

Partnership - getting more involved

Partnership (or membership as it is called in many Baptist churches) is designed to help those who have been attending a local Baptist church get more involved and become more committed to it. In Watchet Baptist Church, we have a Covenant Service once a year which is an opportunity for those who are already Partners to re-affirm their commitment and for those who are new to the church to become Partners for the first time.

Covenanting Together

At the core of Partnership are relationships. In a Covenant Service we consider our relationship with God, with others in the church and with those who live in the communities in which we live. Those becoming Partners make sincere promises (covenant) to live out their commitment to God within the community of the local church as they seek to serve those in their local communities. They will join together to say the words below;

- ***I commit to Jesus***

(Spoken to God)

Responding to Your love for me,

I commit my life to You.

You are my Lord. You are my Saviour. You are my example.

Please help me to become more like You.

- ***I commit to the people in this church community***

(Spoken to each other in the church community)

Recognising that God wants us to live out our faith together

and to encourage each other to become more like Jesus,

I commit to serving God in this church community.

Please disciple me as I open my life to you.

You are my community for discipleship, mission and worship in this coming year.

I will live out the vision and values of this church in partnership with you.

- ***I commit to my neighbours in the world***

(Spoken symbolically to those in our wider community)

Joining in with God's loving mission and going,

I commit to sharing God's love with you

in my attitudes, in my actions and in my words.

I will be good news in relationship with you.

Vision & Values

It's important to know the Vision and Values of any church before becoming more committed and involved with it. Not agreeing with a church's Vision doesn't stop you from attending on Sundays but it does make it more difficult to get involved in the life of the church. The last session of our 'Partnership Course' will give a bit of background to Watchet Baptist Church but more importantly will introduce our Vision for the future as we try to serve God as best we can in this area.

Stewardship – gifts, time, money

Jesus talked about using all that God has given to us wisely (Matthew 25:14-30) and this applies to all aspects of our life – it is sometimes referred to as 'Stewardship'. Partners of the church are encouraged to be 'good stewards', particularly with regards to the gifts, time and money that God has given to us.

Gifts

The Apostle Paul points out that each of us are given abilities, or 'gifts', by God to be used for the benefit of others. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 says,

⁴ There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit is the source of them all. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but we serve the same Lord. ⁶ God works in different ways, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us.

*⁷ **A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other.** ⁸ To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice to another the same Spirit gives a message of special knowledge. ⁹ The same Spirit gives great faith to another, and to someone else the one Spirit gives the gift of healing. ¹⁰ He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to discern whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, while another is given the ability to interpret what is being said. ¹¹ It is the one and only Spirit who distributes all these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.*

Partners are encouraged to discover the abilities that God has given them and to start using them to 'help each other' both in and outside the church community. There are a number of different ways to do this and many different God-given abilities - far more than appear in the verse above.¹ The questionnaire included with this leaflet is not a bad place to start discovering your gifts but it's also good to talk and pray with other Christians to find out how God might want you to 'help others'. Our Minister, Carl, is always very happy to chat about ways you can use your God-given abilities within the life of the church.

Time

Time is a precious commodity and most of us think we need much more of it! We have busy lives and are often tempted to try and pack them with many different things. But time itself is a gift from God and we are expected to carefully consider what we do with it. We are to be responsible people, doing all we can to provide for ourselves and our families by working.² But making time for relaxation, family and friends as well as work provides us with a 'balance' in life which God likes.

There are many ways that we can serve God through our church and Partners are asked to consider how they might manage their time so that they can spend some of it in this way. There is no fixed expectation on how much time we ought to give to serving God through the church and no-one is 'checking up' on us! Each of us has different responsibilities and at different points in our lives might be able to give more or less time to church activities – it is for us to consider individually how much time we have to give. Maybe you could spare a few hours a month to volunteer regularly at The Link; maybe you could turn up on Sundays half an hour before the service starts and help 'set up' the hall, or operate the video projector in the services; maybe you could offer to prepare food for our regular church social events;³ maybe you could become a part of our weekly ladies group, 'Liberty'.⁴ These are just some of the many ways you can serve God through the activities of our church. Please chat with Carl if you'd like other ideas of how you might get involved.

It's important to realise that we are called to serve God with *all* our lives, not just through church activities. Going to work on a Monday morning is no more or less 'serving God' than washing the cups after the Sunday service or playing in the Music Group. But as a community of disciples, we share a common desire to serve God by serving each other and those in our wider communities. The

¹ Maybe God has given you an ability to play music, or to see a need and help out practically with very 'down to earth' things like washing up, or to cook and be hospitable...all these are God-given abilities which he might want you to use to serve him and 'help others'.

² God even gave a job to the very first human, Adam - he was a gardener.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15

³ Have a chat with Iorwerth Jones if you would like to help in this way.

⁴ Ask Ruth Levett for more details

activities of the church provide opportunities for us to do just that but are only sustainable if those committed to the church are able to give a little of their time to making them happen.

It is very possible to end up being so involved in church activities that time for relaxation, family and friends soon begins to disappear and a good 'balance' is lost. Jesus had very busy periods which he spent serving his Father in heaven but he also had quieter times when he got away from it all to pray and rest.⁵ At our Covenant Service, Partners ask Jesus to 'help me become more like you' and this applies amongst other things to how we use our time. Consider how you can serve God through the activities of our church but also consider how to maintain a good 'balance' in life so there is also time for relaxation, prayer, family and friends.

