



what a whole church can do to empower evangelism

TOPICS

- 1. Action Stations**
- 2. Dynamics that Empower Evangelism**
- 3. Nurturing New Disciples**
- 4. Developing Disciples in Small Groups**
- 5. Vital Christian Communities**
- 6. Ten Ways to Strengthen Your Church**

1. ACTION STATIONS!



One task in one Holy Spirit with many different parts

GOAL OF THIS SESSION: To apportion responsibility for the work of evangelism across the church, and to pray for one another.

There are many submerged ship wrecks in the Papua New Guinea and Australian coasts. This is what the captain calls when a ship comes under enemy attack: "To your action stations!". Every one in the crew has their part to play and they are confident to rely on the others to play their part. So, in the Body of Christ, the work of sharing the Good News of God is **everyone's** task, but each one has **an action station**. (1 Cor 12)

GIFTS

Scripture in many places teaches differences of responsibility across the church. Here is one of the main texts about **the gift of the evangelist**.

- Ephesians 4.1-3, 14-16 grow
- Ephesians 4.4-7 to each one gifts
- Ephesians 4.11-13 to equip the church, not to go solo.

ACTION STATIONS

Here are four action stations: **PEWS** =

- the task of **Prayer**, everyone must pray, but some are called especially. This is tough.
- the work of **Evangelism**, some are called out, as part of the whole Body, to be an evangelist.
- be ready to **Witness**, everyone must do it and some die doing so. Each plays one part.
- everyone needs **Support**, and everyone can offer it. Leaders watch and ensure it.

e.g. Everyone can pray daily the **'five seconds that changes the world'** exercise (Unguarded #4)

RESPONSIBILITY

Here are some roles in church and community. Below we list three responsibilities for each role, and bear in mind that some people may actually be two or three of these roles. As you finish describing each one, ask any who are in this category to stand and pray for them specifically:

Parents and Grandparents – act as the first and last resort

1. **Pray** for the ongoing discipleship of your children, that they will do nothing of eternal harm, that they will meet someone who will impact their lives for God.
2. **Love them unconditionally**, tell them you love them, never abandon them, cherish them always, discipline them for teaching not for punishment, make them know they are a gift from God. All this is modelled on God's faithfulness.
3. **Talk with them 'along the way'** (Deut 6.4-8) about faith in the midst of life, **talk back** at the television and other media, **ask them** their point of view and be open to changing your mind. Do not leave this task to anyone else, but seek other adults to mentor them.

Neighbours and colleagues – witness to what we have seen and experienced

1. **Get to know** them beyond the narrow expectations of your roles, do this gradually until you have an appreciation of how they are a gift to the world.
2. **Pray for them** to be aware of your distinctive faith, to overlook your mistakes and see your heart.
3. **Create** an event and **invite** them to it, where you share your Christian friends, leading up to a time with an evangelist who can speak with respect and skill about faith in Jesus

Evangelists – equip the saints for the work of the Gospel

1. **Reduce** your in-church commitments, so that you are free to be out in the community and connecting, networking, meeting for coffee, preparing talks that connect, create events, visit schools and prisons and hospitals.
2. **Be accountable** to your pastor and a team of church leaders for your integrity in money, sex and power, and for your public statements. You are evangelist, not theologian. Only do what the Lord prompts you to do.
3. **Learn more** about how to speak with a wider range of people, religions, age groups, educational levels, and about how to equip the church for witness.

Pastors – shepherd the flock for the mission God has given them

1. **Ask everyone** about their non-church activities, where their interests and enthusiasms are, and empower them to see this as witness opportunity of the church. Ask them to create the events to which they *will* invite others.

2. **Support evangelists** in their task in the community with prayer and funds, provide teaching and training opportunities, encourage them often and go with them sometimes, hold them accountable (supervision), stay in touch or trouble comes.
3. **Uphold before the congregation**, in Bible teaching and encouragement, their responsibility as witnesses in everyday life; allow enough time/training in the church schedules that mission and evangelism to be seen **as important as** leadership, pastoral care and worship.

Chaplains – front line representative of the church as a whole

1. People outside the church cannot tell the difference between denominations, so you must represent everyone fairly, **keep in touch** with them all in your area, let them know what you are learning in the community about mission and evangelism.
2. Chaplains can be **careful ‘brokers’** of church ministry. E.g. Hold a “chaplain’s fathering seminar” at the school, an event that might normally be done by one of the churches alone, but with less impact.
3. Be the **Presence** of God in that community, a reminder of the holiness of God by your **persistent provocative** and gentle challenge to the systems and powers that try to run people’s lives for their own small purposes. Speak up for people as whole beings.

Bishops – oversee the vitality of the Community of God

1. By person to person conversations, give your **practical and prayerful support** to pastors and evangelists to take risks and back them up with confidence and encouragement if it does not work. Arrange for training events, visiting speakers and published resources, maybe through satellite internet infrastructure. Maintain theological colleges that can adequately prepare ministers for the work of the Gospel.
2. Be a **role model** of witness and prayer, tell stories about your experiences, and pray with all your people.
3. Participate in civic events and business forums, showing the high-level interest of the church to **high-level powers**, letting them know they are being prayed for and watched; talk back to them that people are whole persons.

Some points of tension that you will certainly encounter.

- Rural vs capital
- Male vs female
- Older vs younger
- Evangelist vs pastor
- Skins and styles vs substance and unity

Learn to manage the tension or conflict without treating it as a fatal injury. Ultimately, we are all like being in preschool - learn to take your turn!

