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A STRATEGY TO DEVELOP SMALL GROUPS AT NTCBC
FOR COMMUNITY, PASTORAL CARE, AND GROWTH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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AUGUST 2008

ABSTRACT

A Strategy to Develop Small Groups at NTCBC for Community, Pastoral Care, and Growth.

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2008

The English congregation at North Toronto Chinese Baptist Church (NTCBC) has experienced a significant decline in recent years in the depth of fellowship between members, sense of pastoral care within the church, and stagnation in growth. While recognizing that these problems are rarely caused by a single factor, the goal of this paper is to present a contextually sensitive, biblical and theologically informed strategy to address the three presenting problems at NTCBC and reform the existing structure of fellowship and small groups within the English congregation.

This paper contains three major parts. Part One describes external and internal factors to NTCBC contributing to our problems. The external factors considered include the distance between English congregation members and their parents that results in a desire for deeper community; the unique needs of Canadianized Chinese Canadians that call for greater pastoral care; characteristics of the Chinese Church that makes it highly dependant on immigration for growth, and general problems associated with this postmodern generation. Internal factors highlighted include weaknesses in the current strategy of large fellowships, over-reliance on paid clergy, and use of large scale evangelistic events for outreach.

Part Two presents a biblical and theological foundation to address the problems at NTCBC. The Bible and theology confirm that facilitating the meeting of God through the small group ministry at NTCBC will address our needs.

Part Three of this paper proposes a two-pronged approach to the solution - the cultivation of small groups that foster meeting with God, and a reformation of the small group structure at NTCBC. The specific strategies in this approach are to encourage lectio divina and introduce the Hybrid Model. After suggesting a basic timeline for implementation of changes, including some key statistics for evaluation, preliminary results are presented.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, DMin

Words: 317

To Melody, Joshua, and Caleb

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank North Toronto Chinese Baptist Church for their invaluable contribution to this project. They graciously gave me time off from my pastoral duties to finish this paper, and have supported my family and me through their prayers.

I would also like to thank my in-laws, who have encouraged me every step of the way, and my parents, sister, and brother, who have shaped me from my early years.

INTRODUCTION

The North Toronto Chinese Baptist Church (NTCBC) in Ontario, Canada, is a church of approximately 680 weekly attendees. There are about 440 in the Chinese-speaking congregations and 240 in the English-speaking congregation. It has been home to my family and me for the last four years. At NTCBC, we have a pastoral team of four, including a senior pastor and pastor of women's ministries who serve in the Chinese congregation, me as the English pastor, and a youth pastor for the English teens and young adults. My family and I are enjoying our time at NTCBC, and I see God's hand moving among us in many ways. In the past, God has used NTCBC to develop and support numerous pastors and church leaders who presently serve throughout the city and around the world. In addition, we have been involved with the planting of as many as five other churches. I have much hope and confidence that God will continue to do great things in and through the members of NTCBC for many years to come.

In order not to become complacent, it is always wise for church leadership to consider any problems encountered in the church as opportunities for theological reflection and as a stimulus for change. Three recent concerns have been raised within the leadership of the English congregation, and my desire to address these concerns has resulted in this study. Those concerns are a desire for deeper community, a desire for

greater pastoral care for church members, and a concern about the numerical stagnation in the growth of the congregation.

I was concerned recently when members and leaders of the English congregation said they noticed a significant and observable decline in the depth of fellowship and closeness that they sense within the congregation. People have been telling me that the church felt more like a family when the English congregation was much smaller.¹ These informal observations have confirmed my own eyewitness research over the last four years as the English pastor. For example, when I first came to the church, the congregation would regularly celebrate the birthdays of members during the announcement time after the worship service and sometimes even had a birthday cake for those members during the snack time after the service. We no longer do this. Neither do we mention birthdays, anniversaries, or even recent weddings in the Sunday bulletin. These are informal clues that may be an indication of a desire for deeper community at NTCBC.

There is also a more quantitative indication of a desire for deeper community in the congregation. In April 2008 a Natural Church Development Survey was completed within the English congregation at NTCBC. A representative sample of thirty church members was asked over one hundred questions regarding their views of the church. For the question “I can rely on my friends at church” (Q39) only 33 percent responded positively. This is significantly below the expected average of 50 percent as computed

¹ Interview by author with several members of English Ministry Group (EMG) leadership team.

by the NCD organization.² Not being able to rely on friends at the church indicates a lack of closeness in the church community.

There are many ways to define community, but perhaps the simplest definition of community would be a group of people where one feels that one belongs in some way. In other words “belonging” is essentially another word for community. The members of NTCBC have expressed a desire to experience a deeper sense of belonging to the church. Elaboration of the terms “belonging” and “community” is found in chapter 2 of this paper.

Along with a desire for deeper community has been a general desire for greater pastoral care. Pastoral care can be defined as the tender supervision of church leaders or pastors over the flock. In the aforementioned NCD Survey the response to the question, “Our pastor has too much work to do” (Q28) was very low. The thirty members of the congregation who were surveyed answered in the bottom sixteenth percentile, meaning that most agreed with this statement. Scoring in the low sixteenth percentile means our church scored low in comparison to all other churches.³ In other words, 84 percent of other churches had a more positive response to this question. It is evident that NTCBC members feel that their pastors are overworked. When this happens, members tend to feel that they are not being properly cared for by the church, especially if they feel that only a pastor can do “pastoral care.”

Church leaders are to watch over the congregation for their continual spiritual health and development. As a result, members should grow spiritually, serve more, and

² NTCBC NCD survey results, 2008. NCD International, Diedersbueller Str. 6, 25924 Emmelsbuell, Germany.

³ Ibid.

may develop into leaders themselves. Leadership development is, therefore, one indication of pastoral care, since some members within a healthy group of Christians should develop into leaders. Unfortunately at NTCBC, fellowship leaders are burning out at an alarming rate. For example, this year our core fellowship, the Emmanuel Fellowship that serves career adults and has about twenty to thirty regular attendees, was unable to recruit a chairperson to lead it. This eyewitness research is another indication that pastoral care may be lacking in the church.

Finally, the pattern of continual growth through outreach for our English congregation worship services and fellowships has slowed down, and attendance has plateaued over the last few years. From its inception on January 1, 1992, the English congregation grew steadily every year until recently. Attendance has remained at about two hundred for the last five to six years. Leaders at NTCBC know that just counting numbers do not tell the whole story of a church, and neither are numbers the sole reason for a church's being, but it is also recognized that each number represents an eternal soul, and each person is part of a complex web of many people affected by his or her life. Touching one person's life can potentially affect many others. Leaders are concerned that, despite many newcomers attending our Sunday morning services, few remain to join the church. More alarmingly, attendance in the Chinese congregations of our church, whose children have traditionally been the source of most members in the English congregation, has started slowly declining in the last two to three years.

Leaders in the English congregation recognize that feelings of distance between members of the church, the perception of shallow pastoral care, and stagnation in church

growth are rarely caused by a single factor. They also recognize that all three problems are related and somewhat evolutionary in nature. There is a kind of domino effect of the problems on each other – an insidious cause and effect syndrome. If there is little community and a perceived lack of personal pastoral care, then it is natural that numerical growth would stagnate and decline as people look for these in other churches. The leaders feel that something needs to be done, and we should start by focussing on one area of the church that could make a positive difference for all three problems. After some initial discussion among themselves, and based on what they have learned tangentially from different sources, such as books and testimonials from other churches, the leaders asked me to consider a strategy to develop small groups at NTCBC in order to foster deeper community, enhance pastoral care, and stimulate growth through outreach in the congregation.⁴ They feel that the small group ministry at NTCBC has a lot of room for improvement. For example, at the moment, there are only a few organized small groups in our congregation comprising less than 15 percent of the Sunday attendance. Small group leaders are given little training, are hard to find and retain, and commonly experience burnout. These deficiencies in the small group ministry, matched with what the leaders have heard that a developed small group ministry can do, made it a natural area for inquiry as a solution to our problems.

This study is designed to find a practical strategy and theological basis from which to reform our current fellowship and small group structure in order address the

⁴ Interview by author with several members of EMG leadership team. Whether their suggestions are valid will be seen in Parts Two and Three of this paper.

aforementioned concerns. It is recognized that developing a small group ministry at NTCBC may not be the total solution, but this paper will show that there are firm biblical foundations to predict that small groups will make a substantial difference in the three areas of concern. Furthermore, preliminary results from current developments of the small group ministry have given us assurance that focussing on small groups is beneficial to the church in these three areas.

This paper will contain three major parts. In order to understand the need for the reformation of NTCBC's small groups, the first part will describe the factors external and internal to NTCBC that have led to the present state of distance between members, perceived lack of pastoral care, and stagnation in growth. Among the external factors considered are a greater desire for community due to the distance between the English and Chinese congregations in Chinese churches; the need for greater pastoral care due to the unique needs of Canadianized Chinese Canadians; the high dependence of Chinese churches on immigration; and the problems with developing close community, pastoral care, and church attendance in this postmodern generation. Internal factors considered include weaknesses in NTCBC's current strategy to develop community, provide pastoral care, and grow the English congregation. These weaknesses are seen in the large fellowships at NTCBC that have too few small groups, small groups that are temporary and superficial in nature, and a perpetual crisis in small group leadership. Some other weaknesses include the over-reliance on paid clergy for pastoral care and stagnation in growth due to a reliance on large scale evangelistic events instead of personal one-on-one evangelism.

The second part of this paper will present a biblical and theological foundation for a small group ministry at NTCBC in order to address the critical issues established in Part One. After recognizing the common problem of the need to enhance community at NTCBC, the Bible and theology will be used to show that our Trinitarian God is our ultimate example of deep community, pastoral care, and incarnational outreach. The root problem and need of the English congregation at NTCBC is for each member to have regular transformative meetings with God. It will be shown that, in a church, a good place to facilitate and encourage these meetings is in small groups.

Part Three of this paper proposes a two-pronged approach to the solution – the cultivation of small groups that foster meeting with God, and a reformation of the small group structure at NTCBC. The specific strategies in this approach are to encourage *lectio divina* and restructuring the small group ministry into the Hybrid Model – both to be described later in this paper.

PART ONE:

CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

EXTERNAL FACTORS

Before suggesting solutions to problems at NTCBC, it is important to understand both the external (environmental/cultural) and internal (within NTCBC) dimensions of the problems. In this chapter, some key external causes will be examined. In chapter 2, the key internal factors in NTCBC's current structure that impact the problems are studied. Together they help explain why NTCBC's English congregation has a desire for deeper community, a desire for greater pastoral care, and stagnation in growth.

It is important to look at the context and environment in which problems develop because the gospel is always conveyed through the medium of culture.¹ The term for this continuing discipline is "contextualization." It is recognized that, "while the dangers involved in accommodating the faith to culture are real, the quest to construct a culture-free theology is misguided. We simply cannot escape from our particular context into some transcultural intellectual vantage point."² At NTCBC, culture affects much of what we do in the church. This paper considers four key external factors, starting with a separation at NTCBC between the Chinese and English congregations, which is typical of Chinese churches. It will also look at problems posed by the unique needs of

¹ Darrell L. Guder, ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 18.

² Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 151.

Canadianized Chinese Canadians; the close relationship between immigration and growth in the Chinese church; and the way this postmodern generation has problems developing close community, receiving pastoral care, and attending church services. All these conditions have affected the present sense of separation between members of the English congregation, their need for greater pastoral care, and the stagnation of overall congregation growth.

A Desire for Deeper Community Due to the Distance between English and Chinese Congregations

One external environmental factor that affects the English congregation at NTCBC is its context within a multi-lingual, multicultural church. This factor increases the desire of members in the English congregation to experience deeper community within the church. Parents of members in the English congregation are often separated from their children due to language and cultural barriers, and this increases the feeling of isolation within English congregation members and their desire to find deeper community.

Outsiders may consider Chinese churches unicultural by nature and only focused on one group, the Chinese. In reality, most Chinese churches in North America are bicultural, if not tricultural. They may have one predominant ethnic group in attendance (i.e. Chinese), but, within their churches, often there are three distinct language groups and cultures: Cantonese Chinese, Mandarin Chinese, and English.

Parents in unilingual Chinese-speaking churches which started in the 1970s did not want to lose contact with their English-speaking children by shipping them to English language churches when they grew up. Instead, they started English-speaking worship

services and congregations within Chinese churches as the children grew older. At NTCBC, this led to a separate English ministry leadership team, separate Sunday school department, separate outreach department and separate fellowship department.

As a consequence, the congregations began to slowly drift apart – not in location, but in emotional distance and in activities and communications. This separation was typical of immigrant churches where a cultural gap between the overseas-born parents and their local-born children existed.³ For example, five years ago at NTCBC, the English and Chinese congregations would often see each other at the annual church picnic, Christmas and New Year’s events, Thanksgiving, baptisms, and Summer Conference. All these events are now held separately. This increases the isolation among the English congregation members from their family members in the Chinese side and is an external contributing factor to the desire for deeper community.

The Need for Greater Pastoral Care Due to the Unique Needs of Canadianized Chinese Canadians

In chapter 1 of *Pursuing the Pearl*, Ken Fong describes several reasons why he thinks Americanized Asian Americans have been neglected in the past.⁴ It is easy to see parallels with the experience of Canadianized Chinese Canadians. He starts by noting that Americanized Asian Americans are virtually invisible.

At least two major groups are blind to the unique requirements of the more Americanized Asian Americans. The first group is made up of predominantly white American Christians who belong to churches that consist mostly of people

³ A description of the cultural gap is found in Appendix D.

⁴ Ken Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl: A Comprehensive Resource for Multi-Asian Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), 9-14.

of European descent. They assume that more acculturated Asian Americans must want to blend into their Euro-American culture rather than affirm any aspects of their Asian cultural status. The second group consists of immigrant-oriented Asian American Christians who believe that the majority of Asians in this country will always identify most closely with cultural roots from the countries of their forbears.⁵

Fong explains that both white Americans and Asian immigrants can sometimes make the false assumption that Americanized Asian Americans would always want to blend into the Euro-American culture or identify solely with an Asian culture. Any desire to be part of a different culture, a unique blending or bridge between the two, may not be considered. In a related point, Fong states that Americanized Asian Americans are often enigmatic to others and to themselves. Cultural identity is a major question for Asian Americans and Canadianized Chinese Canadians (CBCs) as they are growing up.⁶

In light of the virtual invisibility of the CBC culture and the enigma that they pose to others and themselves, CBCs can be considered a high-maintenance group. There is therefore a need for greater pastoral care in CBC congregations due to the unique needs of Canadianized Chinese Canadians. Fong points out that people within this third culture tend to be short-changed when it comes to energy and staff resources.⁷ It is much simpler to either try to minister to them as part of the immigrant population, or assume that they will mix easily with a white congregation somewhere else. As a result, it is said that only 5 percent of the CBC population ever stays in the church; the other 95 percent

⁵ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 9.