Money

Money is another commodity that most of us think we could do with more of! How we use our money is a subject of great personal interest to all of us. It can also be one of the most exciting aspects of Christian discipleship. Jesus probably had more to say about the use and misuse of wealth than any other single topic. On one occasion he told a rich man to 'go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me'. In response we read, 'he was shocked and went away grieving for he had many possessions.' (Mark 10:17-22)

What we do with our money is no less an emotional and sensitive issue today but it is one that every Christian needs to address directly. Jesus, who himself lived a very simple life amongst people who were relatively poor, might not ask everyone to 'sell what you own' – things would get a bit chaotic if we all did that! But he does require us to take a radical view of what we choose to do with our money. The best way we can avoid the temptation of greed and misuse of our money is to see it as something that we ought to use responsibly for the good of God's kingdom. The following guidelines might help with this;

- *Live simply but make reasonable provision.* All of us are inclined to want more rather than less, but we should be happy to settle for enough. The apostle Paul wrote, 'I have learnt to be content with whatever I have' (Philippians 4:11). At the same time it is a duty to take care of ourselves and our families (1 Timothy 5:8).⁶ Many people have found that by first of all deciding what should be given away and setting this aside, they have no difficulty in living on what is left. Some do this by giving a regular amount to the church each month by standing order, or by putting a pre-decided amount of money or a cheque⁷ in an envelope each week and then putting it in the offering in church on a Sunday.
- *Give systematically and proportionately out of your income.* Paul commends the Christians in Corinth because 'they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means' (2 Corinthians 8:3). In the Old Testament the people of God were expected to give a tithe (a tenth) of their crops to God. No such precise commands are given in the New Testament, but out of gratitude to God we are encouraged to give a proportion of our income and a tenth or more is not a bad guide. The more we have the larger the proportion ought to be.
- *Learn the joy of generosity* – Paul wrote, 'Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work' (2 Corinthians 9:7-8). It is a spiritual principle that those who learn to be givers will have much given back to them (Luke 6:37-38).

⁵ 'As often as possible Jesus withdrew to out-of-the-way places for prayer.' Luke 5:16

'The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" Mark 6:30-31

⁶ 'But those who won't care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers' 1 Timothy 5:8

⁷ Cheques should be made payable to 'Watchet Baptist Church'.

- *Make your giving count.* Money which is given to charities including churches by those who are tax-payers can be 'gift-aided' in order for the tax to be recovered. This makes a huge difference to the income to the church.⁸ Additionally, churches have often benefitted greatly by money left to them in the wills of those who have been committed to them. In death, as in life, many have blessed God's work through local churches long after they have gone.⁹
- *Take risks in giving.* It is good to give systematically but it is also good to give spontaneously as a way of affirming freedom from 'the love of money' that is a 'root of all kinds of evil' (1 Timothy 6:10).¹⁰

Decision-making - The Church Family Meeting

The way that each church decides how God wants them to serve him is through prayerful consideration at Church Family Meetings. At present, Watchet Baptist Church holds a monthly Church Family Meeting and the aim is to seek God's will for our future. Issues discussed are things such as our Vision, Mission, Leadership, Finances etc. Sometimes a vote might be taken following prayer and discussion to decide on bigger issues. Only those who are committed to the church (our Church Partners) are entitled to vote although everyone can contribute to our discussions.

Those recognised by the church as Deacons and the Minister might work on behalf of all the Partners to present ideas, suggestions etc. at Church Family Meetings and 'churches should give to their appointed offices, whether ministers, elders or deacons, all proper respect and should listen to their guidance with all due attention'.¹¹ However, major decisions will always be made by the Partners of the church having discussed and prayerfully considered those ideas and suggestions.

The fact is that in Church Family Meetings, Baptists can be at their worst or at their best. They are at their worst when they allow meetings to become places of divisive argument, or when they are used by some people to get their own way, to exercise 'power' or to resist legitimate change. They are at their best when people realise that all of us together are wiser than any of us on our own. When God's people gather in spiritual agreement to seek God's will, to build up the church and to serve God's kingdom they are capable of great achievements.¹²

So because we believe that when we seek God's will together and act on it together we are 'capable of great achievements' in his name, we encourage all our Partners to come along to Church Family Meetings and to be an active part in the process of discovering all that God has for us to do and be in this area as we pray,

*'Your Kingdom come, your will be done
On earth [in our lives, in our church, in our towns] as it is in heaven.'* Matthew 6:10

Each local Baptist Church will have a Governing Document or Constitution outlining the processes through which decisions are made. Our Church Constitution is available to all – if you would like a copy, please ask our Minister (Carl) or Church Secretary (John Parsons).

If you have any questions or just want to chat about things that have come to mind during this session, I am more than happy to meet up sometime, chat on the phone, or have a conversation by email. My contact details are;

Carl Smethurst
Tel: 01984 639177
Email: minister@watchetbaptist.org.uk

⁸ Please talk to Karen Wright for more information about 'Gift Aid' and for a form that you will need to fill in.

⁹ For more information about leaving a legacy to the church, please talk with Carl or Karen Wright.

¹⁰ Section on 'Money' taken from Wright, N.G., 'Stewardship' in *Baptist Basics* (Didcot: BUGB, 2009)

¹¹ Wright, N.G., 'The Church Meeting' in *Baptist Basics* (Didcot: BUGB, 2009)

¹² Paragraph taken from Wright, N.G., 'The Church Meeting' in *Baptist Basics* (Didcot: BUGB, 2009)