

THE MINISTRY OF SMALL GROUPS

Towards An Integration of Orthodoxy And Orthopraxis



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- A Brief Note On the Following Research Material –

The following research paper is the result of a core literature review of more than 20 books, articles and websites in the area of small group ministry, spanning the decades from the 1980's through to the current day. Much of the material is not only supported by anecdotal evidence but also reflects my own ideas and convictions from over 20 years of leading small groups and training small group leaders. The findings of the paper were confirmed and complemented by a field study questionnaire I specifically designed to correlate with the research framework used in the literature review.

The paper is by no means designed to be an exhaustive analysis but has been kept concise for the purposes of the project.

The following material has been an attempt to integrate *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* in the area of *small group ministry*.



- Overview Summary -

THE MINISTRY OF SMALL GROUPS Towards an integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxis

(A) IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: WHY GROUPS FAIL:

There are often many reasons why a small group or small group ministry fails. These are 6 of the most common:

- * Failure of leadership
- * Failure to train, coach, mentor or pastor leadership
- * Imbalance of core small group elements
- * Unclear or competing expectations
- * Stagnation, atrophy and discontent
- * Unclear or disconnected methodology & philosophy

(B) TOWARDS A SOLUTION:

Our ultimate goal is to achieve 'true gospel growth' i.e. to be '*making disciples who will make other disciples*' (Matt 28:18-20)

The injunction made to the first disciples in Matt 28 to go forward and grow the gospel by 'making disciples' is a paradigm for all disciples that follow. This disciple making function and priority therefore becomes "*binding on all Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Christ.*"

If our goal is to 'make disciples', and more importantly to make disciples who make disciples (i.e. *disciple-making disciples*) then we must return to two core questions...

1. What does a disciple of Christ look like, what is a disciple called to do/be?
2. What processes/activities/ministries need to be put in place in order to most effectively achieve that goal?

In this regard, we note that several of the key small group 'non-negotiables' listed below are also paradigmatic of what it means for us to *live* as disciples of Jesus and to *make* disciples of Jesus. Many of the aspects we think necessary to emphasise in the life of a small group are also 'non-negotiable' in the life of a believer. Biblically speaking, these elements are actually the marks of a true follower of Jesus Christ...

e.g.

- The call to be a disciple-making disciple (Matt 28:18-20)
- The call to a life of obedience, sacrifice, servanthood and suffering (Deut 10:12, Matt 16:24-25, 28:20, Mk 8:34-35, Lk 14:25-27, Jn 14:15-24, Eph 4:12, 1 Pet 4:9-11, Phil 1:29, 2Cor 1:5)
- A concern for and witness to, the lost (Matt 28:19, Col 4: 2-6, 1Pet 2:11-12, 3:15-17)
- The command to specifically demonstrate love to the brethren, and to obey the 'one another' commands (1Jn, 3:21-24, 4:7, Gal 6:10)
- The pursuit of spiritual growth, maturity and fruitfulness of living (Eph 4:13, Jas 1:4, 2Cor 3:18, Rom 8:28, 2Pet 1:3-9) through obedience to God's Word (Jn 8:31, 14:23-24, 2Tim 3:16-17) by prayerful dependence on God (Eph 6:18, Col 4:2) living by the Spirit, & bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Jn 15:1-16, Col 1:10).

This is what it means to *be* a disciple and to *make* disciples.

Therefore 'what' we then do in small groups and 'how' we do it, must ultimately work towards that goal, and towards fostering those same core characteristics and behaviours, both in the life of the group and each individual.

Similarly, any small group evaluation or review process should be designed with that overarching purpose in mind.

NON- NEGOTIABLES:

- * Not mandatory but purposeful
- * Word/ prayer/ 'one-another' prominence
- * Mission & ministry DNA
- * Leader selection
- * Leader training, recruiting, coaching, modelling & accountability
- * Accessible span of shepherd oversight
- * Review or sunset understanding
- * Evaluation
- * Clear integration & communication of ministry philosophy & methodology

THE NEGOTIABLES:

- * Group Type:
- * Group Gathering Method:
- * Group Composition Structure:
- * Group Curriculum Structure:

WHAT OF THOSE NOT IN SMALL GROUPS?

By implication, surely the goal to 'make disciples who make disciples' must by necessity remain the same. Therefore we need to work out 'how' that goal might best be achieved for these individuals.

- RESEARCH PAPER -

THE MINISTRY OF SMALL GROUPS Towards an integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxis

"Now, seeing the case of weakness in the converted is so sad, how diligent should we be to cherish and increase their grace! The strength of Christians is the honour of the church. When they are inflamed with the love of God, and live by a lively working faith...love one another with a pure heart fervently...suffer joyfully for the cause of Christ, and study to do good...becoming all things to all men in order to win them to Christ... What an ornament to the church; and how serviceable to God and man!"
- Richard Baxter - ¹

"By God's grace it is possible for everyone in the church to administer love and care, to be ministered to, to be given ears to listen and voices to comfort, council, reproof and rebuke - without a necessary increase in pastoral staff. This is accomplished as the pastor equips the saints for the work of ministry – Eph 4:12"
- P. Tripp - ²

"... we need a different mental picture of church life and ministry- one in which the prayerful speaking of the word is central, and in which Christians are trained and equipped to minister God's word to others... where people are trained and taught to be disciples of Christ who, in turn, seek to make other disciples..."
- Marshall & Payne - ³

A Brief Note On Terminology:

The terms '**small group**', '**cell group**', '**house church**', '**cell church**' and '**Meta-church**' are all used to describe a broad range of church life and ministry activity. They also describe very different and distinct theological and philosophical models of small group ministry. Though there are often vast differences in structure and emphasis within these models, most commonly focus on a commitment to fostering personal relationships amongst members, to developing and encouraging spiritual formation, community, caring and discipleship.

The question of what terminology best describes the **role** and **function** of small groups also varies across literature, across churches, denominations and para-church organisations. It's not unreasonable to suggest that choice of nomenclature significantly influences the way churches and church members understand and engage with this particular ministry eg. Should groups be referred to as '**growth**' groups, '**small**' groups, '**gospel**' groups, '**Bible study**' groups, '**nurture**' groups, '**care and share**' groups, '**community**' groups etc? And how might the designated nomenclature indicate primary purpose? ⁴

(A) IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: WHY GROUPS FAIL:

"(Small groups) don't work. Small groups are things that trick us into believing that we're serious about making disciples. The problem is that 90 percent of small groups never produce one single disciple. They help Christians make shallow friendships, for sure. They're great at helping Christians feel a tenuous connection to their local church...but when it comes to creating the kind of holistic disciples Jesus envisioned, the jury's decision came back a long time ago – small groups just aren't working". ⁵

¹ R. Baxter: The Reformed Pastor: p.98.

² P. Tripp, Instruments In The Redeemer's Hands (New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2002).

³ C. Marshall & T. Payne: The Trellis And The Vine: (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009) p.99.

⁴ My personal preference would be to call such groups '**discipleship groups**' because this term best reflects their intended nature and purpose. It also reflects the spiritual reality that we all continue to be first and foremost lifelong disciples of Christ Jesus.

⁵ Brian Jones: Why Churches Should Euthanize Small Groups (Christian Standard <http://christianstandard.com/2011/01/why-churches-should-euthanize-small-groups/>, Jan 2011).

There are often many reasons why a small group or small group ministry fails. These are 6 of the most common.

- * A failure of leadership
- * Failure to train, coach, mentor or pastor leadership
- * An imbalance of core small group elements
- * Unclear or competing expectations
- * Stagnation, atrophy and discontent
- * Unclear or disconnected methodology & philosophy

Important to note is that these 6 areas largely originate from a lack of clear understanding of the disciple-making *purpose* and *process*, and therefore lack of intentionality in growing *disciple-making disciples*.⁶

1. A failure of Leadership:

There is often a failure to provide the structure, direction and training needed to assist small group leaders in the task.

*"If structured carelessly, groups can hinder growth, exclude people, provide platforms for negative or destructive personalities, and keep people from reaching their potential for service and outreach"*⁷

Both literature and anecdotal evidence outline common 'failure factors' in relationship to leader selection, competence, experience, lack of role clarity and responsibility overload as reasons for negative small group outcomes.

For example, leaders often feel...

- ill-equipped for the task
- a lack of clarity regarding role or responsibility expectation
- a lack of personal support, guidance, mentoring, training or pastoring
- an inability to enable group members to engage in mutual responsibility for group life & function
- a lack of confidence or competence in managing group dynamics & pastoral concerns
- a lack of time/ priority given to adequate preparation

2. Failure to Train, Coach, Mentor or Pastor Leadership:

*"Without training, delegation of pastoral ministry and responsibility to a small group structure is an abdication of pastoral stewardship. Small groups can be very effective vehicles for ministry, but only if we train leaders to have a sound grasp of doctrine, a godly character, and the ability to understand and teach the Bible through group discussion"*⁸

Both the literature and anecdotal evidence indicate that there is little, if any, 'pre-service,' or 'in-service' training offered to small group leaders in churches. Rarely is there ongoing support, pastoring or guided oversight provided by church leadership for small group leaders who often carry significant teaching and under-shepherd responsibilities within congregations.

⁶ It's important to note that the term 'disciple-making' encompasses every stage of gospel growth, from the engagement of unbelievers, at the point of conversion through to full maturity in Christ (Eph 4:11-16, Heb 6:1, Jas 1:4). The ministry of small groups is but one of many mechanisms that can be employed in the disciple-making process (see fig.2 'The scope of disciple-making' in the appendix). The Trellis and Vine describe the goal of all Christian ministry, in all its forms, as disciple-making p.153.

⁷ J. Arnold The Big Book on Small Groups: (2004, 2nd ed. USA), p. 32.

⁸ Trellis and Vine: p179.

3. An imbalance of Core Small Group Elements:

There has been significant confusion in recent years regarding the exact purpose of small groups and therefore what activities should take priority as a small group gathers.

*"There has been a shift in the purpose of small groups...
it is not so much thought of as a way of seeking God
as much as seeking Christian friends.
The vertical axis is not emphasized as much as the horizontal axis."*⁹

Despite the proliferation of small groups (both evangelistic and non) in our churches, much of the literature affirmed our own concern at their failure to produce any substantial church growth or substantial spiritual transformation in the lives of individual believers in their congregations.

In relation to small group ministry, these reasons were posited...

- tension over 'felt needs' versus 'study based' purpose
- greater emphasis on development of 'relationships' and 'community building' over emphasis on growth in Christ and gospel transformation
- greater dependence on leaders or members than dependence on God (pastorally and spiritually)
- demotion or devaluation of the rightful place of the Word, prayer or Christian life sharing
- lack of evangelistic concern or endeavour by individuals or small group ministries
- lack of engagement in 'every member ministry' within groups or by groups beyond themselves

In recent years the ground regarding what the exact *purpose* of small groups is meant to be has shifted in emphasis, and therefore the particular activities that must take *priority* as a small group gathers has also shifted.