⁶ A more detailed analysis of this situation is given in Appendix E.

⁷ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 13.

are neglected and tend to fall through the cracks of ministry.⁸ “In the 1990s the main metaphor depicting the status of the Asian American church was “Silent Exodus,” to explain the vast number of previously-churched, second-generation Asian Americans who never returned to church once they left home for college.”⁹ With greater pastoral care and attention, this silent exodus may be lessened.

Stagnation in Growth Due to a High Dependence on Immigration

Toronto is known as one of the most multiethnic cities in the world. Within Toronto, there are hundreds of churches that target specific ethnic minorities, including over two hundred Chinese Canadian churches.¹⁰ Ethnic Chinese are the largest group within the general Asian Canadian population.¹¹ In fact, Chinese are the largest visible minority group in Canada today. The 2001 Government of Canada Census records ethnic Chinese as accounting for 3.5 percent of the total national population and 26 percent of the visible minority population.¹² In Toronto, Chinese make up 8.8 percent of the population, numbering 409,535 people.¹³ They form a distinct people group and culture

⁸ It is difficult to verify this commonly quoted statistic, but, in my own informal assessment of this situation through consideration of my CBC peers, this statistic is not far from the truth.

⁹ Peter S. Cha, Steve Kang, and Helen Lee, eds., *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 10.

¹⁰ Understanding the rationale for these Chinese-focused churches will help in appreciating the background of NTCBC and the role that the English congregation plays within it. A short rationale for Chinese-focused churches is found in Appendix A.

¹¹ For the purposes of this paper, “Asian” refers to those from East Asia and, in particular, China.

¹² Canada, Government of Canada 2001 Census, “Chinese Largest Visible Minority Group, Surpassing 1 Million,” http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/etoimm/canada.cfm#chinese_largest_visible_minority (accessed April 16, 2008).

¹³ Canada, 2001 Census, “Chinese Largest Visible Minority Group.”

within Canada, and most attendees of NTCBC are either part of or familiar with this culture.¹⁴

It is necessary to understand the influence of Chinese culture on present day Chinese Canadian churches like NTCBC because it is the environment and atmosphere which pervades all that is done or attempted in these churches. Francis L. K. Hsu, a professor who was born and raised in China yet studied and taught in Europe and America for many years, has written an excellent comparison of American and Chinese attitudes and ways of thinking in his 490-page book, *Americans and Chinese: Passage to Differences*.¹⁵ In that book, he shows that people from the East and the West often have diametrically opposite or contrasting worldviews when it comes to how they perceive art; deal with relations between the sexes; value home life; and hold attitudes toward government, religion, the economy, science, and many other areas. Hsu demonstrates that the cultural divide between Asian and Western ways of thinking is vast.

In the past history of the Chinese in Canada, cultural differences have led to racism (both systemic and subtle) against all those of Chinese origin.

For much of its history, the Chinese Canadian community saw its development constrained by discrimination. Despite the entrenchment of individual rights and the official commitment to multiculturalism, Canada today is by no means free of racial discrimination and cultural stereotypes. Although they are no longer officially second-class citizens, Chinese Canadians have yet to be accepted as full-fledged Canadians entitled to pursue their residential choices, linguistic preferences, and cultural fulfillment free of Canada's historical baggage of cultural stereotypes and racial stigmatization.¹⁶

¹⁴ A basic description of distinctives of the Chinese culture is given in Appendix B.

¹⁵ Francis L. K. Hsu, *Americans and Chinese: Passage to Differences* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981).

¹⁶ Hsu, *Americans and Chinese*, 155.

The factors mentioned above: a large population of Chinese in Canada, a vast distinction of culture between East and West, and a history of racism in Canada have in a large part shaped the mentality of the Chinese Church in Canada as it is today. These factors combine to result in churches that have a tendency to be insular and isolated, inward-looking and ethno-centric. In turn, this tendency has made Chinese churches highly dependent on immigration for a source of numerical growth. Recognition of this major influence helps to explain one of the three main problems discussed in this paper, the stagnation in numbers of the English congregation at NTCBC, which is a subset within the Chinese church. In particular, when immigration from Hong Kong slowed down in the mid-1990s, Sunday worship attendance plateaued at NTCBC. The overall numbers in the church did not increase significantly after the 1990s, despite increased immigration of Mandarin-speaking people from Mainland China.¹⁷

For the present, it is clear that growth in the English congregation at NTCBC cannot depend on the addition of children from the Chinese congregations. Advances in growth similar to those that occurred in the past due to large numbers of immigrants from Hong Kong cannot be assumed for the future. Immigration from mainland China and the maturation of the Mandarin congregation may result in growth many years from now, but the Mandarin congregation at NTCBC is too young and undeveloped at the moment to benefit the English congregation in terms of numbers.

¹⁷ Further details about the growth pattern and stagnation of worship service attendance at NTCBC can be found in Appendix C.

Problems with Developing Close Community, Pastoral Care, and Church Growth in a Postmodern Generation

The term postmodern is used in this paper to label the current generation of people born after the baby boom that followed World War II. In the 1960s, the birth rate in Canada and the United States dropped dramatically, ushering in the age of “Generation X” and beyond, the people generally identified as the beginning of the current postmodern generation.¹⁸ Most leaders and members of the English congregation at NTCBC are part of this generation. According to Leonard Sweet and many other modern thinkers and social commentators, “We are all poised at the beginning of something very new—a start-up culture which (for want of any better designation) is being referred to as ‘postmodern.’”¹⁹ Due to various factors such as urbanization, mechanization, the internet, and mass media, relationships in this postmodern generation tend to be relatively superficial. People are able to email strangers halfway around the world, but are increasingly unable to communicate with their family members or neighbours. Relationships are often one-dimensional and short-lived, in which people meet only briefly in fragmented ways. There is little contact, and life is fast-paced, especially in urban centers such as Toronto. In a large city, people can be ignored, fall through the cracks and not be known by many others. Big city crime is escalating, so people feel unsafe and become unwilling to connect with others. It becomes increasingly difficult to

¹⁸ Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1997), 101.

¹⁹ Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2003), xv.

encourage others in holiness of life as less contact means less chance for “iron to sharpen iron” and allow godly friends to shape each others’ characters. Darrell Guder states that

Complex, modern society is a reality for everyone in North America. No one has escaped being shaped by its pervasive influence. It has become the very air we breathe... which includes such dimensions as:

- urbanized life with its complex patterns of social relationships
- multiple tasks and responsibilities that fragment time and space
- job, career, and identity defined by professionalized roles and skills
- the pervasive influence of change and rapid obsolescence
- radical forms of individuality producing isolation and aloneness
- hunger for some overarching story to give meaning and structure to life²⁰

Guder’s description of the characteristics of today’s postmodern society points out many factors contributing to this generation’s cry for more connection and community.

One significant factor that has occurred in this generation and not listed above by Guder is the fragmentation of the family, where many marriages have ended up in divorce or separation.

Evidence for the loosening of family bonds is unequivocal. In addition to the century-long increase in divorce rates (which accelerated from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and then leveled off), and the more recent increase in single-parent families, the incidence of one-person households has more than doubled since 1950, in part because of the rising number of widows living alone. According to the General Social Survey, the proportion of all American adults who are currently married fell from 74 percent in 1974 to 56 percent in 1998, while the proportion of adults who have children at home fell from 55 percent to 38 percent. The Census Bureau reports that the fraction of adults who are married and have kids at home—the archetypal Ozzie and Harriet family—was sliced by more than one-third from 40 percent in 1970 to 26 percent in 1997.²¹

²⁰ Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 20.

²¹ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 277.

As a result, there has been a reduction in connectedness and community in this generation.

Postmoderns wrestle with intimacy issues, loneliness, and fear of commitment. As

Robert Putnam, in *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community*

states,

The American family structure has changed in several important and potentially relevant ways over the last several decades. The downturn in civic engagement coincided with the breakdown of the traditional family unit—mom, dad, and the kids. Since the family itself is, by some accounts, a key form of social capital, perhaps its eclipse is part of the explanation for the reduction in joining and trusting in the wider community.²²

A reduction in “joining and trusting in the wider community” can leave postmoderns

deficient in social connections and the ability to relate to others in meaningful ways. As

Putnam also remarks,

For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago--silently, without warning--that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current.²³

In this quotation, Putnam states that community life or social engagement increased in the

United States (and I believe to a similar extent Canada) until the 1970s and then suddenly

decreased right up to the present. Putnam traces this trend as consistent across seven

separate measures of social engagement including: political participation, civic

participation, religious participation, workplace networks, informal networks, mutual

trust, and altruism.²⁴ People born in the 1920s and 1930s are significantly more socially

²² Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 27.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., Section 2.

connected than later generations, largely as a result of social habits and values developed during the “great mid-century cataclysm” of World War II.²⁵ In other words, postmoderns are poor in deep social and intimate relationships in comparison to their parents.

As a result, postmoderns crave relationship and community. In the words of Sweet, there is a ...

hunger for connectedness, for communities not of blood or nation but communities of choice. The very prevalence of the word *community* itself—is there any sector of society that isn’t a “community”? (environmental community, gay community, Muslim community, Christian community)—betrays the absence of and craving for the real thing.”²⁶

Daniel Yankelovich, the veteran United States sociologist, has stated, “My studies of the public reveal an immense pool of goodwill and good faith all over the country. Americans are hungry for enhanced quality of life, for deeper community, for endowing our communal life with spiritual significance.”²⁷ Another observer, Louise Conant, associate rector of Christ Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, noted that in the past “people came together in church on Sunday morning to celebrate the community that they had the rest of the week. People now come to church on Sunday morning to find the community that they don’t have the rest of the week.”²⁸ The hunger for community

²⁵ Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 16-19.

²⁶ Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 109-110.

²⁷ Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 217.

²⁸ As quoted in Edward M. Hallowell, *Connect* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 15.

among postmoderns is so strong that they have been reduced to finding community in cyberspace groups such as eBay.

More than buying and selling, the electronic emporium [eBay] is about posting messages and Maydays on bulletin boards, policing the integrity of transactions through Feedback Forum, discovering new friends, and launching new relationships at the eBay Café. The Internet is becoming a key relational tool both for kids-as 51% of teens use chat rooms to connect relationally with their peers-and for adults. Ask the question, “What are the most used resources on the Net?” and the answer is (1) information search engines, and (2) E-mail. Ask the question, “What accounts for the most time spent on the Net?” and the answer changes: chat rooms rank number one, consuming 26% of all time spent on the Internet. One user said, “eBay and its cyber-incredible world is bringing people together to do a lot more than goods. We are trading our hearts.”

Don’t laugh.

eBay may just be the closest experience of small-town US-America available to postmoderns.²⁹

The English congregation of NTCBC needs to respond to the challenge to develop close Christian community posed by the deep yearning of this postmodern generation for connection with others. Since postmoderns live in a superficial culture, have few meaningful connections with others, are affected by fragmented families, and are not able to connect in deep ways, they are known as a wounded generation. They desperately need pastoral care from others, but are not flocking to churches to get it. As Dan Kimball points out in the title of his recent book *They Like Jesus, Not the Church*,³⁰ this generation is not necessarily looking to the institutional church for solutions.

²⁹ Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, 111.

³⁰ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007).

Summary

Several external factors outside of NTCBC's control and influence have contributed significantly to its three key problems of a desire for deeper community, need for greater pastoral care, and stagnation in growth. The existence of a clear separation between the Chinese and English congregations in Chinese churches contributes to the need for deeper community; the unique needs of the CBC population increase the need for greater pastoral care; and the Chinese Church's high dependence on immigration has affected NTCBC greatly, particularly when immigration from Hong Kong diminished after the 1990s, stalling NTCBC's growth. Finally, this postmodern context exacerbates all three of the identified needs at NTCBC – the need for deeper community, greater pastoral care, and growth in church attendance.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, before suggesting solutions to problems at NTCBC, it is important to also understand internal factors within NTCBC and the way things are done here that have contributed to the problems. In chapter 2, current strategies used to develop community, enhance pastoral care, and grow the church at NTCBC will be examined, and their deficiencies highlighted. Together with the external factors described in this chapter, they help explain why NTCBC's English congregation has problems with a desire for deeper community, a desire for greater pastoral care, and a stagnation in church growth.

CHAPTER 2

INTERNAL FACTORS

Chapter 1 of this paper considered four key external environmental conditions that have contributed to the problems at NTCBC that are the focus of this paper – namely, the existence of a large emotional distance between the Chinese and English congregations, the unique needs of the CBC population, the Chinese church's high dependency on immigration, and difficulties in this postmodern generation in developing close community with a resulting low church attendance and large need for pastoral care. In order to adequately address the three problems of a desire for deeper community, the need for greater pastoral care, and stagnation in growth, internal factors within the structure of NTCBC must also be considered.

Later in Part Two of this paper, it will be argued that the solution to the three problems examined in Part One lies in biblical and theological issues related to the basic need for intimacy with God and that one place to address this need in the church is small groups.

Current Strategies Used to Develop Community, Provide Pastoral Care, and Grow the English Congregation

When the English congregation at NTCBC was started in January 1992, there was no formal strategy articulated by the leaders on how to develop community, provide pastoral care, or grow the congregation. Instead, the congregational leaders followed

their “gut instincts” and patterned the ministry after what they had seen in other Chinese churches around them. Their informal strategies included fostering community using large fellowships with cell groups, calling an English pastor to provide pastoral care, and designing large-scale evangelistic events to attract newcomers to the church. These informal strategies are described below.

Fostering Community Using Large Fellowships with Cell Groups

To foster community, the early leaders of the English congregation formed age-based fellowships to encourage cohesion and community among members. Everyone was encouraged to join a fellowship, and the fellowships were singularly tasked to help develop deeper community in the church.¹ Small groups, or “cell groups” as they were then commonly known, were an afterthought to the development of the fellowships.

When a fellowship grew large (i.e. over forty weekly attendees) it would subdivide into cell groups for closer sharing and Bible studies. These cell groups would meet once a month for Bible studies, but would still meet jointly with the rest of the fellowship the other weeks of the month for common activities and singing. Cell group leaders were chosen every year, and every year new groups with new leaders and members would be formed. Thus, it was rare for a fellowship member to be in the same cell group with the same leaders and members for more than a year. This practice was

¹ The Fellowship Department was established to “be responsible for planning, organizing and promoting fellowships for all age levels.” NTCBC Constitution (Ontario, by the church, 1982), Article VI: Subsection 5 (J).

common among many Chinese churches of the day.² It was hoped that this system of large fellowships subdivided into cell groups would address the English congregation's need for deeper community.

