

Empowering People

The place of small groups in
local church



Laurence Singlehurst



Other titles in this series:

Help! I am leading part of my Small Group
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Encounter—20 Interactive Bible Studies for Small Groups
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Small Groups Bigger Kingdom—Pathways to faith in today's world

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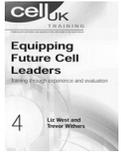
About the author



Laurence Singlehurst

A regular speaker at major events, such as Spring Harvest, and cell conferences worldwide, Laurence has also worked with numerous churches in the UK. However, his particular passion is equipping churches to reach their communities, with an emphasis on network evangelism, which is empowered by small church structures.

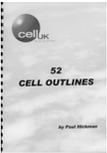
Other Resources



Equipping Future Cell Leaders

by *Liz West and Trevor Withers*

This course has been designed to equip leaders to do more than lead a structure cell meeting. It is developed from the values base of the cell model and is an opportunity to establish the plumblines of cell for the new cell leaders.



52 Cell Outlines

This very popular, top selling resource has really practical Cell outlines for a whole year to encourage your group to live out the Jesus values. Easy to photocopy and use in your group, these outlines have been tried and tested in the author's own church.

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Introduction

Since 1995, there has been an on-going experiment in the United Kingdom called Cell Church. The ideas of Cell Church were brought to the UK by Ralph Neighbour, Bill Beckham, Lawrence Khong, and Cesar Castellanos. All these ideas came in a defined format. I, amongst others, have had the privilege of facilitating conferences and working alongside churches that loved these ideas. Within a short period of time, over 600 churches across the denominations and new church streams were working on cell church ideas.

The Cell Church idea resonated because it gave definition to church; it gave another shape and texture and above all it seemed to promise huge growth.

But these ideas, wonderful as they were in other cultures - Singapore, America, South America, began to hit cultural barriers in the UK. Some of these ideas, historically shaped in other nations, simply did not work here. It is not the purpose of this book to go through all the lessons learnt, but its purpose is to say that many of us believe as passionately as ever in the key ideas behind the Cell Movement. We believe that small groups with an outward looking heart beat are as valid today as ever, as a part of our expression of church.

We have had to go through a process of contextualising these ideas to our culture. We realise that while the essence of Cell Church as described continues to be fabulous, the structures suited other cultures. We have had to find out what works for us here.

I am working with three main concepts in this booklet:

holistic missional groups: by 'missional' I mean groups which adopt the posture, thinking, behaviours and practices of a missionary in order to engage others with the gospel message. These group members not

Other Resources



40 Creative Worship Ideas for Small Groups

We have brought together 40 Creative Worship Ideas which have been printed on a card with a picture and presented in an attractive durable tin. These worship cards have been organised into six streams that reflect historical streams of our Christian faith:- Contemplative, Holiness, Charismatic, Social Justice, Evangelical, and Incarnational.



The Gospel Message Today

by Laurence Singlehurst

In a postmodern, unchurched, multi-faith and multi-racial society, it is more important than ever to articulate the enduring message of the gospel in language that can be understood by the culture around us. In this booklet Laurence Singlehurst makes the case for the adoption of contextually appropriate language in order to communicate the truths at the heart of the gospel.

Missional Ideas for Small Groups

How can each one of us live out Christ in the context of where we work, where we live and in our families? Cell UK has brought together 40 fantastic ideas for use in small groups. Each idea takes about 15 minutes and gives practical ways to encourage and empower each other as we seek to love those around us and share Jesus with them. The ideas in this set of postcards, presented in a high quality durable tin, break down into 8 themes each taking your small group on a journey, renewing minds and creating new rhythms for life.

what is required this hidden part of church will deliver something so exciting and so dynamic and that is 'Empowered People.' Christians who are equipped for personal witness and evangelism, who are missionary disciples, who are living their faith out on the front line.

Notes

Comiskey, Joel (2014-10-22). 2000 Years of Small Groups: A History of Cell Ministry in the Church). CCS Publishing. Kindle Edition.

- 1 Kindle Locations 84-102
- 2 Kindle Locations 187-190
- 3 Kindle Locations 1482-1487
- 4 Kindle Locations 2080-2091

only support one another on their journey towards God, but are also committed to help others discover him in whatever way they can.

empowered people are Christians who are given the encouragement, the freedom and permission if you like, to be and to do all that God would want them to be and do.

church in the big and small: This is my short hand way of talking about the description of church which was introduced by Bill Beckham when he brought us the idea of church being like a bird which needed two wings in order to fly. The two wings describe elements of church. The 'big wing' represents the organisation of the church, the larger gatherings, the overall leadership and direction of the church. The small wing covers the small groups and the equipping and support of the small group leaders. The wings are of equal importance and are part of our fundamental understanding of church.

The purpose of this booklet is to put forward the positive; what we see is working in our culture at this time and what we think God is doing in our nation. It is our hope that this contextualisation will resonate with you. We hope that you too might want to work with this contextualised way of being church in the big, the gatherings and central organisation and the small, where holistic small groups with a missional heart beat are the very core of your idea of church.

Laurence Singlehurst

1 The Dream

All good stories need to begin with a dream and a vision. What is God's dream? What is he seeking to do in our nation at this time? What does 'church' look like in the context of God's dream?

You may ask yourself 'How do we know what God's dream is?' Indeed there is no blueprint in scripture and yet I think we have some significant pointers. I believe that God's dream is very clearly defined in its broadest objectives and principles in the Great Commandment in Mark 12:30-31. *'And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'*

From these amazing verses I think we get a very clear picture of God's dream. The first thing that we realize is that this dream is for everybody. God is wanting all His people to embrace love. This is about empowered people who are set free to love and to be loved. When the church, person by person, is empowered we find a church that can love the world and make a difference.

We see four ideas in this verse. First, it is implicit that God loves us and it is God's dream that every soul would know that there is a God in heaven who cares for them. No matter what their background or their social standing, they are loved and are cherished. The wonder of the Christian story is that all of us can discover that it is our destiny to be God's children. We can experience God's love. Our lives will surely be filled with good days and bad days but we will not be on our own. His promise through Jesus is friendship and relationship.

We see that it is God's vision that we should love him. Not because of some egotistical, selfish motivation in the heart of God, but because of beauty and wonder; because of who he is in his very essence. We are drawn to love because of who we see Jesus to be in his life, his work, his

Essence 4

These groups must be participative. Groups that change people are groups that hear the voice of the people within them not the voice just of the leader or the extroverts but a place where everybody can participate. Again and again we have seen transformation take place in people's lives through the power of participation. If the voice in the group is the voice of the group members then the group belongs to them.

Essence 5

Facilitating leadership. These groups must have leaders who have a sense of where the group is now and where it should go. They have a capacity to troubleshoot problems where they arise. They want to partner with church in the big in the events put on by the bigger church leadership but their overall style is facilitation, not direction, not doing all the talking. They are facilitating the group on its journey in its partnerships.

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Having laid out the five essences that live within the group there are also other strategic responsibilities that lie with the main church leadership.

