

CHURCH 2 CHURCH

Growth Group Agreements

Our vision is to 'REACH THE CITY, REACH THE WORLD' with the Gospel of Jesus.

CONNECT to God through trusting in Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, and connect to church.

GROW in your relationship with Jesus and others following him, especially through a Growth Group.

SERVE Jesus and others according to their needs, especially a Ministry Team.

This MINISTRY PAPER is written alongside the 'Growth Groups' Ministry Paper – to help you turn that vision into action.

The Growth Group was new, well sort of, new. Planting a Growth Group meant that there were people who had known each other for years and there were people who had never met before. Geoff was well aware that as people came together each week they had plenty on their minds – work, family and their relationship with Jesus. It was daunting to think that Growth Group was the place where we learn to live for Jesus– it is hard enough just getting people to turn up. Moving to share the deep details of their lives with each other, so they could love and challenge each other seemed pretty much impossible.

So how could he, as the Growth Group Leader, help the group come together? Play games - there's a place for that. Be loving and wise in leadership? That's a great aim, but draining on the Leader? Was that sustainable?

Everyone in the Group seemed to have a different idea of how the group should work. What would be a really good start would be a way to bring together everyone's understanding of Growth Group. What they would do, what they thought was important, how often they would meet – all sorts of things. Maybe talking these things through with the Group, writing them down and referring to it often might be the thing to do

In our fast paced, individualised lives, Growth Groups are somewhat counter-cultural. They bring us into relationship with people who love and serve Jesus (or who seeking to understand him more) and within those relationships, friendships form.

These friendships are gifts from God and are forged in the context of close relationship. An image that is used consistently to help us understand this unique relationship is that of a body.

*For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and **each member belongs to all the others.***
- Romans 12:4-5

So here we see that as we belong to Christ, we thus belong to each other. Totally counter-cultural, to belong to each other. Belonging to another human being can be confronting – but when it is done as God plans, we fit together like parts of the body – supporting and sustaining each other. Helping each other as we do life together.

So the question emerges, how are we to belong to each other?

In this uncharted territory of belonging to each other – God is asking us to be together with a purpose.

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another –and all the more as you see the Day approaching. - Hebrews 10:23-25

As we think about our Growth Group and how it might feature within our lives of spiritual transformation, this passage from Hebrews helps to focus our thoughts and actions. There are so many things that a Growth Group can do – but ultimately Growth Groups must always be about seeking God through the Bible and then how we together, can help each other to respond to the good news of Jesus – growing our servant hearts together.

It is interesting that we are to meet together (and not give up meeting together). Being together is crucial to how we spur each other on, how we encourage each other and how we, together, keep the long view – the view of our heavenly home

Coming to agreement

In every group of people there are “patterns of acceptable behavior and expectations from the group members. These patterns or norms can be determined deliberately by the group and the leader; or develop by default. ...they will exist.” (*Leading Better Bible Studies Morris & Morris, 2011 p.119*)

In other words, every group of people functions in a particular way. This can develop completely without direction and sometimes missing vital components. For Growth Groups the risk is that they focus exclusively on the Bible or prayer and miss time to share their lives. Or there can be lots of sharing and little time hearing the word. Patterns will form – if we, as Growth Group Leaders, don't lead our groups in discussing the features of our group, we miss a great opportunity. The key is to plan to have this discussion together, touching on features that are vital, talking through what each person values and expects

The resultant Agreement can then be recorded in some way so that members of the group can review when they are wondering why something has happened or be reminded when they have forgotten an important decisions or encouraged when they see the Growth Group fulfilling its God given function.

Thus, the Group that participates in its own development by devising and documenting an agreement is able to develop very quickly in,

- Clarity of purpose & expectations
- Understanding of how to depend on each other
- Trust & respect
- Challenge & Safety
- Open & Clear communication
- Cohesion & balanced participation
- Achievement & recognition

Growth Group Agreements get everyone on the same page.

Growth Group agreements

So agreeing on how your Growth Group will function brings great benefit. Recording this Agreement will enable consistent communication and shared purpose.

The Growth Group is then in a place where spiritual transformation can be a real outcome. We really can grow our servant hearts together. A Growth Group Agreement is not a silver bullet – it won't do everything. But it will help people be on the same page, helping each other to work towards the same thing.

What is in your Growth Group Agreement is up to you & your Growth Group, but can we suggest the following as a great starting point?

- Day and time to meet
- Venue
- How we will handle the Bible
- Expectations about homework/preparation
- Expectations in terms of how often people should turn up
- Food – during GG, before, after, every week, once a term?
- Communication methods e.g. facebook, text, phone, all
- Confidentiality
- Growth Group Weekends Away
- Social Events – role & frequency
- Evangelism – when will be do something to ask our friends along?
- Roles within the Group
 - o Growth Group Leader
 - o Growth Group Member
 - o Growth Group Coach
- What to do if you need some help
- What to do if you're going to be away
- Music-singing, listening, writing, all
- Prayer-before, during, after, during the week
- Cross Culture Connect Partner – who is that & how will we support them?
- Planting a new group – when and how might this happen?

Community in Growth Groups

The bible speaks of many blessings which true community offers. Read the 'Growth Groups' MINISTRY PAPER together, to further explore these blessings. Reading through this paper will help you see more of what the Bible says about Community in Growth Groups, as you then work together on your Growth Group Agreement.

We need friends to hold us accountable and offer acceptance while we change. “Friendships can provide unique opportunities for spiritual growth,

especially when we covenant to be mutually vulnerable and tell the truth.” (*Ibid p.41*)

But how to do this safely? The best place to start is to have an open and safe conversation within Growth Group. The details of your meetings and whether you have music or food (or both) are important, however, the shared understanding about confidentiality and safety are vital.

People will only share the matters that will lead to spiritual transformation when they know that they can trust the hearers with the information. Growth Groups

that arrive at this place of safety together, though talking it through, are well placed to love and care for their members as they face the challenge of change that brings them closer to Jesus.

Resources

“*Leading Better Bible Studies*” Rod & Karen Morris – particularly Chapter 4

“*Building a Church of Small Groups-a place where nobody stands alone*” Bill Donahue & Russ Robinson