Q. Share some of your solutions to any of these tensions that have arisen in your ministry so far.

Planning Evangelism

Plan and train and support and pray for all four of these below.

- Plan for Personal witness
- Plan for invitation to programmes
- Plan for preachings *and* table-talk
- Plan and carry out deeds that speak

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4.11-13

Further Research – which are the right questions here? For instance:

1. What new models for being church and doing evangelism are emerging around the world?
2. What do younger people want and need in discipleship and in opportunity to for leadership?
3. How can we identify, train, set free, support and work with our evangelists?
4. What partnerships with other churches and agencies should we prioritise anew and which should at this time diminish?

2. Dynamics that Empower Evangelism

This is a summary of research 2007-9 across Australian churches and regions within the Uniting Church in Australia. **Time to get out your pens.** Read through this list twice so that you can be familiar with the range of what it says. **Place a tick** against four things you do moderately well, **a cross** against four things that you do reasonably badly, **a question mark** against those you don't understand or disagree with.

Enhancers of Evangelism in a church

- Theologies that emphasise life (Jn10), hospitality (Heb 13), disciple-making (Matt 28) and grace that empowers transformation (2 Cor 3, Eph 2)
- A listening, discovery, coaching questions oriented approach (as contrasted with a telling, 'we've got the answers' mindset)
- Crunch-time realities – eg average age 61, low young adult retention, 10% members seek faith sharing opportunities, congregations closing (*both enhancer & inhibitor!*)
- Spirituality quest in wider culture
- 34% of UC attenders belong to small study or prayer groups
- Hospitable, incarnational attitudes and behaviours – solidarity without answers or physical resources but with prayer; modeling of radical discipleship; Christian meditation; faith exploration courses and options (eg *Becoming Disciples, Faith Story, Alpha*)
- UC attenders often have good networks with unchurched
- Signs of desire for greater sensitivity to the Spirit among some members
- Rising desire for experience of community among general population
- Potential to learn from 'flagship churches' - i.e. those congregations that are 'initiating people into the Kingdom of God for the first time' (Wm Abrahams)
- Increasing lay leadership in congregations (fewer ministers + affordability) – breaking the clergy dependency cycle
- Rise of emerging church, fresh expressions and alternate faith communities
- Learning from our chaplains who are often in the front line of faith sharing
- Postmodernity – the lack of a meta-narrative in wider culture creates a legitimate space for the church to communicate its faith alongside other worldviews

Inhibitors of Evangelism in a church

- Cultural climate that doesn't appear to recognize/encourage specific gifts and callings and equip/place people accordingly
- Lack of faith-sharing language
- Substitutionary atonement language fails to connect in contemporary world
- Dominant culture that equates mission with community service (with the 'mute button' on for verbalizing faith)
- Church institutional culture preoccupied with survival and structural issues – little energy evident for cultural and systemic change that empowers evangelism
- Relational communication not valued in congregational or wider church culture

- Few congregations are safe places for faith conversations – many congregations are inward focused only wanting new people (if at all) if they're like those who already belong
- Perception in several quadrants that ministry is a job rather than a vocation with increasing emphasis on rights and self protection for ministers
- Time management struggles for many ministers – failure to invest in Quadrant II (important but not urgent) behaviours
- Inadequate modeling of contemporary, authentic evangelism – lack of stories and examples of credible Christians fruitfully sharing their faith with unbelievers
- Evangelism seen as proselytism by many in UCA Crunch-time realities – eg average age 61, low young adult retention, 10% members seek faith sharing opportunities, congregations closing.
- Presence of 'cheap grace' + passive universalistic theologies that disempower disciple-making
- Lack of sensitivity training to perceive and collaborate with the Spirit's work in the lives of non Christians
- Power of privatized faith and civic religion in dominant UCA membership
- Biblical and theological illiteracy among many UC members
- Power of hedonism, addictive behaviours and self protection in wider culture
- Rising sense of people feeling tired, victimized, lacking motivation to grow or change
- Many congregations disconnected from their community contexts – not seen as hope/life giving by wider community
- Loss of specialist missional staff (Synods & Assembly) to promote/encourage evangelism
- "We're too old to change" mindset in our congregations
- Evangelism seen as fundamentalism. Fear that evangelization is imposing our beliefs on others
- Opting out of connecting with the community – our church agencies do that for us!
- Expectation in many congregations that 'seekers' should fit in with us
- Fear that we might say the wrong thing (emotionally, theologically, biblically) if we share our faith
- Fear that others might think we are religious 'freaks'
- Don't know how to express our faith in everyday language

DISCUSS:

- What were your ticks? List them without discussion, beyond what is required to understand them. What will we do about strengthening them further?
- What were your question marks? List them without discussion, beyond what is required to understand them. What can we do to address those questions? Do they present us with a series of topics for elders meetings, sermons, small group sessions, etc. Do we need an outside resource for this?
- What were your crosses? List them without discussion, beyond what is required to understand them. What can we do to minimize their impact while we do what we are strong in?

Note that the focus is not about fixing your weakness but about building on your strengths and finding the ways to address the questions in small doses.

Full document by Graham Beattie:

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/theology/publications/item/852-enhancers-and-inhibitors-of-evangelism>



3. Nurturing New Disciples

by John Mallison and Ian Robinson

GOAL

To learn best practice and important content for nurturing new disciples.