4. Unclear or Conflicting Expectations:

Some of the most common conflicts and tensions experienced by small groups relate to conflicting expectations of purpose and relationship.

*"Most churches go so far as to promise their attenders that they will find meaningful, intimate relationships with fellow Christians if they join a group.
But if we step back and take an honest look at what actually goes on in healthy small groups, we have to admit this isn't actually what happens at all.
Too often we find the exact opposite.
In the end promises of close friendship at the outset lead to less spiritual growth, more frustration and fewer people signing up for your church's small groups."*¹⁰

*"... Agreements on the front end will prevent disagreements later"*¹¹

By far the most common conflicts, disappointments and tensions experienced within small groups, by small group members and leaders do not revolve around age, ethnic, theological or personality differences, but from unclear, conflicting or competing expectations by members, leaders or church staff.¹²

⁹ J. I. Packer: 'Christianity Today.'

¹⁰ N. Searcy & K. Thomas: Activate: An Entirely New Approach To Small Groups, p 20.

¹¹ Searcy & Thomas: p.194. It's important to note here that all groups need a clear sense of purpose, where all members are clear on what they are doing and where they are going. Most of the literature reviewed underlined the critical importance of setting out clear expectations and understandings from the beginning, for both group leaders and members. Expectations would outline the purpose of the group, the role of the leader and the role and expectation of members. Some call these agreements 'covenants', accountability agreements' or 'community commitments'. These 'covenants' or 'commitments' could then be reviewed and prayed over by the group at key reflection points across the year.

¹² It's important to recognise that churches create certain expectations of leaders, groups and members in the way small groups are promoted and advertised, and also by the way they go about recruiting members. The way groups are communicated and members recruited therefore requires careful consideration for it pre sets certain expectation of both purpose and priority.

These tensions can exist at several levels...

- unclear role, purpose or function of small groups within the church or within groups
- unclear or conflicting expectations of group members towards one another
- unclear or conflicting expectations of group members towards the small group leader
- lowering of expectation regarding group attendance, participation or mutual responsibility

5. Stagnation, Atrophy and Discontent:

"Without intentionality (groups) falter or become extremely inward focused... they pride themselves for having been together for 10 or 15 years. They study and pray together, but their lives are never changed...they never serve the community together nor come together to help neighbors in distress. They watch their children grow up together, have lots of desserts and refreshments while talking about the loving God of the Bible.

But of what value is it all? How is it making them better disciples?"¹³

Literature affirms that without *clear intentionality of purpose*, that rather than growing in Christ and bearing fruit for the gospel, groups easily drift toward becoming...

- venues of shared ignorance or Christian complacency
- inward focused, ingrown, self-serving or 'needs' driven
- cliques, clusters of discontent or disconnected from the wider church family or leadership
- resistant to change, restructure, oversight or accountability

6. Unclear or Disconnected Methodology & Philosophy:

"...the way your church 'does' small groups says a great deal about your ministry philosophy; that is, whether you treat groups simply as a structure to park people in, or as a theatre for disciple-making and training"¹⁴

"...perhaps we are losing ground not despite our overabundance of activity but because of it"¹⁵

There's often been no articulated connection between the philosophy of church and it's relationship to small group discipling goals. Rarely is there a clearly thought out small group system that correlates with the overall *goals* and *philosophy* of church. Like many church activities there can often be a lack of relationship between *'the parts and the whole'*.

When this happens the small group ministry can quickly become just an *add-on* to church life and community, just one of many competing activities within the church program, or merely a convenient means of relieving overloaded church staff of pastoral and shepherding responsibilities.

Likewise, in much of the literature there was also a general sense that church programmes and calendars are often overly cluttered and demonstrate a lack of a clear *vision for the church*, let alone a concrete or clearly articulated vision for the place or importance small groups, discipling or evangelism/mission. There can be an emphasis on *programmes over people*, where programmes and 'church activity' often become an end in themselves rather than a means to maturing believers.

¹³ A. Deters: Markhowellive.com

¹⁴ T. Payne: What the Guru Learned (The Briefing: Feb 2011 #389, AUS) p.16.

¹⁵ T. Rainer & E. Geiger: Simple Church: (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2006) p.20.

(B) TOWARDS A SOLUTION:

"We have now sunk to a depth at which the restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men"
- George Orwell -

*"The failure is not in having small groups,
but in small groups done badly, that's the real failure".*
- Sarie King -

The answer to these problems is not found in the development of a specific format, procedure or improved administrative structure but in greater clarity of *goal* and *process*.

Small groups by their very nature are organic. Every group will be different and function differently depending on its make-up, individual's lives, personalities, and relational and spiritual maturity. What is therefore important is having a clear *biblical goal* in place, followed by the formulation and execution of *principles* and *practices* that work towards achieving that end.

In other words, what is needed is a greater integration of *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis* in the important area of small group ministry.¹⁶

And what might the goal be? To quote 'The Trellis And The Vine':

*"The goal of all Christian ministry, in all its forms, is disciple-making".*¹⁷

And that would include the ministry area of small groups.¹⁸

Our ultimate goal is to achieve 'true gospel growth', both in the lives of individuals and corporately in the church. For true gospel growth to happen we must begin by '*making disciples who in turn make other disciples*' (Matt 28:18-20).¹⁹

This injunction made to the first disciples in Matt 28 to go forward and grow the gospel by 'making disciples' is meant to be a paradigm for all disciples who follow. This disciple making function and priority therefore becomes "*binding on all Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are – disciples of Christ.*"²⁰

Likewise, Hull describes the intention of the Great Commission this way: "*Disciple-making should be installed at the heart of the church, and the commanded product of the church is a fruit-bearing believer called a disciple. Christ's command to his church to make disciples provides the scriptural mandate.*"²¹

If our goal is to make disciples, and more importantly to make disciples who make disciples (i.e. *disciple-making disciples*) then we must return to two core questions...

1. Theologically speaking: What does a disciple of Christ look like, what is a disciple called to do/be?

2. Practically speaking: What processes/activities/ministries need to be put in place in order to most effectively achieve that goal?

¹⁶ Hull notes: "*few churches run aground theologically; most break apart on the rocks of methodology. Theology can determine methodology if the theology is thought out and applied*". Bill Hull: The Disciple-Making Pastor (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988) p.153.

¹⁷ Trellis and Vine: p.153.

¹⁸ It's important to note that the term 'disciple-making' encompasses every stage of gospel growth from the engagement of unbelievers, the point of conversion right through to full maturity in Christ. The ministry of small groups are one of many mechanisms that can be employed in the disciple-making process. (see fig: 2. in 'appendix').

¹⁹ Interesting to note here is the intentional 'intergenerational' nature of 'disciple-making' we find depicted in both the old and the new testaments. For example Gen 18:19, Deut 6:4-9, 11:18-21, Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4, 2 Tim 1:5, 3:14-15. It's no stretch of the imagination to envision that this model would have been a compelling example for the Apostle Paul to follow. He clearly envisioned himself a spiritual 'father in the faith', a 'familial' discipler, mentor and disciple-maker not only to individual believers but also to whole congregations (1Tim 1:2, 2Tim 1:2, Tit 1:4, 1Cor 4:15-16, Gal 4:19, 1 Thess 2:11, Phil 10). And Paul exercised his fatherly responsibilities with all the spiritual gentleness, encouragement, warning, rebuke and loving tenderness that such a relationship entails (1Cor 4:14, 1 Thess 2: 7-11).

²⁰ Don Carson: Matthew Commentary: EBC

²¹ Hull: The Disciple-Making Pastor, p.50.

In this regard, we note that several of the key 'small group non-negotiables' that follow in this paper are also paradigmatic of what it means for us to live as disciples of Jesus and to make disciples of Jesus. Many of the aspects we think necessary to emphasise in the life of a small group are also 'non-negotiable' in the life of a believer.

Biblically speaking, the following elements are the marks of a true follower of Jesus Christ...

For example:

- * The call to be a disciple-making disciple (Matt 28:18-20)
- * The call to a life of obedience, sacrifice, servanthood and suffering (Deut 10:12, Matt 16:24-25, 28:20, Mk 8:34-35, Lk 14:25-27, Jn 14:15-24, Eph 4:12, 1Pet 4:9 - 11, Phil 1:29, 2Cor 1:5)
- * A concern for and witness to, the lost (Matt 28:19, Col 4: 2-6, 1Pet 2:11-12, 3:15-17)
- * The command to specifically demonstrate love to the brethren, and to obey the 'one another' commands (1Jn, 3:21-24,4:7, Gal 6:10)
- * The pursuit of spiritual growth, maturity and fruitfulness of living (Eph 4:13, Jas 1:4, 2 Cor 3:18, Rom 8:28, 2Pet 1:3-9) through obedience to God's Word (Jn 8:31, 14:23-24, 2Tim 3:16-17), by prayerful dependence on God (Eph 6:18, Col 4:2), by living by the Spirit, and bearing the fruit of the Spirit (Jn 15:1-16, Col 1:10)

The call to discipleship and to disciple-making is ultimately a call die to self and live for Christ.²² It's the call to unconditionally commit our lives, our minds, our whole being to becoming more like Christ, and actively and intentionally encouraging others in the same (Deut 6:4-9, 10:12, Matt 27:37-39, Rom 8:29-30, Eph 4:1-16).²³

Theologically speaking, this is what it means to *be* a disciple and to *make* disciples.

In this regard, true discipleship and disciple-making is a *process* not a program. The verb '*to disciple*', describes the *process* by which we encourage another person to be such a follower of Jesus; it means the *methods* we use to help that person to become mature in Christ and so be in a position where they may then disciple someone else.

In this regard it means that disciples must be *made* or *formed*, not just informed. It's not merely about imparting theological *information* but about personal, relational and spiritual *formation* and *transformation* (Gal 4:19, Rom 8:29, 12:2-3, 2Cor 3:18, Eph 4:14-15). This is certainly the 'holistic' intention of Jesus' words to the disciples in the Great Commission.²⁴

Therefore '*what*' we then do practically in our small groups and also '*how*' we do it, must ultimately work towards this goal. It must work towards fostering the same commitment, the same core characteristics and behaviours, the same spiritual formation and transformation, both in the life of the group and in each individual member.

Similarly, any small group evaluation or review process must necessarily be designed and executed with those overarching purposes in mind.

²² In the words of Bonhoeffer: "*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die*". Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *The Cost of Discipleship*. David Watson describes it this way: a disciple is a follower of Jesus. He has committed himself to Christ, to walking Christ's way, to living Christ's life and to sharing Christ's love and truth with others. David Watson: '*Discipleship*' (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981) p 66, 83.

²³ The major issue in taking the Great Commission seriously is the intentional guidance of the church leadership toward multiplication. Christ did not say 'make converts', or 'make Christians', but 'make-disciples, an individual and corporate process that must take people from conversion to trained disciple-maker.

