



RENEW
LOVE LIFE
COMMUNITIES

Biblical reflection and practical advice for forming, developing and growing missional communities that edify congregations through relational evangelism



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Renew Love Life Communities.

Through biblical reflections and practical advice these eight small group studies are designed to facilitate the formation, development and growth of a new kind of small group in your congregation or Parish – Love Life Communities (missional communities).

The purpose of a Love Life Community is to grow your congregation through doing relational evangelism.

Evangelism is about learning the art of discipleship for the 'lost'; spiritual direction for the orphans of God. Participating in such work requires developing relational skills, Christ like attitudes and biblical/cultural knowledge rather than one singular 'catch all' technique. Therefore, developing to be an effective witness is a lot more like gardening than rocket science. Most people can do gardening and do it very well if they commit time and energy, learn shared knowledge, have patience and a constant desire to improve.

You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand.

Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven. (Matthew 5.14-16)

As you gather for your first Love Life Community Bible study, may you hear the call of Father, Son and Spirit beckoning you to echo this invitation to “*keep open house; be generous with your lives...*” so that people may discover our “*...generous Father in heaven! Opening up to others...so that we prompt people to open up to God.*”

Across Australia and New Zealand a grassroots people movement, a community of practice in Evangelism is growing. I am looking forward to discovering together with you how the Holy Spirit will teach and lead us to become more effective in evangelism in the years ahead.

Love Life © Enjoy the journey!

Dean Eaton



Church Planting Mentor and Mission Facilitator.

Lutheran Church of Australia, Board for Local Mission.

PREPERATION

SCHEDULE

Meet once a week for the full eight weeks. Whatever else you plan to do (e.g. a shared meal, prayer, play) allow at least 60 minutes each time for doing the bible study discussion together.

At least the first week should commence with a shared meal or snacks and some dialogue about what is written in the introduction. At this first meeting you will be asked to make decisions together about,

- When the group will meet together.
- Where the group will meet.
- Who will take on the various functional roles of host and group leader (discussion navigator)? These roles can be shared around.

You will also do the first study so please read and reflect upon it *prior* to the first meeting.

BENEFITS

Upon completing RENEW: Love Life Communities bible studies participants will have been introduced to the skills, attitudes and resources that are needed to develop a successful evangelism team in your Congregation.

INVITATION

At the conclusion of these eight studies participants will be invited to become on-going members of a Love Life Community (LLC). This will involve prayerful dialogue with your Pastor to discover what this might mean for your existing ministry commitments in the church. You will need time and energy to engage in relational evangelism.

If you do decide to join an LLC there will likely be a phase out period from what you are currently doing in the congregation so that someone can replace you in your current role and a proper handover can occur. Let your Pastor guide you in this matter.

NAME

Your Congregation may choose to call such a group something other than a Love Life Community (e.g. Missional Communities). In these studies we will use the term Love Life Community (LLC). Many Australian and New Zealand Lutherans have adopted the working title, 'Love Life Communities', because it is linked to the theme of our Churches tag line, *Where love comes to life*. What you choose to call these new evangelism teams is up to you. The purpose however remains the same – participation with the Holy Spirits active drawing of people *into* Christ. This is another way of describing relational evangelism.

EVANGELIST

Do you have to be an 'evangelist' to join a Love Life Community (LLC)? No. But you do need to have a passion to use your gifts, time and energy to see people come into God's family. These bible studies will help you work through the question of how your gifts can best be used to serve in a team doing relational evangelism together. The personal skills required to

do relational evangelism are explored fully in the Lutheran Church of Australia NEW Evangelism workshops, designed to train you how to invite people into God's family.

LEADERSHIP

Who will lead the eight weeks of Bible study? Some Pastors will choose leaders from within their Congregation to lead these studies. If not then leadership tends to show itself naturally and in most cases, whoever starts the group will be considered the main facilitator. However, many groups get started with a handful of friends who share the role of group discussion leader or group navigator. This person organises a venue (e.g. home, café), ensures the group starts and finishes on time, and involves all group members in bible readings and discussions.

PREPERATION

Each person should do the bible study at home and write down personal reflections prior to each Love Life Community's bible study meeting.

FORMAT

When the group comes together the person elected to lead the group will guide you through a pattern:

- **OPENING PRAYER:** by the group leader or someone else.
- **SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES:** Ask different group members to read this section. This section shares wisdom gathered from research, missional literature and ideas from mission practitioners.
- **INDWELLING THE WORD:** Ask someone in the group to read the bible reading. Then follow the instructions given to lead that section.
- **CONVERSATION:** The group leader can use the discussion questions provided to open up the conversation about the group members' reflections. The group leader (navigator) is required to allow free discussion but also seek to keep the group on track so that the whole study is completed within the time limit and that all members get to participate.
- **CLOSING PRAYER:** Have an open prayer time at the end praying to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel and praying specifically by name for people that you know who need the Lord.

What happens the first time the new Love Life Community bible study group meets?

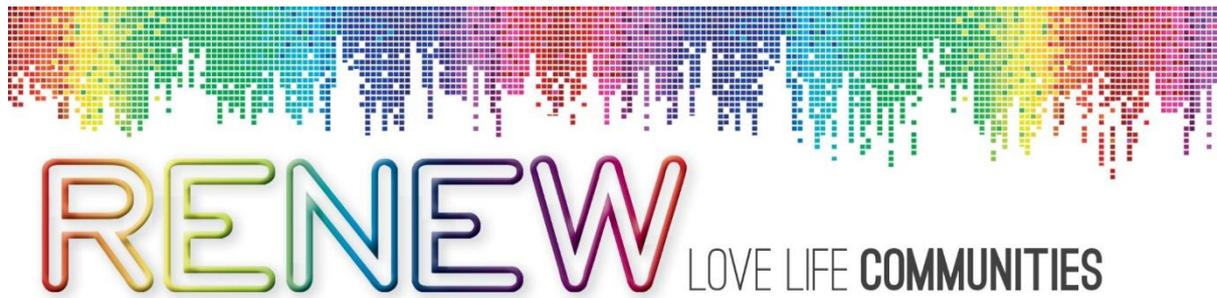
Come together for a shared meal and open dialogue.

1. Over dinner ask each person to say a little about themselves in regard to their own spiritual journey. For example, when did you become a Christian and how? Who has been a positive spiritual influence upon your life?

2. Discuss group members functions:
 - a. Who will lead (navigate) the bible study discussions each week?
 - b. Who will host by providing a venue (their home), or finding a suitable venue (e.g. Café) each week?
 - c. Who will communicate with all group members on-going? For example sending a reminder email or sms as to time, venue, and other necessary arrangements.

3. Then after dinner progress to doing the first study, session one: purpose.

Remember, prior to each Love life Community gathering it is expected that every group member would have already read through the coming weeks study and written down some personal reflections and ideas to share with the group during the CONVERSATIONS period of the study.



FORMING

SESSION ONE: PURPOSE

Forming a community of practice whose purpose is to participate in echoing God's invitation to the world.

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

The Church Universal shares the Gospel in Word and deed in so many ways.

- Public Worship is at its core Gospel proclamation; Christ gives Himself to us through Word & Sacrament.
- Every Church-based community service (e.g. Schools, Chaplains, and Charities) or media ministry (e.g. Gospel radio, TV, YouTube) is proclaiming and demonstrating the Gospel.

However, the reason many churches are not seeing more people come to the Lord, despite our best efforts in all of these areas, is a lack of ***intentional relational evangelism***.

Missionary Lesslie Newbigin in his classic book, *The Open Secret* describes intentional relational evangelism.

“My own experience as a missionary has been that the significant advances of the church have not been the result of our own decisions about mobilizing and allocating of ‘resources.’ The significant advances in my experience have come through happenings of which the story of Peter and Cornelius is a paradigm, in ways of which we have no advance knowledge. God opens the heart of a man or woman in the gospel. The goal of evangelism, as a practice of witness, is not initiating people into the reign of God, but simply and definitively participating with God. Witness, is first and foremost a practice done “with God” rather than one done “to people.”¹

¹ Lesslie Newbigin. *The Open Secret*. p. 67

INDWELLING THE WORD

This is why Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day." (John 6.44 NRSV) The word 'drawn' in this text is the same word used in other passages (John 21.11) to describe fisherman drawing in their fishing nets full of fish. God is not shouting at people from heaven but drawing them in by His power. Later in this passage Jesus says, "...no one is capable of coming to me on his own. You get to me only as a gift from the Father." (John 6.65b) J.B. Philips translation says, "No one can come to me unless my Father puts it into his heart to come." (John 6.65b)

If God is already actively drawing people to Himself, what if anything can we do to participate in the process? Isn't it enough just to show people God's love and not necessarily echo God's invitation personally?