INTRODUCTION: St Paul and St Norm

The apostle Paul took seriously his nurturing of new disciples. He said to his friends in Thessalonica: “You are our witnesses, and so is God, that our conduct towards you who believe was pure, right and without fault. You know that we treated each one of you just as a father treats his own children. We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share in his own Kingdom and glory.” (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Then, in Luke's report of a speech before the elders of Ephesus, Paul recalls his ministry. “Watch, then, and remember that with many tears, day and night, I taught every one of you for three years (Acts 20:31).

Norm, a very active, godly man in one of John Mallison's churches, was a carpenter who had a pastor's heart. He took seriously his assignments to care for others, especially young people and new Christians. We assigned him to follow up a builder and his wife who had been recently converted. He frequently shared meals with them in his home, brought them to church where he sat with them, introduced them to others, and made them feel comfortable and wanted. To help this couple develop their devotional life, he met with them for breakfast once a week. During these breakfasts they read Scriptures – which he briefly explained – and then they prayed together.

Q. What nurture did you receive as a new Christian, and how did it help? What were your feelings at the time?

OR what assistance would you have appreciated?

BIBLE TEACHING

1. Authentic Christian Discipleship Involves:

Beginning (Born again John 3:3; New creation 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Becoming (Matthew 11:28-30); 1 Peter 2:1-3; Ephesians 3:16-19)

Belonging (John 14.1-3; 15.7-8). Most people ‘belong’ before they ‘believe’.

Ministering (Jn 4.28-30; Matthew 28:18-20; John 13:1-17; Acts 1:5,8)

Leading (1 Timothy 4:11-14; 2 Timothy 1:6,7; 4:1-5).

Although there is a logical sequence here, real people seem to start anywhere! E.g. Jn 4.28-30

2. Framework of Support for New Disciples:

- Be a mentor
- Find them a task to do, especially for males.
- Establish a beginner's group if possible
- Lead them to a church that is a supportive community
- Help them find 3-5 Christian friends

To lead new followers of Jesus Christ to Christian maturity, to become the persons God wants them to be, is a long-term process, **requiring all the help available** through the Holy Spirit working directly with them and through other more mature followers of Christ.

3. Make this a Priority Task

Slippery priorities. The most important thing is to make sure that the most important thing remains the most important thing!

- Romans 15.1-2 The church changes towards the needs of the weaker ones.
- Matthew 18.1-6 Give priority to the needs of the little ones. Old timers have to do most of the changing.
- Acts 9. How hard it was for the church leader (Peter) to be open to change.

4. BASIC ITEMS FOR BEGINNER-MENTOR DISCUSSIONS

Firstly take them through **the steps of faith** in Christ to ensure they have made a clear commitment to Christ (eg. Romans 5:8; 3:22,23; Ephesians 2:8,9; John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 5:17). (Refer to the notes for "The Gospel Put Simply".)

Secondly show them **who they are to love** and ask them how they will begin to do this. Matthew 5.43-44; 19.19; 22.37-39; John 15.12.

The Other Hand

1. Little finger: Love the world,
2. Ring Finger: love one another,
3. Tallest finger: love neighbours as much as you love yourself,
4. Pointer: love God, with all your heart soul mind and strength
5. Thumb: love sinners and love enemies,.

THIRDLY , THERE ARE SOME BASIC TEACHINGS TO INCLUDE IN YOUR CONVERSATIONS:

(The following are extracts from a booklet "Becoming a Follower of Jesus Christ" prepared by John Mallison. It is available, with diagrams, on John Mallison's website www.johnmallison.com). You may have another way to do the same thing as this.

i. Our relationship with God needs to be alive and growing:

For any love to grow, one needs to spend time with the other person. In our relationship with God this is achieved **by prayer**, and by knowing, understanding and putting into practice the teachings of the Bible. **When will you make time to pray.**

It also grows through **fellowship** with other followers of Christ, sharing faith with each other and showing love and concern for each other in practical ways. **When will you meet up?**

We need to make God Lord of **every area of our lives**, so learn how. Work/study? Girl/boy? Family? Money? Recreation? Seek support from others who are trying to live this way. Alone, it is just too hard! **Share honestly** your victories and struggles, always framed by scripture.

We need to pray that the new power of God within us flows out into our everyday living making us more like God intended us to be through activities which become **channels of his grace**, opposing the evil forces which spoil our lives.

Explain that all this is **what the church is here for**.

ii. **Think straight - The 1,2,3s of the Christian Life**

One body

We are not saved to an individualistic Christian existence. By faith we are born into the family of God. We can't be truly Christian alone; we need each other. In becoming like Christ we need each other's ministry—each other's love, care, counsel and prayers (Ephesians 4:25..."we are members one of another"). When we gather with other believers in worship, fellowship and service we both receive and give. Each has a special role to fulfil.

We need to be involved in the local expression of the "Body of Christ" – a Christ-centred church, and also if at all possible, a small group of disciples who are eager to grow and serve. The small group should be a smaller expression of the large community of faith.

Q. What is the church's role in 'building up one another' Hebrews 10.23-25? Would a newcomer say that your church looks like that?

Two natures

Many get confused when they experience the continuing evil potential within them after their commitment to Christ. OR they see the bad behaviour of a Christian leader. OR a prayer is not answered. OR they see that we do not always agree. They need to grasp two natures are in conflict.