²⁴ France notes that until this point Jesus alone has been the teacher, and Matthew of his disciples' ministry has not used the verb. Now the disciples take over his teaching, which is the necessary application of his 'authority' (v18). They're to teach- not just abstract ideas, but to *observe all that I have commanded you*, the latter verb being from the same root as the noun for 'commandments' in 5:19; 15:3 etc. (and the same verb in 15:4; 19:7). France notes: "*There is thus a strongly ethical emphasis in this summary of Christian mission and discipleship, as there has been in Jesus' teaching throughout the gospel. To make disciples is not complete unless it leads them to a life of observing Jesus' commandments*". R.T France: Matthew (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985) p 415.

THE NON - NEGOTIABLES:

*" Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.
And surely I am with you always,
To the very end of the age"*
- Matt 28: 19-20 -

"Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ."
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer —

If the ultimate goal is to achieve true gospel growth in our groups, and to engage in making the kind of disciples, who in turn make other disciples, then what might that mean for both *shaping* and *directing* our small group ministry theologically and practically?

Our aim in the particular area of small group ministry will be to grow 'disciple making disciples' by developing groups that...

- * Are not mandatory but purposeful
- * Have a Word/ prayer/ 'one-another' prominence
- * Exhibit mission & ministry DNA
- * Have careful leader selection
- * Provide leader training, recruiting, coaching, modelling & accountability
- * An accessible span of shepherd oversight
- * Predetermined review or sunset understanding
- * Regular and specific evaluation
- * Have clear integration & communication of ministry philosophy & methodology

1. Where Groups Are Not Mandatory But Purposeful:

'They're to be intentional not incidental'

*"Small groups don't create disciples; disciples create disciples"*²⁵

*"You don't have to have small groups – they are not divinely mandated.
But neither are they inherently suspect or dangerous...
they are just a structure that can be fruitful and useful,
or useless and dangerous, depending on how they're done."*²⁶

*"Our goal should not be to simply 'get people into small groups'.
Unless Christians are taught and trained to meet with each other, to read the bible and pray
with each other, and to urge and spur one another on to love and good works,
the small-group structure will not be effective for spiritual growth."*²⁷

It's not the number of small groups in a church, nor the percentage of a congregation in them that's key. In or of itself this is no indicator of healthy growth or community. Spiritual 'activity' does not necessarily equal spiritual growth. Note: The failure of 'Willow Creek' is an excellent example of this.²⁸

²⁵ Jones: <http://christianstandard.com/2011/01/why-churches-should-euthanize-small-groups/>.

²⁶ Payne, Guru: p.16.

²⁷ Trellis and Vine: p.100.

²⁸ The 'Reveal' research of Willow Creek conducted in 2004 uncovered that, despite the number of members in small groups that one out of every four were stalled in their spiritual growth or dissatisfied with church and that many were considering leaving. Reveal, p. 2.

What matters is not whether people are in a small group or not, but whether 'true gospel growth' is happening for its members. Where gospel growth has become *intentional* to group life and purpose not *incidental* to it.

And by that we mean members are actively and purposefully growing in "*the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*" (2Pet 3:18) as well as bearing evidence of that grace and knowledge in their lives (2Pet 1:1-12).

2. There is Word/ Prayer/ 'One-another' Prominence:

'Their focus should be vertical not horizontal, Christ centred not group centred'

*" All pastoral ministry basically boils down to two things:
making those that are not in union with Christ know they are not in union with Christ,
and making those that are in union with Christ to live as if they are in union with Christ." ²⁹*

"By God's grace it is possible for everyone in the church to administer love and care, to be ministered to, to be given ears to listen and voices to comfort, council, reproof and rebuke - without a necessary increase in pastoral staff. This is accomplished as the pastor equips the saints for the work of ministry – Eph 4:12." ³⁰

"We need a model of church and pastoral ministry where prayerfully speaking of the word is central, and in which Christian's are trained and equipped to minister God's word to others." ³¹

The N.T already dictates for us much of what is expected of Christians towards one another as they meet together. And therefore explains what healthy spiritual *goals* and *activities* for a small group should look like. ³²

Biblically speaking, it's clear that the goal of growing 'disciple making disciples' necessitates that the priority and emphasis always be given to the *vertical* axis (understanding God through his Word) and allowing that to then shape, define, inform and transform the *horizontal* axis (our relationships together). Not the other way around (Deut 11:18, Ps 119: 9-16, 97-104, Col 3:16-17, Heb 4:12-14). The overall biblical model is that God transforms people's lives as God, through His people, bring His Word to others (2Tim 3:16-17, Eph 4:14-16). ³³

For small group ministry this will mean that the ultimate end and expression of all group activity will therefore seek to be '*Christ centred not group centred*' in all it does.

The end goal will be *individual* as well as *corporate* growth to maturity in Christ (Eph 4:11-16, Col 1:28, Heb 6:1, Jas 1:4) and the fostering of greater trust, obedience and dependence, not on group leaders or members, but on God (1Jn 5:1-5, Ps 52:8, 62:8, Prov 3:5-7).

As we look to the scriptures for practical guidance it is clear that the hallmarks of a Christ centred group will be one that seeks to grow each believer's knowledge of, and obedience to God, through reflective study of God's *Word* (Ps 1:2, 2Tim 3:16-17, Col 1:28, 3:16) by *prayerful dependence* on God for themselves, others and the gospel (Jas 5: 13,16, Col 4:2-3) and where biblical and pastoral *one-another-ministry* can be exercised.

²⁹ John Owen.

³⁰ D. Tripp.

³¹ Trellis and Vine: p. 99.

³² For example, we know that when Christ calls individuals to follow him they are also called into common discipleship. Christ calls each believer to share their lives both with him and with one another in love (Jn 15:16-17). The N.T 'one another' commands also make it clear that it is every Christians obligation and responsibility to practice such things as - love (Jn 13:34), instruction (Rom 15:14, 1Cor 12:25) speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15), teaching and admonishing (Col 3:16), encouraging and building up (1Thess 5:11), spurring each other on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), confessing sins (Jas 5:16), praying (Jas 5:16, Eph 6:18), using their gifts to serve (1Pet 3:7-10), carrying each other's burdens (Gal 6:2), forgiving (Eph 4:32), submitting out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21), devotion (Rom 12:10), acceptance (Rom 15:7), patience, kindness and compassion (Eph 4:2, 32), as an act of spiritual obedience and to build up the body of Christ.

³³ Tripp notes here that personal ministry is about people loving people, but in a way that includes bringing them God's Word. "*This is the 'truth in love' model Paul describes in Ephesians 4. The combination of powerful truth wrapped in self-sacrificing love is what God uses to transform people*". Tripp: p21.

For example where each believer is...

- * Exercising hospitality (1Pet 4:9)
- * Prayerfully speaking the truth to one another in love (Eph 4:15-16, 25, 5:19)
- * Acceptance, devotion, concern & prayer for one another (Rom 12:10,15:7, Gal 6:2, Jas 5:16)
- * Teaching, admonishing, exhorting, correcting, building-up and encouraging one another through mutual instruction and Christ like loving (2Tim 3:16, Rom 15:14, Col 3:16, Heb 3:12-13, 10:24-25, Jn 13:34-35)
- * Willing to confess sins to one another so that others can pray for spiritual healing (Jas 5:16, 1Pet 2:24)
- * Carrying each others burdens (Gal 6:2)
- * Meeting pastoral and practical needs as they arise (Acts 2:44-45, 1Thess 5:14-15, Rom 12:12)
- * Spurring each other on in love and good deeds (Heb 10:24, Tit 2:8)
- * Using their gifts to serve one another (1Pet 3:7-9, Eph 4:15-16)

It's clear therefore, that for groups to focus on the 'vertical' over the 'horizontal' will mean giving priority to activities that specifically build the body in that 'Christ-ward' direction.

In summary, it means giving centrality to:

- * growth in God's Word
- * a prayerful dependence on Him for all things
- * taking mutual responsibility for each other's growth in Christ by commitment to exercising the one another' commands toward each another.

Therefore none of these important disciple-making elements should be deleted, devalued nor demoted from central prominence in the life of any small group.

It is also important to note here that biblically speaking, true '*spiritual*' and '*pastoral*' care is demonstrated by commitment to, and exercise of the '*one-another commands*' within the body of Christ.

The metaphor of the body in Eph 4 captures God's plan for his church and his people. Christ has given his church leaders, not to bear the full ministry load of the body of Christ, but to equip each member to join in God's work of personal, spiritual and pastoral transformation.³⁴

Therefore, for effective pastoral care to take place within a church ministry, there needs to be a right understanding of, and engagement in, these important spiritual obligations and responsibilities by all church members towards one another.³⁵

Pastorally speaking, it also means that all Christians need to be reminded constantly of the truth of the Gospel in their lives. This duty, this privilege, this honour of *living in the promises of the Gospel* provides an excellent opportunity for other Christian believers to engage in the mutual task of '*servicing us*' as we '*serve them*'.

This '*gospel pastoring*' for '*gospel living*' is a duty, a God given responsibility that all Christians are called upon to minister to 'one another' both individually and corporately.³⁶ All believers are called to engage in biblical

³⁴ Cf. 1Cor 12. Tripp helpfully notes that the times of formal, public ministry are meant to train God's people for the personal ministry that is the lifestyle of the body of Christ. Tripp, p. 20.

³⁵ The 'one another' commands are every Christian's obligation and responsibility to exercise as an act of spiritual obedience and in order to build up the body of Christ.

³⁶ Tripp: p185-186.

personal ministry with those around them as well as demonstrate a willingness to receive biblical personal ministry from others.

"Personal ministry is not about always knowing what to say. It is not about fixing everything in sight that is broken. Personal ministry is about connecting people with Christ so that they are able to think as he would have them think, desire what he says is best, and do what he calls them to do even if their circumstances never get 'fixed'...

It involves exposing hurt, lost, and confused people to God's glory, so that they give up their pursuit of their own glory and live for his...

It is about so thoroughly embedding people's personal stories in the larger story of redemption that they approach every situation and relationship with a 'God's story' mentality. We need to be filled with awe at what the Lord has called us to participate in! ...

*Biblical personal ministry is more about perspective, identity, and calling than about fixing what is broken"*³⁷

In his book *"Instruments In The Redeemer's Hands"* Tripp goes on to say that all Biblical personal ministry must be just that – biblical. This means that whether in the pulpit, a member of a small group or one-to-one, we're to understand and minister into people's lives from the distinct perspective of a biblical worldview.³⁸ That our goal in every arena of ministry and church life is to help one another live with a 'God's story' mentality.

That the mission of every believer is to *"teach, admonish and encourage one another to rest in his sovereignty, rather than establishing our own; to rely on his grace rather than performing on our own; and to submit to his glory rather than seeking our own. This is the work of the kingdom of God: people in the hands of the Redeemer, daily functioning as his tools of lasting change"*.³⁹

3. Exhibits Mission & Ministry DNA:

'Their gravitation should be outward not inward'

*"A small group is intent on participating with Christ in building his ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world."*⁴⁰

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1Pet 2:9).

"...as Paul's 'spirit was stirred within him, when he saw the Athenians wholly given to idolatry,' so it should cast us into one of his paroxysms, to see so many men in the utmost danger of being everlastingly undone.