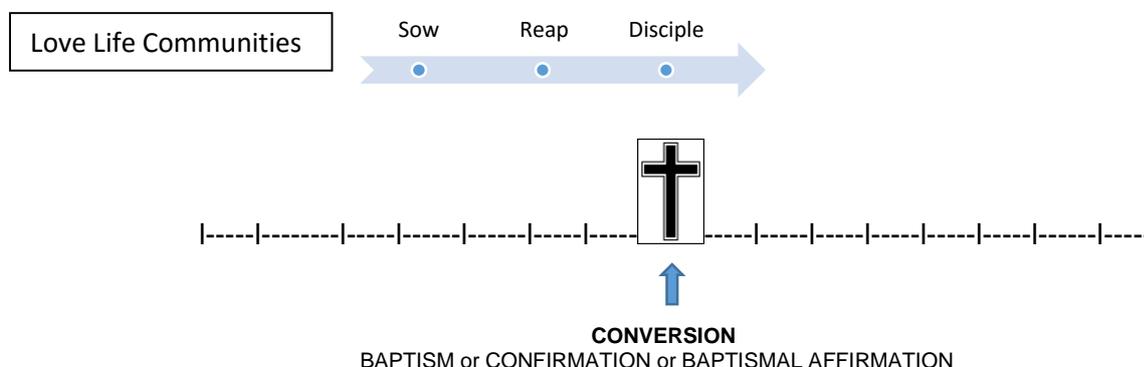
The Apostle Paul affirms that God is making his appeal through us, "...since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." (2 Corinthians 5.20b)

"For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." ¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" ¹⁶ But not all have obeyed the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" ¹⁷ ***So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.*** (Romans 10.13-17)

Therefore we are sent by God into the fields of harvest to speak the word of Christ, to appeal or ask people to be reconciled to God. This involves both calling *back into life in Christ* those who have abandoned faith (the already baptised) and calling *into Christ* those who have never been baptised, as illustrated in Diagram 1. **Conversion Pathway**

EVANGELISM (Sowing & Reaping)

CHURCH LIFE (Worship & Serve)



Love. Life (Mission) Communities work on the left hand side (of diagram 1) bringing people *into* Christ and people involved on the right side build people up *in* Christ. Both are essential.

This assumes a biblical view of what God is up to in your neighbourhood.

- God desires all people to be saved (1 Timothy 2.3-4)
- Every person you encounter is being drawn by our Heavenly Father to Himself through Christ, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit (John 6.44).
- We are called to echo God's invitation to love, to life, to reconciliation with God through Christ crucified (2 Corinthians 5.14-21)
- Every person is being drawn into God's family.
"...the contemporary scene is dominated by evangelism enterprises that reduce the practice of evangelism to earning the emotional, and momentary consent or prayer of an individual, or recruiting individuals into consumption of the religious goods and services the church has to offer...Evangelism seeks to participate in Trinitarian action as it calls, welcomes, and forms persons into the body of Christ and the people of God."²

Jesus lamented at the lack of people willing to both sow the seed of the Gospel AND reap the harvest. "He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves." (Luke 10.2-3).

CONVERSATIONS

If God is already actively drawing people to Himself what if anything can we do to participate in the process?

What has happened for you in the last week as you have reflected on this material?

What is something we can take away from this session together?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

² Stone. B. (2007), p 36.

FORMING

SESSION TWO: IDENTITY

Forming a community who are constantly discovering their new identity in the mission of God.

OPENING PRAYER

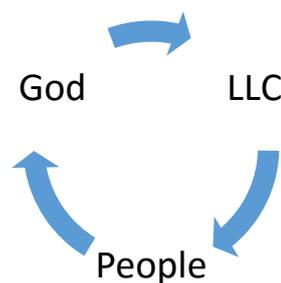
SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

In Luke 10 Jesus sent out teams not individuals to do mission. The 70 (or 72 depending upon the translation) were sent out in pairs and as part of this larger team. This team approach to mission continued throughout the Acts of the Apostles and is just as essential today. Evangelism, like any other ministry, is to be done in teams.

The word team infers that we have a task to perform together. However, beyond the task of learning how to more effectively witness to the Gospel, we are, like Jesus first disciples being continuously shaped by the people we encounter and the God who is constantly at work in us. This is an identity voyage, a journey of discovery on the job. Therefore forming a team who are willing to be shaped by God, to discover who they are becoming in their particular missional context is essential for effective relational evangelism.

By starting a Love Life Community you are entering into and continuously making room for others to enter, a transformational conversation with God. That is why we call the discussion time 'conversations'. This material aims to start a cycle of conversation that commences with you and God, develops with the Love Life Community, and continues in the missional setting with the people you are engaging with the Gospel. This action-reflection cycle of conversation throughout the eight weeks of these studies is the first step in developing your Love Life Community's capacity to enter the mission of God *together* and invite not-yet-believers to do the same.

Love Life Community (LLC) Conversation Cycle



INDWELLING THE WORD

Read 1 Corinthians 9.19-23.

In a letter to the Corinthian believers Paul reflects upon his own identity voyage (1 Corinthians 9.19 – 23). The Apostle Paul is demonstrating the first set of skills required by followers of Jesus who want to “bring many to Christ”.

1. Adaptability

Who you are in the church space is not the same as who you need to become in the missional space. In the church space we need consistency, predictability, stability, routine balanced by creativity. For example when you turn up for Sunday worship you like to know that the Pastor has prepared a sermon, that the Treasurer will do the right thing with your financial offering, that someone will bother to plan ahead for volunteers by doing team rosters. That all children’s workers have had a Safe Place (Police) check.

On the other hand, in the relational evangelism (missional) space you need to be adaptable, innovative (without being novel) and flexible because you are dealing with dynamic human beings on their way into the Kingdom of God. This means that you may do ‘outreach programs’ but more than likely the Spirit will guide you into simple relationships in which you share God’s love in practical ways (e.g. someone needs a meal you give them one). Then in time, in various ways you clearly invite them to experience salvation in Christ. This *may* mean inviting them to a program such as a playgroup, Messy Church, or even Sunday worship, but experienced evangelists report today that for most people this is a leap too far.

The answer is relational evangelism which involves you entering into their world rather than the other way around.

Paul understood this and gave up many of his cultural comforts (e.g. language, customs, and routine). This is not just living *with* people but *like* them. This takes sacrificial love to give up our own cultural identities to identify with others. Remember, you don’t have to be all things to all people, but you do need to be one thing to some people.

Baptism understood as communion in the suffering and death of Christ means also a communion in the suffering and death of the world, our neighbour, the “other.”³

In the church we talk about how people who come to faith will need to adapt and change their behaviour, habits and even learn a new language (Christianese). We rarely discuss Paul’s idea that being on mission with God will require an intentional willingness for us to be shaped by the people we are bringing to Christ. This will likely mean adjusting our approach and ministry style to accommodate their culture and needs rather than our personal cultural preferences. It may also mean less programs and more participation in whatever God is up to in their lives as He draws them to Himself. Remember its relational evangelism not a one size fits all evangelism strategy!

³ Dirk G Lange, *A Baptismal Example: Communal Prayer and the Missional Church*, in Zscheile. D.J. Ed. *Cultivating Sent Communities, Missional Spiritual Formation*, WM.B.Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Cambridge. P.198

2. Common ground

It's easy to discern differences but can we find common ground with people? Paul did not focus upon differences in moral codes or man-made rules but upon common human pain, aspirations, desires, and our underlying need for the One (God) in whom we commonly 'live and move and have our being' (Acts 17).

3. Fellow sojourner

Paul came to people as one willing walk alongside them on their journey to God. He was not 'dumbing down' the Gospel or compromising his morality but rather humbling himself to be a friend and servant like Jesus Christ (Philippians 2).

