



## PASTORAL CARE Pt 2

### CITY GROUPS

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#### HOW WILL CITY GROUPS AFFECT PASTORAL CARE? AN IMPORTANT QUESTION

As we have explored with folk the change from Growth Groups to City Groups, the question that has come up the most is “What about pastoral care?” The fact that this issue is so important to many of us is an encouragement; it shows that we are part of a very caring church family and that it is an important question.

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#### WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR PASTORAL CARE? TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS

##### 1. We are responsible for ourselves

The Bible makes it quite clear that each of us will give an account to God for how we lived. This means we need to make wise, careful and godly decisions about our lives. We need to invest well in growing to maturity. This is critically important to grasp – we cannot put all the expectation on other people to meet all our needs if we aren't actively participating in our own obedience to God.

*And remember that the heavenly Father to whom you pray has no favourites. He will judge or reward you according to what you do. So you must live in reverent fear of him during your time here as “temporary residents.” (1 Peter 1:17 NLT)*

*Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. (Romans 14:12 NLT)*

##### 2. We should take some responsibility for each other

We are also to care for those around us – especially those in the church whom God has made our brothers and sisters.

*'Love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:31 NIV)*

##### 3. The elders are responsible for the church

As well as being responsible for ourselves and each other, God also appoints elders in the church, who are charged with caring for those they lead and must give an account to God for how they have done this.

*Obey your spiritual leaders, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. Give them reason to do this with joy and not with sorrow. That would certainly not be for your benefit. (Hebrews 13:17 NLT)*

*So guard yourselves and God's people. Feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. (Acts 20:28 NLT)*

The elders cannot personally know every single person in the church, so they create teams and formal structures to best enable each member to be discipled.

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## **WHAT HAS CHANGED?** FROM GROWTH GROUPS TO CITY GROUPS

### **Three formal structures for pastoral care at City Church**

#### **1. Sunday gatherings** - these have not changed

Our Sunday gatherings remain an essential part of our life together as a family. A lot of pastoral care happens here through the preaching of the word, the worship of God and our various types of ministry and encouragement to each other. These are a visible demonstration of our unity which God promises to bless.

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

#### **2. Clusters/Growth Groups** - these have changed

Growth Groups will become City Groups overseen by a “coach”. This document is aimed at looking at some of the pastoral implications and opportunities of this change.

*They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity... (Acts 2:46 NLT)*

#### **3. Pastoral Co-ordination Team (PCT)** - this has not changed

The PCT co-ordinates specialist pastoral care by those who are gifted in this way. This remains available to the church family and is accessed through the Sunday Prayer Team, through your City Group leader or by direct referral.

*For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. (Romans 12:4-8 NIV)*

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## **ONE SIZE FITS ALL?** FROM ONE WAY TO MANY WAYS

### **Growth Groups had many strengths**

For over a decade Growth Groups have been a valuable asset to City Church. In them many have received teaching, prayer, love, acceptance, encouragement, support, discipleship and opportunities to develop as leaders. They have been a safe place to try new things, worship God with others, and build meaningful relationships.

### **Why change things?**

Although Growth Groups have been a good way to do many of these things, they are not the *only* way to do them. Our desire with City Groups is to create a system that is flexible enough to accommodate a number of ways of working because all of us are different.

### **Intentionally developing more leaders**

They say that the best time to develop leaders is twenty years ago! But if you haven't done that, start now. We really do want to develop leaders. That means hands-on experience as well as theoretical knowledge. We

hope City Groups will be an effective way to help more people discover their passions and grow in their leadership.

### **Intentionally developing all disciples**

We don't only want to help leaders, we want to develop a whole family of disciples on a mission. Not everyone is a gifted leader, but we believe everyone is gifted, and that God has *works prepared in advance* for us all to do. Therefore we need to encourage, inspire and equip each other to be fully obedient to the things God is calling us to. City Groups give us more flexible and varied opportunities to develop leaders and, indeed, develop all disciples.

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## **THE TRELLIS AND THE VINE**

### **SYSTEMS HELP, BUT DISCIPLES MAKE DISCIPLES**

#### **A picture from the garden**

Two trellises stood against a garden wall. One was perfectly maintained, nicely varnished and strong. It was easily visible as the vine that grew against it was small and nearly dead. The second trellis was invisible beneath the verdant and flourishing vine that obscured it completely. Which trellis was being more successful? The one that looked good or the one that was doing good? The trellis is only there as a support to the vine. The health of the vine is far more important than the health of the trellis. The trellis symbolises systems and support structures while the vine symbolises people.

It isn't so much the structural system of City Groups that matters (though, just like the trellis, it is important that a system exists and that it is up to the job) but the life that is catalysed by the system. Systems help us make disciples and be family and be on mission, but they don't do it for us. Ultimately it is disciples who make disciples, whatever the system. We need structures that are flexible and provide enough variety for us all to participate in church life.