*Me thinks, if by faith we did indeed look upon them as within a step of hell, it would...effectually untie our tongues....he that will let a sinner go down to hell for want of speaking to him, doth set less by souls than did the Redeemer of souls... O, therefore, brethren, whomever you neglect, neglect not the most miserable."*⁴¹

³⁷ Tripp: p184-186.

³⁸ In other words, this means that in each arena of personal ministry we're to be conscious of, and concerned with *"the glory of God, the sinfulness of man, the fallen condition of the world, the reality of the Devil, the grace of the gospel, and the certainty of eternity."* Tripp: 185.

³⁹ Tripp: p. 35.

⁴⁰ Arnold: p.32.

⁴¹ R. Baxter: The Reformed Pastor.

If a significant aspect of both *being* a disciple and *making* other disciples is the call to a life of *self-sacrifice* and *servanthood* (Deut 10:12, Lk 14:25-27, Matt 16:24-25, Eph 4:12, 1Pet 4:9-11) as well as a concern for and witness to the lost (Matt 28:19, Col 4: 2-6, 1Pet 2:11-12, 3:15-17), then we must ask the question - 'are we fostering this important aspect of discipleship within our small group gatherings'?

An important aspect of *discipleship formation* for small group members is the fostering of *evangelistic concern*, or *outreach*. The formation may consist of both - *attitude adjustment* (i.e. concern for the lost, de-privatising of faith) as well as *skill development* (learning to tell their own stories, building bridges to non-Christians, learning how to use basic evangelistic tools) as well as taking opportunities to engage in an evangelistic endeavour individually or as a group.

Or to put it another way, this is pursuing '*kingdom growth*' and '*discipleship formation*' by the fostering of *evangelistic concern* or *outreach*. Consisting of both attitude formation and skills development.

Likewise, an important aspect of *discipleship formation* for small group members is the encouragement and practice of '*every member ministry*' (Eph 4:12-13), particularly ministries that focus on discipling and disciple making. Here group members are encouraged, and given opportunity to exercise their abilities and ministry gifts within the group, as well as challenged to use their gifts to serve the wider body of Christ, and encouraging fellow group members in the same.⁴²

Again, to put it another way, this is pursuing '*kingdom growth*' and '*discipleship formation*' by the encouragement and practice of *every member ministry*, both within a group and within the wider body of Christ.

It soon becomes clear that Biblically healthy small groups, in which true gospel growth and discipleship is developed and nurtured, will have 3 distinct disciple-making '*disciplines*'...

An...

- * **Upward discipline:** the discipline of learning and prayerfully applying biblical truth to all of life and relationships.
- * **Sideward discipline:** the discipline of learning and practicing mutual pastoral and spiritual responsibilities towards each other through the exercise of 'one-another' ministry and 'every member' ministry.
- * **Outward discipline:** the discipline of cultivating a commitment to service and evangelism.

4. Where Leaders Are Selected:

'Our attention needs to be given to quality over convenience'

*"The small group ministry in a church rises and falls on the quality of its leaders"*⁴³

If the goal of small group ministry is to 'mature the saints' and 'make disciples' then choice and accountability of leaders becomes critically important, as does the importance of assessing the appropriate *character, competency and conviction* (i.e. *orthodoxy*) traits necessary for such a task.

Hull cites 5 reasons why such careful selection of leaders is critical: ⁴⁴

1. *It protects the product:* not reducing the leadership of Christian life or witness to the lowest common denominator but to maintaining spiritually mature, experienced, committed shepherd leadership (1Tim 3:1-7

⁴² Important to note here is that encouraging 'every member ministry' should particularly encompass such activities such as peer discipling, discipling new believers, 1-1 bible reading with a fellow believer or unbeliever etc.

⁴³ Bill Donahue & R. Robinson: Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) p.123.

⁴⁴ Bill Hull: The Disciple Making Pastor: (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1999) p. 147f.

2. *It produces a good product:* the church will grow and the integrity crucial to orthodoxy and ministry multiplication is maintained (1Tim 4:16, Tit 1:8-9)
3. *It protects the church from trouble:* leadership is based on objective Biblical criteria reducing the likely accusation of favouritism, or members aspiring to leadership based on ungodly motivation (1Pet 5:1-4)
4. *It models the objective:* this is Christian parenting. Teachers model their teaching (Titus 2:7-8, Phil 3:17)
5. *It gives something to aspire to:* the disciple becomes like his/her teacher (1Cor 11:1)

5. Where There's Leader Training, Recruiting, Modelling, Coaching & Accountability:

'The necessity of training rather than abdicating'

*"If you take care of your group leaders, they will take care of your small group system."*⁴⁵

If the key function of the church (and therefore small groups) is to make disciples, then the goal must be to *equip effective leaders in the art of disciple-making* through small groups.

If small groups are one, if not *'the'* core avenue of disciple-making in the church, then small group leaders need to be given not only a clear vision for their role beyond mere group facilitation, but also the necessary training, pastoring and coaching guidance to achieve it.

If small group leaders are the key delegated *'disciple-makers'*, *'under-shepherds'* and *'teachers'* under the congregational pastor then...

There's a radical need to reshape and to re think the following:

1. Who we select to lead.
2. Who selects leaders.
3. How leaders are best trained.
4. Who best to train leaders.
5. What content should shape that training.
6. How leaders are cared for, supported, coached, mentored during their ongoing leadership.
7. How the roles and functions of small group leaders are understood within the general leadership and oversight structures of the church.
8. How best to identify, recruit and develop future leaders.

It's important to not only provide leaders with opportunities for support and training from ministry staff or small group co-ordinators, but also by fellow small group leaders. Peer leaders need opportunities to learn from a *'leadership community'* i.e. learning from each other, engaging in, and gaining support from a peer support system outside their own group.

As well as an opportunity to provide theological guidance where necessary, training should aim to provide leaders with support, encouragement and affirmation, to help them gain confidence and skills, and to provide an avenue for accountability and troubleshooting.

In this regard, it is also worth considering running separate training or coaching tracks for new leaders and those who are veterans. These two groups are at different stages of leadership development and therefore have very different needs in terms of guidance, training, mentoring and support.

A Note on training processes:

A helpful model for any training or coaching process will incorporate the key educational activities of *'teaching'*, *'modelling'*, *'doing'* and *'replicating'*.

⁴⁵ N. Searcy & K. Thomas: *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups*: (California: Regal, 2008) p. 222.

For example:

- Tell them why
- Tell them what
- Tell them how
- Show them how
- Let them do it
- Reflect on it, learn from it
- Replicate it

Fig 3. In the appendix section of this paper offers my proposed '**process model**' for this kind of training. The method proposed is one where the trainer purposefully 'teaches by modelling' the content of training to their small group leaders. ⁴⁶

6. There Is Accessible Span of Shepherd Oversight:

'Keeping the task accessible not onerous'

The bigger the group the more relationships there are to be formed, developed and maintained, therefore the greater the challenge to engage *effectively* in the real task of disciple making, both individually and corporately. Therefore an appropriate 'span of oversight' should be determined by:

1. The leadership:

Taking into account the experience, time and discipling capacity of its leaders, as well as the likelihood of being able to share 'oversight' responsibilities with co-leaders or other 'mature' leaders in a group.

2. The group:

Allowance needs to be made for a particular group's capacity for 'optimum engagement' and participation in disciple-making activities.

7. A Predetermined Review or Sunset Understanding:

'The need to ensure there's regeneration not regression'

*"Many groups have become ingrown or focused inward...inward focused groups die. The idea is there's almost a lifelong commitment to your group, so the bonds can imitate those of a family. Unfortunately, these long-term groups are often nothing like families, because even families have an 'outward focus', that is, from generation to generation, children are born, move out, find partners, form new families... a family tree is not a straight line...inward focused groups face the same problem."*⁴⁷

Over time it's easy for groups to lose their '*disciple making*' focus and slip into 'anti- growth' or 'inward growth' behaviours. Clearly defined 'sunset clauses', or very short-term groups, seem to be the most helpful mechanism to ensure and generate group growth and health maintenance.

As a general practice it can be helpful to set limits rather than an expectation that groups will never change or alter...that's not a healthy expectation:

⁴⁶ In the realm of sociology and political science this 'teaching by modelling' methodology is known as '*the demonstration effect*'. It is used to describe the effects on the behavior of individuals caused by observation of the actions of others and their consequences. where what is 'taught' by observation in one place can often then act as a catalyst in another.

⁴⁷ Arnold: p.11.

Setting some form of termination or changeover limit:

1. Can help members accept that change is normal and not to be feared. That God and relationship with him is the only constant.
2. It helps members understand that their small group leader is not the only one they can learn from, or receive pastoral or spiritual support from (i.e. it can reduce unhealthy spiritual or interpersonal dependence).
3. It helps remind members that purpose of meeting is not ultimately about the group, particular personalities or preferences. It's about growing in Christ and helping others to grow in Christ.
4. It fosters an attitude of inclusiveness towards others.
5. Having new members and new leaders can sometimes force group members to change and grow in ways they may not otherwise envisage or have chosen. This is a good thing.

Therefore, pre-setting some sort of appropriate termination time, or instituting regular 'review' points, both for leaders and members, can provide a valuable and necessary opportunity for renewed growth and restored direction.

That said...

Pastorally speaking, we must also be mindful of those with special concerns for which some ongoing consistency of contact or relationship might be important for a time.

8. There Is Regular And Specific Evaluation:

'Always assessing, never assuming'

Socrates once said: *'the unexamined life is not worth living'*. So too the 'unexamined group may not in fact be thriving.'

Healthy small group ministries need to have a regular 'stock take' on the life and viability of its groups, and to examine how effectively they are meeting their goals and purposes, particularly evaluating the groups effectiveness in the core gospel growth elements:

- the place and reflective study of the Word
- prayerful activity and commitment
- engagement in 'one another' ministries within the group
- engagement in 'every member' ministry (service)
- engagement in gospel concern or enterprise (mission)

9. There's Clear Integration & Communication of Ministry Philosophy & Methodology:

'Articulated and integrated, rather than ad hoc or assumed'

"...the way your church 'does' small groups says a great deal about your ministry philosophy; that is, whether you treat groups simply as a structure to park people in, or as a theatre for disciple-making and training"⁴⁸

Much of the literature, as well as anecdotal evidence, point to the fact that there is a great need for a clearly articulated *philosophy of church*, a philosophy/theology that not only outlines the place and purpose of church

⁴⁸ Payne: *Guru*, p.16.

but also the *place & purpose of small groups* within the overall goals and mission of the church.⁴⁹ This is then clearly communicated to all members and small group leaders of the church.

There is evidence to suggest that there is often little or no integration, or clear communication of church philosophy and methodology. This is particularly in regard to 3 key areas...

1. A clearly articulated understanding of how the *purpose* of the small group ministry *support, underline or proceed from* our philosophy of church.
2. How the philosophy or purpose of small group ministry as a *disciple-making mechanism* is *communicated* to the broader *church*, to *small group leaders* and to *small group members*.
3. How those *outside* small groups are to be engaged in the *disciple-making goal*.