The great 17th Century physicist Newton was an intellectual genius who, according to his contemporaries, was nonetheless often arrogant and difficult. Yet as he gazed upon the Universe he was humbled by the extent and complexity of the research endeavour. "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."⁴ May we be like a small child gazing out at the great ocean of God's love; standing on the edge of the undiscovered possibilities! David wrote in Psalm 40,

More and more people are seeing this:

they enter the mystery,

abandoning themselves to GOD

This means inviting all people on an identity voyage whereby we discover together our true humanity, nurturing human flourishing by indwelling Father, Son and Spirit. This is the invitation at the heart of the Gospel of Jesus, the attitude of the Apostle Paul which we should imitate.

CONVERSATIONS

What did you understand Paul to be saying to the Corinthian Christians in 1 Corinthians 9.19-23?

What do you think will be the greatest challenges for you on this missional community formation journey?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

⁴ Grigson & Gibbs-Smith 1954, p.303.

FORMING

SESSION THREE: SHAPE

Forming a community who are willing to be shaped by God

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

At the heart of the discipleship process is a community of people willing to be shaped by God and inviting others into that life journey.

This goes way beyond inviting our friends to be fellow consumers of religious goods and services. It radically invites them into an engagement with the most dangerous thing in the Universe, the love of God.

God's love is a danger to a life that has fallen asleep to the grand adventure of living in God. As humans loved by God we are more than the sum total of our own thoughts and desires, more than a bundle of impulses to be gratified. We are born with dignity and made in the image of God. We can be born again and changed into the likeness of Christ.

This occurs when our lives are centred upon the Cross. In Word and Sacrament Christ is giving Himself to His people. This is an important priority because conversion is more than giving mental assent to a set of doctrines. It involves a process of turning from a self-oriented life to a God-centred, other people focused life. Through indwelling God's Word we experience a renewing of our minds; a re-orientation over time in every aspect of our lives, including the social, economic and political dimensions.

Those who are becoming disciples of Jesus need mature disciples to engage in mutually transformative relationships of co-learning and co-serving centred in the great promises of God in Christ. The Love Life Community is therefore a community of practice engaged in an action-reflection learning process which develops skills as the team works together, listening, discerning, and acting with God on mission.

This is a complete change of ministry paradigm for many people, especially if we have been in the church for a long time. It is transitioning from training people to run programs of evangelism and discipleship to resourcing people to live in relationships of evangelism and discipleship? Church Planter Greg Gibson challenges us,

We may talk about making disciples and even hope to make disciples, but until we actually invite someone to become a disciple, we have only a stated value, not a true value. If you were to invite someone to be a disciple and teach them what it means to abide in Christ, who would it be? Perhaps a struggling couple in your church, a neighbour down the street, an unbelieving co-worker, or even the barista at your local coffee shop? Begin to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you to someone you can disciple—and when he does, extend an invitation.⁵

⁵ Smith 2014, p. 55.

That is why Mike Breen says,

That's why it is crucial that we have a life worth imitating! We are inviting people into our lives and asking them to imitate the parts of our life that look like Jesus. Giving people access to our lives doesn't necessarily mean we constantly schedule additional time for coffee or drop everything for them at a moment's notice (though depending on the situation, it could mean that). If someone is struggling spiritually, invite him or her to go to the grocery store with you and talk with you on the drive there and at the store as you shop. Fold the person into your normal comings and goings. It doesn't have to mean more work. This is exactly what we see Jesus doing. He ate. He taught. He laughed. He healed. He prayed. He told jokes. He told stories. He visited friends. He fed thousands. He partied. He went to weddings. He went to the local synagogues. He went on retreat with his disciples. He cried. He went to funerals. He gave advice. He answered questions. And in all of his comings and goings, his disciples watched him doing this and observed. They were immersed in a life with Jesus. It should come as no surprise, then, that we see them doing the exact same things in the book of Acts. Discipleship didn't stop simply because it wasn't "intentional discipleship time." That kind of compartmentalizing is detrimental to the discipleship process. You are inviting someone into your life to learn how you follow Jesus in all aspects of your life. ***Giving people access to your life is a necessary component to making this happen.***⁶

INDWELLING THE WORD

Reading: Romans 12.1-3 (Message)

"So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.³ I'm speaking to you out of deep gratitude for all that God has given me, and especially as I have responsibilities in relation to you. Living then, as every one of you does, in pure grace, it's important that you not misinterpret yourselves as people who are bringing this goodness to God. No, God brings it all to you. The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him."

It is God who draws people to Himself and into the Love Life Community which is forming into a community which seeks to 'work out our [common] salvation in fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12) and by 'becoming all things to all people' (1 Corinthians 9:19), existing so that many may hear the Word and see the Way of Jesus and respond to His call.

⁶ Breen, Mike (2011-08-16). Building a Discipling Culture (Kindle Locations 582-589). 3DM. Kindle Edition.

CONVERSATIONS

1. What happens to the complexion of Congregational life if you to shift your paradigm from training people to run programs of evangelism and discipleship to resourcing people to live in relationships of evangelism and discipleship?
2. Is it possible to develop a one size fits all approach to discipleship?
3. Someone once said that we should always be discipling at least one person, and being disciplined by another. Who are you being disciplined by? And who are you discipling?⁷

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

⁷ Spangler and Tverberg, 2009, Kindle Locations 1042-1043

DEVELOPING

SESSION FOUR: CONTEXT AND ROLES

Developing the missional community context and roles

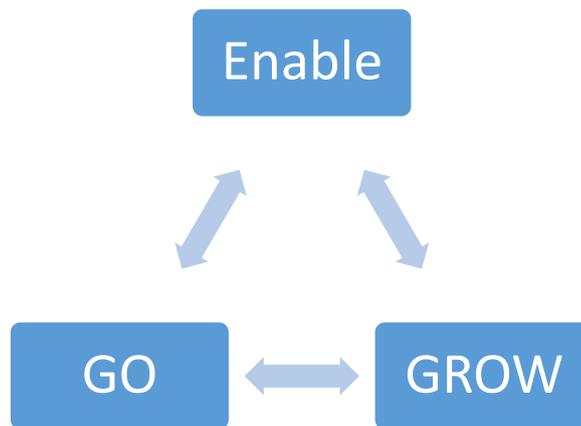
OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

At the completion of this eight week bible study you will be asked if you want to form a Love Life Community, mission community (or whatever you wish to call it). This session will seek to introduce how to develop the context and the kind of roles required to make a missional community function.

1. CONTEXT

There are three spheres of ministry involvement for volunteers in any local congregation.



The overall core purpose of every congregation is to make disciples that make disciples. But what does this look like? At its foundation it means establishing three teams.

- **GO:** a team focused upon seeing people come to Christ anytime (Evangelism)
- **GROW:** a team focused upon growing people in Christ anytime (Pastoral Care)

Love Life Communities are designed to be the core team for focusing completely upon the areas of GO – Evangelism, and the initial stages of GROW - Pastoral Care needed by new believers. However, after new believers have been introduced to a Congregation then an invitation to join a small group designed for on-going growth through bible study and fellowship is required. This is needed to keep the discipleship process going and to help new converts with social inclusion in the wider Congregation. The 2006 and 2011 National Church Life Survey (Operations Survey) reflects that only about 20% of Australian churches have a group or program for new converts or new members.⁸ Therefore, to reach the goal of making disciples who make disciples, Love Life Communities can be the first stage of social inclusion,

⁸ Sited at <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6400>

but you will also need to set up small groups within your congregation designed for on-going Christian growth and ministry training.

The third sphere of ministry involvement needed to grow a Congregation is called enable.

- **ENABLE:** this refers to the various teams that serve to enable public worship, good governance (administration) and on-going Christian growth resources and fellowship opportunities. The people serving to enable are vital to the on-going health and development of a congregation. If these things are done well then new converts and new members can keep growing in Christ.

2. ROLES

Commonly people assume you have to be a natural evangelist to join a Love Life Community. This is not true. However you do need to have a passion to use your gifts, time and energy to see people discover salvation in Jesus Christ and come into God's family. Practically it does mean giving up doing other ministry within the congregation so that you have the energy margin in your life for relational evangelism.

