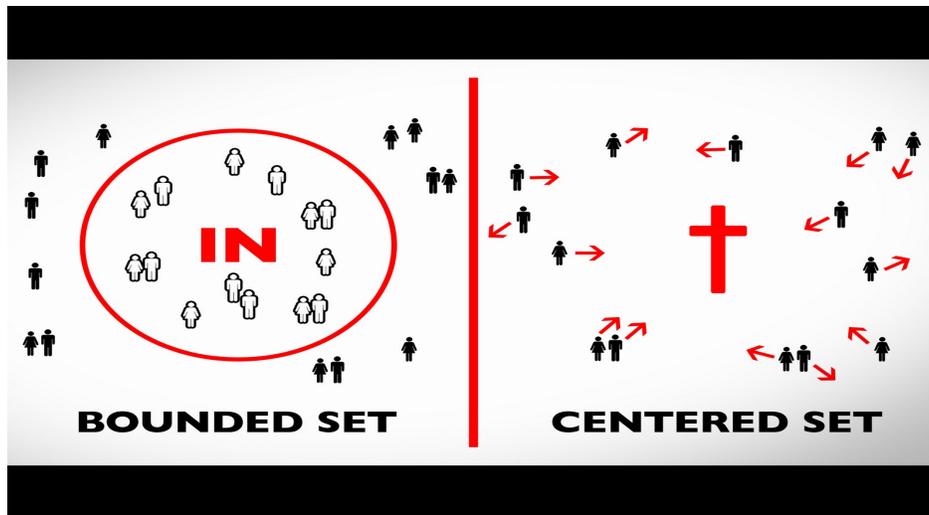
As we continue our discussion on membership, we each need to explore our understandings of the relationship between belonging, acceptance, commitment, accountability and membership. **The Leadership Team strongly urges all people who participate in GoWC-C to reflect and share their thoughts on the content of this report and on ways of moving forward in our membership discussion.**

As we look ahead to spring and evaluating our year of adventurous experimentation, we are aware that we have many questions left to explore. Philosophically we need to continue to sort out our understanding of the relationships between the concepts presented above. Concretely we need to make decisions about the relationship between membership and required participation in church structures. At the Feb.8 seed group meeting we will be providing a set of questions for discussions and feedback; we see this meeting a core process in hearing from the body. If you are not in a seed group you will receive these questions via email. **As a starting point here is a list of questions we envision may need to be decided.**

1. Do we want a formal connection between baptisms and membership at GOW?
2. How will membership be defined? Do we want membership to require participation in particular structures?
3. How will we decide who can be a Servant Leader, participate in leadership searches, on the DMC, in Seed Groups, chair a committee, lead worship, give a homily, teach children's ministry, who can be a servant leader

We invite each of you to prayerfully consider and enter into corporate discussion and discernment on how you believe each of these ideas should be defined and connected.

*Hebrews 10: 24-25, "Let us consider how we can stir up one another to love. Let us help one another to do good works. And let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope. Let us do this even more as you see Christ's return approaching."*



### Centered Set

The concept of a centered-set church has guided our thinking on this year of adventurous experimentation and membership. The idea of having a strong core, with outer boundaries that are easy for many people to enter in, is appealing to many of us. Ideologically this model is responsive to our desire to be a church that is invitational and welcomes people in. Practically, the centered-set model raises many questions which are linked to our discussion on membership and structure. Some of these questions are:

- What are practices that maintain a strong core?
- What are practices that create an invitational community? What does "belonging" to GOWC-C mean?
- How will we discern priorities and core convictions when there is a conflict between practices that invite exploration and practices that support structures?

#### A Centered-Set Church:

- Has a definite center, comprising non-negotiable core convictions, rooted in the story which has shaped the community- and ultimately in Jesus Christ. For Grain of Wheat – the 13 commitments are our core convictions.
- The centre is the focal point, around which members of the community gather enthusiastically
- Its core convictions shape the church and separate it from other communities in a plural and contested culture.
- The church expends its energy on maintaining the core rather than patrolling the boundaries.
- Confidence in its core convictions frees the church to be inclusive, hospitable and open to others, who are welcome to explore the community.
- Those who 'belong' are moving towards the centre, however near or far away they currently are in terms of belief or behaviour.



### **Winter Camp 2017**

A opportunity for intergenerational connection

Meaningful relationships and connections between adults, youth and children is one of the greatest gifts we offer each other. Our winter retreat is one of the primary annual opportunities we have to strengthen the relationship between our children/teens and our adults. The importance of having our kids know that they have a faith community full of people who are interested is immense. We invite everyone to consider attending all or part of the weekend and to see this as an opportunity to nurture and be nurtured by the blessings of our children and youth.

### **Members' 2017 participation in structures**

At this point in adventurous experimentation we have multiple structures on the horizon that require input and presence from the community. Although participation is not a requirement of membership this year, we are aware that there is a need for a substantial percentage of the membership to participate for these structures for the systems they support to function well.

We ask membership to strongly consider participating in the following :

- Feedback on Servant Leader Evaluations (Andrew's final year evaluation is currently happening and Linda's 4 yr. and Tessa's 2 yr. will happen in the spring ).
- Attending our annual general meeting on Feb. 15th This meeting includes reviewing and accepting the 2016 Financial Statements, approving the 2017 budget, approving signing authorities, and is a requirement of being a non-profit organization
- Attending the first hour of Mar. 15th DMC to hear a general report of Andrew's evaluation.

Part of our conversation for this year will include whether participation in these structures should be a component of membership.