Within each follower of Christ there is a potential for evil and a potential for good. The "old nature" is that self-centred, rebellious spirit which dictated our former way of life. These old ways have to be abandoned (Ephesians 4:22). But this is no negative appeal to merely abandon evil ways. Such would result in a vacuum which would quickly revert back to former ways. The new God-like nature has to become part of us (Ephesians 4:24).

In Galatians 4:16-25 Paul develops this concept further calling the two natures "the flesh" and "the spirit". They are opposed to each other, the old nature seeking to draw us away from God and the new

nature, created by God, the Holy Spirit, restoring the image of God (“in true righteousness and holiness” Ephesians 4:24) and strengthening our relationship with God.

Most new followers of Jesus Christ become concerned about a new sensitivity to sin in their lives. Christians are not perfect. The potential for evil regularly surfaces in un-Christlike attitudes and behaviour. But the renewing force of the Holy Spirit is present to set us free to be pleasing to God.

Two dogs are fighting in our hearts, one for good, one for evil. Which one will win us? The one we feed! Feed the evil one with tv, escapism, greed, drugs, bad friends and cheap sex. Feed the good one with scripture, creative works, encouraging friends, positive relationships, self control.

Q. How will you feed your heart and your mind with ‘whatever is good, whatever is noble... (Philippians 4.8-9)

Three aspects of salvation

Our relationship to God is a developing experience and it is important to understand this if we are to grow spiritually.

Past: When we respond in faith to Jesus Christ we are forgiven and saved, or set free, from the **penalty** of sin (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 6:23).

Present: But that does not end the matter...it is a continuing process. We need to be **healed** of those things that spoil life and to become more like Jesus. God frees us daily, from the **power** of sin as we continue to draw upon his life and power by faith (1 Corinthians 1:18).

Future: Christians have the certainty that this relationship is not destroyed by anything, not even death. The process of healing is only complete in the **life after death** when we are saved from the presence of sin (Romans 5:9,10; 1 Corinthians 15:55-57). The Resurrection.

Maybe I don't feel that I have changed all that much. Christians are not better than anyone else and we struggle with the same things (Romans 7.14-25). We are **however** stronger to resist, more generous, more persistent and more hopeful. AND we are a lot better than we would have been if we had not met Christ, AND we serve the world in love, going often where angels fear to tread.

Q. Some will say that Christians are hypocrites, covering up their faults like a mask, pretending they are better than others. What do you say to that? What has historic Christianity brought into your family or your culture?

5. CHRISTIAN CONFIDENCE

How can we be sure that our spiritual experience is really from God and not purely emotional, not simply traditional or intellectual? How can we be confident when we or others say we are simply fooling ourselves?

The **outer** witness, the **inner** witness and the witness of **scripture** all agree, and all have three components.

The Outer Witness

The indwelling Holy Spirit produces a new quality of life within, which is evidenced in new attitudes and behaviour (Ephesians 4). The new disciple will **not always be aware** of this change. Christian friends play an important role in recognising and affirming this outward evidence of the new inner creation. Say: 'I see growth in you in *(name an area)*'

John Powell in "He Touched Me" (Argus 1974) shared his belief that when God touches a human being, the experience will survive **three tests**:

1. The Time Test: "The person touched by God will never be the same again. Even if change is not dramatic the experience will leave a permanent work". This is a long term test. Only time will prove that it was not an experience with no long-term effect. (Philippians 1:6). (After about **18 months, Egypt** tries to call them back (Exodus 16.3). Be ready to support them, for when it happens the Lord has allowed that they are ready for a severe test by the evil one, using their old habits as bait.)

2. The Reality Test: A proof that a person has had a genuine experience of God's grace is that it puts him/her in touch with the world as never before. It doesn't leave him/her living in an unreal world, but it deepens awareness of the world around. People should be lifted out of their selfish little world and become more aware of people.

3. The Charity Test: When people are touched by God they mirror the God of love in their behaviour. They become more loving. They love in the way Christ loved— the old "standing apart from others' needs" gives way to the new "identify with others", and the old "selfishness" fades into the new "self-giving". The love of God floods into their hearts by the Holy Spirit producing a new love for God and humankind. "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

The Inner Witness

Christian confidence is not based on feelings of happiness. There will be times of joy and elation, but these will fluctuate according to circumstances. The Holy Spirit who indwells the Christian disciple will produce an inner confidence, what John Wesley referred to as "**the inner witness**" – "When we cry, Abba! Father! It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." (Romans 8:16). "We know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us". (1 John 3:24, 4:13;5:10).

So, from these scripture descriptions, recall times of **closeness** to God or **guidance** by God, sense of **call**. What else?

The Witness of Scripture

Assurance, or Christian confidence, rests heavily upon an understanding of the Scriptures and an acceptance by faith of the **promises** they contain. The Bible is the record of God's revelation of himself

and his intention for humankind. It reveals his plan of salvation; it conveys the new covenant, the promises of grace. As with any covenant, it sets out God's part and our part. When we fulfil our part in a personal response in faith, we trust God will honour his side of the covenant. As we read the Scriptures and become more aware of the breadth and depth of his grace in Christ, and respond in faith, our certainty grows. (1 John 5:13 and John 20:31).

As we read, the Spirit **quickens** certain words and verses to us for our attention. Take note of these and talk them over with God.

A full appreciation of the authority of scripture is something that grows with experience. NO amount of debating it will convince anyone.

Grow in biblical **understanding**. Scripture teaches us how to tune in to the true nature of God and life by describing Jesus. Learn and understand biblical principles, God's character, God's people.