US based Mission Community *Missio* prescribes the following roles needed in a Love Life Community,

1. **Communication Person:** Someone who will keep the online and phone communication going through emails, web support, etc.
2. **Hospitality Co-coordinator:** This person is generally the one whose house is the warmest. This person is about food, ambiance, and helps create a place of social belonging for the group.
3. **Caregiver:** Someone who naturally has the spiritual mojo to lead discussion, share devotions and care for spiritual needs that come up. Often, many people can share this role so don't lock it in, but designate someone who will keep a pulse and make sure that spiritual growth is happening.
4. **Social Co-coordinator:** This person tends to keep the group moving and always has an ear for social connections, service and blessing opportunities, etc.
5. **Gospel Sharer:** All team members will share the Gospel with people in different ways, this person has an ability and passion to proclaim the Gospel and invite people to receive God's free gift of salvation in Christ alone.

Discuss together where each member feels a natural affinity to serve.”⁹

Starting a Love Life Community requires between 3 – 7 people. If you only start with three then some of the five roles described above will need to be combined until you grow (e.g. Hospitality and Communication could be the one person, Caregiver and Social Coordinator

⁹ This material is adapted from a resource from *Missio* who have produced some really useful resources, based on feedback from starting thousands of Missional Communities - they call them Incarnational Communities. <http://www.missio.us/>

could be the one person). If you have more than have 14 adults wanting to start an LLC then immediately form two groups of seven. It is suggested that anyone with a Gospel Sharer role should not have combined roles as this person is a natural evangelist who needs to maximise their time and energy for engaging not yet believers with the Gospel.

In session eight of these studies some practical instruction will be provided for setting up a Love Life Community. Appendix A will help answer many of the practical questions that the group will inevitably have.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the New Revised Standard version (NRSV) of the Bible. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12

Now concerning spiritual gifts,-brothers and sisters,-I do not want you to be uninformed. ²You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

⁴Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CONVERSATIONS

What role might you see yourself fulfilling if you joined a Love Life Community?

Is there another role not listed that you think would be needed?

Have you prayed about transitioning from your current ministry role in the Enabling space (Worship and Governance) into a GO (Love. Life Community) ministry role? If so, do you feel the need at this stage to talk this through with your Pastor or another congregational leader?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

DEVELOPING

SESSION FIVE: DISCERNMENT

Developing listening and discerning

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

What is God up to in the world? How can we join God in God's mission?

Experienced church planter Paul Sparks suggests these three strands of listening to discern what God is up to in our time and place.

- a. Listening in Scripture to God's desire for all creation is vital. It calls you to act faithfully in the present even as you long for the promised restoration.
- b. Listening to your own story in light of God's story helps you accept your limitations with gratitude while setting you free to take responsibility for what is uniquely yours. It is the ground for personal meaning-making and vocational clarity.
- c. Listening to the story of your place opens you to the possibility of genuine relational encounter, which is mutually transformative.¹⁰

When meeting together for bible study, prayer and sharing the Love Life Community is constantly engaging in this listening process; to God's Word, one another's stories and to the story of our place; our neighbours and social networks.

*Come close, listen carefully: I've never kept secrets from you. I've always been present with you." And now, the Master, God, sends me and his Spirit with this Message from God, your Redeemer, and The Holy of Israel: "I am God, your God, who teaches you how to live right and well. I show you what to do, where to go. If you had listened all along to what I told you, your life would have flowed full like a river.
(Isaiah 48:16-19 MSG)*

Love Life Community Team Exercise: PRAYER WALK

Intentional, regular, specific prayer for the people you are sharing the Gospel with is a major component of how a Love Life Community becomes effective in reaping the harvest.¹¹

Traditionally we sit in rooms and pray but this can be supplemented by something that many evangelists and church planters find very helpful - prayer walks. Why? Because it is a helpful way of spiritually connecting you with your local neighbourhood.

The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood (John 1.4 Message)

¹⁰ Sparks, Soerens & Friesen 2014, p. 127

¹¹ The *Geneva Push Church Planting Report 2016* reflects a much higher success rate amongst church planting teams that engage in intentional, regular prayer walks.

The task is simple. Get on your walking shoes at least once a week, walk your neighbourhood in pairs, talking to God and engaging with anyone you meet who may be open to saying 'hi'.

- Pray asking God to give you His heart and perspective for the people of your community or relational network. Wherever and whenever you pray, prayer improves your sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit in people's lives.
- Pray asking for God to enable you to be sensitive to the opportunities that He will bring your way to sow the seeds of the Gospel and participate in the movement of God's Spirit in the lives of people you meet.
- Pray asking God to pour out His Spirit on the next person (or family) that He is asking you to invite into God's family. Remember, specific prayers get specific answers. Present the names of specific people who need to become followers of Jesus.

When you meet as a Love Life Community always spend a few minutes sharing about what you saw, sensed, felt, thought, and who you encountered on your prayer walk.

Remember the Holy Spirit is working in so many people's lives all around you.

Counting against restrictivism is not only God's nature as Father and the universality of the atonement of Christ but also the ever-present Spirit, who can foster transforming friendships with God anywhere and everywhere. The Holy Spirit is present in the farthest reaches of this wonderful, ambiguous world. The Lord and giver of life broods over the depths of creation and renews the face of the land. The Spirit is present everywhere, both transcending and enfolding all that is, present and at work in the vast range of happenings in the universe. The Spirit meets people not only in religious spheres but everywhere—in the natural world, in the give-and-take of relationships, in the systems that structure human life. No nook or cranny is untouched by the finger of God. His warm breath streams toward humanity with energy and life.¹²

Remember the process of listening, discerning and acting is never really finished. Nor is it always so cyclical. It's not as if there is a point where you can check off the listening box and forget about it.¹³ Thus we need an LLC to establish this positive habit of a continuous cycle of listening, discerning and participating in what God is up to in the world?

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

¹² Ibid. 197

¹³ Sparks, Soerens, Friesen 2014, pp. 131-132

Reading: Luke 10:1-12

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. ³Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

⁸Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' ¹⁰But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ¹¹'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' ¹²I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

DEVELOPING

SESSION SIX: EVANGELISM

Developing team capacity for social inclusion and Gospel invitation

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

So far in these studies we have discussed improving the team's effectiveness in relational evangelism through,

- Developing a biblical understanding of our purpose (session one),
- Defining team member's roles (session four) and,
- Developing Christ like attitudes towards lost people (session four).

In this session we will add to this picture by discussing some practical ways to develop the team's capacity for social inclusion and Gospel invitation.

1. Setting Up The Rhythm for Social Inclusion

Love Life Communities turn relational evangelism and discipleship into a reality rather than simply an ideal. This happens because the social inclusion of enquirers or new believers is done in ways that are relevant to them. This requires setting up a Love Life Community which is flexible and adaptable but also living in a consistent rhythm of missional life together. An established rhythm of life together as a Love Life Community for bible study, prayer, listening and discerning was introduced in session five, but now requires further detail. Here are some practical suggestions for setting this up? (Many more practical suggestions are given in Appendix A).

Love Life Communities Weekly Rhythm: Love Life Community (LLC's) may meet whenever it suits them. In many cases Sunday is the best day. Start the day by attending Sunday morning worship in your home Congregation, then meet afterwards in a home for a meal, play, bible study, prayer and debriefing about who you are reaching with the Gospel. This debriefing is a conversation which features dialogue about specific people you know who are on their way to God and discerning together how to provide them with appropriate stepping stones to move them forward on their spiritual journey. This means that LLC group members are not only witnessing individually but also with one or more members of the Love Life Community to pairs or groups of people who are not yet believers. The Lutheran Church of Australia NEW Evangelism workshops trains you how to do discern and define the stepping stones people need you to provide.

Once the Love Life Community realises a few converts then they add to this timeframe a discipleship session for new believers. For example, if you decide the easiest time to meet as an LLC is on Sundays, then the group members Sunday schedule could look like the following:

- **Worship at church** – depending upon when your worship is held, for example 9am – 10.30am
- **Love Life Community Discipleship bible study/prayer/conversations** -11am – 12 noon - Meet in a home or other venue (e.g. a park with swings for the children). This

is the team member's fellowship, bible study, prayer, de-briefing session and is closed to new believers and sojourners (not-yet-Christians).

- **Love Life Community Open House Lunch** - 12noon – 2pm – including the Love Life Community members, friends who are not yet believers and new believers. This could also be in a park or local café.
- **New Believers and Sojourners bible study/prayer/conversations** - 1pm – 2pm - Some of the team to meet with new believers and enquirers for bible study and pastoral care and other team members hang out with the lunch visitors who are not yet believers or not yet desiring to accept an invitation to bible study.