These groups must be seen to be important; they are church in the small and yes we have church in the big. It is a well known fact that any kind of small group system takes more work and effort on part of the church leadership team.

Small group systems that are not supported inevitably run out of steam so there must be a level of commitment to make these groups happen and a level of intentionality in supporting these groups. Some of this I have already mentioned, but without this the groups will struggle. But if we embrace their importance, if we embrace the intentionality of

There are lots of mid sized groups which also have an important role to play but I am convinced that if we want to empower people and equip them small groups are where we must be.

In this booklet I have highlighted the lessons we have already learnt that will make small groups fit for this purpose in the future. These are the five essences that I believe groups that work will have:

### **Essence 1**

There will be a God ward dynamic where believers encounter the word of God; they help one another in the discipleship journey and they pray and worship together. This is about their authenticity, their discipleship.

### **Essence 2**

A community emphasis. This group of people, no more than a houseful-maximum 12 - probably averaging somewhere between six and ten, care for one another. If any are in difficulty they look after each other - there is a reality.

### **Essence 3**

There is a missional outward emphasis. This group seeks to empower each other for their front line. What it means for them in their front line, their workplace, their school gate. It seeks to empower the members of this group for service. We know that the many projects of social action that have been promoted by the Cinnamon Network - street pastors, food banks, money advice - have been highly successful. There is no question that, as councils have less money to deal with the needs of our local communities, there will be a growing opportunity for the church to step in and demonstrate unconditional love in the name of Jesus and serve. And this will take more volunteers and more people saying I will put my name on that rota and be there. A missional dynamic of a small group can help to make that happen.

words, his death and resurrection. As we are drawn to love, we discover something amazing. The simple truth is that as we live for something bigger than ourselves, we find our real selves. We are set free to endeavour to be the people who God wants us to be. Loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength is the most sensible thing we can do and it is God's dream that we should all do it.

We see that God's dream is bigger than this. It is not just that we should know that he loves us and we love him, but it is God's dream that we should love our neighbour. What this means is not our neighbour just in terms of our Christian brother and sister, but we should love our world. At the heart of God's dream is that his people will be the carrier of love in words and actions to every corner of the earth - that in every community God's people might live differently, might demonstrate love and might be a catalyst for good. Now that's what we call a dream! It is not what we the church have always done, but it is what God wants us to do.

It is God's dream that we love ourselves. I've always felt that this is one of the strangest parts of this extraordinary verse and yet the truth is that we really cannot love other people if we hate ourselves. I believe it is God's dream that we should each be whole and healed and as much as possible learn to love ourselves. So no matter what your background, whether rich or poor, whether you have many gifts or few gifts, whether you've been damaged by life, damaged by the selfishness of others or by your own choices, you come to a place where you realize that God's love has made you significant. You can forgive and accept yourself and realize you have value.

The curse of our humanity is that so often we have such a negative view of ourselves that we define ourselves by the words of others. We define ourselves by success or failure, rather than defining ourselves by saying that we are the children of God. We have value and God has placed something wonderful within each one of us.

This dream has a hidden message. In a sense this dream is about 'people power'. It is about empowered people, people who are able to discern the contribution they can make and are willing to offer that contribution. This implies leaders who get up every day to support every member of their church, through training and releasing people to make their contribution. It develops in a culture where participation is the norm, not only within the church but in the community and workplace. It is realizing that God wants a church where everybody can participate. The church is sometimes called the Body of Christ in Scripture and this gives us a picture of every part of that body being important. It has a role to play. In our human body, every bit is significant and our bodies work best as each part plays its part. *'Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.'* (Ephesians 6:15-16)

Yet church history shows us that sadly we can fall into a trap and the trap is that God's dream and vision is not lived out by everybody. In fact we have created structures and organisations that encourage passivity amongst the many. It is the leaders and the activists that do the work. It is said of many organisations, and it is true of church, that most of the work is done by 20% of the people. This is not God's dream. God's dream is that his church would equip, strengthen and mobilise every member to love him, to love the world, to love themselves and to use their opportunity and talent to participate in God's dream.

Joel Comiskey captures this dream in his book *'2000 Years of Small Groups'* and describes it in a very enticing way:

'Picture yourself travelling down a Roman road on your way to attend a first century house church. As you walk down the narrow streets, you notice people everywhere. You're well aware of the over-population of Rome— where approximately one million people live— with the vast majority crowded in one or two room apartments above or behind shops and markets. You admire some of the larger homes as you make your way down the narrow road, but you also notice that

## 9 Start with a dream and end with a strategic direction

- Archbishop Justin Welby has said that he wants every Christian to be empowered for personal witness and evangelism.
- The Pope in *Evangelii Gaudium* says that all Christians should be missionary disciples.
- Mark Greene of London Institute of Contemporary Christianity challenges everyone to be a holistic disciple living their faith out on their front line.

Empowering every believer is definitely the direction of travel for the church in the years ahead. The newly released Barna research is built around the ministry of individual Christians and how they are perceived by the unchurched. That research showed that the average believer in England is far more connected than we thought - over 70% of people have a friend who is a regular church goer, and extraordinarily they really liked us. I believe these statistics confirm the good work that has been done by many groups over the last 20 years. But the research also highlights that, in terms of conversation and sharing faith, much of our word based activities is misunderstood and there is a great deal more empowering and equipping required in these areas.

So we must ask ourselves some serious questions of how we are going to empower people and see effective change both in terms of discipleship and skills and motivation. Where is this going to happen? We have to take an honest look at our Sunday services; they are fantastic but they cannot deliver the type of empowering and equipping that is necessary.

community and the larger gatherings, usually on a Sunday. It gives a mid-size context for social life and community, for the development of spiritual ministry, speaking gifts, worship gifts and discipling gifts, as well as an outward focus. For smaller churches of under 200 this is not always such a felt need.

We have also learnt that church needs to provide a space for those who do not want to be part of a small group and yet find God within the community of believers. Others might choose to be part of only a small group. Again, these are issues to work with and develop together.