All Christian groups need a clear sense of *purpose*, where group members are clear on their purpose and commit themselves to work towards achieving that goal. In order for any disciple making ministry to thrive it is imperative that participants know and understand *what* they are joining, *what* obligations are involved and to *what end*.

Therefore if small groups are to be one of the central avenues of disciple-making in the church then:

- All small *group leaders* need to be given a clear vision of their role beyond mere group facilitation.
- It's critical that all *group members* be given a clear vision of their role in that regard also.

THE NEGOTIABLES:

It is clear that what's crucial in small group ministry development and formation is a clear focus on both the *goal* and the *core tasks* that enable us to '*make disciples who make disciples*'. What may be of lesser importance therefore may be....

* **Group Type:**

Whether groups are 'affinity' based, 'free market' based, gender based, demographic based, 'singles/married or mixed' based, inter-generational based, neighbourhood based, ministry based, ethnicity based etc.

* **Group Gathering Method:**

Whether groups develop by a 'self-select' group formation or 'organised member placement.'

* **Curriculum Structure:**

Whether small group materials are 'sermon' based, 'semester' based, 'interest/thematic' based, 'group-selected' or 'leadership chosen'.

Decisions or preferences regarding the value or appropriateness of each of these elements, depends much more on the context, goals and known needs of each particular ministry setting.

Ironically, often an inordinate amount of staff time can be taken up with administering these less important functions than on securing, maintaining and developing the 'non-negotiable' elements that ensure a greater likelihood of healthy gospel growth and disciple making ventures.

NOTE: in the end, group type, gathering method and curriculum structure can become mere pragmatics unless they are undergirded and driven by the clear purpose of producing disciple-making disciples.

⁴⁹ See notes on various models and philosophies of small groups in appendix in the '*Overview Of The Small Group Movement*'.

Concluding remarks...

It's clear that the challenge both to 'be a disciple,' and also the task of 'making disciples' is no easy one. Giving ourselves over in this way for the sake of others is demanding, time consuming and costly, but the Apostle Paul certainly found no greater undertaking, nor any endeavour more glorious.

In regard to his own discipleship, he considered everything else loss 'compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ' and being found in him, of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings' (Phil 3:7-11).

For Paul, spiritual maturity was found in living up to what he'd already attained. Of forgetting what lay behind and pressing onward, Christ-ward and heavenward toward the goal (Phil 3:12-14), and encouraging all that might follow to do the same (v17, 1Cor 4:16, 9:24-27).⁵⁰

Likewise, it became Paul's lifelong aim to present all others 'mature' (*telios*) in Christ (Col 1:28).⁵¹ His ultimate goal was to replicate what he himself had become, in other words to make other 'Christ followers', other disciples. Paul wrote in Colossians, "*to this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me*" (v29), and again in Galatians: "*I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you*" (4:19).

The question is, should such a calling to know Christ, to proclaim him, to admonish and teach everyone with all wisdom, to seek to present everyone perfect in Christ, should such a task as this demand anything less from every disciple that follows? Should the task of faithful, loving, patient and obedient disciple-making demand anything less from me?

I leave the final word to that great teacher-discipler, John Stott. This piece is taken from the last book he ever penned: '*The Radical Disciple*'.⁵²

"...it is legitimate to stand alongside the apostle Paul as he addresses the Colossian Christians, especially if we are in a position of Christian leadership. It's true that he was an apostle and we are not. So we do not have his authority. Nevertheless we do have pastoral responsibilities comparable to his, whether we are ordained or lay leaders. So we need to note Paul's pastoral goal.

The popular image of Paul is of an evangelist, the pioneer missionary and church planter, whose goal was to win converts, set up a church and move on. But this was only one side of the picture. Here he portrays himself as a pastor and teacher. His great longing, he writes, is to go beyond evangelism to discipleship, and to present everybody mature in Christ. And because this is the goal on which he spent his energies, so should we!

'To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me' (Col 1:29:NIV). Both Greek verbs ('labour' and 'struggle') express metaphors which imply physical exertion. The first is used of the farm labourer, and the second of the competitor in the Greek games.

Both conjure up a vision of rippling muscles and pouring sweat".

Let us not shrink from such a marvelous task. May each disciple and disciple-maker echo the Apostle's example to labour for Christ and in Christ, and to do so with all His energy that so powerfully works in each one of us!

⁵⁰ Cf. Note: Lk 9:62, 2Tim 4:6-8.

⁵¹ The Greek adjective *telios* occurs 19 times in the New Testament and whether it is translated 'perfect' or 'mature' depends on its context. It rarely means perfect in an absolute sense. Instead the *telios* (person) is contrasted with the child or infant (cf. 1Cor 13:10-11).

⁵² John Stott: '*The Radical Disciple*': (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2010) p. 52.

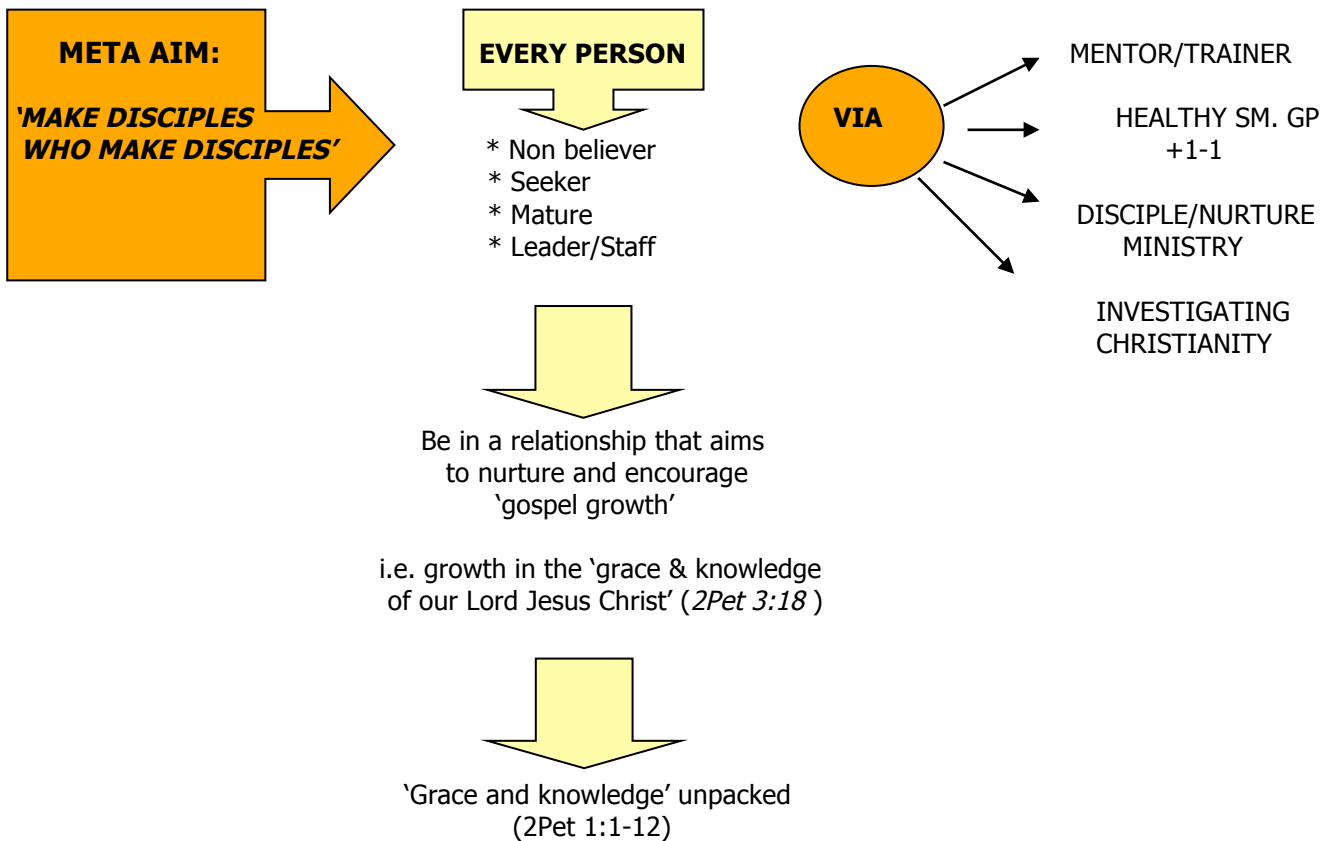
WHAT OF THOSE NOT IN SMALL GROUPS:

By implication, surely the goal to 'make disciples who make disciples' must by necessity remain the same. Therefore we need to work out 'how' that goal might best be achieved for those individuals.

The overarching aim therefore should be to have every person linked to a 'disciple making' relationship.

Fig. 1.

ULTIMATE GOAL = to ensure very person is linked into a 'disciple-making' relationship



Categories Explained:

Mentor/Trainer:

For example: Paul's relationship with Timothy, Titus, Epaphroditus etc. This category would encompass MTS trainees, lay ministry leaders, small group leaders, as well as church ministry staff who may be linked an external mentor figure for encouragement, challenge and reflection.

Healthy small group +1-1:

This is where small group leaders would perceive their primary role to be intentionally discipling, teaching and shepherding group members as 'disciple- makers'.

Disciple/nurture ministry:

This category would encompass those who may not be linked into a small group network.

Investigating Christianity:

This category would encompass 'seekers'.

Brief Definitions:

Affinity Based Groups:

Groups based on the idea that groups bond best when based on common marital state or life stage interests.

Free Market Groups:

Groups based on the idea that groups bond best when based on common practical interests (e.g. dog training, fly fishing, Bible study, etc.). Members self-select a group based on common interests.

Neighbourhood Based Groups:

Groups based on the idea that there's more room for life & relationships when you simplify or streamline small groups to center on the people who live near one another. By forming small groups within neighbourhood zones creates more time to build and develop relationships with believers & non-believers.

Sermon Based Groups:

Groups where a weekly 'post sermon' discussion guide is used by all small groups allowing for further discussion and application of the message the pastor just preached. Rather than group members hearing one concept on Sunday and another in their group meeting. They focus on one idea/concept/theme/teaching at a time.

Semester Based Groups:

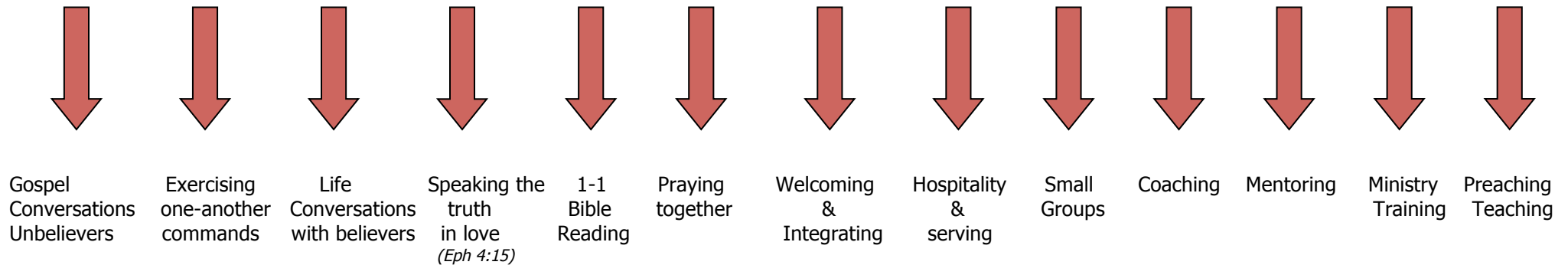
A strategy designed to take advantage of three well-timed opportunities to help people connect with a group by constructing a built in opportunity to promote group life two or three times a year. The main purpose of the model is to enable as many to participate in small groups as possible by requiring members to only make a 13 week commitment (one semester) to any given group, rather than an indefinite one.⁵³

⁵³ Depending on what frequency semester structure a church works on.