Providing Pastoral Care through Paid Clergy

In order to care for its members, the leaders of the English congregation at NTCBC asked for a paid clergy member dedicated to the congregation. The English pastor was given the task of shepherding the sheep in the English congregation, and it was common knowledge and practice to bring to him most issues that needed pastoral care and attention.³ These issues might include visiting the sick at home or the hospital, calling on those who had been missing church services, helping the weak in faith, and conducting pre-marriage and marriage counseling. These shepherding duties were over and above his regular duties of organizing the fellowships, teaching Sunday school, planning the weekly bulletin, preaching two to three times a month, conducting weddings and funerals, being a liaison with the Chinese congregations and church leadership, helping organize the Summer Conference; participating in the summer vacation Bible school and summer baseball ministry, and helping organize all special events and missions activities.

² The author has participated in a similarly-structured fellowship at four other Chinese churches and has observed this structure in at least twenty other Chinese churches in Toronto.

³ NTCBC has both male and female pastors, and also ordains both genders, but in the short history of the English congregation it has only had male pastors for this group.

The first English pastor left after seven years, and the second after three years. I am currently the third English pastor, and September 2008 will be my fourth anniversary at NTCBC. Traditionally, the English pastor was considered the answer to the need for most pastoral care in the church.

Large Scale Evangelistic Events for Growth

Many of the members in the Chinese congregation of NTCBC were raised up in the age of mass evangelistic rallies such as those run by the Billy Graham organization. In fact, several were converted when Billy Graham went to Hong Kong in 1956 and 1975. So when it came to choosing methods of evangelism, holding special events with an evangelistic preacher was the preferred method, and this strategy was transferred to the English congregation when it was formed.

In the early years of the English congregation's growth, the main function of the Outreach Team was to organize these events, which were held two to three times a year. The events were successful in bringing out a large crowd, but few would continue attending the church afterwards or be assimilated into the church community in the long run. Yet, this was the main strategy used to bring new people into the English congregation and grow the church.

Weaknesses in the Current Strategy

Some weaknesses in the practice of ministry in NTCBC's English congregation appeared early in its development, while others took a few years to manifest themselves, as structures and practices that were effective in a smaller congregation were not

sufficient when the congregation grew. The English leaders at NTCBC started to notice deficiencies in the way things were done as the fellowships grew larger: pastors burnt out and outreach stagnated. These issues directly affected the three key problems of the congregation's need for deeper community, greater pastoral care, and lack of growth in numbers.

Large Fellowships Resulting in a Need for Deeper Community

As the fellowships in the English congregation of NTCBC grew larger, the sense of cohesion and community within the fellowships grew smaller. This was due to several factors, including the fact that too few cell groups were formed, the cell groups tended to be temporary and superficial in nature, and there was a perpetual crisis in the cell group leadership.

Too Few Cell Groups

NTCBC's large fellowships had a problem with only having a few cell groups. In Appendix F, entitled "Different Levels of Community," it is noted that small groups such as the cell groups are supposed to address the need for community at the deepest level, the personal level. Unfortunately the cell groups at NTCBC were not highly developed or maintained in our earlier model of ministry. They were an afterthought and considered optional to the fellowships.

Some fellowships had a few cell groups, while others did not have any at all. Even as recently as three years ago, there were only about seven cell groups in the church that connected about 10 percent of the congregation with each other. This left the other

90 percent with no community at a deep personal level, and it resulted in several cell groups which were quite large. Some groups grew to the size of twenty members and were led by only one person.

Cell Groups Temporary and Superficial in Nature

Compounding the problem of having only a few cell groups was the temporary and superficial nature of the groups in existence. In the past, cell groups were formed within fellowships and designed to exist for only one year at a time. There was little continuity in terms of leadership and membership from year to year. If a cell group met only once a month, then they would meet only twelve times before being separated, with the group members joining new cell groups the next year.

Due to the relatively short amount of time spent in the cell groups, member interaction tended to be superficial and at a shallow level. The interaction was deeper than that found at the fellowship level, but rarely approached the deep personal level sought by the leaders. This was accentuated by the fact that cell group membership was assigned to people at the beginning of the year, and selection of a particular cell group was not optional. If the “chemistry” between cell group members was not working, it would sometimes take about half a year to identify the problem and sometimes even longer to attempt a solution.

Perpetual Crisis in Cell Group Leadership

Given the temporary nature of the cell groups in the past and the large size of some of these groups, several cell group leaders were overworked and eventually burned

out or dropped out before the year's end. The result was cynical, emotionally-tired, former leaders, and members who were reluctant to take their place. This meant even larger cell groups the following year and fed into a downward spiral of fewer and fewer cell group leaders responsible for larger and larger numbers of people in their groups. Finding a new slate of cell group leaders for the following year became an annual chore for the church leadership and took up valuable time and resources starting in September and lasting until the end of the year.

Compounding the problem of burned out leaders and those who quit before their yearly commitment was over was the fact that there was little formal training for the cell group leaders. Most training was "hands on" in the ministry, and monthly gatherings tended to focus on business matters or Bible study preparation. Long-term training was not possible given the temporary nature of the cell groups.

As cell groups grew larger and the number of cell groups grew smaller, and given the temporary and superficial nature of the cell groups and the perpetual crisis in their leadership, it was inevitable that a need for deeper community within the English congregation would develop over time. This internal factor of large fellowships was a significant contributor to the presenting problem of a desire for deeper community at NTCBC.

Over-Reliance on Paid Clergy for Pastoral Care

A second internal factor, the over-reliance on paid clergy, directly affects the congregation's need for greater pastoral care. Greg Ogden, in *Unfinished Business*:

Returning the Ministry to the People of God, describes the background to an all too common problem in churches today, when there is an over-reliance on paid clergy for pastoral care.

Historically, the church has been entrapped in institutionalism. The institutional church resembles a corporation with the pastor as its head. Locked into a hierarchical structure, the clergy are ensconced at the pinnacle of the pyramid. They are the “experts” in religion. As a separated, elevated class, the clergy have occupied a spiritual realm not open to the ordinary believer. The clergy as a distinct caste have supposedly received a special unction and calling that enable them to have a closeness to God unattainable by average church members. This theology of ministry has more in common with the Old Testament priesthood than with New Testament peoplehood.

Appropriating another image, we can describe the pastor as a solo performer or a one-person act on the theatre stage, while the church members serve as the admiring audience. Laypeople passively warm a pew and place money in the offering plate to create the context for pastors to perform their ministry.⁴

NTCBC, being a Chinese church that values hierarchy, also tends to overly rely on the pastor for the “performance of ministry.” As in many churches, the job specifications for pastors at NTCBC are quite broad and general. There is very little definition and identification by the church leadership in terms of their priorities and goals, visions and direction. At this stage of the English congregation’s history, there needs to be a clear statement of the role of the pastor. For example, the pastor needs to know what the main expectations of the church leadership are. Do they want mainly a preacher/teacher, a shepherd, a coach, an administrator, or “all of the above?” When it is recognized that a pastor is not superhuman and the specific role of the pastor is made clear to both the church and the pastor, than a proper fit between the pastor and church

⁴ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 28.

can occur. Effective ministry occurs when the pastor and the congregation know which part of the body they are called to be (1 Cor 12:14-31).

As the size of the English congregation at NTCBC grows, the lack of a clear job description and an over-reliance on the pastor for pastoral care becomes more of an issue. Church tradition, Chinese tradition, and early examples from previous pastors tended to encourage the members of NTCBC to believe that only certain pastoral duties could be performed by the paid clergy. These duties included tending to the sick, prayer for healing, counselling the troubled, and various other shepherding duties. The pastor became the first person that a member would seek out for help, rather than the last. As a result, pastoral care became a large part of the pastor's duties and pushed out other items on his agenda.⁵ The pastor also became the "bottleneck," and ministry would sometimes be postponed or unnecessarily delayed while members waited for the pastor's presence or involvement.

This was especially true in the English congregation at NTCBC, since the English pastor was uniquely connected to the congregation. He was often the only pastor who spoke English clearly and knew of the cultural distinctives of the English congregation. Since there was only one English pastor for many years (until last year when a youth pastor arrived), this problem was very acute, in contrast to the Chinese congregations who had up to four pastors at a time. The internal factor of over-reliance on paid clergy

⁵ An extreme (and somewhat humorous) example of this occurred to me one evening when a member of the congregation woke me up in the middle of the night with a telephone call. When I asked the nature of the problem, she said she simply wanted to know how to spell the word "fifty."

and a shortage of English pastors heightened the need for greater pastoral care at NTCBC.

Stagnation of Growth Due to Reliance on Large Scale Events

Over the years, the English congregation has been learning that its sole reliance on large scale evangelistic events is not effective in the long run. The very fact of a slow decadal growth⁶ alone shows the weakness of this ministry strategy for the English congregation. Like many other churches, we will have a difficult time breaking the two hundred-member barrier and beyond if we continue using large scale events as the only method for evangelism and ignore or neglect the fact that one-on-one relationships with non-Christians are the time-honoured and biblical method of bringing people to Christ.

Large scale events are helpful in generating attention and initial interest in a church, but they are not effective for long-term retention of members. On the contrary, focussing on large scale events tends to take time and resources away from other relationship-building activities that help to build friendships and bring visitors closer to Christ and the church family. Further elaboration of this crucial concept will be given in Part Two of this paper.

Summary

This chapter has looked at some internal factors that have contributed to the three key problems of a need for deeper community, a lack of adequate pastoral care,

⁶ The English congregation only grew from a size of about 60 at its inception in January 1992 to about 150 in 2001.

and a stagnation of growth in the English congregation of NTCBC. It began by describing the current strategies used, and showed how they are weak and ineffective. The strategy to foster deeper community through large fellowships with cell groups has not resulted in closer community among members, due to the existence of only a small number of cell groups, which tend to be temporary and superficial in nature and have a perpetual crisis in leadership. The practice of reliance on paid clergy has resulted in a bottleneck of pastoral care that tends to put inordinate responsibilities on the English pastor and a general desire among the congregation for more pastoral care than just one pastor can provide. Reliance on a few large group evangelistic events a year has drained church member resources from relationship building and other evangelistic activities that are effective in long-term evangelism and assimilation of newcomers into the church, contributing to the congregation's stagnation in growth.

Strategies which may have worked in the past or in other church contexts are not necessarily effective at NTCBC today. Past and present methods to foster deeper community, increase pastoral care among members, and grow the English congregation are showing signs of significant weakness and ineffectiveness. The external factors of an emotional distance between the English and Chinese congregations creating a desire for deeper community, the unique needs of Canadianized Chinese Canadians calling for greater pastoral care, and the Chinese church's high dependence on immigration hindering growth are all significant factors contributing to the three key problems. Another contributing external factor is the

nature of this postmodern generation, which adds to all three problems of a desire for deeper community, the need for greater pastoral care, and stagnation in church growth.

The external factors, coupled with the internal factors of large fellowships resulting in a need for deeper community, an over-reliance on paid clergy for pastoral care, and stagnation in growth due to a reliance on large scale evangelistic events are the context of the three problems described in this paper. The weakness of the present ministry in NTCBC's English congregation calls for a new way of doing things.

Part Two of this paper will examine biblical and theological explanations for the root of the problems described in Part One and suggest a biblical and theological foundation for a small group ministry at NTCBC as a solution. The Bible and theology confirm that developing the small group ministry at NTCBC will address our needs.

PART TWO:

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS

Any significant reformation of the ministry at NTCBC needs a solid biblical and theological base. This is often necessary, considering the long time commitment needed to implement change or any paradigm shift of thinking in a church. Suggested changes to present ministry practices must have a firm theological foundation in order to sustain and nurture the vision of the future until the goal is achieved. In doing theology in ministry, one seeks to identify the current situation and practices (Part One of this paper), examine them in the light of normative sources such as the Bible (Part Two), and then suggest some steps and strategies for reformation of practices (Part Three).¹

In Part One, three specific areas of need at NTCBC were articulated—the need to enhance deeper community, the need for more pastoral care, and the need for congregational growth in outreach. Chapters 1 and 2 described those needs in the context of external and internal factors to NTCBC. These give context to a constructive theological reflection. Part Two will look at some biblical reasons underlying or causing the problems described in Part One and show why the development of a strong small group ministry at NTCBC will address this root problem.

¹ Ray Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1-32.

A Common Problem – The Need to Enhance Community

All three of the problems identified in this paper are related to the common problem of a need to enhance community. For example, stagnation in church growth is often addressed in churches when a feeling of community is increased. When people in a church draw closer to each other, they are more likely to come to the worship services on Sunday and participate in the activities of the church. If people feel separated from one another, they do not feel compelled to go to worship service or get involved in meaningful ways.

Pastoral care is also related to a need for deeper community. When pastoral care is experienced, people feel “at home” in a church where they feel people care for them. There is a feeling of oneness when people care for one another. This encourages people to go back to the worship services week after week and to seek to know their fellow members at the church better. There are many other factors contributing to stagnation in numbers and a feeling of little pastoral care, but the need for deeper community is certainly a significant one. It is the thesis of this paper that increasing the sense of community at NTCBC through small groups will significantly improve the environment of the church so that deeper community will be experienced, greater pastoral care accomplished, and subsequently a growth in overall numbers observed.

Community in the broadest sense can be understood to be the movement between persons to experience “common” life. Bonhoeffer called this “life together.”² Community is the process of individual persons coming together into unity (“com” +

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1954), 21.

“unity”). God has placed in each of us a deep desire for community. As Grenz and Franke point out, community is theology’s integrative motif, meaning that it lies at the heart of Christian theology.³ Gilbert Bilezikian states in the opening chapter of his book, *Community 101*:

The silent churning at the core of our being is the tormenting need to know and to be known, to understand and to be understood, to possess and to be possessed, to belong unconditionally and forever without fear of loss, betrayal, or rejection. It is the nostalgia for our primal oneness, the silent sorrowing for paradise lost, the age-long pursuit after the encompassing embrace for which we know we were created. It is the search, however wanton and sullied, for the pristine grace of holding and being held, for the freedom to be who we really are without shame or pretense, for release and repose in the womb-like safety of unalterable acceptance and of overarching love.⁴

Every human being desires community, but it is also noted that not necessarily of the same level at the same time. A discussion of this issue is found in Appendix F.

Desire for Community Based on God’s Trinitarian Nature

God exists in a small group community – the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Three in One. The doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Theological Society describes the biblical teaching about the Godhead as the original community of oneness in a single sentence: “God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”⁵ God is the model of a perfect small group community – different persons with a common, intimate, and interconnected life.

³ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 203-238.

⁴ Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), 15.

⁵ From doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Theological Society, <http://www.etsjets.org/?q=about> (accessed April 30, 2008).