The wisdom of doing all of this on Sundays is that many people, especially young families who you will reach with the Gospel, are more likely to be open to attending either a Worship service or related event on a Sunday rather than during the week.

This may appear to be a big time commitment on Sundays but as outlined previously (Introduction) Love Life Community members should have no other ministry related responsibilities. You ideally have no responsibilities in assisting at the Worship event or during the week in any other church related commitments. This is because you have allocated any extra energy and time in your life for doing one thing - relational evangelism.

2. Gospel Invitation

The LCA NEW Evangelism workshops unpack how to invite people into God's family more fully. Therefore, this section is not so much about the particular skills needed to develop the LLC's capacity for effective Gospel invitation but rather the practical lifestyle issues encountered in doing effective relational evangelism.

Relational evangelism takes place 24/7! However, it doesn't have to be a burden on your time if you do relational evangelism by including people into the normal rhythms of your weekly schedule. For example, if you go to the Gym, a Playgroup, play a sport, walk your dog locally, go shopping, spend time eating lunch at work or school with someone, these are all opportunities to fold into your normal schedule meaningful relationships that become the context for Gospel sharing and discipleship of new believers.

Love Life Communities break this realistic rhythm if they try to also serve in a ministry in the Enabling (church) space (see session 4), or, if they get drawn into doing 'outreach programs' which have great goals but often end up simply providing religious good and services for a local community based upon felt needs. Many experienced evangelists and church planters know that this can often spell the death of evangelistic effectiveness in either an existing congregation or a new church plant. This is because the energy margin of the team gets taken up with running the outreach program, leaving little time for actually reaping the harvest through relational evangelism. In the short term outreach programs can make the team feel like they are doing something, but it can too often become an energy and time wasting exercise. Remember, if you offer the public bread and circuses you will always gather a crowd of consumers. If you take the time to slow down, meet as a Love Life Community for listening and discerning what God is up to, discover Gods activity it in the flow of your everyday life, then you will never have to create opportunities for witnessing as you take the ones God gives you.

In this ministry of relational evangelism flexibility and availability are essential as opposed to being committed to a singular 'outreach program'. You need the time and energy to hear the call of Jesus to relate to the one lost sheep God is wanting you to connect with next. Unless such intentional social inclusion and patient Gospel invitation occurs, fruitful relational evangelism may remain an ideal rather than a reality in your life.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14 – 6:2

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ²For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

GROWING

SESSION SEVEN: DISCIPLESHIP

Growing skills in making disciples that make disciples

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

The turning point season or moment in a person's life that we label 'Christian conversion' is just the beginning of a life long journey of discovering who they are in Christ. This is why discipleship is the task of forming people over time through consistently inviting them further into Gods transformational adventure and including them in yours!

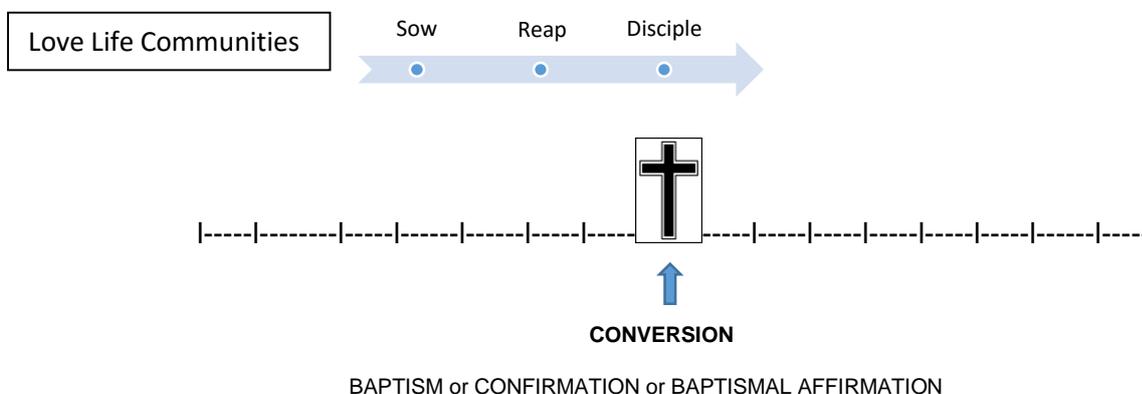
We may gather many converts but not grow many disciples

Previously (session one) we described the role of Love Life Communities as bringing people to Christ through relational evangelism.¹⁴ The aim of evangelism is not simply conversion but the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ. Following Christ is therefore a life of continuous co-learning about how to grow in Christ and how to lead others to live in the promises of God in Christ. When Love Life Communities succeed in reaping the harvest, new converts experience a small group environment that commences the discipleship process with them, however the goal is to integrate them relationally into an on-going discipleship process. Therefore every congregation needs to develop small groups that aim to build up people in Christ post conversion. GROW Ministries provides plenty of resources for families to do discipleship at home. Further small group bible study resources need to be provided or at least sourced by every Pastor for their congregation. Without this intentional continuation of the discipleship pathway for people post-conversion you will gather many converts but not grow many disciples.

Diagram 1. **Conversion Pathway**

EVANGELISM (Sowing & Reaping)

CHURCH LIFE (Worship & Serve)



¹⁴ In depth understanding of how this occurs can be persued by your Love Life Community doing the Lutheran Church of Australia's NEW Evangelism twelve week series.

Therefore what gets added to the Discipleship Pathway (Diagram 1) now is the place of the existing congregation in growing new converts brought in by the Love Life Communities.

Although some new converts may take time to come to and feel they belong within the wider congregation, in time it can happen. This is somewhat easier for converts who are what our Lutheran Confessions describe as a 'reconvert'. This is someone already baptised who experiences an awakening of their faith in Christ. Often such people are more familiar with and accepting of church culture. On the other hand converts who have never been to church (a growing number in our society) often take time to move towards attending Sunday worship and joining the congregation because they feel insecure in an unfamiliar setting. Patience is required by Love Life Community members and the congregation to which they belong when this apprehension towards attending Sunday worship is observed amongst new converts.

What can all congregation members do to assist new believers moving into an existing congregation?

1. **Pray:** When we rely upon God's Spirit to draw people into fellowship with God's family in the same way He draws them to God in the first place, then it happens organically. Therefore, existing congregation members can pray the Lord of the harvest to not only send forth labourers into the fields of harvest to reap, but also to send pastoral carers to disciple these new believers. **Spiritual Health Warning:** such prayer requests often receive an answer in the form of a mandate from the Spirit to be the answer to that prayer.

2. **Socialisation:** If the receiving congregation goes beyond the initial welcome and actually integrate people socially, then the evangelism work of the Love Life Communities is more likely to grow an existing congregation. "A culture of inclusion is as important as a culture of inviting if new people are to stay, and eventually consider themselves belonging to the church. Churches that provide ways to intentionally include new people have significantly more success in retaining them (*Enriching Church Life, p28*). The National Church Life Survey Operations Survey asked whether a church had planned procedures to follow up new people and help them to become integrated into the congregation. The results for churches in Australia and other comparisons are shown here."¹⁵

Table 6: Percentage of local churches with planned procedures designed to help integrate new people.	All NCLS in 2006 %	All NCLS in 2001 %	All Prot in 2006 %
Follow-up visits by clergy or other people from church	67	67	70
People extend hospitality and invite them for meals	50	45	55
Group or program for new Christians or new members	20	18	22
Invitation to join a small group, fellowship or similar	57	52	59
Invitation to take up a task in the life of the church	43	35	42
Other	3	4	3
<i>At least one of the above</i>	86	84	88
Source: 2006 NCLS Operations Survey Based on Operations Surveys responses from the following number of locations:	4,400	6,148	4,212

¹⁵ Sited at <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6400>

This table reflects that only about 20% of Australian churches have a group or program for new converts or new members. Could this be a reason why so few congregations are successfully socializing new people into church life?