### **Leadership Teams**

Church leaders have said to me over the years 'how can I possibly do all this? It sounds as if you are asking me to run two churches, the one I already run and then all this small group stuff'. One way in which this has worked out is through the increased move towards team leadership. There is no doubt that where church in the big and the small flourishes best is when someone on the leadership team is the enthusiast for the small group idea. They do not have to be the senior leader, are often not in fact, but they run the support for the small group idea, working in close partnership with the senior leader. As previously indicated, most small group systems die from lack of support and regular connection to the overall leadership.

most of the dwelling places are small single rooms. You finally arrive at the home, which is really an apartment. It's a residential unit with an adjoining courtyard and you notice several rows of apartments connected to each other. You remember from your previous trips to this house that the neighbours are very quizzical about the gathering because they can hear the singing and even some of the conversations. You once again reflect on the crowded conditions of Rome due to the constant influx of immigrants. Privacy is almost impossible here. As you enter the home, the rich smell of food fills the air. You notice the food baking outside while you are ushered into the dining area, the largest room in the house. Like most apartments in the area, this one is made of timber and mud brick, making it prone to fire and collapse. The apartment also has an upper floor but like most places, there is no central heating, running water, or lavatory. You count thirteen people at the gathering and all have been invited to share the meal together—in memory of Jesus Christ. The story of Christ's last supper with his disciples in the upper room makes Christ's presence seem so real to you. You love the testimonies of changed lives, and people's love for this risen Jesus. You hear stories about those who actually saw Jesus after his resurrection. And they say that Jesus promised to return quickly. Other stories of Christ's miracles are repeated. You love the natural free-flowing atmosphere, the singing, the Scripture reading, and the expectation of the Holy Spirit's presence. Your experience in the house church that night is emotional and vibrant. You feel God's joy as you talk with like-minded believers and remember that Jesus is also present in spirit. As you reflect on being born again one year earlier during your first meeting, you are grateful to be Christ's follower and a participant in such a loving group of believers. Your supreme desire is to spread the good news of the gospel to everyone you meet. After all, Jesus is coming soon! <sup>1</sup>

I believe that in this summary, to love God, love ourselves, love one another and make our contribution, which we call the Great Commandment, Jesus gave us a description of the DNA that is the essence of church. Church carries this distinct DNA as a place where we

grow in our love for God and know His love. It is a place from which we are empowered to love our world and to make a difference. It is a place of healing and wholeness and it is a place of participation where, whenever possible, we encourage one another, all of us, to love God and to serve our community, our neighbours and our world.

It is this DNA that we want to explore and look at in a contextualisation of church in the big and the small, the gathering and the small group in the UK. What does it look like? How does it work?

### **For reflection**

What would you say is the DNA of your church? In what ways is participation encouraged?

important these groups are in the life of the church when this amount of time and energy is put into their support and wellbeing.

All these things often go unnoticed but are essential to keep the small groups healthy and ensure their ongoing development. Many small group leaders fail, burn out or simply give up because they feel undervalued and unsupported.

### **A vision for mission**

Another role that the large wing offers is that of casting and keeping a vision for mission. For example, one large church in England with holistic small groups focus on the missional dynamic of 'loving your neighbour' at least four times a year. They know that this is important and groups need that continual encouragement. In the same way they emphasise why church is best in the big and the small. Sustaining this way of being church over many years means keeping the ideas alive and enthusing new members along the way. The key factors of church life, the key factors of walking in the Christian way, need to be repeated on an ongoing basis.

### **Communication**

The two-way flow of communication between church leaders and small group leaders is vital in this dynamic partnership. It leads to well supported small groups and relevant initiatives for the whole church in outreach and training. It also ensures that there is the provision of mature Christians who can be involved in counselling as a support to the small groups.

### **Missional Communities**

A number of larger churches who have been working with the holistic small group idea have developed another structure. These are sometimes called Missional Communities and consist of 20-40 people where there is a distinct focus, embraced by all the individuals in the group. The structure of the church has three focuses, the small groups, the missional

objective view. This also communicates a sense of value to the leader and the group as a whole. The fact that time is being given and support offered to the leader and the group speaks volumes about the value of the group in the life of the church at large.

The other crucial role we have seen these group coaches play is that of being a referral point for those who need support beyond the small group. For some this needs to be ongoing support, for others it is for a short period of time to enable them to cope with the circumstances of life. Many small group leaders become overwhelmed with the needs of some individuals in a group and need someone who can step in to help. This is the role of the coach. They can offer a variety of help either from within the church at large or sometimes by professional bodies outside the church. This means that the individuals who need support do not see the small group as the solution to all their problems and avoid sucking the life out of it and the leader.

### Supporting the leaders

Another part of big wing support of the small groups is how the leaders of the groups are valued and developed. Many churches in the UK have taken this on board and given it attention and priority. We have seen leaders gathered together for feedback and prayer. This happens every eight to ten weeks, sometimes over breakfast on a Saturday morning. Time is spent sharing what has been going on in the groups and cross fertilising good practice and ideas. This strengthens the feeling of team amongst the small group leaders. It is a good opportunity to pray for each other and have a renewed sense of commitment together to see the groups and individuals in them encouraged and growing.

A good number of Churches have developed a pattern of ongoing development of their leaders by running a day away each year with specific training and greater time to share and pray for each other. In some cases this has been a weekend away where the team dynamic is further strengthened and increased time is available to resource and support these leaders in their front line role. As you can imagine this sends a very strong message to the rest of the church about how

## 2 The DNA in groups

We have described the dream and have seen the possibility of empowered people. The lesson that we have learnt as we have worked to contextualize the Cell Model of church here in the UK is that for groups to become a carrier of the dream, to be a place that empowers its members, there needs to be a certain DNA. All aspects of this DNA need to be at work at the same time. So what is that DNA?

- ⇒ **Strand One:** To love God and to grow in devotion.
- ⇒ **Strand Two:** To love your Christian community and to genuinely care for individuals and the community.
- ⇒ **Strand Three:** To love your neighbour as you love yourself, to love your world and the place where you work.
- ⇒ **Strand Four:** To create groups that are participative in nature, seeking to create whole life disciples.

If you have the first strand of DNA, to love God, this is a start. It could be called a Bible Study group. The members learn from one another and inspire one another in devotion. A good thing, but not enough.

If you have a second strand, and you love one another and care for one another, this group becomes what we might call a house group or fellowship group. This is also a good thing but not enough.

Adding a third strand, the group becomes outward looking and seeks to think of its responsibilities to empower one another to love and good works. This is nearly the dream.

When we add the fourth strand, a sense of participation, a sense that everyone is involved, we create a different sort of group. This four stranded DNA creates the contextualized house group or cell group -

names are not important. This is the place of whole life discipleship with a missional heart beat when all four strands are playing their part. We have learned over the years in England that if we can grasp this idea, organically as it were, then this begins to create the kind of groups which are powered by the Great Commandment.

We learned the lesson that structure alone doesn't create this DNA. We have created structures. We worked with the Four Ws - a Welcome, an act of Worship, an encounter with God's Word, a challenge to be a Witness. Many times the structures didn't really produce what we wanted. Bill Beckham recognised this as he worked with us in the early days of contextualisation. He said 'don't change the structure without changing the value'. Many took on board the structure and did not appreciate the DNA that needed to be in place that would help to bring about the values change. The most resistant strand of DNA to incorporate has proved to be the missional purpose. Loving God, loving one another, creating an atmosphere of healing, wholeness and participation have all been part of many of our small group experiences.

These strands have been easier to incorporate into these cell groups. In comparison, seeking to mobilise everybody to be a Christian worker has proved to be more of a journey. What helps us is to fully understand the DNA. If a group lives from all four strands of DNA it is possible to quickly discern the nature of that group, whatever the structure.