The Genesis account (Gen 1:26) declares that humans are made in the image of God (Latin: “*Imago Dei*”) and are unique within all Creation in our relation to Him. They are living beings capable of embodying God’s communicable attributes (cf. Gen 9:6; Rom 8:29; Col 3:10; James 3:9). In rational matters, humans are like God in that they can reason and have intellect, will, and emotions. They also reflect God’s image in their desire for community. This desire for community is based on the fact that God is a social being who also desires community. When we in the church live in community as God lives in community, we will address the three key problems at NTCBC presented in this paper – the problems of the need for deeper community, the need for greater pastoral care, and the need to outreach and grow. When God’s people at NTCBC discover the Lord and His attributes, we who are made in His image will have no problem strategizing and bringing healing to the church. God is our supreme example, and in the Godhead there is deep community, an instinctive pastoral care for one another, and through the Incarnation a desire to outreach to others. These three characteristics all speak to the root of NTCBC’s three key problems. Later in this chapter it will be seen see that our greatest need, and the ultimate need that must be addressed, is our need to meet with God and be in community with Him.

The Trinity: A Model of Deep Community

The oneness of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is believers’ model for deep community. Jesus declared that “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Likewise, when promising the Holy Spirit to His disciples, Jesus declared that “I will ask the Father, and

he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever” (John 14:16). That Counselor was to be “*another*” Counselor. The Greek for “another” in this text has the meaning of “one who is similar to, or just like the other.” Jesus and the Spirit are just like each other. They are one, as the Father and Son are one. For example, immediately after saying that the Counselor would come, Jesus told His disciples that “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). The coming of the Counselor is as if Jesus were coming to His disciples. The experience of having the Counselor with them would be like having Jesus with them. Jesus explained to His disciples that “the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). In other words, having the Holy Spirit with us is just like having Jesus with us – because they are one and the Holy Spirit reminds us of Christ. Thus God the Father is one with God the Son, and God the Son is one with God the Holy Spirit.

In similar fashion, God the Father is one with God the Holy Spirit. As Paul states in 1 Corinthians 2:10b -12, “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” The Spirit and the Father are one, even as the Father and Son are one and the Son and Spirit are one. The three persons of the Godhead are one in nature, their very being, and one in their work. Appendix Z lists biblical references demonstrating that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in nature (deity; self-existence; eternity; omniscience; omnipresence; omnipotence; goodness; holiness; truthfulness) and one in their work (creation;

inspiration; birth of Christ; salvation; indwelling of believers; protection of believers; help for witnessing). A simple example occurred at the baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:13-17), when all three persons of the Godhead were actively engaged in concert and showing their trinitarian community and oneness – God the Son getting baptized “to fulfill all righteousness” (vs. 15); God the Holy Spirit giving His approval by “descending like a dove and lighting on him” (vs. 16); and God the Father giving His verbal approval with the words, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (vs. 17). This is our model of deep community and oneness.

It is understood that we humans will never attain to the degree of oneness that the Trinity experiences, given our imperfect nature and being in this imperfect world, but when our Lord Jesus prayed for us in His high priestly prayer of John 17 He commended the oneness experienced in the Trinity as a model of oneness for His followers. In verses 20 and 21 of that chapter, Christ said, “I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, *just as* [emphasis added] you are in me and I am in you.” The oneness of the Father and Son (which includes oneness with the Spirit) is to be the model for our oneness as believers.

The oneness of the Trinity involves love, co-operation, mutual blessing, and equality. As Gilbert Bilezikian states in *Community 101*:

In this oneness, there is complete mutuality and equality. In whatever the Godhead undertakes to do, the three members of the Trinity function together—never independently of each other.

The Father is at the forefront of the work of creation, but both the Word and the Spirit are present and involved with the Father in creation. The Son is at the forefront of the work of redemption, but both the Father and the Spirit are present and involved with the Son in redemption. The Spirit is at the forefront of

the work of sanctification, but both the Father and the Son are present and involved in the work of sanctification.⁶

Human beings are made in the image of God, and God created us to be unique, separate, and different, but also to have a common life with him and with our fellow humans. This is part of what it means to be in the image of God: to be a creature that desires community with others. As Grenz and Franke point out,

It is not surprising that ultimately the image of God should focus on relationality, fellowship, or “community.” Indeed, as we have seen, God is inherently relational. As the doctrine of the Trinity asserts, throughout all eternity God is “community,” namely, the fellowship of the three trinitarian persons who comprise the triune God... Only in community can we truly show what God is like, for God is the community of love, the eternal relational dynamic enjoyed by the three persons of the Trinity.⁷

Some, like Gareth Icenogle, even write that community is one of the important reasons for the Bible, creation, and salvation by Christ.

God is separate and very different from humanity, but Scripture teaches us God’s great creation desire is to be in community with humanity. The search for community is a very important reason for the existence of the Bible. Community is the reason for creation. Community is the purpose for Jesus Christ, the Son of God, being born, living among us, dying and being raised from the dead. Community then, is the common life between God and humanity, and small groups are the most visible and frequent form of this community.”⁸

It can be seen that deep community and oneness is inherent in God’s nature, and a model for God’s people to follow.

⁶ Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 18.

⁷ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 201.

⁸ Gareth Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 10.

The Trinity: A Model of Mutual Pastoral Care

In addition to being a model of deep community and oneness, the Trinity is a model of mutual pastoral care. All three persons in the Trinity care for one another and are concerned for one another. Each member looks after the well-being of the other two. There is no “hierarchy” of care within the Trinity, where for example, the Father does most of the caring for the Son and the Spirit, who are served by the Father and do not care in return. Instead, each cares for the others in a mutuality of pastoral concern. In some instances, one member of the Trinity may be at the forefront, but in all cases the others are involved and participate. There is a mutuality of concern in the Godhead, and this mutuality is to be an example to God’s people in the church.

In the New Testament, there are numerous instances where it states that the Son was cared for by God. If God the Father or God the Holy Spirit is not specifically mentioned, then it is reasonable to state that in these instances God the Son was being cared for by both of the other two persons of the Trinity. When the baby Jesus’ life was threatened by Herod, God (the Father and Holy Spirit) sent an angel to warn Joseph and tell him to take the family to Egypt (Matt 2:13) and later to return to the safe haven of Nazareth (Matt 2:22-23). God (the Father and Spirit) sent angels to minister to the Son when He was fasting in the desert (Mark 1:13). In response to the devil’s temptation, Jesus affirmed that He lived by every word that comes from the mouth of God, and that God (the Father and Spirit) would send angels to help even if He should strike His foot against a stone (Luke 4:9-11). In Matthew 12:18 God the Son affirmed that God (the Father and Spirit) loved Him and delighted in Him.

Likewise, when it is stated in the Scriptures that God the Son cared for God, and yet does not specify either God the Father or God the Spirit, one can see the pastoral care of God the Son for the other two persons of the Trinity. In Matthew 14:19 and 15:36 God the Son honoured God (the Father and Spirit) before the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand by looking up to heaven and giving thanks before the miracles of the loaves. Indeed, one purpose for all the miracles done by God the Son was to elicit praise for God the Father and God the Spirit (Matt 15:31). The Son taught His disciples that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God (Matt 22:37).

In addition, there are several specific references in the New Testament of a particular member of the Godhead showing pastoral care to another member of the Godhead. God the Father cares for God Son by giving all authority into the Son's hand (Matt 11:27; 28:18); always listening to God the Son (John 11:42-44); stating that He loves Him (Matt 17:5); giving whatever is asked for in the name of the Son (John 15:16); and being willing to send more than twelve legions of angels if asked by the Son (Matt 26:53). God the Son likewise cares for God the Father by loving the Father and doing everything the Father commands (John 14:31). Anyone who does the will of the Father is accepted by the Son (Matthew 7:21; 12:50).

God the Spirit cared for God the Son when He gave Him power to drive out demons (Matt 12:28). God the Spirit reminds the world of the words of God the Son (John 14:26) and testifies of Jesus (John 15:26). One key function of God the Spirit is to bring glory to God the Son (John 16:14). In reciprocation, God the Son cares for God the Spirit; as demonstrated when Jesus affirmed the authority and ministry of the Spirit by

declaring that anyone who blasphemes against the Spirit will not be forgiven (Matt 12:32) and that the Spirit speaks through believers (Matt 10:20). God the Spirit and God the Father also care for one another as shown by the Spirit willingly being sent by God the Father (John 14:26; 15:26) and the Spirit taking from the Father to give to world (John 16:15).

This model of mutual pastoral care within the Trinity is an example of how we are to love and care for each other. As the Lord told His disciples in the Upper Room, “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:9, 12).⁹ We are to love one another *just as* Christ has loved us, and Jesus loves us *just as* the Father has loved Him. So the model of mutual pastoral care for one another in the church ultimately comes from the example of care within the Godhead.

The Trinity: A Model of Incarnational Outreach

In addition to being a model of deep community (oneness) and pastoral care, the Trinity is a model of outreach to others. All three persons in the Trinity are involved in reaching out to the world. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 the disciples are commanded to “go and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” In this final command of our Lord He instructs His disciples to reach out to the world in the name of all three members of the Trinity. When the Apostle Paul blessed the Corinthians, he blessed them with the words,

⁹ Note that this love is not just a sentimental emotional love, but involves actions and deeds – a pastoral and sacrificial love as described in 1 Corinthians 13 and ultimately demonstrated on the Cross.

“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). All three members of the Trinity are involved with reaching out to the world and blessing the world. In particular, the trinitarian model of outreach is that of incarnation. The Godhead reached out to our world through the Incarnation.

Every gospel begins with the birth narratives except John, who starts with the Incarnation. John is not mainly concerned with presenting a biography of the life of Christ, but rather with showing that God came to be with us. Besides bringing redemption, Christ came to make visible and reveal the invisible God. “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14a). The Greek term for “dwelling among” is alternately translated, “to pitch a tent.” It is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe the tabernacle where God’s presence “dwelled among” His people. The tabernacle shone God’s glory, and similarly Jesus was God dwelling among us and where He shone His glory.

For thousands of years men and women have looked into the heavens and asked, if there is a God, and, if so, what He is like, if He cares about us, if He loves us, if He is a monster, and what He requires. In the Incarnation, Christ revealed the heart, the essence, the being of God. He told His disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) God in Christ was revealed to be our confronter, intimate companion, professor, healer, and, in particular, our Saviour. This is the Gospel, and it is at the heart of the need of mankind.

God's strategy of Incarnation is instructive for us believers because His mission was to be our prototype. Jesus did not just tell the world that God loves them; His actions showed that He loves them. He did not just preach on forgiveness; He forgave those who wronged Him. He did not just preach from a pulpit; He invited men to live with Him twenty-four hours a day. The Incarnation was a strategy to become flesh and live among us, and, as God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) reached out to the world in the Incarnation, we are also to reach out to others. Jesus explicitly told His disciples, "As [emphasis added] the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21b). We are sent, *just as* Jesus was sent. There is a similar sense of mission, dimension of power, resources, and authority. We are empowered as God's ambassadors. In the Incarnation, we see a model for us to follow. As our God became flesh to reach out to us, we are to flesh out the Good News to the lost around us and be willing to do whatever it takes to reach them.

The Apostle Paul demonstrated this incarnational attitude when he stated,

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor 9:19-23).

This attitude of being willing to become like the "other" and live among them in order to attract them was at the heart of the Incarnation, and it is a model for God's people on how to win others to Him.

The Root Problem and Need – To Meet with God

The three problems at NTCBC of a desire for deeper community, need for greater pastoral care, and stagnation in growth are all related to a need for deeper community. While examining this need, it has been shown that the Trinity is a model of oneness, mutual care, and incarnational outreach. It therefore follows that, to the degree the members of NTCBC are living in accordance with the oneness, mutual caring and incarnational outreach nature of God, they (we) will address the three key needs. The solution lies in discovering how to encourage members to be like the Trinity in its community, care, and outreaching nature.

The Bible gives many examples of how people have been transformed and sanctified in godliness through meeting with God. These examples are illustrative of how intimacy with God has increased a person or people's deeper sense of community, pastoral care for others, and heart to reach out to the lost. Any solution to NTCBC's problems will need to encourage a greater intimacy with God among its members in the hope that, when members are spiritually revived in their walk with God, the church will revive; leading to a deeper sense of community, more pastoral care among members and a growth in numbers through outreach.

Examples of the Transformative Nature of Meeting with God

When people meet with God, their lives are changed irreversibly. Later in this paper, the beautiful process of meeting with God leading to repentance, reformation, and

then utter transformation, is described. This process is made clear in the gem parables of Matthew 13:44-46.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

In the parables above, a good English translation of the Greek for “sold all he had” and “sold everything he had” would be “sold *absolutely everything* he possessed.” The men in these parables experienced more than mere reformation, but a complete transformation. No one told these men what to do. The treasure and pearl were the passive energizers in these cases.

The treasure and pearl in these parables represent the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the pearl of great price and the treasure to be found. Once a person discovers God by meeting with Him, they are changed completely in all avenues of life, not a mere reformation, but a complete transformation. If a church is not full of people who have been transformed, then that church will be weak in its spiritual power and effectiveness.

Throughout the Bible, those who experienced the joyous discovery of meeting with God responded by “selling absolutely everything they possessed” to gain the finds. The following three biblical examples are just a few of many in the Bible where a person’s life has been transformed after meeting with God. These people, hopelessly God-centered, were now intoxicated with the Lord, and God could at that point entrust them with ministry.

It will be demonstrated that, in each case, the person's life was transformed in his desire for community among God's people, his willingness to show pastoral care to others, and his heart to reach out to the lost. Taken as a whole, they suggest that any solution to NTCBC's problems must include a component in which intimacy and meeting with God is enhanced, and conditions exist which encourage this as much as possible.

Moses at the Burning Bush

By Exodus 3, Moses had gone from being a Prince of Egypt to being an eighty-year-old lonely, defeated, and exiled shepherd on the far side of the desert. Despite his outer circumstances, God met him at the burning bush and transformed his life forever. Intimacy with God later became the mark of Moses' life and ministry. He knew God's name (Exod 3:14), saw God's glory (Exod 33:18-23), and was known as the person who met with God face to face (Exod 33:11). When God spoke to Moses, He revitalized Moses' love for his people, desire to care for the Israelites, and heart to reach out to the lost.

The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (Exod 3:7-10).

In this passage God commanded Moses to reconnect with the community of Israelites whom he had left forty years ago, and had not really known well during the first forty

years of his life. After meeting with God, Moses was thrust into a community where he would be intimately connected for the next forty years. Meeting with God calls us back into community with Himself and His people.