3. **Teach them the dance moves:** Increasingly in our society new believers have little previous exposure to church culture; our history, liturgy, biblical language, rituals, signs, symbols and governance. It is vital that during the initial stages of discipleship these things, alongside the Gospel itself, are patiently explained so that the rich meaning, significance and benefits of belonging to a congregation can be understood.
4. **Cultural intelligence training for church leaders:** Increasingly in the Australian and New Zealand context it will be necessary to contextualise ministry styles amongst the cultures and sub-cultures within the *majority* of the population (Anglo-Celts and Anglo Saxons) in the same way we have to with minority cultures. Therefore cultural intelligence training for congregational leaders is needed to ensure that local congregations develop ways of doing Lutheran worship and discipleship that remain true to the Gospel and the Confessions of the Church while being contextualised for the people being reached. This is available through the LCA Board for Local Mission NEW Evangelism workshops, specifically Evangelism workshop 4.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Philippians 3

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ²Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence.

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹² Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹⁵ All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

GROWING

SESSION EIGHT: PLANTING

Growing a people movement that simultaneously builds up existing congregations and starts new ones

OPENING PRAYER

SKILLS, IDEAS AND ATTITUDES

In the Australian and New Zealand context Lutheran congregations tend to grow as the result of three things;

Organic growth – church members have offspring – approximately 52% of church growth.

Transfer growth – Christians from other churches transferring in – approximately 41%.

Newcomer growth – New believers in Christ – approximately 7%.

As Love Life Communities reap the harvest and the congregation grows, the possibility exists to either just keep drawing people into the one Congregation, or, when various factors warrant it, to set up new church plants as a spillover effect.

The church planting (forming new congregations) option is worth considering for the following reasons.

1. **If you want to realise a greater overall number of new converts.** Church plants have greater average levels of new converts than churches undertaking other mission strategies. In mainstream churches (e.g. Lutherans) church plants achieve 17% new converts whereas established congregations at best achieve 7%. Clearly church plants achieve 10% more converts than do established congregations.
2. **If you want to be more effective in evangelising the next generation.** Not only are newly planted congregations realizing more converts, they are reaching a younger demographic with more than 69% aged between 15-49 years, compared with only 48% in congregations generally. There is also a slightly higher proportion of males in church plants.
3. **If you want to be more socially inclusive.** Church plants will often involve the break-up of existing networks of relationships among attenders, making it easier for newcomers to be included.
4. **If you don't want to get too big.** For various reasons you may decide as a congregation that you don't want to grow beyond 200 regular men, women and children. It can be argued that around 200 you are big enough to be sustainable yet small enough to still know most of the people in the congregation.

5. **If you cannot or don't want to face a building program.** If you grow to a point whereby the existing congregation's venue has reached its capacity and you don't want to or legally cannot extend the building facilities, then church planting is a good option. Many growing congregations however accommodate growth through multiple weekend worship services (e.g. two Sunday am, one Sunday pm and one Friday pm). This can mean for example that a church building that seats 120 people can accommodate a congregation of up to 480-600 regulars (people that attend at least once every three weeks). Clearly at that size you would require two full time pastors. However, for the reasons already mentioned you may sense that starting new congregations is a more effective way of realising the maximum number of converts through your congregations God given time, energy and resources.

6. **If you find the style of ministry in the existing congregation too narrowly focused.** In the last session we said that as we have in the past, in the future we will need to develop ways of doing Lutheran worship and discipleship that remain true to the Gospel and the Confessions of the Church while being contextualised; conducted in a language and cultural style that is applicable to those who we are reaching with the Gospel. The need to plant new congregations within the structures of an existing congregation becomes most obvious if we effectively bring people to Christ from culture and language groups other than the dominant one in the existing congregation. What may be less obvious is to recognise the need to do this with converts from subcultures within the dominant (e.g. Anglo-Saxon) culture. The planting of a new congregation in this situation allows the existing one to maintain a style of ministry relevant to its needs, whilst creating a new situation most relevant to the style of ministry discerned as most effective to converts from various sub-cultures (or demographics). For example if the existing congregation is dominated by young families who find that one or more of the Love Life Communities starts to reap a harvest amongst a much older generation in let's say an aged care facility. It will be necessary to consider offering a worship style, service time and venue that could be significantly different from what the existing congregation enjoys. In such a case for example you may opt to meet in a room or Chapel at the Aged Care facility not your church, sing well known hymns instead of contemporary songs, and not offer a children's talk or program during worship. Of course the generations in this example may be reversed, with an older generation realising the need to change their ministry style in order to effectively reach young families. This is why Love Life Communities, whether in an existing Congregation or in a new Church plant are not as bound to previous conventions of congregational life and are in a better position to experiment. (Bellamy & Castle, 2003, p.17)¹⁶

These pragmatic reasons for having a church planting vision incorporated into a Congregations vision for growth are common sense. Discerning how the Spirit is leading in these matters is always essential. We can ask God for a 'word of wisdom' (1 Cor. 12) in every circumstance.

¹⁶ The more recent studies by NCLS (2014) only confirm these previous findings.

It could be argued that every congregation should have a vision for growth through reaping the harvest. As Missiologist David Hesselgrave asserts,

Paul considered the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of churches as his primary task. The biblical record leaves no room for thinking that either Paul or the members of his team were basically engaged in raising living standards, ameliorating social conditions, imparting secular knowledge, or dispensing aid from previously established churches. There can be no doubt that allegiance to Christ on the part of converts in the churches entailed these effects as by-products of faith even to the sending of needed aid back to the Jerusalem church (a kind of reverse flow). That the missionaries were concerned about social relationships, and about minds and bodies as well as souls, is patently true. But Paul's primary mission was established when the gospel was preached, people were converted, and churches were established (Hesselgrave, D. J, 2000, p.24).

The Apostle Paul used an agricultural image to portray the concept of starting new congregations, *I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow* (1 Corinthians 3:6). This planting and watering of communities of disciples that God is growing is where we get the concept of 'planting churches'.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28.19-20)

Some people feel that the Church is dead and have abandoned the institutional church. Others think that the Church has become irrelevant to the mission of God. However research by Australian National Church Life provides evidence that local churches remain the key instrument that God uses to bring in the harvest. The evidence reflects that people who come to faith in Australia do so primarily through attending a local church. The research also indicates that church plants (new congregations) are the most effective churches for reaching people with the Gospel and growing the Church through new converts.

When you think of church planting, don't think of another option in a shopping mall food court, think of a new farm in a starving country.

This doesn't mean that we abandon putting energy into existing congregations in preference for planting new ones. On the contrary, every child needs to be born from a Mother. Thus every new congregation needs to be birthed by an existing one who is willing to become an effective 'Mother Congregation', or what we commonly call a Sending Church. So if you are currently a small congregation (e.g. between 20 – 60 people), mostly of an older demographic and concerned about the future, don't give up. Perhaps between three to seven of you will now form a Love Life Community where you spend time praying for people you know who need the invitation of God to salvation. Pray also for the Lord of the harvest to send forth more labourers to help you reap the harvest and welcome them when He answers that prayer. Continue seeking help from the LCA Board for Local Mission and get ready to receive the harvest. Perhaps through doing this you will realise that it may be possible to achieve a much higher rate of growth through conversions that you ever thought possible. If established congregations at best grow by 7% through new converts, why not start praying about, training for and preparing for the kind of harvest new church plants get 17%?

If you are sensing this call, make an appointment soon to talk to your Pastor about becoming part of your congregation's first Love Life Community. Remember this will mean phasing out of the ministry you are currently doing to take on this new calling. If you don't sense this ministry is for you then tell your Pastor and the other group members who have been doing these studies with you. Perhaps God wants you to continue in whatever ministry you've done in the past or even some other new role in the Enabling aspect of congregational life (e.g. governance or worship). Either way tell your Pastor how your feeling and seek his prayerful guidance.

INDWELLING THE WORD

Pray together. Then begin by asking someone to read the text below out loud from the NRSV. Do it ... S L O W L Y ... and leave 15-20 seconds or longer of silence after each section so that you have time to jot down thoughts as they come to you. If necessary repeat the process. God bless your listening! Make notes.

Reading: Acts 11

Now the apostles and the believers who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also accepted the word of God.² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him,³ saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?"⁴ Then Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying,⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. There was something like a large sheet coming down from heaven, being lowered by its four corners; and it came close to me.⁶ As I looked at it closely I saw four-footed animals, beasts of prey, reptiles, and birds of the air.⁷ I also heard a voice saying to me, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.'⁸ But I replied, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing profane or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'⁹ But a second time the voice answered from heaven, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.'¹⁰ This happened three times; then everything was pulled up again to heaven.¹¹ At that very moment three men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were.¹² The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us.-These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house.¹³ He told us how he had seen the angel standing in his house and saying, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon, who is called Peter;¹⁴ he will give you a message by which you and your entire household will be saved.'¹⁵ And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning.¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'¹⁷ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?"¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."