What we have learnt is that in reality most churches with more than four or five groups will find that some groups carry the essence of the dream, some are a work in progress and some have stopped carrying the dream altogether. Leaders have to keep encouraging, keep seeking to put the dream and the understanding of the DNA on the agenda and yet have grace. We are seeking to empower and to encourage. We know that within our churches, even those that have significantly embraced these ideas, some groups have all four strands of DNA and some don't. We also discover that some members of these churches, maybe up to 30%, prefer not to become a member of a small group. We have learned that that is just fine. We are not seeking to create a pure model. This is life.

## 8 Partnership: Big Wing and Small Wing

Church in the big and the small has been a strand in church history from the early history of the church through to today. We have the wonderful example of Methodism and John Wesley's passion for church to work at both these levels. He visited classes all during his life in ministry. He reports that on Thursday 17 July 1760 he visited a small group in Limerick. He was concerned that their classes were not delivering spiritual life, zeal and activity. At other times, he was concerned about preaching, communion and the big picture. We know that this dynamic partnership of church in the big and the small changed this nation.

Churches in the UK who have worked with the cell idea have worked best when they have understood this partnership. Church in the big supplies the overall leadership and framework, not only making sure that Sunday church works, but that the pastoral structure of the church is in place and its missional purpose and small group leaders are properly resourced.

### The Group Coach

We have learnt that for church in the big to really know what is happening in the small groups, someone needs to visit them. This small group coach needs to be somebody who understands the DNA, can visit a small group and assess whether this group is working on participation and concern for those outside the church community. The important thing is to know what is actually happening in the groups and this can only be ascertained by visiting them. You can pick up a certain amount by talking to the leader of the group, but they inevitably see what is happening in the group through their own filters. For this reason it is good to have someone from the outside going in who can bring a more

growth primarily as the fruit of Alpha. People were on an Alpha course because they met an individual who was mobilized and supported through their small group, who was able to invite them to Alpha.

One spin off from this was that rather than the groups getting bigger, they sometimes got smaller. They sent some of their key group members to sit at the Alpha table who then became leaders of new small groups.

One or two churches followed a slightly different route. An existing small group became the host of an Alpha course which looked a little bit like a classic cell meeting, except there was a meal instead of an icebreaker followed by the Alpha talk and discussion. Later on the whole group attended the 'Holy Spirit' weekend. When some of the people on the Holy Spirit weekend came to faith, they stayed within the group which then needed to multiply in that classic sense.

Some churches have had groups which did multiply. This happened through folding in existing church members and adding some who had become Christians. However the lesson we have learnt is that the real gift of the small group is that it mobilizes people; it empowers them to be missional; it holds them accountable to whether they are making friends outside the church, whether they are holding hands with these friends through their loving service. I believe it creates a steady stream of people into church through Alpha and their guest services. In that sense we see that small groups in the UK have been successful in as much as the hard ground allows. The good news is that the perception of Christians and the church is being changed as more and more Christians get involved in loving service, in friendship, in projects, going out into the world as a mobilized workforce. It is this changed perception that leads to a greater openness to the gospel. My belief is that if we persist in church in the big and the small, in love and service, we will see increasing numbers of people coming to faith as there is greater spiritual openness.

We want to facilitate as many people into small groups as possible. We want as many people as possible to carry that DNA and to be a part of these groups, but we live with ambiguity and dysfunction and we have learnt that is fine. This is family, not a regime. This is church, expressing itself in the big and the small, with all its weakness and strength.

### **For reflection**

One of the shifts we have begun to see is a re evaluation of the nature of church. Ralph Neighbour looked at this as he talked about programmes and the organisational nature of church. The emphasis on small groups has drawn us to a more relational model of church life, particularly where every member making a contribution is such a key ingredient. This is not in opposition to the necessary structural components but refreshes this relational dynamic that can get lost. In this respect the structures are there to serve the relationships rather than the other way round.

What function do the structures in your church serve?

### 3 People Power

Implicit in the dream which we have been considering is that it is for everyone. This is a movement of people power. As Jesus spoke about the Great Commandment making it inclusive of everyone he created a seismic gap between the traditions that had grown up within Judaism. He painted a different future. In the Old Testament, we see that the work of God is done by the prophets, priests and kings. We see in the New Testament that the religious people, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and Rabbis, speak for God and do the work of God. Here we see Jesus creating a whole new model. Our devotion to God is not through an intermediary. We are all to be active carriers of God's love and purpose.

It seems implicit in the descriptions of the spread of the early church that in the first 100 years or so Christianity was carried as a people movement. It's spread across the Roman Empire was not just the work of a few apostles and bishops, but it was individuals, hundreds and thousands of them, doing the work of God, bearing testimony to their Jesus that was so compelling. Yet sadly as the church became established within buildings it became organized into different groupings and the Old Testament model crept back in. Church can seem once again to be a place where the priests are the intermediary in worship. They do the work of God and the people become passive followers.

Changes begin to happen once you introduce a small group into the life of a church. From descriptions in the book of Acts, it seems that the church met in the temple for worship, for inspiration and that this was lead by chosen leaders who were recognised for this gift. Yet they also met in their homes where it was possible for everyone to make their contribution. People power was alive and well and the church lived in a dynamic harmony of big and small gatherings. In his book *'2000 Years of Small Groups'* Joel Comiskey writes:

number of problems when it comes to evangelism. Firstly, Christians rather sadly are seen in a negative light. We are often thought of as hypocrites. Secondly, we have not been engaging with our communities and changing their perspectives until quite recently. Thirdly, we have used confrontational methods of evangelism in a culture that no longer really believes in truth and the power of words. Fourthly, these words often have been no longer in general parlance, words like sin, repent, born again. There has been a communication problem with people not understanding what we are saying. Fifthly, the power of consumerism, the hedonism of our culture, the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain is proving to be an extremely powerful barrier. We have concluded that groups are always going to grow more slowly here in the UK.

The other area we have needed to look at is the way in which groups multiply. The idea of these holistic small groups emerged in the UK a year or two after Alpha had begun. This was a significant game changer. It is my contention that because of Alpha and because of a particularly British characteristic, our groups were never going to multiply in the same way as in other countries. Groups in Singapore and South America mainly grew on the basis of personal evangelism. Individuals were mobilized, they reached out to their friends, led those friends to Christ and brought them into their group. The group grew and had to multiply. However, here in the UK, despite a hundred years of encouragement, British people do not ask personal or leading questions. Whereas we are happy to share our story and our faith with our friends, it is perhaps a cultural step too far, an invasion of private space, to ask them a leading question. We would much prefer to ask them to something where someone else puts up the proposition or brings a challenge. In the past, that opportunity was provided by gospel meetings or guest services.

What we quickly perceived was happening in the UK was that members of these holistic small groups had been mobilized, they did reach out to their friends. They invited their friends to Alpha, their friends came to faith in that process and new groups were started at the end of Alpha. We discovered that on the whole the cell idea was more successful than we had thought. Local churches who embraced the cell idea had seen

# 7 Growth/Alpha

There is absolutely no doubt that the major contextualization of the cell idea in the United Kingdom (UK) has been in the area of growth. When the idea of groups like these, with a missional heart beat, were first promoted, they came out of the success of churches in Singapore and South America. An obvious presumption was made that the sort of growth they saw and the models they used would be the same here. That led to the idea that these groups would grow through evangelism and be able to multiply, starting a new group within a two year period at most.