To say a Christian believer can never be sure is to cast serious **doubts** on God's integrity (1 John 5:10). It is not presumptuous to have a humble certainty that we are forgiven and accepted into a right relationship with God. The promises are there for us to claim by faith. (1 John 5:11,12; John 1:12; 6:37; 5:24).

This does not mean that all doubts are bad. Healthy doubt is a question in search of an answer. This is how we grow. Seek and you shall find. Unhealthy doubt is a fear that we refuse to face, a questioning attitude without looking for an answer.

There are a number of helpful **daily Bible reading guides** available to enable a regular routine of reading and the Bible. They all have brief explanatory notes and questions which help our understanding of the Scriptures and their application to our lives.

DISCUSSION

What characteristics did Paul have which made him such an effective mentor of new followers of Christ? (Refer to the passages quoted at the beginning.)

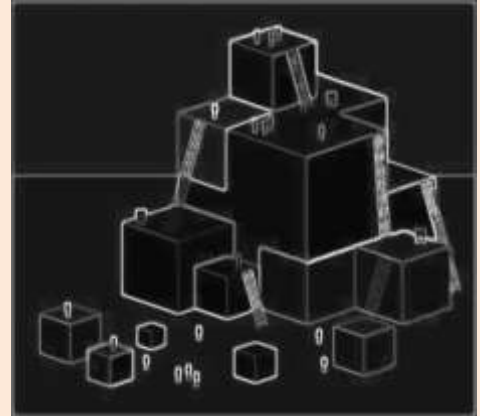
What characteristics would you look for in a person for you to consider them capable to fulfil this responsible role as mentor with new disciples? (Refer to both Paul and Norm and maybe think of some additional characteristics.)

What steps will you now plan to build up this capacity in persons in your church?

4. Developing Disciples in Small Groups

The building blocks of the church

by John Mallison



GOAL

To frame the biblical importance of nurturing disciples in small groups and how this applies to new believers

INTRODUCTION

Mark 3:14–15 tells of Jesus calling out the twelve to share in his ministry. These were a very diverse, young and inexperienced group.

Q What do you think might have been some of the first things Jesus did with this group? "To be with him"---

The small group is the basic building block of the life of the local congregation and is fundamental to the development of:

- individual Christian lifestyle
- corporate church culture
- leadership development.

Christ used a small group strategy

At the heart of Christ's ministry was a dynamic small group. Jesus deliberately concentrated his ministry on a very small number of people Mark records, 'He appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons' (Mark 3:14,15).

He set out to teach those persons in order for them to love one another and to pass on the good news of God's love to others. One cannot miss the significance of the twelve in searching for ways to vitalise the church of our day.

Small groups in the early church

The second reason which compels us to take seriously the potential of small groups is the example of the New Testament. The early church followed the model the Lord gave to them. In its infancy, the church was a network of small groups in which believers gathered to support each other in growing in Christ and in witnessing to their Lord.

The whole Christian community daily went to the temple to pray (Acts 2:46; 3:1-10). Here also was the centre of their ministry of preaching (Acts 2:14ff; 3:11ff) and teaching (Acts 4:2; 5:20, 21). But from their inception, the early Christians placed the private home alongside the temple, as a focus for their fellowship together.

'And every day they went steadily on with their teaching in the temple and in private houses, telling the good news of Jesus the Messiah' (Acts 5:42).

There are numerous references to households in the book of Acts and Paul's letters (e.g. Romans 16:5, Colossians 4:15).

Peter's ministry in Cornelius's house in Caesarea is one of the great turning points in the story of the early church, as the gospel is directed to the Gentiles (the Graeco-Roman world) with great effect (Acts 10).

The early church followed their Lord's example in building one another up in the faith as they gathered in small intimate fellowships. This they balanced with witness to their communities in word and deed.

Small groups in the ministry of the church

A third reason for us to seriously consider the role of small groups in enriching the life and witness of the church today is the place they have had in the history of renewal in the church.

New spiritual life has time and again been marked by the emergency of small groups. Francis of Assisi used small groups extensively. The Anabaptists, the Hutterites, The Religious Society of Friends and the early Lutherans were small group movements.

Small groups played a major role in the Methodist Renewal. John Wesley said, "No circuit (parish) ever did or ever will flourish unless there are small groups in the large society (congregation)".

In the last fifty years there has been a renewed growth in the small group movement worldwide. They multiply Christian character, the number of new believers and the number and quality of new leaders. However, clergy often overlook this strategy by only seeing the group at worship.

Q. ARITHMETIC. Do you feel some reluctance to focus your ministry on a small group instead of the whole church? There may be some good reasons for this, so share them with your group. Now, do some arithmetic - you will find that the small group strategy is more effective within five years.

There are Two Types Of Small Groups For New Disciples

- A short-term nurture cell
- An ongoing growth group....

The Nurture Cell

This is effectively a bridge to the wider fellowship of a local church ... never isolated from it. Some guidelines follow:

- Avoid having extremes of culture and background as members of the same group
- Limit the size of group to about 12 in each group
- Meet in a private home (if possible)
- Meet for a short term - six to ten meetings
- Enable all to get to know each other (See "Relationship building" below)
- Use trained leaders who are sensitive, gracious and loving
- Follow a program based on a reliable resource
- Be flexible and patient as they learn to adjust to new priorities and social behaviours

Q. As a new Christian were you ever linked with a group like that described here?

If so how did it help?