Write your thoughts & reflections here

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that took place over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, and they spoke the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But among them were some men of Cyprus and Cyrene who, on coming to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists^[d] also, proclaiming the Lord Jesus. ²¹ The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord. ²² News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion; ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were brought to the Lord. ²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with^[e] the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called “Christians.”

Write your thoughts & reflections here

²⁷ At that time prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them named Agabus stood up and predicted by the Spirit that there would be a severe famine over all the world; and this took place during the reign of Claudius. ²⁹ The disciples determined that according to their ability, each would send relief to the believers^[f] living in Judea; ³⁰ this they did, sending it to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Write your thoughts & reflections here

CONVERSATIONS

Begin by listening to one another. Split into pairs and tell each other what you heard in the text. Take 7-10 minutes or more.

- Did anything strike you as particularly important or grab your interest?
- Did the text raise any questions in your mind?
- Listen carefully (feel free to take notes); your job will be to report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Team Feedback Session

Now report back to the whole group what your partner said.

Then as a whole team discuss,

What has your listening to God speaking through his word shown us about our,

Mission – that is, our *purpose*; why God has put us here in our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

Pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit to become effective witnesses of the Gospel.

Pray by name for the people you know who need salvation.

Appendix A – What Next? How to form a Love Life Community¹⁷

Talk to your Pastor. The first thing to do is get together with your Pastor to discuss how to form a permanent Love Life Community. Specifically use the practical information below as navigation points for your discussion.

1. Who should join a Love Life Community?

Refer to the section on ROLES in SESSION FOUR: CONTEXT AND ROLES to identify what your role in a Love Life Community might be.

In general you definitely want to avoid people joining the group who are either Pharisaic bible thumpers; people that would rather teach than listen, or who have a tendency to be judgemental.

The types of people you want are hospitable, warm and winsome with people who are not yet believers, not freaked out by alcohol, swearing, or weird spiritual philosophies, and who are loving and helpful. Introverts can be great because they are great listeners, but they also have to be relationally warm.

2. How many people should we start with? When do we multiply?

We recommend that you start with 3-7 people. Most communities will start to be too big at around 15- 20 simply because that's all that you can fit in a home or around tables at a local coffee shop. If you start with too many Christians, the weight of that will make newcomers uncomfortable so start with a small number to avoid that factor.

Unlike most small groups, we don't recommend that you multiply based on getting to a certain number. Relationships and spiritual trust take a long time to form - usually, at least a year. Therefore, to just clinically multiply based on numbers fails to take the relational connections into account. We recommend that all groups look and pray to expand and multiply but that it should be based on a new "mission." For instance, if one couple says, "I really feel it's time for us to go on a new mission and form a new Love Life Community for our friends that live across town." That's a great reason to split off between 3-7 people.

3. How important is proximity for Love Life Communities?

Obviously, the closer you live, the better it will be. Spontaneous life together is critical to the natural flow of a community so work hard to be as close as you can. However, every city and culture is different. People connect through their work associations, recreation, kids athletic teams, etc and often people are used to driving 30 minutes to link these relationships. So some Love Life Communities can function quite well with members living further apart, especially in country areas, but we still feel that there's a 30-minute drive point. We would recommend you avoid trying hold people together if they have more than a 30-minute drive. Urban environments where people live in the same neighbourhood work the best and

¹⁷ This material is adapted from a resource from *Missio* who have produced some really useful resources, based on feedback from starting thousands of Missional Communities - they call them Incarnational Communities. <http://www.missio.us/>

suburban environments where people can get to each other within 5-10 minutes also works well.

4. What About Kids? (This is the most asked question)

As we think about parenting our little ones and integrating them, we've learned they can be a huge asset but also our biggest dilemma. On a philosophical note, we have to remember that our Christian faith is an eastern faith and most eastern cultures have learned much better than we "westerners" how to integrate children into the spiritual lives of adults. Old Testament and New Testament writings indicate that parents are to pass down the story and experience of the Christian faith to their children, not the children's ministry at one's local church. Here are some practical ways we've seen this work.

- Have different Love Life Communities take turns babysitting each other kids.
- Have older kids (teens) watch the younger one's while the big people have their discussion time.
- Learn to integrate the kids during parties or "mission" times where you're out helping people together. This gives them memories of a much more holistic Christian life.
- Let the little kids run the Love Life Communities once every month or two. For example, one set of third graders created invites for other kids at the school to come by and watch Shreck on the side of the house using their parent's projector and also made invites for the parents to come over for coffee and refreshments. 60 kids showed up and as many parents! Encourage your little ones in praying for their friends and finding ways to be on mission with you. Even let them lead!

5. What about teenagers in a Love Life Community?

We find that middle school and high school students thrive in a Love Life Community (mission community). They love to be a part of an adult community to do service projects, helping ministry and also love a good party. Reality is, however, that most don't necessarily want to be with their parents for communion or bible study type of activities. Here are a few options.

If you're in an existing youth group context, consider encouraging them to take leadership in forming a Youth Love Life Community. Some youth groups actually have moved their program-oriented youth ministry to a Mission Community focus and have adult mentors lead the communities. We also find that if the teens love being with their parents, even for spiritual study you can easily integrate and even form communities around the needs and desires of teens. If your Congregation or Parish doesn't have a Youth Group then encourage your teens to be a part of a Youth Group in a good church of another denomination in your area.

**Addendum for teens.* As with any community, we all have to learn how to interact with non-Christians. Some teens are too weak and may fall to the temptations associated with deep integration with unchurched teens, but many teens have strong values and can dive deep into the culture of their friends. For example, one group of teens took the incarnational call very seriously and asked their parents if they could be at all the parties they hear are going on so that they could make sure their friends don't drink and drive or get too out of hand.

They committed to go as a servant team together in groups of at least 3-8 students and they eventually became known as the kids that were keeping an eye on the others. Parents and even other teens started to call to ask if this servant team was going to be at the party and they were responsible to drive the kid's home, call parents if they needed help, and actually became highly valued and respected by even the "party-kids." This is what we should all be aiming for our children. Part of our role is to protect them, and the other part is to prepare them to live a life influencing culture instead of being influenced. Have this talk and ask them to decide where they feel they are at.

6. How do we schedule Love Life Communities in the context of our Congregation?

It's up to you and your Pastor. In SESSION SIX – EVANGELISM under the heading 'Rhythmn', it is suggested that the schedule of a Love Life Community could be as follows.

Sunday Worship attendance followed by,

- a. Love Life Community Discipleship bible study/prayer/conversations** -11am – 12 noon - Meet in a home or other venue (e.g. a park with swings for the children). This is the team member's fellowship, bible study, prayer, and debriefing session and is closed to new believers and sojourners (not-yet-Christians).
- b. Love Life Community Open House Lunch** - 12noon – 2pm -- including the Love Life Community members, friends who are not yet believers and new believers.
- c. New Believers and Sojourners bible study/prayer/conversations** - 1pm – 2pm - Some of the team to meet with new believers and enquirers for bible study and pastoral care and other team members hang out with the lunch visitors who are not yet believers or not yet desiring to accept an invitation to bible study.

Even these sessions should be a time of growth for Love Life Community team members who may already be mature believers. Here's a truism. Christians struggle with the same things non-Christians do and visa-versa. (How to parent, marriage issues, financial stress, fighting inner demons and vices, depression, dealing with in- laws, and everything related to developing our faith, spirituality, etc.) Once you settle this issue, you can simply dive into scripture and struggle with it and anyone can be in the room.

Beyond the Love Life Community bible studies doubtless your home Congregation will have other Christian Growth courses and recommended Ecumenical events to attend for further growth. If someone wants more intense bible teaching, simply ask your Pastor and or suggest that they download sermons from the Lutheran Church of Australia's Media Ministry, attend conferences and courses provided through the various Lutheran Church of Australia departments (e.g. Board for Local Mission, Grassroots, Australian Lutheran College, Grow Ministries, etc). You don't have to try to be a seminary class! Remember a Love Life Community exists to lead people to Christ and assist them in the initial stages of discipleship. When they are ready for the next step in their 'conversion process' a new believer will be taken through either a Baptism or Confirmation class by your Pastor. After

that it's up to your Pastor and other congregation members to assist the new believers in their Christian growth.