In most cases in England this simply did not happen. However this does not mean these groups were not effective evangelistically. So let's look at this in a stage by stage, point by point way.

Firstly from a missional perspective we need to ask ourselves if Singapore and South America are comparable to the UK in terms of openness to the Christian gospel and receptivity to Christian ideas. The answer is clearly no. Here is an illustration to this point. When I was director of Youth with a Mission England a YWAMer from South America who was based here in England was appalled that YWAM's DTS outreaches in England only led two to three people to Christ in a month's outreach to a town. In South America over the same period there would have been over 100 people come to faith and a church planted. As a result I proposed a swap with the South American leader. We would send a team to South America and he would bring a team here. He was convinced that it was a methodological problem, a Holy Spirit problem. So his team came and our team went. The UK team in South America led 40 to 50 people to Christ—not as many as they might have due to language difficulties. Their team led four or five people to Christ in the UK.

This showed me that the problem is not to do with method, but with the nature of the ground. Here in the UK we know that we have had a

'The early church saw itself as God's new family. Their intense familial love permeated the meetings. As brothers and sisters in Christ's new family, they wanted to serve one another as Jesus served his own disciples. This is why the phrase 'one another' appears more than fifty times in the New Testament. These phrases instructed the early believers on how to cultivate relationships among themselves.'<sup>2</sup>

Take away the small groups and slowly but surely the contribution of 'the everyone' ceases. We arrive at the sort of equations that are well known in the church today, that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people.

What happens in these small groups which intentionally embrace the concept of people power? In essence, these groups are seeking to fulfil the Great Commandment and the Great Commission to encourage discipleship and mission. In today's language we might call this *authentic and connected*. The small groups aspire to be a place where authentic wholeness and discipleship are pursued and where being encouraged and equipped to connect with those outside the church is at the heart of the idea. A part of this authentic process is that groups become a place of healing. Dr Gary Sweeten says in his experience that an active and purposeful small group can be a place where through the shared life of community and prayer and ministry, restoration and healing from our selfishness, the damage of life, the selfishness of others, the troubles and the problems that we all carry, can take place. Where the 'one another's' of the New Testament, the care and the prayer, bring a wholeness. In his research he concluded that 60% of people respond to this environment. 20% of people can find their healing and restoration talking on a one to one basis to wise people with experience and leadership, and 10% find their restoration by seeking the professional help of trained doctors, psychiatrists or counsellors. I could tell you story after story, of people who came to a small group barely able to participate, damaged by life, who had never prayed out loud, never participated, never thought that God could use them, and yet a year later, they are praying, participating, joining in.

But small groups do something else. They give space and opportunity. In a big meeting, only a few can genuinely make their contribution, and that is how it should be. But in a small meeting, there is an unlimited opportunity, particularly if it is well led, for all to contribute and participate.

Small groups not only give opportunity for us all to contribute but in groups which embrace the fullness of the Great Commandment, there is opportunity and encouragement for each person to become active in how they can be part of God's purpose in the world throughout their week, where they live and where they work.

What size of group are we talking about? In looking at the experience here in the UK, the best practice that we have seen over these last years, is that groups work best at a number somewhere between 4 and 12 on a regular basis. 4 is nearly too few and 12 is nearly too many. Once you have 12 in a room, the capacity for participation is significantly reduced.

Why is this? It's to do with the number of lines of communication between the people in the group. Where you have three people in a group you have six lines of communication two between persons A and B two between persons B and C and two between C and A. This makes the group feel quite intimate and gives plenty of opportunity for participation. The way that the number of lines of communication can be worked out is to simply apply a little formula, which is taking the number of people in the group and multiplying it by the number in the group, then taking away the number in the group. So if you have ten people in your group you have  $10 \times 10$  which is 100 minus 10 which is 90 lines of communication. Not surprisingly this limits the amount of participation that is possible! We have noticed that it can also limit the attendance of members as the group becomes large. People don't participate as much and don't feel as connected as a result. Many groups can have a list of members, some up to 15 or more, but in reality only have 10 or so in regular attendance.

Stage two could be a step into spiritual interest and on to understanding the content of the spiritual message. This is where small groups and church structures need to work together in partnership. This second stage could be an individual sharing their personal story, why they believe. It could be an invitation to a carol service or to an Easter Day service where the story of Jesus is told. It could be the giving of a good book. There are so many wonderful resources that are becoming available (see Other Resources). To mention just one, The Bible Society have brought together the story of Jesus in the New Testament in a little booklet called WHO? The last stage, stage three of this relational pathway might be an invitation to discover what it means to be a Christian, maybe through Alpha or to encourage people to pray and talk to God for themselves. I have done some informal research over the years and have found that over 30% of British people have made their most meaningful step to God on their own.

Our small groups enable us to be authentic, real disciples. Whether through friendship or through a project, people can see that we are real, although not perfect. They can see something of our faith and that we are connected to people. Through these connections we offer people a spiritual journey. We will love them regardless of whether they take the journey or not, but we are not ashamed to offer them that journey.

### **For reflection**

I think the question being asked by our non Christian friends has changed. Once they asked 'is it true?' The world was structured around objective truth and our reality was being expressed in this way. As our culture has become more post modern and experiential, the question has become 'does it work?'. This is the reason why we need to live differently so people can see that being a Christian makes a difference and then they might consider whether it is true.

What does this look like? Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28 to go and make disciples. In modern English we could say that we are to be authentic and to be connected. Contextual mission, in my mind, looks like these two things. It is about being authentic whole-life disciples seeking to demonstrate Christ in and through every aspect of our lives. It looks like empowered people who connect to their world through friendship, love and service, in the context where they work and where they live. This is our front line.

I think that in the past I overemphasized the power of friendship evangelism, thinking everybody could make friends and just be hospitable. I now see that is not the case. It simply is not enough. We must demonstrate love by being as personally relational as we can, joining sports clubs, interest groups, being a good neighbour, being hospitable. All of these things we can do as individuals. We also recognize that to connect truly we must serve our communities using our creativity and local knowledge to meet local needs. The Cinnamon Network have identified twenty seven simple ideas that local churches could do that demonstrate unconditional love for their community. Amongst their suggestions are starting a food bank, helping people with their debts, visiting shut-ins, giving lunch to young people in the holidays who may be hungry or helping people with addictions. These projects have given churches a whole new confidence. Our small groups empower people to friendship and to service. As we do more of these projects, we will need more people and more people will come to serve and be a part because their small groups empower, support and encourage them to do so.

The HOPE project also has suggested hundreds of different ideas and ways that people can be involved. See 'HOPE: The Heartbeat of Mission' - *Other Resources on page 42*.

I believe that the first stage of mission today is connection and this demonstrates unconditional love whether through friendship or service. We might discover through this connection where people are in their experience of God. The second stage is to offer people an opportunity to hear the words. Stage one says that God is good and his people are okay.