Some guidelines when caring for new comers in small groups

- Make no assumptions about prior knowledge or experience of the members
- Work at developing relationships, accepting differences.
- Seek to make each meeting an enjoyable experience
- Don't force members into participating during the group's meetings
- Avoid giving too much too soon
- Keep everything simple
- Be accepting, caring and supportive. Be unshockable!
- Do not keep talking about one person's many needs or big problems. Pray for their needs, or ask if they would like prayer for healing, and then get back on track.
- Help all to listen well to each other. If someone talks all the time, interrupt them and ask 'does anyone else have another view on this matter?'
- Be open to the Spirit's direction – try not to force others into your mould
- Don't involve mature Christians who you think may be insensitive, know-alls
- Spend some informal times together
- Find a practical and significant task you can all do together, especially for men and youths.

What to include in each small group session

- Relationship-building experiences (Use "get acquainted" exercises. See "The Small Group Leader" by John Mallison, pages 160–163, available for free on John's website.)
- Times for members to share their faith stories. How and why they came to faith, and how it is working out. (Not all will have time to share in the one session.)
- Ensure spiritual foundations are laid well (See notes for session 10, "Nurturing New Disciples".)
- Study relevant Bible passages, using relational methods. Small group resources with multi-choice answers etc. are ideal for beginners. See Chapter 11 of "The Small Group Leader")
- Encourage regular personal Bible study. Link members to reliable daily reading resource/s.
- Pray together using non-threatening methods (E.g. silent prayer, short written prayers, one word prayers, etc. See Chapter 13, of "The Small Group Leader").

- Worship God together – but don't use many hymns or songs as most newcomers won't know them.
- Supper – which is a good time for informal conversations.

Q. What are the main advantages of using small groups for nurture?

Caring Between Meetings

- Casual visit – 'just dropping in to see how you are.'
- Pre-arranged visit - "May I call and see you this afternoon?"
- A phone call - "You were on my mind so I'm just checking you're OK."
- A letter or e-mail- "Just to let you know you are in my thoughts and prayers."
- Meeting for lunch or coffee - "Let's have lunch or coffee together..."
- Sharing in a task - "Can you help me with" or "Can I help you with...."
- Recreation together ? - "Would you like to play a game of"
- A walk/hike together ? - "Do you feel like a walk together?"
- A small gift - "To assure you we love you."

Q. What special characteristics would you look for in a person to lead a nurture group?

Ongoing Growth Groups

See notes for "*Vital Christian Communities*" for additional guidance in conducting effective small groups to help followers of Christ to keep growing.

THINKING FURTHER

Imagine the church leader or pastor is not the leader of the small group/s. How can a church leader stay in touch with how all the small groups are going?

What are some questions you could ask so that you really get to find out how the group and the leader are going so you can encourage and resource them? (Hint: Don't ask "How's it all going?" You will get an inadequate answer.)

5. Vital Christian Communities

By John Mallison

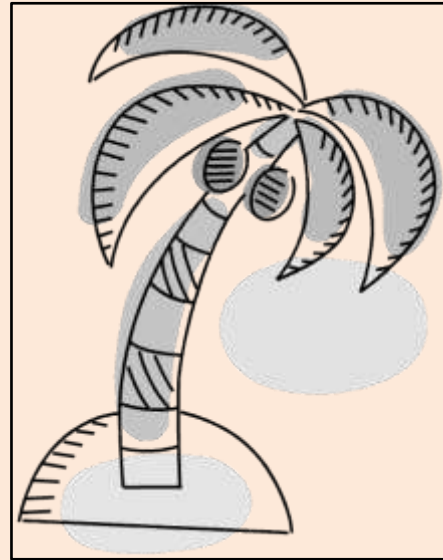
GOAL OF THIS SESSION:

To describe key characteristics of healthy small groups as they build up their members and the Body of Christ.

Q. Why is your small group meeting?

A FRUITLESS ENDEAVOUR?

Jesus said: "I appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last." (John 15.16)



The two kinds of New Testament "fruit" are closely related to each other. The fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5.24) in our words and actions (quality fruit) leads to the fruit of the seed (Matthew 13.23) (quantity of fruit).

STAY VITALLY ALIVE

These fifteen headings are a way of unpacking the subject in order to help you to get into the subject in small parcels.

1. Keep your group Christ-centred

- Acknowledge his presence and Lordship over the group
- Discuss everyday issues from the perspective of Jesus' teachings and example

2. Live under the authority of God's word

- Seek to understand and take God's word seriously
- Discuss what it means for your daily living – home, workplace, etc
- Pray for each other in seeking to be obedient to Christ's teachings
- Be accountable to each other in putting what you have learnt into practice
- Report progress or otherwise to each other.
- Scripture is our authority, not you, nor any human theologian. We keep going back and back and back to the Bible for our guidance, and we need each other to read it fresh and true, 'new every morning'.

3. Be a Holy Spirit empowered group

- Draw upon the spiritual resources which are available through the Holy Spirit. This is the key to your group's effectiveness from a divine perspective. It is the Holy Spirit who creates and maintains genuine interdependent, caring Christian fellowship

- Pray for the guidance, grace and love made possible by the Holy Spirit in all your group relationships
- Seek to identify, over time, the spiritual gifts of each member, beginning with the most humble acts of service. Without humility, nothing will be found, though we are also to desire the higher gifts. Make room for the use of these gifts.

