

CHURCH @ CHURCH

# Growth Groups

**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 to set out the role of Growth Groups in our vision.**

As we seek to Reach the City and Reach the World with the gospel of Jesus, we want people to connect to God through Jesus, to grow as they follow Jesus, and to serve Jesus from the heart.

For people who have connected with us at church, Grow is the next step along our 'Connect, Grow, Serve' pathway. It's also a big part of the 'vertical' pathway – where Kids, Youth and Young Adults are also in age appropriate Growth Groups.

Once a person has attended a Connect Lunch/Dinner, they are invited to take this step of joining a Growth Group, to keep growing in their relationship with Jesus through studying God's word in relationship with other believers. You don't have to be a follower of Jesus to join a Growth Group, we invite you to be part of these groups once you've decided to connect with us.

The purpose of Growth Groups is to encourage each other in growing servant hearts.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. – Acts 2:42-47*

When the Gospel of Jesus was proclaimed by his Apostles on the Day of Pentecost, the church was born. A new community was formed, gathered by the gospel of Jesus. So also with us – we are a gathering, a new community formed by Jesus.

Earlier in Acts 2 we see that people were 'cut to the heart' as they heard the message of Jesus' death and resurrection. We see that they received new hearts – receiving the Holy Spirit as they accepted forgiveness for their sins through trusting in Jesus. Then you can read here what they did next – they gathered together, living a whole new life together, with 'glad and sincere hearts.'

While the gospel demands an individual response from each of us, this response is lived out with other believers in community. Growth Groups are a vital way we can make community in Jesus a reality – that this rich picture of church in Acts 2 might happen for us.

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, 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 4:11-16*

Everyone has a part to play in teaching God's Word, the Bible. Pastors and Teachers are to faithfully proclaim Christ so that everyone in the church is equipped for 'speaking the truth in love.' Picture it this way: we sit in rows on Sundays – being taught the Word, so that we can sit in circles through the week – teaching the Word to each other. Growth Groups are a great way to make this a reality – sharing the Word and sharing our lives as we grow our servant hearts together. If Growth Groups attempt truth without love, they will be only about information. If groups attempt love without truth, they will be only about feelings. But as we focus on 'truth in love' our groups will be about transformation. Our whole lives. Together we will grow to be like Jesus – in head, heart and hands.



**SERVE** Jesus and others according to their needs and your gifts, especially through active involvement in a Ministry Team



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



**CONNECT** to God through trusting in Jesus' death on the cross, and resurrection, for your sins, and connect to the church family here at Creek Road

## A church of Growth Groups

Our Growth Groups are very important to us in growing our servant hearts together. We're a church of Growth Groups, not a church with Growth Groups. Being just a church with Growth Groups is an approach that says: 'the groups are there if you want one – just for the keen ones.' Being a church of Growth Groups is an approach that says: 'everyone needs to be cared for, and everyone has a role to play in caring for others.' Growth Groups are where we meet together regularly with the same people, sharing our lives, loving, caring for and supporting one another to become more like Jesus.

Being a church of Growth Groups is not always the easy way. Relationships are hard work. We are called to love each other, not because of how lovable we all are, but because of Jesus' love shown to us in his death on the cross. But it's worth it! Being a church of Growth Groups benefits everyone. It's a great way to fulfil the biblical picture of a new community sharing in the Word and prayer as we grow our servant hearts together.

## Growth Group Benefits

Here are some of the important ways Growth Groups build on our weekly Sunday gathering, bringing transformation to our lives:

- **BIBLE STUDY:** an opportunity for asking questions, clarifying meaning, and sharing insights, especially applying the message personally to our lives.
- **PRAYER:** an opportunity for sharing personal prayer points and praying meaningfully for others. Also provides opportunities for praying for ministries in our church and for cross-cultural ministries we support.
- **SERVING:** the commitment of meeting week by week with others is not just good for our growth, it's a real investment in the growth of others – serving others by being an encouragement to them.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** is greatly increased as you share struggles with each other and follow up on these in an ongoing way.
- **PASTORAL CARE:** Growth Groups act as great support networks – healing wounds through acceptance, helping each other through life's storms and sharing each others' joys.

## Span of Care

How many people can you care for?... Two people? Three? As many as five? Definitely not more than six!...

The Ephesians 4 picture of a church body is clear: everyone is to be supported. However, something else is also clear: while every part is to be supported, no single part can do this alone. There is a limit to how many people one person can truly care for. This brings us to the principles called 'span of care.' It's the idea that:

- Everyone is cared for.
- No-one cares for too many people.

Of course, lots of care happens through relationships in our church family outside of growth groups. Indeed, as we learn to speak the truth in love in our groups, this kind of godly relating should 'spill over' into all sorts of relationships in the church.

A structure of growth groups, gives us great opportunities to develop these attitudes and skills. And without such a structure, some people are inevitably 'lost' in the big group. This is especially true of newcomers and those who don't form relationships easily. Being a church of growth groups helps ensure meeting the 1st principle: everyone is cared for.

Being a church of growth groups also acknowledges the 2nd principle: that no one person can care for too many people. This means that groups must not grow too large (but seed new groups as they grow). It also means that Growth Group leaders must be supported and assisted in their role.

Being a church of Growth Groups means being a church where no-one stands alone..

- **EVANGELISM:** growing in the gospel together week by week is a great reminder of the need to share it with others – and an opportunity to pray specifically for unbelievers in our lives.
- **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES:** groups can organise social activities together, providing opportunities for growing relationships with each other and also connecting with each other's friends.
- **TRAINING:** As assistant and apprentice leaders are needed (see 'span of care'), Growth Groups are a great way to raise up new leaders.
- **PLANTING:** as Growth Groups grow in number they can plant new groups – something to aim for and to celebrate.

## 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