## **Safety**

The joy of a small group is it can become a safe place. A sense of community develops, a bonding which means that 'what happens in the group stays in the group'. If people participate and their participation is a bit out of order or not the right thing, it doesn't matter. This is a safe place. Laugh or cry, get it right, get it wrong, these are friends. No judgements passed, all participation welcome.

Mark Greene, the director of LICC, has championed the thought that 'everyone is a full-time Christian worker'. A cry for, 'whole life discipleship'. Small groups can help deliver this. One example of the way this happens is where in turn each member of the group shares what they do from Monday to Friday. They outline the challenges that they face, the joys they live with and they ask the group to pray for them. This can be a very powerful time as the group gather round a group member and lift them to God in prayer. This can be done by focusing on one person each week. It does not take the whole meeting time but just needs twenty minutes or so. This helps to break down the sacred/secular divide and connects the whole group with the reality of living out our Christian faith in the real world. It affirms each of us as full time Christian workers being salt and light in the whole of life.

In our culture, we also have a powerful historical model.

## **The Wesley Revolution**

John Wesley gives us a powerful example of what happens when the dream is spread to the hearts of as many Christians as possible, and the opportunity of 'People Power' is created. When John Wesley began his movement the ministry of the church was solely in the hands of leaders. The people were passive and the message limited. John Wesley had a different sense in his heart of what the church at that time could become in order that it might be relevant to the culture in 1730. One in six women in the city of London was a prostitute. Gin and alcohol were everywhere. Entertainment was life's joy. Slowly but surely money was growing in power. On the face of it, you would think that this would be a

place where the church would fail. Yet John Wesley did something different. He preached his message of salvation and commitment and in his heart he saw a different model of church. No longer dependent on the professional minister to do the work, he preached the primary message that the church should encourage responsibility for those outside the church. The message was no longer 'come' but 'go'. He demonstrated this when he began to go to open spaces to proclaim the Christian message. It was not to turn every believer into a street preacher, but it was to turn every believer into an activist. In John Wesley's mind the church was to 'go'. The leaders were to equip and give example. The people were disciples and part of being a disciple was to love God and to love your neighbour. His message was big. John Wesley was not just interested in souls being saved, but he wanted to see our society changed: slaves freed, children educated, and the institutions of business and life to be altered.

How successful was he? Dr Martin Robinson has said that the first 30 years of Methodism from 1730-1760, was a time of enthusiasm and experimentation. From 1760 to the end of John Wesley's life in 1790 was about hard work. Christians living out their Christianity on a day by day basis, empowered by church in the big and the small, with real discipleship. In a John Wesley small group, or a class as it was called, everyone would have participated and this included an opportunity for each believer to confess their temptations to one another, believer by believer. Those who confessed were challenged by their fellow group members with this question, 'what means of grace is God giving to you to be different?' This level of discipleship, this participation created different sorts of people in communities where everybody knew each other. These people who followed the 'method', the Methodists, no longer squandered their money on alcohol and riotous living but sought to love their own families. Their children, once thin and hungry, were now well fed and well dressed. Family and marriage meant something and these Methodists sought to take their faith out to a wider context wherever possible.

## 6 Contextual Mission

What does this look like in the United Kingdom, circa 2015? I think we all understand that the culture of this nation has gone through a radical change. It is no longer a secular nation where legislation sits on a Christian moral foundation. We are a secular nation with roots in a post-modernism. It is a totally different culture - not all bad, not all good, just different. Just as the culture has changed, so mission needs to change. What are some of those big changes?

Firstly, we have become a culture where belief in one truth is no longer accepted. We have become cynical about politicians, church leaders or anyone who claims to have the truth. We are a culture who wants to see before we believe. We want to touch it and see it before we believe it and if we can touch it and see it, we might be prepared to listen to the proposition which lies behind what we have seen. This of course is the Jesus way. Jesus came and lived amongst people. He was one of them. He was totally and fully connected. He encouraged them to come, to follow, to see and to experience. When the disciples of John came and asked him 'Are you the one?' Jesus did not give them the talk he gave to his disciples on the Emmaus Road after the resurrection. He told them to tell John what they had seen and experienced.

As the church, we need to learn to walk a different way. In times past, because of the love and service of previous generations, many understood and accepted the gospel as truth often before they experienced much of the Christian community of love and action. But in today's society we must put love first. We must connect and demonstrate how we live out our Christian faith before we earn the right to speak. We are not ashamed of words, but recognize both their power and limitations.

forgotten what it felt like to be in a relatively small room where the other six people smoked, and Ailish and I did not. By the end of the night, I thought I was going to die. In reflecting back to the Lord, I said I was very happy to be a pastor, but was it possible for me to have a non-smoking congregation? I felt God opened the doors of heaven and looked down and said 'Poor Laurence. Is the smokey wokie getting up your nose wosie?' Then I thought that perhaps hanging on a cross was not such a good experience, and if Jesus could hang on a cross for me, then I could be a member of this group. For ten years, most Thursday nights, I sat in a group with my good friends. How will people know about the love of God unless in some way we connect with them.

I learnt that in beginning a small group, before we put mission on the agenda, we need to reflect together how easy or how hard it is to make friends or to serve in a project. We need to ask God to give us the right motivation - for a big heart. Week by week as we think about those we are reaching out to, we pray not only for them, but we pray for ourselves that our hearts would be big and we would be motivated.

### **For reflection**

The story of Jesus sending out the 72 is reported in Luke 10. Before this happens Jesus says, *'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'* Did he suggest that we should pray for the harvest? No, it is the workers, you and me and our friends in the small group with us who need prayer to go out.

A number of years ago, an Open University programme looked at the architecture of Methodist buildings and discovered that they were designed to have a worship space and attached to it, another big space. This big space was made up of a number of rooms and his view was that these spaces acted as local community centres, which the members of church used to care for and help their communities. The mobilising of these Methodists created such impact that there is a cabinet minute where the government asks themselves 'If John Wesley wanted to be Prime Minister, who could stop him?' Another said, 'if he wanted to be king, who could stop him?' Such was their awareness of Methodism and its growing impact on society.

“Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.” *John Wesley*

One such story is the legendary Samuel Budget, whose life is described in *The Successful Merchant* by William Arthur. Samuel was a trader. Just an ordinary church member, who ran his business for maximum profit and benefit to himself. He bought from manufacturers at the cheapest price he possibly could, leaving very little profit. He sold at the maximum price the market would bear. But one day he was challenged to love his neighbour. He became a mobilised person. A whole-life disciple. He asked himself, 'Do I love my neighbour?' As a result he made changes to his business practice. He began to buy from manufacturers at a much fairer price that left them with a profit. He sold at a fair price. Surprisingly he found himself much wealthier. He asked himself other questions such as 'if I love my workforce, how many hours should they work per week?' He began to think of the proper hours and a proper day off. He began to think of the role of children and realized that they should be educated and not exploited. He created a method of work and business practice that was written up in *The Successful Merchant* published in 1852, which was reprinted again and again. This book was the inspiration for some of the successful Quaker business people, with businesses such as Cadbury's and Sunlight Soap, who followed his example. They built houses for their work force, made sure children were

educated and gave rights and privileges to their workers. The Successful Merchant laid a foundation and changed the business practices of this country. All of this began to change the perceptions of ordinary English people who had reacted to the Puritanism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and who had a negative perception of Christianity. The mobilisation of so many to love and good works began to so change the environment and people's perception of Christianity, that from 1790 to 1850 there was unparalleled church growth.