4. Equip and support leaders

- Give some initial training before leaders lead, then provide in-service training, mentoring and support, in this sequence. The equipper says:
 - I do and you pray. then
 - I do and you watch. then
 - You do and I watch. then
 - You do and I pray.
- Keep alert to those group members with leadership potential. Assist them in hearing and recognising God’s call to lead. Provide opportunities for them to develop and gain experience in leading. They must freely choose, not be forced or jollied or pressured.

5. Work at developing good relationships

- Take time getting to know each other at the beginning of your group
- Be sensitive – don’t force people into speaking, praying or participating in the group
- Participate, don’t dominate. Foster the gifts of others that are greater than your own.
- Listen carefully to each other. Seek to hear not only words but the feelings
- Don’t judge or criticise each other in an unhelpful manner
- Confess no-one’s sins but your own – don’t gossip! Laugh at yourself!
- Learn how to handle conflicts positively and promptly as in Matthew 18.15-20.
- Be aware of individual needs.
- Be a supportive fellowship – encourage and care for one another

6. Minister to each other

- Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (*Acts 2:38*) to become more like Christ (“fruits” – *Galatians 5:22-24*) and gifted for ministry (*1Peter 4:9f; 1 Corinthians 12 &14; Romans 12:4-8*). This Christ-like character and giftedness is to be used to serve and bless others.
- The small group is an ideal situation in which to understand the New Testament teaching on spiritual gifts and then to discern, to affirm, develop and use each other’s gifts.

7. Care for one another between meetings

The members of many effective groups divide into pairs to pray daily for each other and keep in contact between group meetings when there are special needs.

8. Don’t make your group too big

- Eight to twelve in a group is big enough to permit good interaction
- Divide when the group becomes too large

9. Follow a plan for each meeting

- This helps make the most of the time available

- Include worship, prayer for each other and people not in the group, Bible study, discussion and open sharing. ‘Worship’ does not have to be music. But be flexible – respond to individual needs as they arise
- Begin and end punctually

10. Make a ‘grace’ covenant

- This should be a **group decision** and **not imposed by the leader**
- The covenant may include regular attendance, personal daily devotions and Bible reading, remembering each other daily in prayer, personal witness, honest sharing, not giving unwanted advice, keeping confidences, integrity in the workplace, maintenance of healthy family relationships, commitment to the poor and oppressed, etc
- Be accountable to each other regarding these, but do this in grace, don’t become legalistic, engendering unreal guilt

11. Don’t become separated from the Body

- Keep in fellowship with local small group network and the wider ‘Body of Christ’
- Seek to maintain ‘the unity of the Spirit’
- Groups can become divisive when they develop superior or critical attitudes to others

12. Plan from the start to grow in numbers (as well as spiritually)

- Keep an empty chair in your group to remind you to pray for others to join the group
- Pray in each meeting for prospective members
- Invite people personally and accompany them to the group
- Start with the knowledge that you will be dividing the group when the number exceeds 12

13. Be mission not maintenance oriented

- Don’t become a holy huddle! Spiritual life must be given away to keep it fresh and vital. A Holy Spirit empowered quest for holiness and togetherness should overflow in compassion for the spiritual, physical and social needs of others. ‘Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone’ (John 12:24)

14. Evaluate

- Make time to think together about how the group is going.
- This can be done informally by simply observing the group in action or by asking, ‘How are we going?’ ‘Are you finding the group helpful?’ ‘Are there ways we can improve the group?’

15. The group is not a substitute for your spiritual disciplines

- Your individual relationship with God is important too
- Meet with a prayer partner as well, especially for very private matters. (see Purple Cow Workshop 5 Unguarded)

DISCUSS

From your experience, both inside and outside church and in your family, add any other principles that you have found (probably learned it the hard way!) to be very important for vital group life. Tell the story as briefly as possible.

FURTHER THINKING

- On which of the above points, if any, do you need to work?
- What can you do about it? Do you need more information?
- What action may God be leading you to take when you return home to commence small groups or increase the number?
- Who could you ask to pray separately or together with you about this?
- Some surveys conducted of Christian leaders reveal that one of the major reasons for ineffective ministry and burnout is little or no real personal devotional life. Prayer has a very low priority. Why do you think this is so?

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This material is a summary of sections of ***The Small Group Leader*** – *A manual to develop vital small groups*, by John Mallison (Open Book Australia) Now available on www.johnmallison.com.



6.TEN WAYS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR CHURCH

Here are ten suggestions that have worked about how to use some of the exercises from *Makes You Wonder* or *Purple Cow Workshops* or *Wonder Workshops* in your existing programmes.

Start with your own small group, or whoever wants to start. Prove it there first. Help others to grow from your encouragement and experience. Give us your feedback on the website listed in the cover.

1. Sunday church sessions

If your congregation is fifty or less, like the vast majority of churches in Australia, instead of a sermon, do one of these exercises. Each Sunday do one more, once or twice each month. Some of the sessions can be adapted to use as sermon input. Make it your own with your own language and experiences added in.

2. Regular sessions for a social service team.

To keep the community service team reminded of the gospel edge to all church life and to increase their capacity to cross over with permission, introduce these exercises to their training, on a regular basis.

When “clients” *request* an explanation of why we do what we do, there need be no barrier to what staff can say. An *imposed* talk or pressure to attend church will be counter-productive.

Inspired by Purple Cow or Wonder workshop exercises, you can put up beautiful posters which say “Ask me why?” OR “God loves you and so do I.”