The meeting with God also called Moses into a pastoral care role. He was called to shepherd the flock of God, the fledgling nation of Israel, for the next forty years. Taking care of sheep in the desert for forty years was easy compared to his role taking care of God's people in the last forty years of his life. Indeed the pastoral nature of Moses' calling would be the most burdensome aspect of his many roles, and resulted in the famous advice given to him by his father-in-law Jethro about arranging for a reasonable span of care (as described later in this paper). Yet Moses willingly took on this role of pastoral care after meeting with God because intimacy with God gives us the strength and willingness to care for others. As we are filled with the love and nurture of our Lord, we are able to love and nurture others and live a life of service to others. Attempts to serve and care for others in our own strength inevitably lead to burnout, frustration, fatigue, and ultimately bitterness. We serve from an overflow of the heart rooted in an intimacy with God through meeting with Him.

Finally, it can be seen that, after Moses met with God, he was given a new vision to help the lost. In his case, the lost were the two to three million Israelite slaves in Egypt. Despite obvious risks to his life and a complete change to his serene life in the desert, Moses' meeting with God gave him the strength and courage to rescue the perishing. After forty years of relative safety and not doing anything for the people of Israel, Moses' meeting with God reignited a desire to reach out to his kinsmen. This desire was present

in Moses in the earlier years of his life (Exod 2:11-15; Acts 7:25), but it had stagnated during his forty years of exile in the desert. After he met with God at the burning bush, his zeal for outreach reignited for he knew that, as long as God was with him, he would be successful in all that God had called him to do.

The Calling of Isaiah

After King Uzziah died at the age of sixty-eight after having reigned in Judah for fifty-two years, the nation was in turmoil, and the prophet Isaiah was understandably concerned. God responded by giving the prophet a vision of Himself in Isaiah 6:1: “In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.” This meeting with God highlighted Isaiah’s connection with the community of Israelites as he declared, “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isa 6:5). Isaiah’s sense of community was heightened when meeting with God. He recognized and declared that he was counted among a disobedient nation of “unclean lips,” and he identified himself with this community. Meeting with God humbles us, and causes us to sense our common unity (“community”) with God’s people and our common need for Him.

In addition, Isaiah’s sense of pastoral care for his community, the Israelites, and his desire to reach out to them was reignited in the classic verse of Isaiah 6:8 describing Isaiah’s calling. “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ and I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’” Although Isaiah’s calling was to

an obstinate people (Isa 6:9-10), his meeting with God, like Moses', gave him the courage to shepherd God's people and reach out to them. Intimacy with God gives us a desire to serve others as we recognize that we are blessed to be a blessing to others.

When God meets with a person, He invariably sends him on a mission – of both pastoral care for others and reaching out to the lost. For the prophet Isaiah, this entailed caring for the lost sheep of Israel and leading them back to intimacy with God. For example, in the next chapter (Isa 7) Isaiah gave King Ahaz the sign of Immanuel (“God with us”) as a sign of comfort, and reminded Ahaz that God is among His people and always ready to meet with us.

Paul's Damascus Road Experience

Saul was a good Pharisee who thought he knew God and tried to obey Him as he thought he should. He was so zealous for God that when he saw what he thought was a heretical sect, the Christians, growing in numbers, he “breathed out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples” (Acts 9:1) to the point of chasing them down in cities outside Jerusalem to imprison them. In Acts 9, Saul learned that believing one knows God, and even trying to serve Him, can be very different from actually meeting with God. Our Lord Himself graciously stopped Saul in his murderous ways and gave him a one-on-one interview on the road to Damascus. This meeting changed Saul's life forever. It changed his name to Paul, it blinded him for several days to give him time to think, and it changed the course of his life 180 degrees from being a persecutor of the church to being its chief proponent.

When Jesus met with Saul, the Lord identified Himself with His people. The heavenly voice said to Saul, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” In this simple statement, Jesus told Saul that when the church is persecuted, so is its Lord. Attacks on God’s people entail attacking God; and conversely, community with God’s people involves community with God. If we desire community with God, we ought to desire community with His people. Jesus identifies Himself radically with His people, so a meeting with Jesus gives us a desire to fellowship not only with Him, but also with His people. After meeting with God, Saul went from a desire to kill Christians to a desire for Christian community with believers at Damascus (Acts 9:19) and beyond.

In addition to giving him a desire to join a body of believers, Paul’s encounter with God instilled in him a desire to serve God’s people in pastoral care. He often wrote of how he was like a father to young churches (1 Cor 4:15) and how he prayed for them without ceasing. In his own words, he told the Corinthians, “I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?” (2 Cor 11:28) Paul’s pastoral heart was evident in his training of other pastors, such as Timothy and Titus, and in his collection for the saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8-9).

Thirdly, Paul’s encounter with God sparked in him a heart for outreach. In his Damascus road experience, Jesus’ final word to him was a command to “get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do” (Acts 9:6). In Damascus, Ananias was told by God that Paul was God’s “chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Paul’s commission

came out of his encounter with God, and he spent the rest of his life fulfilling the heavenly calling to reach out to Gentiles.

Summary

Space does not allow going into the numerous other examples in the Bible in which people, such as Job, Nicodemus, the woman at the well, and Thomas, all met with God. In every case lives were transformed, and, as in the cases of Moses, Isaiah, and Paul, the recipients of God's gift of His presence were completely transformed in their desire for deeper community with God and His people.

A common result was a calling to help and serve the Body of Christ through practical pastoral care, and the kingdom of God was expanded as these transformed individuals became light and salt in their communities. This is the pathway to revival – a renewed intimacy and regular meeting with God; and it is the thesis of this paper that a place to facilitate this intimacy with God is at the small group level of community.

Small Groups in the New Testament – A Common Strategy

Before showing that small groups are an excellent place in the church to foster meeting with God, it needs to be noted that small groups have a prominent place in God's plan throughout the Bible, and in particular the New Testament, as a common strategy to accomplish specific ministries. God loves to use small groups. Small groups need to be seen in terms of their place, purpose, and power in God's overall strategy.

In one sense, the whole of Israel may be considered a "small group" when compared with the world's overall population. In Deuteronomy 7:7 Moses tells the

people of Israel that “the LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples.” In the nation of Israel, and the record of their history as seen in the Old Testament, God used a “small group,” with its God-ordained laws and ceremonies, as a paradigm and model to the world of how Jehovah-God relates to His people.

In the New Testament, God focuses even further on small groups as a tool for His purposes. He went from dealing with a larger group (all of Israel in the Old Testament) to a small group (the twelve disciples) in order to accomplish His specific plan of ministering to the world through the formation of the Church. In fact, Jesus authorized even smaller groups for various reasons. Within the larger group of twelve disciples, the Lord chose a small group of three (Peter, James, and John) for special experiences and training in leadership. He took them up a high mountain to witness the Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-8). He only allowed these three to witness the healing of the synagogue ruler’s daughter (Mark 5:37-43), and He gave them a private tutorial about the end times (Mark 13:3-36). At His darkest hour, in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord took Peter, James and John with Him further into the garden than the rest of the disciples (Mark 14:33).

Jesus also mentioned and used different small groups in several other instances for various ministry purposes. In Matthew 18:16, Jesus authorized the use of a small group of three or four for the ministry of arbitration within the church.¹⁰ The purpose of

¹⁰ This method is in keeping with the principles described in Deuteronomy 19:15 and 1 Timothy 5:19 where it commanded that matters must be attested by two or three witnesses.

this group was to make provision for a personal and semi-private level of due process when sin occurs between two members. It encourages objectivity and fairness as opposed to brutality or coercion, and seeks to win a brother back to the Lord and avoid the potentially devastating process of a public trial and discipline within the church.

In the area of outreach and evangelism, when Jesus sent out His disciples to the neighbouring villages, He also employed the strategy of using small groups. He never sent them out alone, but always two by two – both when He sent out the Twelve (Mark 6:7) and when He sent out the seventy-two (Luke 10:1).

Small groups were so important in our Lord's strategy that He gave them authority in the very ministry of prayer.

I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.
Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them (Matt 18:18-20).

These verses are amazing when considered in light of God's use of small groups in His overall strategy. There is power in agreed prayer as per the promises of God when made in a group as small as two persons. In addition, our Lord has promised to be "right there in their very midst" (an accurate translation of the Greek "there am I with them") within a small group. Remembering the significance of meeting with God as explained earlier in this paper, this promise of Christ's presence within small groups is no small promise. It is therefore completely understandable why the Apostle Paul and others throughout history (such as the Catholic orders) made small groups their ministry format of choice.

In the ministry of the Apostle Paul, small groups flourished. Paul traveled in small groups, ministered with small groups, sent small groups out as a missions team (cf. Acts 20:4) and even penned letters to churches as a small group. For example, Paul teamed with Barnabus (Acts 13:2, 42; 14:14); John called Mark (Acts 12:25); Judas called Barsabbas (Acts 15:22); Silas (Acts 15:40); Timothy (Acts 16:1); Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15); Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18:1-2); Erastus (Acts 19:22); Gaius and Aristarchus (Acts 19:29); Sopater, Secundus, Tychicus, and Trophimus (Acts 20:4); Luke (the “we” in Acts 20:6); and Titus (2 Cor 8:23).

It can be seen that small groups have a prominent and significant part in God’s overall plan, in our Lord’s method of ministry, and in the practice of the Apostle Paul. In the next section of this paper (chapter 4), it will be shown that small groups are an excellent place in the church to foster meeting with God. They are a place for transformation, mutual caring, gradually meeting Jesus, and mutual accountability. This will address the root problem at NTCBC of a need to meet with God for transformation and to enhance community, care and outreach

CHAPTER 4

SMALL GROUPS – A PLACE TO MEET GOD

At the most fundamental level, everyone must meet God one-on-one, personally, in the quiet and depths of his or her own soul. This is a supernatural encounter that only God can accomplish since He is the one who opens people's eyes to see Him (cf. Acts 16:14). Since it is impossible for a church to look into the hearts of its members, it is the joyful task of a church to do what it can – encourage this encounter with God among its members and create a space where this encounter is facilitated. This is the privilege of a church, and this is where small groups are helpful.

In a church, there are several basic levels of interaction, as described in Appendix F. These levels include the public space of the Sunday morning worship service – the congregational level; the social space of gatherings of forty-plus people at fellowships – the fellowship level; and the personal space of ten to fifteen people or less in small groups – the small group level. One can meet with God in the Sunday worship service of a church or at the weekly fellowship gathering of forty-plus people, but meeting God in these public and social spaces is really a result of meeting God in a private space elsewhere first. Small groups are a place in the church to encourage, teach, and facilitate this encounter for several reasons, as described below.

Enhancing Community – A Place for Transformation

Small groups are a place not just to acquire information, but to experience transformation. Transformation brings new life to the fellowship of God's people and enhances community. In the world today there are many sources where church members can get information and head knowledge. Sunday morning sermons, Sunday school classes, workshops, seminars, the Internet, Christian radio programs, and books are among the various options available for learning facts and information. Unfortunately, much of this information is not being translated into the reformation of people hearts, leading to a transformation in lives and churches. It is vital to recognize that no progress can be made in addressing the root problems at NTCBC unless genuine transformation occurs in the hearts of its members. This was the promise of the new covenant – to give God's people a heart of flesh that chooses to obey God rather than a heart of stone that is dead to God's touch.

I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God (Ezek 11:19-20).

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezek 36:26-27).

Unfortunately, in order to address the problem of lack of depth in community, many churches rely on giving more and more information to their members in sermons, Sunday school classes, and workshops; genuine, deep community cannot occur, though, unless Christians first have a change of heart, rather than just a change of mind. If no change of

heart occurs, a church quickly degenerates into a mere social club of superficial relationships, powerless to change lives or the world around them. Thus it is vital and essential that inner, spiritual growth and formation occur in the life of a church's members.

Small groups are a natural place where spiritual growth and formation can take place in a church. In the other "public" activities of a church, such as the Sunday morning preaching or Sunday school teaching, one-way declarations occur from the teacher to the student. The ratio of speaker to listener is often greater than 20 to one, and, in the case of the worship service, can be a ratio of hundreds to one. In these large venues, there is no way to discern if any effective learning or genuine transformation of life occurs. Our Lord knew this, and used the vehicle of a small group (His band of twelve disciples) to model spiritual formation and growth – of both the heart and the head.

Although Jesus did not come just to start small groups, He did choose to use the vehicle of a small group to spiritually form and develop His twelve disciples while on this earth, and that was the pattern of how His church passed on the faith in the early years. Near the start of His earthly ministry, the Lord chose a group of twelve men to be His apostles and live in close community with Him. They were a small group with Jesus as the leader, and in which the disciples had an opportunity to experience deep community, observe, and learn from Him in all aspects of life.

Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons (Mark 3:13-15).

The above text clearly points out that one key reason for the choosing of the Twelve was for them to “be with him,” or in other words, to experience community and oneness with Him. Our Lord formed this band of disciples in order to train them in deep community. This small group was His “seminary” in deep community. As Robert Coleman notes,

Having called His men, Jesus made it a practice to be with them. This was the essence of His training program—just letting His disciples follow Him.

When one stops to think of it, this was an incredibly simple way of doing it. Jesus had no formal school, no Seminaries, no outlined course of study, no periodic membership classes in which He enrolled His followers. None of these highly organized procedures considered so necessary today entered at all into His ministry. Amazing as it may seem, all Jesus did to teach these men His way was to draw them close to Himself. He was His own school and curriculum.¹

Coleman is not necessarily advocating the elimination of all seminaries and Bible colleges, as is evident by the fact that he himself has been a professor at several seminaries. Rather, he is pointing out that, through this small group, the disciples were transformed by Jesus in the context of close community. There are numerous examples throughout the gospels of Jesus taking His disciples aside and slowly transforming them in the context of their small group, apart from the larger group of disciples or curiosity seekers around them (i.e. Matt 20:17; Mark 10:32; Upper Room discourse in John). As it states in Mark 4:33-34, “With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them (the crowd), as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything.”

¹ Robert Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1963), 38.

In the context of their small group with Jesus, the disciples learned how to love one another and sacrifice for one another. “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). The disciples were to love each other *just as* Jesus had loved them – even to the extent of sacrificially laying down their lives for each other. In the small group, they learned how to worship and pray together.² In a small group, it is much easier to pay personal attention to each other and fulfill the over fifty “one another” commands of the New Testament as listed in Appendix G. This pattern of using small groups as a place for learning and growing in close community was followed by the early church.

By modeling how to foster transformation in the context of close community through a small group, Jesus laid down a basic pattern of how the early church passed on the faith and enhanced deep community. The disciples learned almost “by osmosis” that “more is caught, than taught.” Spiritual formation and transformation occurs in the context of close community. They learned that disciple-making happens in small groups and from life-on-life interaction. As Paul told Timothy many years later, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2).