The Board for Local Mission will be releasing two new courses designed for new believers.



An introduction to Baptism and Communion and will act as either a good replacement for traditional Baptism/Confirmation classes or as a good pre-requisite.



An introduction to the relational purpose of being Church together and serving God in our life's vocation.

Coming January 2017 from the LCA Board for Local Mission.

7. How do I navigate moving my friends from our Love Life Community to the larger Congregation?

Some people will surprise you and come quickly into Sunday worship with you, others will take lots of time even after their Baptism. Some will prefer the home based intimate setting of a Love Life Community and take time to travel the cultural distance it often takes 'unchurched' people to adjust to sitting in rows listening to someone they probably don't know yet up the front speaking, singing songs they've never heard, following an order of service they are unsure of, and meeting lots of people that are new to them. Don't underestimate how overwhelming socially this can be for some people (especially introverts) and underwhelming for others who may not feel as excited or spiritually stimulated by the various aspects of worship we feel at home with and inspired by. Remember these people are both 'new babes in Christ' and quite possibly very new to any church culture.

If your gathered community or "church service" is appropriate you'll have no problem inviting people to get to know the larger church community. Just let it happen naturally. But if you're concerned that your sojourning friends would be freaked out or turned off by the corporate atmosphere, you're wise to keep separation, at least for now. You may need to bring up concerns with your Pastor so they can address issues that keep the integration from happening. Sadly, if the larger congregation simply won't work, you're going to have to make a hard decision because you're called to mission to the world and that must take precedence over "getting people to the existing church." The best solution is to consider planting a new congregation as well as growing the existing one. This will solve this issue without unnecessarily disrupting people who prefer one over the other. This is a positive interdependent 'both and' not 'either or' solution.

8. What happens if an enquirer or new believer asks weird questions during a Bible study?

How do you study scripture if everyone has weird or alternative beliefs?

By the time someone moves from the relational connection to the spiritual aspects, they will be ready to process the scriptures. You don't need to lighten anything up, but you do need to be careful, sensitive and dignified in how you process their questions, and concerns. As your group is walking through the scriptures, if a weird question comes up or they share beliefs that are not in line with that of the Christians, the best response is to listen, thank them for sharing their thoughts, and then say, "as we're trying to understand the Christian faith, it's challenging because it teaches this".....and then share the scriptural thoughts. As long as you don't come across offended or arrogant, you'll have a great dialogue. In the case of those who are against the Christian doctrine, they simply won't be there or they'll leave after their first time. If they keep coming, it means they want to be challenged so just do so as a learner and someone who is struggling through it as opposed to coming across like they're idiots for believing what they believe.

Remember, if a sojourner (a not-yet-Christian) has actually come to your New Believers and Sojourners bible study/prayer/conversations, it means they want to know what a Christian believes and struggles with. So be yourself, and be a learner of scripture with them instead of coming across as the guru bible teacher of scripture and everyone should be able to go deep and also be appropriate with sojourners.

9. What do we do when some of our missional people start to slack off on missional living?

Missional life is hard and people will have good months and bad months. Think of ways to inspire people toward a more consistent focus. Consider sending out weekly encouragement emails and use your weekly or bi-weekly rhythm to let people assess their own struggles or successes. Remember, this a lifestyle not a program so give grace and only in the event that someone clearly doesn't want to participate, should you call them out. We always say "raise the bar" on the front end while you're recruiting people, but lower it on the back end so you don't become a legalistic experience.

10. What about alcohol?

As with any issue of life, many things can be dangerous but God doesn't outlaw them. For instance, woman can be dangerous for men, men for women, money can be dangerous to people, and even food. But God doesn't forbid them. He just asks us to learn how to navigate them. Alcohol will probably be the main struggle your community will have to work through. Here are a few suggestions.

If the people you're on mission for are recovering alcoholics, we suggest you have a "dry community." That is, we would avoid having people bring alcohol to meetings, etc. If there is some sojourners who aren't struggling with this, then feel free to have a glass of wine on other times where it's not the whole group. In many cultures if you were invited to come over and they served wine, it would be inappropriate NOT to receive their invitation. It's increasingly the same here in the Australia and New Zealand, so like any other freedom, be

careful, but don't make it more of an issue than any other freedom you've got to learn to be careful with.

11. What are some ideas for relational evangelism which can be done by the Love Life Community?

The NEW Evangelism workshops available through the LCA Board for Local Mission will enable your Love Life Community to be trained in relational evangelism.

In brief, however, please don't dive quickly into doing programs. Most people strike out too far and too fast in getting the whole team to do something together. They try to move an entire small group downtown to help the homeless, or give food away at a food shelter. These can be good, but they tend to be unrealistic and don't sustain over time. Teach people that their "mission" each month should be helping practical needs of our friends. Whenever you get together ask, "Has God presented any need to you through the relationships you currently have?" If not, then surely you can pick a more general way to bless the down and out, but we find that people become more organic and intuitive if your first line of offence is to meet the needs in your present spheres of relationships. For instance if you find out a friend lost their job, or got sick, then that becomes your mission for the month.

12. How should we handle collecting and blessing people with financial help?

Encourage people to continue to grow in their understanding and commitment to trusting God with their money, but we allow them freedom to give through their communities to practical needs or to the main church gathering. We find that people enjoy both and realize that it's a joy to bless people spontaneously as needs come up, but it's also deeply meaningful to give to a larger vision and support the whole congregation.

13. What's the best way to confront major lifestyle issues? Both Saint and Sojourners.

The scriptures teach Christians to hold each other accountable to lifestyle and sin issues, but not to hold sojourners accountable. This is a bit tricky but can be natural if sojourners start to integrate in. They will hear the Christians processing issues of holiness and lifestyle issues and hopefully begin to take their cues from the group. Once they begin to follow Jesus their behaviour issues will change naturally as the group interacts. If someone however, is clearly sinning it affects the whole community so authenticity requires that you confront in love and hope it changes. In the case that someone wants to continue in the group but won't submit to basic and healthy scriptural advice and wisdom, then you'll have to ask them to leave and you must explain that the witness of the true gospel is compromised with them in an unrepentant condition. This should be a last resort so don't consider every transgression a reason to boot someone out. Most of life is about becoming a disciple and people respond very well when confronted in love.

14. What happens the first time the new Love Life Community meets?

Come together for a shared meal and open dialogue. Discuss group members' functions:

- a. Who will lead (navigate) the bible study discussions each week?
- b. Who will host by providing a venue (their home), or finding a suitable venue (e.g. Café) each week?
- c. Who will communicate with all group members on-going? For example sending a reminder email or sms as to time, venue, and other necessary arrangements.

POSTSCRIPT

God is on mission. God is the true Evangelist. He seeks his lost children who are already in the Covenant (Baptised), "For thus says the Lord God, "I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among the scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep... I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again" (Ezekiel 34:11, 12, 16). We see Jesus doing this with Jews such as Zacchaeus calling him back into the Covenant, proclaiming, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). We see him seeking those who are as yet outside of the Covenant (unbaptised) such as the non-Jewish Samaritan woman at Jacobs Well in John 4.

Wherever Jesus went and whoever he met he *announced the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.* Today we are invited to participate with him in reaping this harvest. He said to his disciples, "*The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into his fields*" (Matthew 9.35-38 NLT).

Some have responded to this call. *After all, who is Apollos? Who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the Good News. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us* (1 Corinthians 3.5 NLT).

- Are you one of Gods servants who desires to be someone through whom people believe the Good News? Is evangelism *the work the Lord is giving you*?
- Could your congregation develop its capacity to receive new converts and effectively disciple them?
- Is it possible that your congregations could transition from telling individuals that they must go into the world alone and evangelise to developing a local evangelism team; a Love Life Community?

Just as we need small groups for edifying people who are in Christ, we also need small groups dedicated to bringing people into Christ. Developing this new kind of small group in your congregation who bring people into Christ has been the aim of these studies.

Lastly, Love Life Communities in any context – whether in a new church plant or an existing congregation - find it is easy to overestimate what can be achieved in one year but underestimate what can be achieved in five in their mission. Be patient. Trust God and go reap the harvest.

Love Life. Enjoy the journey!

Dean Eaton

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