3. Prayers for the Lost in church.

Many churches pray for everything except those whom they would love to see come to follow Jesus. Ask the minister, worship team or whoever you need to, to make it a regular structured and listed part of Sunday’s “prayers for others”.

Make them holistic, not just scalp-hunting prayers, an expression of all our love.

4. Say HHii! Month

Also known as the “Cancel Everything” month. Once or twice a year, instead of inviting the ‘evangelist’ to town, invite the whole congregation to become the visiting evangelist! They are to invite their friends in to some beautiful hospitality, no excuses. Simple as that.

Cancel for the entire month ALL other church group meetings and committee meetings, in order to make time to **Say HHii!** H=hospitality at home. I= Intercession and Invitation. Get really serious about this , or it will remain an optional extra in their life.

Prepare for **Say HHii** with special prayer groups , special Sunday prayers and Prayer Triplets. Set up only the sort of special event to which a group feels they CAN and WOULD invite their house guests. Print really nice invitations.

Have ready an *Alpha* course or something similar to follow up the **Say HHii** month, so that people who come to your special event can be invited to attend it. This plan teaches the congregation where their responsibility lies and how they are to pray.

In summary, the sequence goes: Book up the month of no-meetings. Prepare one special invitational event at the end of that month. Print and distribute really special invitation cards to it. Set up special prayer. Set up follow-up dates and leaders for an Alpha or similar. Now, stop! stay home with friends! make new friends! Don’t be seen at church.

Evaluate and set the dates for the next one.

5. For Group Leaders for Alpha, Emmaus Walk, or similar courses.

Many courses follow the Alpha model of a friendly-dinner and discussion approach, however there is a weakness in the model that *Makes You Wonder* addresses. That is, group leaders are not always at ease, respectful or friendly with their own faith-sharing.

The group may be too passive and not react with their questions to the DVD or the ill-at-ease leader may talk too much, or answer too many questions. *Makes You Wonder* training moves them to the next level and the effect is multiplied through the groups.

6. A special study series for a small group or a weekend.

Advertise the course of training for anyone interested, in your church and any others. If you don’t get enough the first time, postpone the course and keep going wider until you get ten to enrol. Ask them what they want to do, where their needs are, and select the exercises accordingly. See the leaders Notes on the *Makes You Wonder* website.

Take them away for a relaxed weekend and do the bulk of it. Then continue to meet for six weeks. At the end of this short series, agree from the outset that you will return and do some more within a year. The point is to check how you have continued to implement the learning.

7. Working with an inter-church team on a mission project.

This works the same as for #6, but they will need to take a bit of time at the beginning to say why their church wants to come and do this. They may already know each personally from the town, through business, schools, sport, etc, but this is different so do not miss it out. It builds a deeper commonality among them. Then, their different emphases and traditions, and ways of praying will not get in the way.

8. In connection with routine family life and working life.

If you are talking about living the faith at home or at work, you will have topics to do with relationships and ethics. Throw in one or two of the case-study exercises too, tailored to the situation. That sense of practical context will help very much.

9. In preparation for involvement in a community festival.

As with preparing mission teams above, the festival team need preparation of not only their programme but their minds and hearts. This is hard due to the limited time and energy available, but also for the tone of a festival event. The casual activities of community festivals can make it seem too hard to “get serious”.

The relaxed approach of these exercise, especially entry and empty points, will provide ways of conversation, and provide new ways to lead in the content you display and discuss.

10. In reviewing the ways you can impact your community.

When you do the exercises, especially the entry and empty points, it may suggest new ways to engage with your community.

When you do your church future-planning, someone who has done these exercises may passionately get an idea upon how to reach out. Not just in conversation but in action too. You won't be just doing community welfare work, but entering people's lives with ALL the love of God, full of gentleness and respect.

Am I the only one to worry that something this easy, this authentic, simply can't be impressive? can't bring the changes it describes, can't move people along very far? Don't we need someone impressive, something dramatic? MYW will make you wonder!



Why do this study?

“What is my part in spreading the gospel?” How can our church see everyone answer that question? Which question is uppermost in your mind?

Not every Christian can be an evangelist. Only about ten percent. Yet, every Christian is called to be a witness and that is all they have to be.

All of us working together, each doing our part of the overall task of the evangel, makes the whole congregation into a healthy loving body. That is how we can sustain the journey.

So how can a whole church learn to empower evangelism?

- **Action Stations** – let’s apportion the responsibility across the church
- **Dynamics that Empower Evangelism** - a list of the best and worst qualities to check
- **Nurturing New Disciples** – what is best practise in mentoring new Christians?
- **Developing Disciples in Small Groups** – the case for small groups in nurturing disciples
- **Vital Christian Communities** – best practise in healthy small group life
- **Ten Ways to Strengthen Your Church** – how to use this material in your church’s life

These are not just intellectual, ‘find the right answer’ small group studies. I hope your group likes to understand God and themselves at more depth.

How to do this Study?

In your group, you don’t have to do all to topics. You don’t have to do them in this sequence. You can adjust the content so that it suits your language and particular emphasis.

Other topics in the PURPLE COW WORKSHOPS for Christian small groups and THE WONDER WORKSHOPS for secular groups, can be found on <http://makesyouwonder.yolasite.com/small-group-exercises.php>

Feedback from other users of this material can be seen on Purplecowworkshops.wordpress.com
YOUR FEEDBACK from your experience will help others. Send it to idtr@westnet.com.au

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