The early church had a habit of gathering not only in the temple, but also in homes. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke

² “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father ...” (Luke 11:1-2a).

bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46). There are several biblical examples of churches that met in homes. Paul addressed the letter of Philemon “to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home” (Philem 2). Likewise in Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, and Colossians 4:15, Paul greets a church that meets in a house. Gareth Icenogle, in his book in a section entitled “The Church as Multiple Small Groups: Apostolic Foundations for Small Group Ministry,” points out that the early church was essentially an extension of the original small group of twelve disciples.³

Although not always widespread or common, spiritual growth and transformation in a small group context is evident in many eras of church history, as described in the following quotation.

One thinks of Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s small pastoral training seminary in pre-World War II Germany where students lived together in covenant community, the Catholic monastic orders bound together in far more than an academic learning experience, or John Wesley’s weekly class meetings around a common set of disciplines and commitments.⁴

Thus it can be seen that a small group was our Lord’s vehicle of choice to enhance community among His followers through the transformation of hearts and lives within the group. Jesus used a small group to transform His twelve apostles. The early church met in small groups; leaders were trained in small groups; and, throughout Church history, close small group communities were used to foster growth and transformation.

³ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 243-254.

⁴ Guder, ed., *Missional Church*, 218.

Enhancing Pastoral Care – A Place for Mutual Caring

When a group gets too large, its leader cannot provide the pastoral care necessary for each individual in the group. This is why small groups are a natural vehicle to enhance pastoral care in the church: they encourage mutual caring among members and delegate the shepherding of the congregation to several small group leaders rather than just one person. A classic biblical example is described in Exodus 18. Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was visiting Moses as he was leading the people of Israel in the wilderness. Jethro recognized that Moses had taken on too much responsibility by judging (leading) the people all by himself, so Jethro encouraged Moses to delegate authority, empower lay judges, and essentially form small groups from the larger Israelite community in order to care for them better.

Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied" (Exod 18:17-23).

Notice that Jethro counseled Moses to divide the people down to smaller and smaller groups. The purpose was so that Moses would not wear himself out, and that the people will "go home satisfied." In other words, Moses was to delegate the leadership and

caring of the people to others. Jethro recognized that, if Moses did not do this, the physical and emotional strain on Moses would be too much for him to bear.

Jethro warned Moses that his plan needed to be executed only if God was pleased with his advice (Exod 18:23). Moses wisely “listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said” (Exod 18:24). The biblical record does not explicitly record the effects of this paradigm shift on Moses and on the Israelites, but the silence regarding this matter in the text and the fact that Moses did not wear himself out afterwards strongly indicate that Jethro’s advice was effective. In other words, both the people and Moses seemed to be pleased with the results.

The new leadership style of delegation and small group care was highly indicative of how God wanted His people to be led and cared for. Control and power were not to be concentrated and reserved for just a few. “While Pharaoh’s leadership style was control and oppression, God’s leadership style was empowerment. God would first empower Moses. And then God would help Moses empower the people.”⁵ Although it may seem from this passage that Moses autocratically chose his own staff and leaders, the actual election was the work of all the people, as can be seen in Deuteronomy 1:9 and 13. When God’s people are empowered, mutual caring among the congregation is encouraged. This is in line with the historic doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, which is the expectation that lay people will minister to one another, as described in

⁵ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 93.

Appendix H. This is designed to “assure the highest level of care at the lowest level in the structure”⁶ of the church.

Note that Jethro counseled Moses to set up leaders for groups as small as ten. While not necessarily a biblical mandate or norm, this number of ten is in line with what most small group theorists recommend to be the optimal size for a small group—between eight and twelve people. If the capabilities of a small group leader to care for his or her group are one of the deciding factors limiting a group’s size, then eight to twelve has been seen by many small group thinkers to be appropriate. “Though groups must grow, the appropriate span of care of approximately one leader for every ten people needs to be maintained. The next step for groups that grow above ten members is to birth new groups.”⁷

Also note that Jethro’s advice to Moses was made public, and the new leaders publicly recognized. Their job descriptions were specifically given. They were given clear mandates, and both the leaders and the people knew them. Likewise, in order to avoid pastoral and leadership burnout at NTCBC, clear job descriptions for leadership and pastoral care need to be discussed and made known to all.

The biblical example of Jethro’s advice to Moses indicates that small groups are a good place to enhance pastoral care through mutual caring and the shepherding of several small group leaders, rather than dependence on one person.

⁶ Carl F. George, *The Coming Church Revolution: Empowering Leaders for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), 56-57.

⁷ Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 24.

Enhancing Growth through Outreach - A Place to Gradually Meet Jesus

In addition to being a place to enhance community through transformation and enhance pastoral care through mutual caring, small groups are also a place in the church to enhance growth through outreach. In small groups, non-Christians have the opportunity to consider the claims of Christ in a non-threatening, friendly atmosphere. The good news of the Gospel is incarnated in the lives of the Christian members of the group who live out their faith in front of their non-Christian friends, giving their friends a chance to understand and observe up-close how a Christian lives and behaves.

Biblically and historically, small groups have been a powerful vehicle for the expansion of the church. The early church had no evangelism seminars, Four Spiritual Laws or courses, or Evangelism Explosion. Instead, they simply followed the Great Commission in their daily lives. In that command found in Matthew 28:19, the Christians were commanded to “go and make disciples of all nations.” The Greek for the word “go” in this text has the idea of “as you are going.” In other words, *as* the Christians were going into the entire world, they were to make disciples. Evangelism was to be a natural part of their lives as they went out into the world. They were to share the good news over coffee, over the backyard fence, at their children’s birthday parties, and while playing sports with their non-Christian friends. Large scale evangelistic rallies were not a normal method of evangelism. The normal methods of evangelism occurred in small groups, with friends and relatives around a fire, or any other intimate, small setting.

Many evangelism courses and seminars focus on teaching Christians how to say the words of the gospel, but not many zero in on living, embodying, and incarnating the gospel in our lives. Evangelism through small groups puts the emphasis on influencing and challenging non-believers using the lives of the Christians within the small group. The focus for the Christian is on “becoming” before “broadcasting.” As the Trinity reached out to mankind through the vehicle of the Incarnation, small groups use the vehicle of the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the believer to reach out to the non-Christian members of a small group. Scriptures tell us that the Father is in us (Eph 4:6); the Son is in us (Col 1:27); and the Spirit is in us (1 Cor 6:19); all three members of the Trinity indwell the believer. In addition, the Bible states that the Father is ever present in the believer to help in witnessing (2 Cor 3:5-6); as is the Son (1 Tim 1:12); and the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-22).

Christians are to be “living epistles” to the non-Christian world, and small groups are a good place for non-Christians to inspect these “letters” at length. As the Apostle Paul told the Corinthians:

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Cor 3:2-3).

We are called to be living epistles, read as a book by all men. We are “Bible translators” for lost people and we are to be the aroma of Christ to a dying world (2 Cor 2:14-16). In a small group setting, non-Christians get to read more than words. They have the opportunity of observing Christianity in action. For example, if a newcomer were to join

the small group of Jesus and His twelve disciples, he would have noticed that they had a common purse for the poor,⁸ learning to give as a small group. The newcomer would have seen how the small group served together, such as when Jesus used them as a conduit for several of His miracles including the feeding of the four thousand (Mark 8) and five thousand (John 6) with bread that was passed through their hands.

Evangelism using the method of incarnating the gospel in a small group context proved to be very powerful and effective in the early church and throughout church history. The original small group of twelve disciples gave birth to multiple groups around the world, so that today more people call themselves “Christian” than any other faith group in the world.⁹ A description of the power of small groups for growth, as seen in the history of the Methodists and the house churches in China, is given in Appendix N.

In addition to being a place for non-Christians to observe Christians close up, small groups provide a good opportunity for non-Christians to ask questions about the faith in a non-threatening, friendly atmosphere, and to ponder the claims of God on their life over a longer period of time than at a one-evening evangelistic event. This gives them a chance to come to Christ via a delayed, inductive process, as modelled by Jesus in the New Testament.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus chose to reveal Himself to the disciples using the delayed, inductive method. He would often ask questions and not give the answers

⁸ Among the group of disciples, they had a common “money bag” used to give to the poor (John 12:6).

⁹ Preston Hunter, “Major Religions of the World Ranked by Number of Adherents,” http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html (accessed April 23, 2008).

immediately. This method is not conducive to a large group, but rather is only enabled in a small group, since it is not easy to ask or answer questions in a large group. An example of this delayed, inductive method is in Matthew 16:15. This passage describes the first time Jesus talks about Himself, and in it He poses the question to the disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Prior to this Jesus taught and healed in order to bring His disciples to a gradual conclusion about Himself as the Messiah (Christ). He could have easily told them right from the start that He was the Christ, but instead He chose to say and do things by which, through gradual revelation, they might perceive He was the Christ. Jesus used the delayed, inductive method of asking questions and not giving answers to lead His disciples to their own confession of Himself; not a forced or contrived declaration, but an honest, heart-felt statement of true inner belief.

The delayed, inductive method of discovery, as facilitated when meeting in small groups, is the normal way to gradually meet Jesus. It is discovery before decisions, facts before orders, beatitudes before command, and Gospel before Law. The Christian Church has learned through the ages that we cannot force genuine conversion or change of life – it must be a personal decision of the heart that has been facilitated through careful consideration; a decision that more likely than not has been prompted after the delayed, inductive method of discovery occurring in a small group context. The process is beautifully described in the gem parables of Matthew 13:44-46.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

In these parables it can be seen that there is the joy of discovery (“found”) and then a life-changing decision and act (“sold,” “bought”). Similarly, in a small group through the delayed inductive method of questions and answers, people find the truth and decide on giving their lives to Christ and following Him.¹⁰ Small groups are a good place in the church to enhance growth through outreach when non-Christians rub shoulders with Christians over a long period of time, giving the non-Christians a chance to observe the life of the Trinity through the incarnational outreach of the believers and a chance to consider the claims of Christ in a delayed, inductive manner.

Addressing All Three Needs – A Place for Mutual Accountability

Accountability is a requirement of the church, for we are called to judge ourselves within the church (1 Cor 6:1-6) and confess our sins to one another (James 5:16). When church members only meet in large gatherings, it is easy for people to escape detection and the watchful concern of fellow members, but, when they are in a small group, it is much easier to pay personal attention to each other and fulfill the over fifty “one another” responsibilities of the New Testament.¹¹ Small groups, as contrasted with public worship services or large fellowship groups, are a natural place for mutual accountability. In small groups, people do not just play games in order to chase away the pangs of

¹⁰ The natural result is joy – such as in these gem parables. There is joy in conversion, and there is joy in living a life of faith and obedience to God’s commands after learning for oneself the truth of the Gospel. Even in the Old Testament, before giving the Ten Commandments God first reminded the Israelites of the joyful fact of their salvation (Exod 20:2). Obeying God’s commands is not to be a joyless duty but a joyful response to His love and salvation. Small groups are a good place in a church for members to hear personally about this joy, experience it first hand, and celebrate it together with some close Christian brothers and sisters. Small groups must be established on such a foundation of joy if they are to thrive.

¹¹ For a sample list, see Appendix G.

loneliness for a few hours. Small groups are a place, perhaps more than any other in the church, where a person can be serious about being accountable to their brothers and sisters in Christ for their walk with God. Mutual accountability speaks to all three needs at NTCBC: for deeper community, greater pastoral care and growth through outreach.

Community is enhanced through mutual accountability when people ask each other the “tough questions,” such as how they are dealing with sin in their lives and how they are walking with the Lord. When conversation deepens in the process of mutual accountability, community is enhanced and deepened; transformation occurs when there is accountability rather than just sociability.

Pastoral care is enhanced through mutual accountability when small group members ask each other for prayer requests, share problems in their lives, and pray for one another. In times of stress and pressure from the outside world, a small group is an invaluable place to gain inner strength and resistance against temptation. The four young exiles Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah gained strength from each other when they decided together as a small group not to defile themselves with the royal food and wine (Dan 1) and when they decided to choose to be thrown into the fiery furnace rather than bow to the image of gold (Dan 3). They knew of the strength of mutual accountability found in a small group, such as described in Ecclesiastes:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Eccles 4:9-12).

In small groups, there is fruitfulness (“a good return for their work”), help (“if one falls down”), “warmth” in ministry, and strength from attack and division. Mutual accountability within a small group encourages members to look out for one another and thus enhances pastoral care.

Finally, mutual accountability enhances growth through outreach. At the core of fallen human nature is selfishness and self-centeredness. “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa 53:6a). “For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Phil 2:21). Small group accountability is a healthy antidote to the natural human tendency to be inward looking and inward focused. In a small group, members encourage one another and keep one another accountable in their goals and mandate to reach the world with the Gospel. Proverbs 27:17 states that “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” The “sharpening” of mutual accountability between members of a small group spurs one another on to good works and to continual ways to reach out to the lost.

Summary

In response to the needs described in Part One of this paper, Part Two has recognized that it is necessary to enhance community at NTCBC in order to address those problems. Using Christianity’s normative source, the Bible, it has been shown that the Trinitarian God is the ultimate example of deep community, mutual pastoral care, and incarnational outreach. It was recognized that the root problem and need of the English congregation at NTCBC is for each member to meet regularly with God because, in

doing so, we will be transformed, as Moses, Isaiah, and Paul were transformed when they met with God.

A common strategy used in the New Testament to foster meeting with God and addressing specific ministry needs was the small group. Christ used a small group of twelve disciples to birth the new Church. Within those twelve, He focussed on a small group of three for leadership. He also authorized small groups for the ministry of arbitration, evangelism, and prayer. The Apostle Paul continued his Lord's example by extensively using small groups in ministry.

In particular, small groups are a powerful place in the church to enhance community through the transformation of its members; to enhance pastoral care through the encouragement of mutual caring and a reasonable span of care; and to enhance growth by creating a place for close interaction between Christians and non-Christians and a place for the delayed, inductive discovery of Jesus. In addition, the mutual accountability found in small groups addresses all three needs of deeper community, greater pastoral care, and growth through outreach. It is, therefore, the challenge at NTCBC to construct a small group ministry that encourages and develops its members to meet with God in a meaningful way through small groups. That is the focus of the last section of this paper, Part Three – The Strategy.

PART THREE:
THE STRATEGY

CHAPTER 5

A TWO-PRONGED APPROACH TO THE SOLUTION

In order to address the weaknesses in the ministry at NTCBC described in Part One of this paper, and in light of the biblical and theological foundations described in Part Two, it is proposed that a two-pronged approach to the solution be adopted. The first and most important aspect of the solution is the cultivation of small groups that foster meeting with God. This should be the primary goal of all the small groups at NTCBC. If this goal is not explicitly stated, it will be easy for the mandate and focus of a small group to drift, and eventually the group will degenerate into a mere social gathering.¹ Having this primary goal will address the root of the problems at NTCBC and is informed by the biblical and theological reflections in Part Two of this paper.