As we have encouraged the cell movement in the UK over the last twenty years or so, it has been with this larger transformational picture in mind. As every member of a small group is encouraged and empowered to live differently and be salt and light in their communities and workplaces, then our nation can be transformed. This is not a quick fix strategy as we saw from the example of Methodism. It took thirty years of hard work to change the perception that people had of Christians. We need to be prepared for the long haul and celebrate small victories along the way.

### **For reflection**

How can we embrace this idea of each one of us being equipped for our front line, being a holistic disciple who makes a difference where we work and where we live? How can we create ownership across our church so that each one of us mobilized?

As I thought about this more, I realized that I had an experience in my own life when I was a young Christian. I had come from a prosperous middle-class background and had been sheltered from difficult situations. When working in a youth club I encountered a young boy from an extremely difficult background who, for a number of reasons, was extremely dirty and often his clothes were soaked in urine and he was in an appalling state. In my 21 years to that point I had never encountered humanity in this way. Rather than stepping into the situation to help, I found myself turning away. At that time I was living in a small Christian community. The leader of that community, Lorraine, could see that I had had a difficult time. She said to me 'Loving people is not easy.' My response was 'It's impossible. How am I meant to do this?' She took me to 2 Corinthians 5:14 where it says that Christ died for all. She pointed out three things to me. Firstly that I needed to understand that every human was of value, so valuable that Christ had died for them. Secondly, in verse 16, it tells us not to look at people from a human perspective and that I was to look beyond what I could see. Thirdly, that love was a choice. Lorraine exhorted me to go and ask God for a big heart. So I did.

Shortly after that, I encountered the same boy again. But this time, by the grace of God, I did not walk away and was able to reach out and care for this boy.

In thinking about this, I tried to think of a metaphor that helps us understand that mission begins in the heart. I was reminded of some words that Ed Silvoso wrote. He encouraged every Christian to think of themselves as a pastor, but their congregation was made up of those outside the church from their community. We should do the two things a good pastor does; love people unconditionally regardless of whether they respond or not and yet seek their spiritual welfare. I began to see that I needed to have a small group of people that I belonged to, and that my small group's role was to pray for me to have a big heart and to empower me to love my unchurched congregation.

Shortly after this thought, my friend Bob invited me to join his darts club, which met in a small garage. The first night I went, I realized I'd

## 5 Missional Heartbeat

There comes a moment in one's mission activities when you realize that something so simple and yet profound has been missing. In 1995, I wrote a book called *Sowing, Reaping, Keeping*, which I'm pleased to say is still in print and is seen by many to be a fundamental book on understanding mission and evangelism in today's context.

In 2003, IVP asked me to re-write the book and update it. In doing that, I took the opportunity to pray a prayer that was basically just being polite. The prayer was that if there was anything fundamentally wrong in the original book (but of course there wasn't), that the Good Lord might let me know. I had plenty of new material, so I began to write. The more I wrote, the more uneasy I became. I began to feel that God was speaking to me about the original book and that there was a significant problem with it. My immediate response to this was 'Are you sure God? Have you read it?' Eventually a metaphor came to mind: you can take a horse to the water, but if it is not thirsty, it won't drink. I felt the Holy Spirit began to speak to me that mission is not a structure or programme, mission is about a question. The question is 'How big is your heart?'

John 3:16 does not say 'God so hated the world that He sent his son to judge it', but God so LOVED the world. In other words, mission began in God's heart. Out of that love came action, the sending of his son. I realize that in many ways I have spent 20 years trying to encourage people into mission, either by preaching in big meetings, or by pushing the subject in small meetings. Up to a point this does encourage individuals, but when you stop that encouragement, churches often stop reaching out. Mission begins in the heart. If we can all have a heart change then the structure becomes a vehicle to support what we want to do from our heart motivation. With a heart change we begin to understand the real nature of loving the world.

## 4 Facilitative Leadership

We are looking at groups of empowered people with a certain DNA. As we have seen from the John Wesley model, his groups had a dynamic impact on the members who attended and in turn their lives impacted our nation. In our context today, these groups need leadership and we have been using a number of phrases to describe the type of leadership required in small groups today. One of these is 'facilitative' leadership and another is light-leadership.

We use these words deliberately. If you go to a group and the only voice you hear is that of the leader, then that tells you who that group belongs to. If you go to a group and hear all the voices, that tells you the group belongs to the people.

So what is it we want the leader to do? Obviously there is the practical organisation; where and when the group will meet; how often will it meet; what will be the content. When it comes to the content, this is the big advantage of having some sort of structure. Most of the holistic small groups within the UK have worked with an internal structure. Other structures were proposed by some of the early pioneers of the idea. The truth is that we're not great fans of structure in British culture. Our recent experience of church, at least from the late 60s, has had a strong Holy Spirit dynamic. A fluidity. We've not been strong on strategy and structure. The early models of Cell Church in England had too many structures; equipping weekends; discipleship pathways; structures in the cell group meeting. For many this felt a little too tight and it took away from the Holy Spirit dynamic. Over the years as the idea has been contextualized to the UK the structures have been simplified, become less dogmatic, more pragmatic. This has been healthy. What remains is useful and serves the development of holistic small groups.

As far as our human body is concerned, we all know that if we didn't have skeletons, we might be alive, but very blobby. If we're just bone and no flesh, we would have structure but would be very dead. So we want life, with as much structure as necessary to support and enable that life.

Historically many of the small groups around the world and here in the UK have used a structure called the 4Ws, which stands for Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness.

A Welcome is, for all intents and purposes, an ice breaker—a simple question which hopefully every member of the group could answer. It can be as simple as 'What is your favourite sport?' or 'What significant event would you have most liked to have gone to in the past?'. It could ask something very much deeper and more meaningful. Everyone is involved and this immediately sets the tone of the group. This welcome question does a number of things. Firstly it means that everybody speaks and is listened to as they answer the question. It sounds quite a small thing but sets the group out on the 'every member contributing' path from the beginning. Secondly it builds community as we get to know each other and often share something of our personal history as part of the answer to the question. Thirdly it can be led by any member of the group who can bring the question and ask it. This again creates ownership and encourages participation in the form of leadership.

Worship—most groups in the UK have developed some form of non-musical worship—reading of scripture or a psalm, reflection together on that psalm, followed by a time of open prayer for those who want to contribute. Other forms of small group worship have flourished as small groups have been created across a wide range of church types and styles in the UK. As part of resourcing the Cell Movement we have drawn together 40 creative worship ideas for small groups from across the body of Christ and made them available on postcards presented in a tin, these are available from [celluk.org.uk](http://celluk.org.uk).