Therefore we all need to be very intentional and purposeful in our participation in City Groups.

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## **IS IT ALL ABOUT NUMBERS?**

### **GROWING A FAMILY OF DISCIPLES ON MISSION**

#### **Big people not big church**

We are called to make disciples. Therefore, if we are being obedient and fruitful in our lives, we should be seeing people saved and added. In that sense we do want and expect the church to grow. But we don't just want to add converts. We want to take time to develop disciples. Adding people to meetings is relatively simple (just run the best meetings). However multiplying disciples is much harder and takes longer, but is far more worthwhile. We want to play the long game, so that in 20 years we can look back at a legacy of lives changed, churches planted, nations reached.

We need to do the right things and not just do things right.

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## **SOME SPECIFIC PASTORAL QUESTIONS**

### **Q1. Doesn't the short term nature of City Groups act against us making meaningful relationships over time, as we were able to do in ongoing Growth Groups?**

**A1.** Because the City Groups structure provides flexibility, there are a number of ways to approach this. Firstly, if you want to have a recurring group with the same people, this is certainly a possibility. Many churches who work this way find that a good number of people do want to meet in an ongoing group. You can do this. Secondly, you might find that meeting new people in City Groups helps you build a broader base of relationships over time. Thirdly, you might decide that your circle of friends want to reunite from time to time, so you might do one term apart and then one term together.

One of the biggest things to be clear about is that we are not expecting Sunday gatherings and City Groups to fulfil all of our relational or discipleship needs – they are just the formal parts of church life. There are any number of other ways to build relationships outside these structures.

**Q2. What about people who find it hard to make friends and need time to build stable relationships?**

**A2.** There is a role for some longer term recurring City Groups, as an option for those who feel they need it. However, we don't want them to become exclusive, termly sign up will still be an important step, so others can join. They will also still be overseen by a coach to support them. However, interest based City Groups (such as a board game group) might also provide a safe place to meet new people in a way that may feel less intimidating, compared with, say, a home-based "face to face" Bible study and prayer group.

**Q3. Aren't City Groups primarily just interest groups, which seems a bit self-indulgent?**

**A3.** No. They are primarily a vehicle to help us encourage one another as Christians, as we seek to more fully be a family of disciples on a mission. This may take place around an interest, such as football, but the real goal is to see people grow in maturity. Bible studies do not always lead to Bible-obedience – it is possible to have Bible studies that don't actually lead to growth. On the other hand, a cycling group could be just the sort of place where a person might open up about what is going on in their lives. Both contexts can be squandered or used wisely.

**Q4. Does the introduction of breaks between terms mean that relationships will suffer?**

**A4.** We are all in different relational situations. Some will enjoy having some flexible time to use for rest, family or friends. Others will miss the routine and regular contact time. For those who want to keep meeting informally, please do! Over the longer summer break we are considering organising a series of 'open houses', so that there is always a place to have fellowship each week.

**Q5. Aren't people more likely to 'fall through the cracks' if there isn't a Cluster and Growth Group system to care for them?**

**A5.** It is possible that the move to City Groups makes it easier for people to both participate (because there are signup moments three times a year) and opt-out if they want to. We can't rely on the system to care for people—we need to care for people. Please keep an eye out for others in the church who might be more vulnerable. City Group coaches and leaders will work hard to make sure people are as well cared for as possible but they will need our help doing this. The Pastoral Co-ordination Team will continue to assist where specialist care is needed.

**Q6. Do all City Groups have to be missional?**

**A6.** No. A loving "family" of Christ's disciples is a very powerful testimony to the gospel, so all groups should be "missional" to some extent. However, while we hope some groups will be focused primarily on mission, others will have a stronger focus on discipleship or family (i.e. be relational).

**Q7. How can we possibly make disciples whilst in a cycling or knitting City Group?**

**A7.** Some people find it easier to talk deeply whilst doing something. Others will like the informality of not following a set of prescribed questions and may actually feel freer to get straight to the main issue. It might take more skill to do it this way, but we're sure there are people in the church who can model this.

**Q8. Won't people become less mature rather than more mature if they aren't regularly participating in a small group Bible study?**

**A8.** Possibly. But if we want to study the Bible together we can join a Bible study based City Group, or just study our Bibles with others informally as many already do.

**Q9. Will people be left to fend for themselves for a long time if they arrive at the beginning of the summer break?**

**A9.** No, we'll put things in place to give people a place to meet and connect.

**Q10. What about shift workers or others who can't commit to ten weeks?**

**A10.** We ask people to sign up for 10-12 weeks, but understand it won't always be possible to make every week, that is fine. Some shift workers can't make any current Growth Groups as these mainly meet mid-week in the evenings. Having a variety of City Group meeting times might actually help them and others.

**Q11. What about people who join the church halfway through a term?**

**A11.** We will try to make sure there are a number of City Groups still open to newcomers. ●

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