The second aspect of the solution, which would not be effective without the first aspect, is a reformation of the small group structure at NTCBC. This will speak to the issues raised in Part One of this paper, which described the external and internal factors that gave rise to the three presenting problems of a desire for deeper community, the need for greater pastoral care, and a stagnation in growth. It is recognized that, without addressing the primary need of our NTCBC members to meet regularly with God (the first prong of the solution), any restructuring of the small group ministry (the second prong) will be ultimately fruitless.

¹ The importance of having clear, specific goals is described in Appendix I.

The specific strategies in the two-pronged approach to the solution are: encouraging “holy reading” (*lectio divina*), a time-honoured and effective method of drawing people closer to God; and introducing a new model of structuring small groups at NTCBC - the Hybrid Model. Both these specific strategies will be described in this final part of the paper, and Part Three will conclude with some suggested ways to evaluate these two approaches and some preliminary results.

The First Prong: Meeting God in Small Groups

Chapter 3 of this paper described how a common need that connects all three of our presenting problems is a need to enhance community at NTCBC. This desire for community is based on the fact that humans are made in God’s image. Our Trinitarian God models deep community, mutual pastoral care, and incarnational outreach. The root of our problem at NTCBC is our need to regularly meet with God and foster this meeting among our congregation members. Among other things, when people meet with God, they are transformed in their desire for community, pastoral care of others and desire to reach out to a lost world. Moses, Isaiah, and Paul are just three out of numerous examples of people in the Bible who were transformed after meeting with God.

Chapter 4 of this paper described how small groups are a place in the church to foster its members’ meeting with God. Small groups are the natural place for radical transformation, mutual caring, and close shepherding. They are also a place for getting to know non-Christians better, where non-Christians can gradually meet with Jesus, and they are a place for mutual accountability.

There are many ways to encourage and foster meeting with God in the context of small groups. Most of these methods are well documented in the literature on small groups and can be found in any good small group manual. These methods include Bible studies, group prayer, group singing and worship time, sharing of testimonies, a book study, and even a common outreach or service event where the group meets with God in the context of serving others. The latter method of “meeting God through serving others” is an example of what Jesus famously stated:

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me (Matt 25:35-36; 40).

As Saul found out on the Damascus road, and as Jesus points out above, the Lord radically identifies Himself with His people. When believers minister to others, they minister to Him, and in a sense “meet” with Christ along the way. Serving others, prayer, Bible study, and the other methods mentioned above can all facilitate a group’s meeting with God.

Due to the variety of different types of small groups at NTCBC (as described later in this paper), different methods may be more suitable to different groups. A group of mature Christians may focus more on outreach and service events, while a group of newcomers to the faith may want to focus on simple Bible studies or a book study to help them draw closer to God. The key is remembering the goal of meeting God. There is also one method that is easy to implement, does not need a trained pastor or church leader

to facilitate, and can be done by virtually any group regardless of age, maturity, size, or location. This method is the ancient practice of “*lectio divina*.”

***Lectio Divina* – A Traditional Way of Meeting with God**

The term *lectio divina* is Latin for “holy reading,” and it is a traditional way of meeting God through the Scriptures. It comes from the Benedictine monastic tradition and is compatible with NTCBC’s Reformed history of focusing on the Word. It is also a reflection of the many biblical examples of meditation in the Bible. One thinks of Isaac meditating in the field (Gen 24:63); Joshua being commanded to meditate on the Word day and night (Josh 1:8); and the godly man of Psalm 1 who meditates day and night on the law – in addition to all the examples of prayer in the Bible when the words of Scripture are used. It is a classical form of prayer and Scripture reading designed to draw a person gently into the depths of their heart to meet with God.

Lectio divina invites small group participants to contemplative prayer through meditation on a particular biblical text. It needs to be pointed out, especially in a Chinese church, that Christian meditation is significantly different from Far Eastern meditation. In Far Eastern meditation, the observant is encouraged to empty his or her mind into a state of nothingness through vain repetitions. In Christian meditation, we are called to fill our minds with godly thoughts (Phil 4:8) and pray continually (1 Thess 5:17). There may not be much physical, outward action that occurs during *lectio divina*, but this does not mean that nothing is happening in the head or heart.

Lectio divina is simply a traditional form of reading-prayer.

Before entering into the prayer, it's helpful to recognize that there are many ways in which we "read." We scan the newspaper for information. We study a book to increase our knowledge or hone our critical faculties. We become absorbed in a good novel. When we engage in *lectio divina*, we are not seeking to read the Bible for knowledge or instruction (although both of those may come), nor are we seeking the escape of a good story. Instead, we come to the words of the Bible seeking to be with God. We come to Scripture as if it were a meeting place, a secret rendezvous where we hope to spend some time with the One who loves us.

When we engage in *lectio divina*, we come to the words of the Bible as if they are words from a lover. We come to the text seeking to encounter God, seeking to make contact with God's love and presence. We come to the Scripture trusting God's nearness and God's desire to heal and transform us. We expect God to meet us just on the other side of Scripture.²

Like a cow chewing a mouthful of grass in its cud prior to digestion, in *lectio divina* the participant chews over the Word of God. Such digestion is a call from and to the author of the Word – the Triune God. The Father inspired the Word (2 Tim 3:16, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"); the Son inspired the Word (1 Pet 1:10-11, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow"); and the Spirit inspired the Word (2 Pet 1:21, "For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"). *Lectio divina* is not just a reading but a meeting with the author of the Word.

² Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 84-85.

In *lectio divina*, we come to the Word with a pure heart – reading, watching, and pondering what the Triune God has authored, and replacing our own ideas with the Word of God. Thus we “let the Word of God dwell” in us richly (Col 3:16), and slowly it transforms us so that what we think and say is based on the Word.

The specific steps of *lectio divina* are quite natural. Some Christians may actually find that they are practicing *lectio divina* without knowing it. For others, it may seem arbitrary and complicated at first, but with a bit of practice it becomes second nature. The steps of *lectio divina* include: preparation, silence, reading, meditation, oration, and contemplation. A detailed description of *lectio divina* is given in Appendix J. The only material needed is a Bible, and one does not need to be a specially trained professional to engage in *lectio divina* or lead a session. This form of contemplative prayer and reading can be done by any small group in a variety of settings, as long as there is some quietness and peace in the environment.

The Value of *Lectio Divina* – A Personal Testimony

I, the author of this paper, have been involved with the practice of *lectio divina* for a few years now, and it has transformed my life in many ways. I first learned about *lectio divina* as a student at seminary over fifteen years ago, but it was only when I started going to a spiritual director for mentorship about five years ago that I started practicing this ancient art of holy reading. In this smallest form of small group, consisting of just my director and me, I learned how to be still before God. My director showed me that meeting with God in my prayer closet is critical to all other areas of my

life. “Heart experience” is necessary for proper “head knowledge.” “Testimony” is just as important as “lecture,” and we must engage in faith before serving in faithfulness.

This experience was especially crucial four years ago when I decided to leave my former pastorate. At my former church, I was part of a large pastoral team that ministered to a church of over fifteen hundred people. I had been there for seven years, was well liked and prospering in my ministry, and was eligible for a sabbatical. In addition, our church was in the midst of a \$16 million construction project to move into a new building. All outward indications were encouraging me to stay at my pastorate and settle into a comfortable routine there for the rest of my life. The only problem was my inner heart.

As I practiced the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*, and met with God regularly through His Word, I started to realize that I was not in the position that God wanted me to be. At my former church, I was the youth pastor, but through holy, meditative reading of God’s Word I started recognizing that I was not meant to be a youth pastor for the rest of my life. My gifts and calling were more to work with adults and coach others in the ministry.

Prayer opens the door to God’s wishes, and lays us bare before Him. Pride, sin, selfishness, self-centeredness, and worldly cares are pushed out. Meditation takes us from an earthly and personal perspective and leads us to a God-centered focus and ultimately to transformation – both for ourselves and others. In my *lectio divina*, I started to see how youth ministry had become routine for me, leading to hollow preaching, hollow ministry, and a hollow life. I started to see how “secular” I had become –

listening to the voices of the world around me telling me that the purpose of my “career” as a pastor was to seek a greater position, more numbers, minister at a bigger church, and be known as one of the pastors of a mega-church in Toronto.

Going to a smaller church (as I eventually did) was the furthest thing from my mind until I started practicing *lectio divina*. One passage in particular became a turning point in my life. I can still remember the exact circumstances surrounding that critical juncture in my life. My spiritual director had encouraged me to take a day away from the church to practice *lectio divina*, reflect on what was going through my heart at the time, and listen to God through His Word. I rearranged my schedule and booked a room at a convent nearby. Following is a short description of the steps of *lectio divina* as I experienced them (with the steps in italics to correspond to the steps given in Appendix J).

When the day arrived, I started my *lectio divina* at the convent by *preparation*. I sat quietly in a small, bare room with only a plain bed, small desk, and chair – but the room had a window that overlooked some trees in the backyard. I centered my gaze on one particular tree directly in view of the window and must have stared at it for about an hour. The exact length of time is hard to remember, because time seemed to stand still for me in that quiet room. I can only remember thinking of how beautiful that tree was, despite the tree’s being completely common and essentially motionless. The tree was doing exactly what God had designed it to do; no more and no less. It gives oxygen, shelter, fruit, and “life” to the many plants and animals around it. That day it helped me enter into *silence*. I found myself truly resting in my spirit for the first time in a long while; relaxing in God’s presence and not feeling the need to prove myself to anyone. I

was free to open my mind and heart to whatever God wanted to suggest to me. I was aware of God's love and watch-care over me, so I said a simple prayer of thanksgiving and offering myself openly to God for His teaching in the next step of the *lectio divina* process.

The next step in the process is *reading*. I chose as my passage that day to read John 21. In particular, I was led to verses 15-23, in which Jesus reinstates Peter to the ministry. At first, I wanted to exegete the passage, study it for sermon possibilities, and get a three-point sermon from the text. This was a natural habit that I had as a preacher and teacher, but, after a third time slowly reading the text, I was able to focus my mind to listen for a small word or phrase that God had for me through His Word. This naturally led me to the next stage of *lectio divina: meditation*. I slowly chewed over the text, like a cow chewing the cud, reading every word slowly and meditatively. Thoughts of my present ministry, my family, my purpose in life, and goals for the future entered my mind. I saw myself as Peter – walking along the beach with Jesus – but this was not just Jesus; it was the Triune God who was there speaking with me and meeting with me. I could sense the power and presence of the Father in the sound and smell of the waves lapping on the shore, and I could feel the warmth of the Spirit's love and assurance in the rays of sun on the beach (and on my face at that time as I was meditating!) Even the three-fold question to Peter reminded me of the Triune God asking me, "Ted Tham, do you love me?" I knew that most commentators suggest that Jesus asked Peter three times because Peter denied Him three times, but I also felt in my spirit all three members of the Trinity were speaking to me through the Word and those questions.

After meditation on the Word, I naturally slid into the next stage of *lectio divina*: *oration*. My heart overflowed with praise to my Triune God for His love, mercy, and continued calling to the ministry. I realized that God, through the *lectio divina* process and focus on John 21, was renewing my call to ministry rather than to just a job at my former church. I did not need to be a youth pastor for the rest of my life at that mega church. I did not need the prestige, power, or influence that came with that position. Rather, I simply needed to fulfill my calling to love God – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I was free to answer the call to adult ministry at another place if that was what it entailed. So I spent another hour simply praising God - on my knees, or flat out in prostration on the floor, or while pacing the room and in other positions. Tears of joy streamed down my face as I told God again and again that I *do* love Him, and that I would feed His lambs and take care of His sheep in whatever context He asked me.

The final stage of *lectio divina* is *contemplation*. After several hours, I had finished reading and praying. I had a sense of completion, and now I simply allowed myself to rest in God, like a child resting in his mother's lap. I sensed God's presence in the room, and with it I was at peace, experiencing deep joy and contentment. My only desire was to experience this community with God even more, and with that longing came a greater desire to meet with God's people in community. I felt secure in God's love, and wanted to share that love with people in the Church. My sense of pastoral care and calling deepened; widened and expanded. I naturally started thinking of those in my circle of influence who were wounded, helpless and in need of care. Finally, I wanted to see God's kingdom grow and expand. I wanted to see more and more people in this

world experience what I had the joy of experiencing. I wanted to feed the flock of God so that they could minister to the world.

In the past, I had a taste of all of the above, but only to a limited extent with teens at my former church. After that special day at the convent, going through the *lectio divina* process, I was energized, awakened, and given the courage I needed to make a huge life-transforming change of church and position (from youth to adult pastor). This change has altered my family and me in numerous ways, but, after four years at NTCBC, I can truly testify and praise God because He knew exactly what He was doing when He spoke to me that day many years ago through His Word. I would not have changed a thing.

The first and most important aspect of a solution to NTCBC's three problems is the encouragement of members to meet with God through the venue of small groups. Although it is only one of many ways to foster meeting with God, *lectio divina* is a time-honoured and simple method to do this. My testimony as described above, and the testimony of countless saints over the ages, has shown that *lectio divina* is an effective method to encourage meeting with God. It is specifically designed to encourage small group members to meet with God through the pages of Scripture. The activities that a small group may do will vary throughout the church, but the goal remains the same: to foster deeper intimacy and meeting with God. This insight is a product of the biblical and theological inquiry in Part Two of this paper. When the goals for small groups at NTCBC are made clear to everyone, the second part of the solution can be implemented –

a restructuring of the small group ministry to foster deeper community, greater pastoral care among members, and congregational growth.

The Second Prong: Restructuring the Small Group Ministry Using a Suitable Model

The goal of the second prong of the solution is to restructure the small group ministry at NTCBC to facilitate deeper community among members, enhance pastoral care, and grow the congregation. This will particularly address the internal issues at NTCBC as described in Chapter 2. A new model called the Hybrid Model will respond to the weaknesses of large fellowships where there are too few small groups; small groups are temporary and superficial in nature; there is a perpetual crisis in small group leadership; there is an over-reliance on the paid clergy for pastoral care; and there is a stagnation of growth due to a reliance on large scale evangelistic events. Before the Hybrid Model is described in the next chapter, it is helpful to understand the three representative models of small group ministry normally practiced in various churches today.