Word—looking at scripture. There are a number of models that have developed. All of these models are trying to encourage a participative approach, rather than a long Bible study taught by one person. The most

time. Called 'Equipping Future Cell Leaders', this is available in booklet form from [celluk.org.uk](http://celluk.org.uk)—see *other resources on page 42*.

### **For reflection**

A friend of mine describes these structures like a garden trellis. It is essential to get the roses to grow well and display their glorious blooms but is hidden by the plants themselves. All structures need occasional refreshing.

Why are we doing this?

Is this structure still enhancing participation and outward focus?

Is it easy to lead? Are the structures encouraging people to grow in leadership?

Do we need a break for a while or to do something different?

By defining leadership as 'light', or as a facilitator leader, we still want the leader to think about their group. Does it work? Where is it going? Is there spiritual energy or direction? But we do not want them to feel they have to do everything or take on the pressure of the entire burden. These are not pastoral groups where the leader feels they must pastor everybody. The group looks after itself. There is a spiritual dynamic and everybody cares for everybody, and is already described in an earlier thought 'if individuals have a serious problem, then they will look outside the group for extra help.'

One of the exciting developments is that this type of leadership is very commonly practiced in the business world where many people will be involved in small teams. Group members may have had experience in organising one of these teams and could lead a small group in the church. It has been an important emphasis in the small group movement in the UK that many people can be group leaders. This role is not just for a small number of special people.

Where a structure is used this enables different members of the group to lead a section of the meeting which encourages participation. A direct spin off from this is that it gives opportunity for leadership to be shared and practice at leading to happen. This means that it is a much smaller step from this to leading the whole group, which is in reality an extension of just leading one of the sections. You have created a pathway within the group for 'on the job' leadership development in a safe environment.

The other area that has been developed as part of our learning in this context is where leadership training takes this same principle of learning through participation and applies it to the training of small group leaders. This is simply done by running a small training group where the sections are shared out and one person facilitates. We have produced outlines around the 4 Ws structure that can be used by those involved in the training group and each of the eight week sessions has an evaluation section so you can reflect together on your learning. The skills needed and the values are drawn out through the word section and evaluation

common model has been for the group to reflect on what was spoken in church on Sunday. This can be done through a number of questions, a re-cap of what was spoken, what the key points were, what the application was that the preacher/teacher had in mind, how we could respond to the sermon, and who would like prayer.

This model has proved to be highly effective. Good educational practice tells us that real learning does not just happen by listening to a 45 minute sermon. There has to be discussion, reflection and application. Through this example, there is a helpful partnership between the larger church gathering led by the preacher or teacher, and the church in the small group who then look at that material with a view to direct application into their lives.

Joel Comiskey also makes the following observations:

“This way of working is not new and is used by Philip Spencer as part of the Pietism movement of the seventeenth century. “Sermons should be practical, focusing on inner change, as well as outer. No sermon should ever be devoid of application.” Spencer proposed that each believer should study the Scripture in a personal way, but he also encouraged people to join church-sponsored small groups to grow in their faith. He wrote in *Pia Desideria* “For a third thing it would perhaps not be inexpedient (and I set this down for further and more mature reflection) to reintroduce the ancient and apostolic kind of church meetings... anybody who is not satisfied with his understanding of a matter should be permitted to express his doubts and seek further explanation. On the other hand, those (including the ministers) who have made more progress should be allowed the freedom to state how they understand each passage.”

Spencer felt that this was the best way for people to experience spiritual growth and maturity. Spencer feared that people who only heard God's Word would soon forget it, without applying it and allowing themselves to be transformed by it. He realized that without immediate application, biblical teaching could easily be lost in the busyness of life...

The Bible became the regular reference and foundation for further discussion, and the sermon text became the theme for the lessons. Spencer was primarily concerned with Biblical application in the meetings, rather than Bible knowledge. Besides Scripture application, prayer and hymn singing were important elements of the meetings.”<sup>3</sup>

Wesley viewed preaching as the preamble to what would take place in the small groups. Discipleship took place in the lay-led class meetings through mutual ministry. Henderson writes,

‘The class meeting was the most influential instructional unit in Methodism and probably Wesley’s greatest contribution to the technology of group experience.’ (1) Although amazingly simple, it had a long-lasting impact that educators and religious leaders alike praised. A biography by Adam Clarke (who was a Methodist preacher during Wesley’s lifetime) recounted Wesley’s insistence about the priority of class meeting.’ From long experience I know the propriety of Mr. Wesley’s advice: “Establish class-meetings and form societies wherever you preach and have attentive hearers; for, wherever we have preached without doing so, the word has been like seed by the way-side” . . . Mr. Whitefield, when he separated from Mr. Wesley, did not follow it. What was the consequence? The fruit of Mr. Whitefield’s labour died with himself. Mr. Wesley’s remains and multiplies’. (2) The class meetings were Wesley’s strategy for making disciples, rather than hearing sermons. Henry Ward Beecher said, “The greatest thing John Wesley ever gave to the world is the Methodist class meeting.” Dwight L. Moody, nineteenth -century revivalist, said, “The class-meetings are the best institutions for training converts the world ever saw.”<sup>4</sup>

A number of churches have found that it works better for them to create a separate series for their small groups from what is preached. This could be a theme or a particular book of the Bible. These notes are given to whoever is doing the Word section of the meeting and the notes become the content. This is still a discussion based approach. A passage is read

out, people comment on it, key points are identified, application is looked for and discussed and again, prayer could be offered.

To help resource those churches who want to work in this way we have brought together ‘52 Cell Outlines’ that include a standalone word section with relevant questions. There are a mixture of topics and scripture stories and are from real church situations where they have been used. *Available from [celluk.org.uk](http://celluk.org.uk)—see Other Resources on page 46.*

The last section is the Witness, which is how the group encourages its members to engage with those outside the church. This is to help each group member to think through their possible impact where they work, where they live, and on the community around them.

We can see that by having a simple structure like this, it takes the pressure off the leader. The leader can organise a programme for a time ahead, letting the members know where they are going to meet, and who is going to lead each part of the meeting. A group meeting must be organic. Sometimes something happens in a part of the meeting which needs time and space. This is at the discretion of the leader, but is simply fine. A friend of mine said some years ago that we need a fifth W - 'the Wind of the Spirit'.

Another quite common structure is to break the meeting into three parts. Some have used ‘Up, In and Out’. They look Up to God in worship, they look IN in the context of the Word and how it affects us, and Out in terms of the world around us.

It is obviously possible to have no structure at all. There is a danger that as soon as the group meets without a structure that the leaders will do more, the natural extroverts will step into the vacuum, quirky people can dominate with their own problems week after week and the rest of the group will become increasingly silent. Inevitably fewer people participate. From my observation, there is no doubt that a lightly held but nonetheless visible structure inside the meeting is a positive thing.