DISCIPLE MAKING...*BY* EVERY BELIEVER...*THROUGH* EVERY OPPORTUNITY

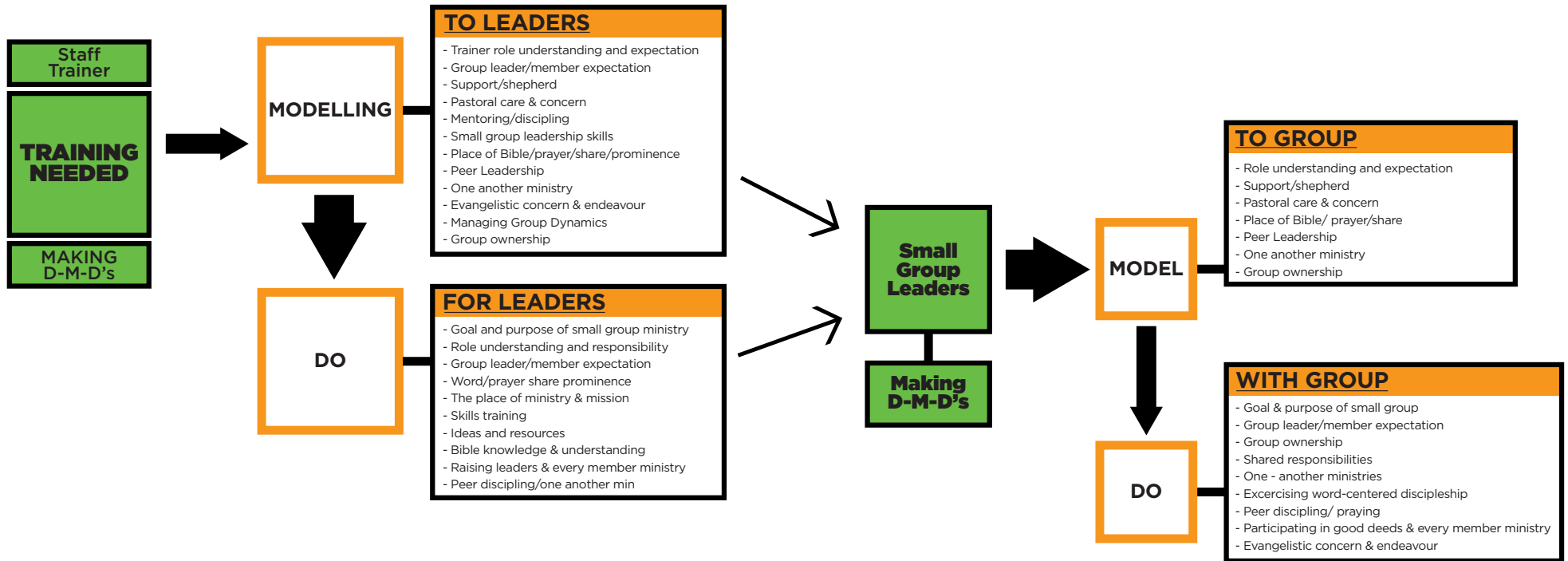
AIM: To grow disciple making disciples to full maturity in Christ
(Eph 4:11-16)

By every believer...through every opportunity



PROCESS MAP - MODELLING and DOING

'Making Disciples who make disciples'



APPENDIX

- OVERVIEW of the SMALL GROUP MOVEMENT -

A brief overview of the small group movement in the late 20th Century and the literature that followed:

With the emergence of the small group phenomenon in the late 20th century, most congregations in the Western world today have identifiable small group ministries. Within the broad context of group life, these small groups assume a variety of formats, foci and names. Churches, fellowships and para-church ministries have on offer anything from prayer groups, Bible studies, adult 'Sunday schools', mission fellowships, evangelism groups, new member classes, house churches, cell groups, 'share and care' groups, through to recovery, healing and support groups etc.

What follows is a very brief outline of my current understanding and observations of the small group movement post 1950, and the key literature it generated.

The overview is as stated - brief, and therefore by no means an exhaustive historical review. The overview is also fairly 'broad' in its descriptors, being somewhat complicated by the fact that the language surrounding the literature on small groups and small group movements is not static or universal in usage.

The challenge of terminology:

The terms '**small group**', '**cell group**', '**house church**', '**cell church**' and '**Meta-church**' are all used to describe a broad range of church life and ministry activity. They also describe very different and distinct theological and philosophical models of small group ministry. Though there are often vast differences in structure and emphasis within these models, most commonly focus on a commitment to fostering personal relationships amongst members, to developing and encouraging spiritual formation, community, caring and discipleship.

The question of what terminology best describes the **role** and **function** of small groups also varies across literature, across churches, denominations and para-church organisations. It's not unreasonable to suggest that choice of nomenclature significantly influences the way churches and church members understand and engage with this particular ministry eg. Should groups be referred to as '**growth**' groups, '**small**' groups, '**gospel**' groups, '**Bible study**' groups, '**nurture**' groups, '**care and share**' groups, '**community**' groups etc? And how might the designated nomenclature indicate primary purpose?

The 50's & 60's 'cell church' or 'house church' phenomenon:

Key figures: *Ortiz & Yonggi Cho:*

Juan Carlos Ortiz was one of the first to experiment with the formation of **cell churches** in Argentina in the 1950's. Under Ortiz' influence there was a clear emphasis on *evangelism* and *group multiplication* through an effective 'cell' or '*church in the home*' ministry.

But by far the most well known '**cell church**' model was developed and lead by **Dr Yonggi Cho** in Seoul, Korea, whose '*Full Gospel Revival Center*' had grown to over 7,000 members by 1967. What became known as the '**cell system**' was then introduced in order to forward both the spiritual development of its members, as well as continuing to expand the growth of the church.

Like Ortiz, Cho's emphasis was on '*evangelism*' (multiplying the numbers of new converts and dividing the cells when they reached a certain size) rather than discipleship:

To quote:

"Our church has become a living organism.

The home cell groups are living cells, and they function much like the cells in the human body.

In a living organism, the cells grow and divide. Where once there was one cell, there become two.

Then there are four, then eight, then sixteen, and so forth. Cells are not simply added to the body; they are multiplied by geometric progression...there is only one way that the home cell group system will be successful in a church, if that system is to be used as a tool of evangelism".⁵⁴

By 1973 church membership was over 10,000 when the church then reorganized itself as the '*Yoido Full Gospel Church*,' or YFGC. There were 200,000 members by 1981, and satellite churches were then established throughout Korea. By 2005, the 'cell church' system had grown to over 800,000 members.

Cho's model can be characterized in its simplest form by 3 core traits:
(And interesting to note here, is the legacy of Cho's influence on small group functions today).

1. A strong emphasis on evangelism.
Every group was required to have an '*empty chair*' that's meant to be filled by a new Christian before the year is out.
2. It's based on the belief that the most effective way to bring new Christians into the larger church is to initially reach them *through a small group*.
3. It promised the potential of *unlimited evangelism* and *church growth*. Groups can grow and divide indefinitely, providing *care* and *connectedness* no matter how large the church gets.

Rather than focus on a large Sunday service, these cell churches focused on developing close *relationships* between members by meeting regularly in member's houses or smaller meeting places. These 'cell meetings' usually consisted of a number of common elements including scripture reading, group discussion, sharing, prayer and worship.

The aim was to provide *spiritual nourishment* for group members and encourage *growth* by the active and intentional invitation of guests. The theory was, that as with the human body, when a cell grows beyond a normal size, it multiplies into two, and the cycle continues.

Over the years, pilgrims returning from YFGC began to emulate Cho's pattern in the United States, and the model ultimately became popularized through the '*Fuller Institute of Church Growth*' in the early 1980's. Since that time, many churches have borrowed and adapted the 'cell church' or 'house church' system with varying degrees of success, and we can certainly see traces of its influence on the philosophy and practice of small group ministry right up to the present day.

Ralph Neighbour, who later became a key figure in reviving a 'second reformation' to this movement in the 90's, was a direct disciple of Cho's Cell Church methodology.

⁵⁴ D. Cho '*Successful Home Cell Groups*.'

The 80's 'small group' phenomenon:

Key figures: Lyman Coleman, Roberta Hestenes, John Mallison & Dawson Trotman:

With the emergence of the modern 'Church Growth Movement' in the late 70's and 80's, a second wave of the small group phenomenon quickly followed.

The rise of church growth movement brought with it the question: 'how might large churches with a pastor and small staff best care for people?' As Marshall and Payne rightly observe, "the answer was the rise of the small home group, in which members could have a set of personal relationships in which they are known and cared for".⁵⁵

This movement was particularly marked by a renewed interest and emphasis on Bible *study*, Bible study *methodology*, small group *dynamics*, *learning styles*, *pastoral care* of members and *discipleship* ministry, as well as a continued concern on the role of small groups for the purposes of *evangelism*.

The movement was also fuelled by the support and influence of key para-church ministry groups, including *InterVarsity Christian fellowship*, *Campus Crusade for Christ* and the *Navigators*. Christian publishing houses such as *InterVarsity Press* and *Zondervan* also began to develop specific small group curricula and leader guides, as well as various other literature focussed around support materials for small group leaders.

This second wave of the small group movement quickly caught hold in the West and soon spread across all denomination groups from mainline churches through to Independent, Charismatic, Pentecostal and Catholic churches.

The 90's return of the 'cell church' and the 'meta-church' phenomenon:

Key figures: Ralph Neighbour, Joel Comiskey, Carl George & Bill Donahue:

During this decade, churches continued to be greatly influenced by the church growth movement. But during this period there emerged a greater emphasis on creating and developing small group structures that might more effectively enable *numerical growth* whilst also attending to the need for *spiritual growth*, and for the experience of more meaningful 'community'.

Broadly speaking, the small group model advocated during the 90's (and on into the new millennium) generally took 3 forms, and the particular model adopted was largely dependent on each church's *theology of church*.

The 3 broad models in relation to church and small group philosophy are ...

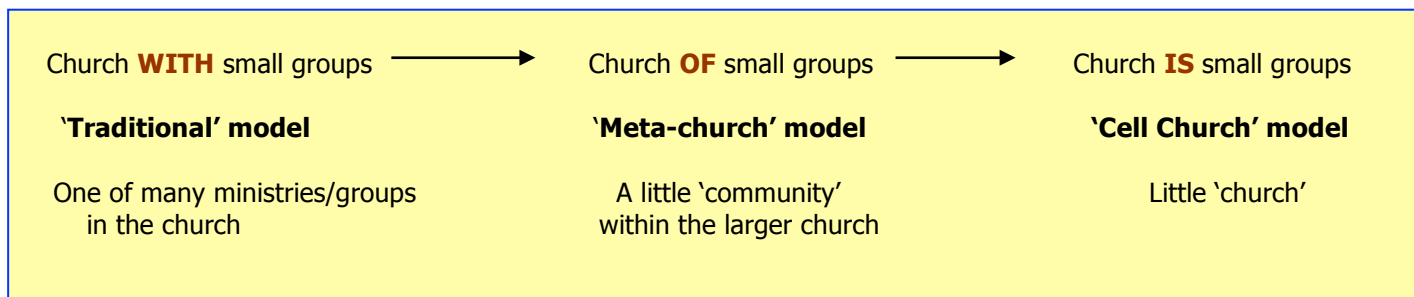
1. The church '**with**' small groups
2. The church '**of**' small groups
3. The church '**is**' small groups

Together, these 3 broad categories comprise a '*continuum*' of small group models.

In its most simplistic form, though each individual church model may vary slightly in its emphasis and structure; most church small group models tend to either fall along or into, one of these categories in the continuum:

⁵⁵ Trellis & Vine: p.97

- The Small Group Model Continuum -



A: The church 'WITH' small groups:

Generally speaking, in this model small groups form just *one of many* ministries or *member participation* activities within the church. Though every member is encouraged to join and participate in a small group, it's *not* compulsory, *nor* is it considered a mark of membership.

The key purpose is usually to help church members *connect* and *integrate* into community life, as well as afford opportunities for Christian *growth, support* or *service*.

The small group ministry within this model often has to compete with other activities and programs that may also engage a member's time, energy and priorities.

B: The church 'OF' small groups:

The church 'of' small groups is best depicted in literature advocating the 'Meta-Church' model (or its adaptation).

Continuing on from the influence of the Church Growth movement, the 'meta-church' (i.e. 'meta' = change) model was originally proposed by *Carl George* in his book '**Prepare Your Church For The Future**', which was largely a Western adaptation of Cho's earlier 'cell church' principles.

George explains the 'Meta-church' term this way:

"This new label allows for greater numbers, but its deepest focus is on change: pastors changing their minds about how ministry is to be done, and churches changing their organizational form in order to be free from size constraints". ⁵⁶

The model George proposes is one of 'change' or *transformation*. Churches are called to break out of previously ineffective growth paradigms and on offer are a new set of principles and practices that are necessary if the church is to reap an *increased harvest* of souls while at the same time effectively *caring* for its members.

Although increasing a congregation's size was a factor in its development, the concept largely unfolded with the conviction that for churches to grow *larger* they must intentionally grow *smaller* i.e. to break itself down into smaller purpose driven units. Taking his cue from churches like the 'Yoido Central Full Gospel Church' in Korea, George proposed that the "*organizational principles of a Meta-church allows a church to maintain quality, no matter how much numerical success it experiences*". ⁵⁷

In this model the primary purpose of groups is to build the church as 'community'. The larger church community is to be built around a network of '*smaller communities*' aimed at developing people in Christ.

To apply the principles of this model requires a massive shift in focus. The central premise is that a pastor must

⁵⁶ P. 51

⁵⁷ P. 53

elevate to first priority the *promotion* and *multiplication* of certain 'lay-lead' smaller groups as '*essential centers of growth*'. Everything else in the ministry is considered secondary to their promotion and preservation.

The two central gatherings in the organization of meta-church are:

1. The smaller '*cell group*' gatherings
2. The large '*praise celebration*' worship gathering

In between the small 'cell' and the large 'celebration gathering' there are mid-sized umbrella 'congregations' or 'sub congregations' that host and give oversight to a set number of 'cells'.

Whilst traditional models of church view cells as 'elective' and 'congregations' as foundational, the theory of meta-church regards cell groups as *foundational* and these 'sub congregations' as *elective*.

The church 'of' small groups or the '*meta-church*' model, views each cell group as a '*little community*' within the larger church. It also assumes the 'whole church' will be involved in a cell group. The staff and ministries are built around what's called a 'small groups skeleton', where everything is built around the small group infrastructure so that every member is connected '*through community*' to the church.

Within this model, there is also a great emphasis on *lay-lead ministry* and on returning ministry back to *church members*. All cells are lay lead, with the leader functioning as 'THE' pastor of their flock. By contrast, much like a CEO, the role of the Senior minister is dedicated to focusing on vision casting, managing, communicating enabling and empowering.

Within this model there is also an overt focus on '*care giving*' and the importance of meeting '*felt needs*', so much so that the pastoring emphasis supersedes Bible teaching, with definite theological implications.

To quote:

*"Churches [of the future] will be known primarily as caring places rather than as teaching associations. These churches of the future realize that God measures His people more by their obedience than by their knowledge of Bible facts".*⁵⁸

There is a conscious shift in priority from teaching to caring, and from theological understanding to application.

Lastly, the meta-church model has similar traits to the 'cell church' model in that it includes an emphasis on group *multiplication*, corporate *worship* and *celebration* as key aspects of group life.

Assumptions and advantages:

Mark Howell, on his small groups website outlines **7 underlying assumptions** on which the meta-church rests its philosophy of church and small group ministry.⁵⁹

1. Churches of the future will be committed to making more and better disciples.
2. Churches of the future will be more concerned with the size of the harvest than with the capacity of their facilities.
3. Churches will be known primarily as caring places rather than as teaching associations.
4. Pastors will genuinely encourage ministry by the laity, despite centuries of modeling to the contrary.
5. Lay ministry assignments will involve leadership of a group.

⁵⁸ P.154-155

⁵⁹ Markhowelllive.com

6. Laity, given the opportunity, will invest time, energy, and money to learn the skills required to do a competent job of pastoring.
7. Pastors and people will remain dependent on the Holy Spirit to make His gifts available for mutually edifying one-another ministry.

Howell also outlines what he considers the **5 key advantages** of the meta-church model for small group ministry today.⁶⁰

1. *Span of care*: the idea that everyone needs to be cared for by someone, but no one ought to be caring for more than 10. This concept helps give structure and builds a realistic framework.
2. The notion that every leader should be developing an *apprentice* sets in motion a potential leadership development pipeline.
3. An emphasis on leader encouragement and development through a *regular program* of centralized meetings.
4. Groups that begin their life by *birthing* from a mother group begin with the *multiplication gene* in their DNA.
5. An emphasis on *discipleship* to produce genuine growth and spiritual maturity.

Even if churches may not have adopted this meta-church model in its entirety, it soon becomes clear that there are observable and significant traces of its principles and influence in much of the structure and philosophy of many of our small group ministries today.⁶¹

C: The church *'IS'* small groups:

At the furthest end of the spectrum would be the church *'IS'* small groups model. This model views each 'cell' as a *'little church'* where members would say: *'the group'* is our church. The model therefore assumes that every single member of the church will be involved in a small group.

The purpose of small groups in this paradigm is to *'be'* the church in its smallest form. This model sees small groups as the centerpiece of congregational life and considered *the primary expression of church*. Some advocates would teach that the *'church is the cell; the cell is the church'*.

As mentioned already, the notion of cell group churches is not new, but in the 1990's, a new wave of cell church experiments emerged following the publication of ***'Where Do We Go From Here?'*** by Ralph Neighbour. The phenomenon is known by various names and adaptations: e.g. *'Cell Church'* or *'Cell-Based Church'* etc.

In this *'Cell Church'* model, the cell IS the basic Christian community, whereas in the *'Meta-Church'* model, a cell is any small group that functions *'under the covering'* of the larger church or congregation.

Advocates of this cell church model present this alternative as a *new paradigm* for the *'social architecture'* of the church. During this period there emerged several authors who promoted what they called a *"new move of God"* in church growth methodology. Here, the Church is viewed as lost in an institutionalized, clergy-dominated structure, rendering it ineffective in adequately addressing and dealing with individuals *'felt-needs'*.

⁶⁰ Mark Howell: <http://www.markhowelllive.com/the-meta-church-small-group-model/>

⁶¹ More specifically, in churches such as *'Willow Creek'* we find a clear example of the adaptation and modification of this model. The result of which is outlined in Donahue's: *'Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone'* where Donahue describes their ministry as a church which embraces the philosophy of becoming a church of small groups. See C. Simonian's review of Carl George's book in appendix.

In this new organizational system the cell group (up to 15 members) is considered the *primary* church; individual cells are connected through several levels of (mostly lay) leadership that are ultimately accountable to the Senior Pastor. Growth is realized as the cells divide, birthing new cells.

Defined by Joel Comiskey, a cell is a "group of three to fifteen people who meet weekly outside the church building for the purpose of evangelism, community, and spiritual growth with the goal of multiplication."⁶² Each of these core components are considered necessary and must be present in any *authentic* cell church ministry.

In general, a cell church uses 2 key ministry elements: *worship* (celebration) and *small groups* (also called multiplying cells). They tend to discard the typical 'program' orientation of traditional church ministries and prefer to perform the key ministries (i.e. care, nurture, support, worship, youth, adult, children's ministry etc) within the cell group structure. Once a week or month, the all 'cells' gather for a *celebration* or worship service.

According to Comiskey's '*History of the Cell Movement*', not all of the following characteristics will be present in a cell-based church, the vast majority will be:

1. Cells form part of the local church structure (commitment is to cell and to celebration)
2. Emphasis is on the 'components' of the cell (as opposed to labeling all small groups cells)
3. Similarity among the cell groups (with regard to teaching material, format, etc.)
4. Partnership in evangelism (the group sees themselves as an evangelizing unit)
5. Groups must multiply in a certain time period (or be dissolved)
6. Uniformity of lesson material (as opposed to each leader deciding what a group will do)
7. Strong administrative control (required reports)
8. Ongoing cell leader training (not optional)
9. Rapid releasing of leadership (due to rapid multiplication, many new leaders must be raised up)
10. Very few programs apart from cells (other programs are discouraged or deleted)
11. Cells take care of basic church duties (cells replace volunteer help)
12. Commitment of head Pastor to cell ministry (or the cell ministry will not succeed)
13. Cells form basis for pastoral team (each pastor has a major role in the cell system)
14. Goal Of 100% participation of members in cell groups (normally between 70-90%)

A Brief note on the term '*House Church*':

The term 'cell' church and 'house' church are not synonymous, even though they are frequently used interchangeably. Comiskey draws a clear distinction between this cell church movement and that of House Churches: "*a house church is a fully functioning, complete church that is meeting in the home. Although there might be interrelationships between various house churches, each one is a self-sustaining, self-propagating entity*".

⁶² <http://www.joelcomiskeygroup.com/articles/dissertation/History.html>

Neighbour also describes the difference between a cell group and a 'house church' this way:

"There is a distinct difference between the house church and the cell group movements. House Churches tend to collect a community of 15-25 people who meet together on a weekly basis. Usually, each House Church stands alone. While they may be in touch with nearby House Churches, they usually do not recognize any further structure beyond themselves".⁶³

New (or not so new) models for the new millennium:

Key figures: Larry Osborne, T. Reiner & E. Geiger, B.Hull, A. Stanley & B. Willits, S. Timmis & T. Chester:

There seems to be a growing proliferation of new small group and church based models in this new millennium, with emphasis on everything from 'affinity-based' groups, 'neighbourhood based' groups, 'free-market' elective systems through to 'sermon-based' and 'multi-year' curriculums.

For most, there continues to be a strong emphasis on *church growth* and how that might best be achieved in the new millennium, but with it, a strong desire to explore how that growth might now need to be done differently.

There's a common thread of debate as to whether the best church growth mechanism is through strategic use of 'front door' and 'side door' methods (i.e. groups, socials, hospitality events and informal gatherings) or whether church growth is best achieved by concentrating on 'retention' over 'evangelism' i.e. where growth emphasis is on 'closing the back door' rather than a pre-occupation with 'widening the front door'. In both strategies small groups or 'gatherings' play a central role.

Also evident in much of the recent literature is a deliberate, or underlying critique of the way we traditionally 'do church', particularly of more traditional and complex models of church that have adopted a 'program based' ministry model. In books such as **'Simple Church'**, **'Sticky Church'** and **'Total Church'** there appears to be a shift towards 'simplifying' models of church, and an attempt to develop and adopt new paradigms in the way we approach ministry, mission, evangelism, Christian growth and 'disciple-making'.

For some, the new emphasis is on *outreach* and living lives of 'authenticity' and 'gospel intentionality', for others it's the need to create 'authentic community', more 'meaningful relationships' and greater 'connectedness'. For yet others the emphasis has swung back to the Biblical call to return to the core task of 'discipleship' and 'disciple-making'.

Within this discussion around church and small groups there's ongoing debate on the priority and preference for 'open groups', 'closed groups', 'specialized groups' (or combinations of all three), as well as an evaluation of the benefits and limitations of 'organized member placement' into small groups versus 'self select' group formation.

Many of the newer models draw their ideas, principles and philosophies from older models, adapting them to suit the new social and cultural context. Most appear to be pragmatically driven, though many who emphasize discipleship and disciple making as the core strategy give theological credence to their model.

I refer now, in no substantial detail, to just 4 broad models in the current mix:

Sermon Based Groups:

'Sermon based groups' are probably one of the fastest growing models. Although it's a model that has been around for some time, the sermon based small group system has gained greater popularity with the influence of Larry Osborne and *North Coast Church* and particularly through his book **'Sticky Church'**.

In his book, Osborne shares the North Coast Church small group strategy. While Osborne's church uses his 'sermon based' model in combination with a 'semester based strategy', the essence of the model is that a 'post

⁶³ http://celycecomiskey.tripod.com/new_page_2.htm

sermon' discussion guide is provided to all small groups that allows for further discussion and application of the message the pastor has just preached.⁶⁴

The aim is that small groups are to be *'the'* hub of the church's ministry and that the sermon-based group be the *primary* type of group offered to its members.

According to the proposed methodology, the sermon based small group system enables the following to take place:

- * It allows for further discussion of the pastor's Sunday message in an open dialogue environment where participants are able to pursue the questions they may have following Sunday.
- * They narrow the focus down to one conversation (both in the small group and in the church). Rather than group members hearing one concept on Sunday and another in group time. They focus on one idea/concept/theme/teaching at a time.
- * Every Sunday service emphasizes the importance of being in a group where 'members have opportunity to dig deeper into the topic' as a way of encouraging non small group participants to try out the idea of being part of a group.

Semester Based Groups:

'Semester based' small groups have been popularized by books like Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas' ***'Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups'***.

Essentially, the *semester-based* small group is a strategy designed to take advantage of three well-timed opportunities to help people connect with a group by constructing a natural built in opportunity to promote group life three times a year. The main purpose of the model is to enable as many members to participate in small groups as possible by requiring members to make only a 13 week commitment (one semester) to any given group, rather than an indefinite one.

Prospective members select groups from the available 'semester topics' on offer, they then spend 13 weeks together as a group and are free to choose a different group the next semester. Members are also given the chance to continue in the same group for the following semester.

The guiding philosophy behind the practice is that because each semester is 10 to 13 weeks long, it provides a relatively *easy commitment* to 'try out' a small group. As the commitment is only for a semester, the model also allows an *easy way out* for those who feel there's been a 'less-than-ideal' match with other members in the group.

This Semester-based model is also a strategy that's used in combination with other concepts (like 'Sermon based' or 'Free market' models) to provide a more complete small group delivery system.

Free Market Groups:

The '*Free Market*' model has been popularized by '*New Life Church*', and is based on Ted Haggard's: ***'Dog Training, Fly Fishing, and Sharing Christ in the 21st Century: Empowering Your Church to Build Community Through Shared Interests.'*** It's a term that's used to describe a system of groups that are based on common interests or 'affinity'.

This model is based on the central idea that groups that are based on common interests (e.g. dog training, fly fishing, Bible study, etc.) will attract a broader range of people into them. After all, everyone has an interest...or at least, that's the premise.

⁶⁴ See definitions of these terms on page 15 of this paper.

While there are often additional elements, the 'Free Market' system is essentially a three-step process:

1. Leaders start groups based on interests (dog training, fly fishing, quilting, stock trading, etc).
2. The church publishes a list of interest-based groups (or holds a fair where open groups are advertised).
3. Members select a group based on common interests.

The 'Free Market model' is often used in combination with a 'semester based' strategy, with 'interest based' groups making up the small group selection catalog for the semester.

The Connecting Church and 'Neighbourhood Groups':

'*The Connecting Church*' by Randy Frazee, is based around the core idea that congregation members create 'more room in life' when we simplify or streamline our small group relationships to center on the people who live near us.

The belief is that in simplifying and streamlining the spread of social networks across church, ministry, social clubs etc. better enables members to '*build and develop relationships*' (not only with each other, but also with neighbouring unbelievers). That by forming small groups within natural '*neighbourhood zones*' it then creates more time to build and develop relationships. This is an idea that '*Willow Creek*' subsequently adopted in their development of '*neighbourhood groups*'.

A FINAL REFLECTION...

When we look at our own context here in Sydney it's interesting to note how in many ways we've often taken various elements from all of these movements without necessarily thinking through the particular *meta-ethos* or *philosophy* that lies behind them. It also highlights the point made earlier in this paper that there's often a distinct lack of clear ministry philosophy or theology that either drives or integrates our small group methodology.

This paper has been an attempt to work towards that end, in other words, towards a greater integration of our *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*.

- Small Group Field Research Questionnaire -

* Explanatory Note: In devising this field questionnaire, I specifically designed the questions and structure to correlate with the framework used in my literature review. The aim was to assess whether the field research findings on small groups matched both the literature under review and what I'd already perceived of the anecdotal evidence.

Date: Interviewer: Parish:

A: Basic Data:

1. How many small groups currently run in your church?
2. What percentage of your parish would that encompass? %
3. What would be the participation percentage differences between congregations / services (if any)? %
4. What proportion of those small groups would be:
 - a. Male only %
 - b. Female only %
 - c. Mixed gender %
 - d. Mixed ages %
5. What sort of small groups are they:
 - a. Youth %
 - b. Adult %
 - c. Believers in Bible Study %
 - d. Investigative Bible Study %
 - e. ESL %
 - f. Other (please list): %
6. What percentage of your small groups would meet:
 - a. Weekly %
 - b. Fortnightly %
 - c. Monthly %
 - d. Other (please list): %

B: The Role and Function of the Small Group Ministry:

Small Group Philosophy

1. How might you best describe the role and function of small groups in your church's ministry
-

Small Group Components

Leadership

1. Selection:	<p>Are leaders:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Self appointed <input type="checkbox"/> Inherited <input type="checkbox"/> Selected</p> <p>If selected, what selection criteria do you use?</p> <p>How many leaders are usually appointed to each group?</p> <p>Is there any other deliberate leadership system within the groups? (i.e. deliberate placement of mature Christians , leaders in training, etc)</p> <p>What is your leader retention rate?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 60px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 80px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px;"></div>
2. Function (i.e. what are we asking leaders to do / be):	<p>From this list, how might you best describe the role / function of your small group leadership?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Discussion facilitator only <input type="checkbox"/> Bible teacher only <input type="checkbox"/> Bible teacher + delegated pastor <input type="checkbox"/> Bible teacher + pastor + trainer <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please list):</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px;"></div>
3. Training:	<p>Is there any small group training offered to leaders?</p> <p>By whom?</p> <p>How often?</p> <p>What does the training encompass?</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 30px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; margin-bottom: 5px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 130px;"></div>
	<p>Is the training:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Compulsory <input type="checkbox"/> Voluntary</p>	

Is there any systematic mentoring /
pastoring of leaders between formal
training sessions?

Is there any deliberate feedback
system for leaders to staff regarding
training needed / offered /
suitability?

Bible / Prayer

1. Teaching: Are studies led:
- Always by the appointed leader
 Mostly by the appointed leader
 Rotated around group members

Are there any other discipling
activities happening between group
members outside of group time (eg.
1-1 Bible reading, prayer pairs /
triplets, leaders in training coaching,
other)

2. Bible Study: Are bible study materials chosen by:
- The small group leader
 Another (please specify):

If by another – are the materials
vetted by anyone?

Are the bible studies based around
a common sermon series? Other
method?

What proportionate priority does it
take within the small group time?

3. Prayer: What is the place of prayer within
the small groups?
How is it organised?

What proportionate priority does it
take within the small group time?

Sharing / Action

1. Open Sharing: What is the place of open sharing
within the small groups?
How is it organised?

What proportionate priority does it
take within the small group time?

2. Support (i.e. how does) How do your small groups perceive their role & responsibilities in terms of
providing:

practical /
pastoral
support
operate within
small groups)

- a. Pastoral support to its members?
- b. Practical support to its members?

Would this pastoral and practical support best be described as:

- A consciously delegated, deliberate & well co-ordinated philosophy and practice within the small groups
- More ad hoc and assumed
- Primarily the responsibility of the church ministry staff team
- Primarily the responsibility of the small group leaders
- Primarily the responsibility of the group leader AND small group members
- Other system (comment):

Is pastoral care of group members:

3.Coordinated
Action
(i.e. the
place of
mission
and
ministry)

What place / priority might coordinated outreach / evangelism take place within the small group structures (if at all)?

What place / priority might coordinated ministry / service outside the group take place within the small group structures (if at all)?

C: Evaluation

1. What measure do you use (if any) to evaluate the effectiveness of:

a. Your small groups?

b. Your small group leaders?

D: Other

Any other comments, reflections you might like to add that was not covered in this questionnaire?

E: Help

If you could be given any help with your small group ministry, what would it be?

SMALL GROUP LITERATURE REVIEW

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