Russ Robinson, in his workshop entitled, “Choosing a Small Group Ministry Model,” stated that there are three representative models of small group ministry currently being practiced today: a church *with* small groups, a church *of* small groups, and a church *that is* small groups.³ In a church *with* small groups, small groups are not emphasized. They exist to help people find a place in the church, and they are considered

³ Russ Robinson, “Choosing a Small Group Ministry Model,” Seminar at Willow Creek Small Groups Conference attended by author, Sept. 22-24, 2005. Robinson is the Executive Director of Ministries and Small Groups at Willow Creek Community Church, a church with over twenty thousand members in Illinois.

an adjunct to the fellowship ministry and larger group gatherings. This is the form of small group ministry that has been practiced at NTCBC since its beginning.

In a church *of* small groups, most of its community is experienced at the small group level, with no larger group structures in the church other than the Sunday morning worship service. Small groups are the core of this church's community. This model of small group ministry de-emphasizes the social level of community where groups larger than a small group size of approximately ten to fifteen people gather together. In a church *of* small groups, there are no fellowships of fifty-plus people.⁴

In a church *that is* small groups, almost the entire church experience for members occurs at the small group level. This is small groups taken to an extreme. It is the form of small group ministry adopted by the largest church in the world, the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, which has over one million members and grows at a rate of over ten thousand members a month.⁵ In that church, the small groups are the primary expression of the church, and larger group gatherings are an adjunct. Small group leaders perform all major pastoral leadership functions for their group, including the administration of the sacraments.

These three forms of small group ministry result in different expressions of church body life and have implications for group membership, the role of group leaders, use of curriculum, level of church authority, level of church monitoring, and evangelistic activity. They are contrasted with one another in Appendix K of this paper. Appendix K

⁴ This is the model that Willow Creek has adopted for their church.

⁵ Paul Yonggi Cho, *Prayer Key to Revival* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1984), back page.

also lists the different names of popular small group ministry models existing today and where they fall under the three representative categories. Appendix L compares some of these existing models with each other.

CHAPTER 6

THE HYBRID MODEL

In his workshop, Robinson emphasized that every church is unique and demands a unique solution. There is no “best” model that is the same for every church.¹ After careful consideration, and in light of the biblical and theological foundations described in this paper and the context, it is suggested that NTCBC’s English congregation implement a hybrid or combination of the first two models described in Chapter 5 – a mix between a church *with* small groups and a church *of* small groups. This will be called the Hybrid Model.

The third representative model, a church *that is* small groups, is not recommended for NTCBC for one key reason. Since the English congregation is within the larger context of a tri-congregational church, it needs to be sensitive to the fact that it is tied inseparably with the Cantonese and Mandarin congregations. If the English congregation were to become a congregation *that is* small groups, this would involve changing the leadership structure of NTCBC as a whole. A church *that is* small groups considers each small group leader to be a pastor with the authority to administer the sacraments, including the Lord’s Supper and baptism. In light of NTCBC’s current situation and theological framework, this is not allowed unless the church constitution is changed.

¹ Robinson, “Choosing a Small Group Ministry Model.”

That would necessitate agreement among all three congregations and would be almost impossible in the current climate.

A Church *with* Small Groups and *of* Small Groups

In the Hybrid Model, the best of the first two models of small group ministry are combined. In this model, as in the situation of churches *with* small groups, larger fellowships are permitted, but small groups within those fellowships are strengthened and developed. At the same time, the Hybrid Model encourages the growth of new, emerging small groups outside of the traditional fellowships at NTCBC and integrates them into the overall church without forcing them to be part of a larger fellowship. This structure is similar to that of a church *of* small groups—hence the choice of the term “hybrid” because aspects of both the models of a church *with* small groups and a church *of* small groups is present. The Hybrid Model is a model that NTCBC’s English congregation can easily transition into from its existing model of a church *with* small groups because it recognizes the value of the existing large fellowships, including their emotional and sentimental value, while also encouraging a new structure outside of those traditional fellowships for newer groups.

The Hybrid Model acknowledges the fact that people need all three levels of community—public, social, and personal. It does this by encouraging attendance at the weekly Sunday congregation worship services, social gatherings of approximately fifty people in fellowship groups, and deeper community through small groups. The way this model differs from the current practice at NTCBC is in its emphasis on small groups and

the greater number of small group meetings that are held. In the Hybrid Model, the core of community will be experienced at the small group level (as in a church *of* small groups), but there will be occasional larger group gatherings at the social level (as in a church *with* small groups). In this model, small groups meet regularly and stay together for an indefinite term, rather than meeting irregularly and disbanding after a short time (i.e. after one year). This addresses the problem of the transitory nature of community in this postmodern generation as described in chapter 1 and allows for longer-term, deeper training of small group leaders.

Addressing the Three Problems at NTCBC

In the Hybrid Model, the three presenting problems in this paper are addressed. Deeper community is promoted through long-term small groups. This is in light of the study of the Trinity (chapter 3) – our model for deep community. Growing closer to others is never easy, given all the flaws in humans, but believers are called to close community by our God’s example. Being made in God’s image, believers are called to be one, as our God is one. Our Lord Jesus made this a focal point of His high priestly prayer in John 17:21, when He asked the Father “that all of them [His followers] may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you,” and that oneness is also with the Spirit.

NTCBC’s English congregation has never really had small groups that met together for longer than one year. Meeting together over several years gives small group members a longer time to know and care for one another. The Hybrid Model has no

“expiration-date” for the small groups that are created within it. Instead, members meet together as long as possible. Groups change when some members within the group are commissioned to birth a daughter group, or they are reformed due to some members’ moving away. This long-term commitment is a reflection of the biblical example of the family as described in Appendix M. As in a family, when differences arise in a small group, members are encouraged to work things out rather than just leave or wait until the following year when small groups are re-formed.

The second presenting need at NTCBC is to enhance pastoral care. Once again, the study of pastoral care within the Trinity (chapter 3) informs the strategy in this area. In the Trinity, there is a mutuality of care, where each member looks after the well-being of the other two. There is no “hierarchy” of care within the Trinity, in which, for example, the Father does most of the caring for the Son and the Spirit, who are served by the Father and do not care in return. Instead, each cares for the others in a mutuality of pastoral concern. In some instances, one member of the Trinity may be at the forefront, but in all cases the others are involved and participate.

This mutuality of pastoral care is reflected in the Hybrid Model by emphasizing the pastoral care of each member for the others in the small groups. This ensures that everyone does his or her part and affirms the Reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers (cf. Appendix H). Thus, in this model, there is no “permanent leader” of a small group, but rather “rotational leadership,” which encourages all Christians in a group (non-Christians being exempted) to eventually take up some leadership position in order to share in the pastoral care of the group. This makes leadership training in pastoral care

a must for this model. The Hybrid Model is highly dependant on proper, long-term training of small group leaders. This is a characteristic of a church *of* small groups. When small group leaders are trained in pastoral care, they naturally start taking more responsibility and initiative when it comes to front-line pastoral care. Leaders are taught to convey to their small group members that fellow small group members are the people to look to when needs arise, not the paid clergy. Only larger, more difficult, and complicated issues are to be brought to the second level of leadership, the small group leader team.² If problems cannot be resolved at this level, then and only then are they to be brought to the pastoral staff. This structure is in keeping with the biblical advice of Jethro to Moses to develop a reasonable span of care.

The Hybrid Model addresses NTCBC's third presenting problem of growth through outreach by emphasizing the incarnational method of outreach, as modeled by the Trinity (chapter 3). The most effective way to reach out to others is through personal contact. God became man in the person of Christ in order to connect with humankind, and as the Father sent the Son, so the Son sends believers into this world (John 20:21b). The Spirit also personally reaches out to the world by dwelling in hearts (1 Cor 6:19) and convicting the world of sin (John 16:8-11).

In the Hybrid model, church growth is not gained mainly through large evangelistic events, but by one-on-one conversations between Christians and non-Christians within small groups. As the place of evangelism within small groups is

² An opportunity to share problems and suggest solutions among small group leaders occurs at the regular "VHS" meetings described later.

emphasized in the church, small groups are encouraged to open their groups to non-Christians and reach out to their non-Christian friends. The life testimony of the Christians within the group will be emphasized as they are reminded that they are living epistles, being read by all people.

In the Hybrid Model, small group leaders are taught to use the delayed, inductive method of evangelism when reaching out to non-Christian members. Following our Lord's example, questions are asked about the identity of Christ and non-Christians given the opportunity to reflect, meditate, and respond over a long period of time. Forcing or pressuring someone to make a premature decision will not be encouraged. Fruit picked before its ripe is often ruined, and a decision made without reflection is premature. As the parable of the sower and the seed mentions, sometimes the harvest may seem to grow up quickly, but if it is not rooted in good soil, it will dry up soon or be choked by the thorns of this world (Luke 8).

If a small group consists of all Christians, one way to facilitate growth through outreach in the Hybrid model is the principle of the open chair. Each group is expected to focus on one or two people who are not part of the group but are related to a member or members in the group in some way—either a relative, friend, or colleague. The small group members are taught to pray for these people over a long period of time, perhaps up to one year. They are then asked to find out those people's significant needs and seek to meet those needs in a genuine, non-threatening, and completely unconditional way. When the newcomer asks why the small group members are being good to them, the group simply replies that they have been praying for this person and want to love him or

her in Jesus' name and invite the person to their open chair in their small group. This simple method of the open chair, focused prayer, and needs-oriented evangelism is a very powerful tool for bringing people to the small group, and then, through incarnational outreach within the group, to saving faith in Christ.

Christian Schwarz studied over one thousand different churches on all five continents: large and small churches; growing and declining ones; churches that are persecuted by the state and churches that are financially supported by the state; prominent and well-known churches as well as relatively obscure ones; those experiencing revival and those in decline. He identified what he calls "eight quality characteristics of a healthy, growing church." Among those characteristics was "need-oriented evangelism,"³ which is related to the concept of the open chair. Schwarz defined need-oriented evangelism by contrasting it with "pushy manipulative" evangelism that does not work.

It can be shown that "pushy" manipulative methods represent the exact opposite of the practice we learn from growing churches. Their secret is the way they share the gospel in a way that meets the questions and needs from non-Christians.⁴

By practicing incarnational outreach, the delayed inductive method of teaching, and need-oriented evangelism through the open chair, small groups in the Hybrid Model

³ Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 96-115.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

become a powerful tool for church growth,⁵ addressing the third need of NTCBC's ministry.

It should be noted that all three foci are not mutually exclusive in the Hybrid Model. Growth in numbers does not necessarily mean that there will be less pastoral care or shallow community within the church. Schwarz points out that a strong, formalized small group ministry is not antithetical to having a growing, large church because it counteracts the tendency of members in large churches to feel ignored, insignificant, or anonymous in them. He mentions,

In one of my seminars I once shared the story of the world's largest church in Seoul (Korea), which at that time had half a million members. One of the participants immediately responded that she could not even imagine becoming part of such a church. When I asked her why she felt that way she said: "Well I could never stand the anonymity. I need the familiar atmosphere of people I know well."

Just a short time later, I actually met a pastor from that church and asked him how they deal with the problem of anonymity. He looked rather puzzled: "Anonymity? Nobody has ever complained about that in our church." Then he proceeded to tell me about how this church has developed a system of self-reliant cell groups of up to twelve members and how most of the members of this church are integrated into this network.⁶

The Hybrid Model is designed so that all three of NTCBC's key needs are met at the same time through the restructured small group ministry. In this model, a church should "grow larger and smaller at the same time" — larger in numbers, but smaller in intimacy and deeper in community. The two main features of the Hybrid Model are the

⁵ It is instructive to note that God's Kingdom has often grown at very fast rates when evangelism and community are developed in small groups. This was evident during the rise of Methodism and in the rapid growth of the Church in China today, as described in Appendix N.

⁶ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 15.

strengthening of the existing small groups within fellowships, and the encouragement of emerging small groups outside of fellowships, as described in the next section.

Strengthening Small Groups within Fellowships

The strengthening of small groups within existing large fellowships is the first main feature of the Hybrid Model. This means that, at NTCBC, the existing large fellowships do not need to disband in order to transition into the Hybrid Model, but rather the small groups within those fellowships are strengthened, and the community within them is deepened. This recognizes that the existing large fellowships at NTCBC fulfill a legitimate need in their members. That need is for community at the social level, as explained in Appendix O of this paper. Allowing small groups to exist within larger fellowships, as the Hybrid Model permits, takes this reality into account by keeping the larger group structure of the fellowships intact.

While recognizing the need for interaction at the social level, the Hybrid Model also tries to encourage members of large fellowships to grow deeper in community through small groups within those fellowships. At NTCBC, the status quo of being a church *with* small groups within larger fellowships, while fulfilling some needs, was not satisfactory. As a response, it is proposed in the Hybrid Model to allow existing fellowships to continue but in a modified form. These fellowships are encouraged to do more formal training of the small group leaders and keep small groups together year after year, rather than splitting them apart every December to re-form again with different

members in January. Strengthening of the small groups will occur through regular feedback and evaluation and through leadership renewal and support, as described next.

Through Regular Feedback and Evaluation

Regular feedback and evaluation often helps systems to improve. This is the basis of most testing in schools, because people tend to work on what others *inspect* rather than what others *expect*. In order to strengthen small groups at NTCBC, it is proposed that a system be created for regular observation and improvement of the existing small groups within larger fellowships.⁷ In the Hybrid Model, it is proposed that the health of small groups be evaluated at regular intervals and weaknesses be addressed in accordance with what is observed. This technique is similar to that used by the Methodists in their early days.

The Methodists watched over one another in love, giving support and encouragement for growth in faith, hope and love. The system of classes, bands and select societies provided a means of progressive catechesis, support and accountability people needed as their faith matured.⁸

In light of the biblical analysis in Part Two of this paper, it can be seen that there are two pivotal scriptural tests on which small groups should be evaluated. They are the

⁷ In the engineering world, this is called a “feedback control loop.” One example is highlighted in the difference between a thermometer and a thermostat. A thermometer simply evaluates and displays the temperature, whereas a thermostat measures the temperature and automatically increases or decreases the heat in a home until the desired, preset temperature is achieved.

⁸ Steven Manskar, “Small Groups and Accountability: The Wesleyan Way of Christian Formation,” http://www.gbod.org/smallgroup/articles.asp?item_id=10827 (accessed May 10, 2008).

verses in John that focus on Christians following the example of Christ, verses that hinge on the tiny word, “as.”

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love....My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you (John 15:9, 12).

As the Father has sent me, I am sending you (John 20:21b).

We are to love one another *just as* Christ has loved us, and Jesus loves us *just as* the Father has loved Him. We are sent, *just as* Jesus was sent. The implication is that our mission and our equipping of power and authority are identical with our Lord’s. These two “high ideals” are the bar by which small groups should be tested. Whatever we do should seek to move people through the process of reaching these two goals – to love like Jesus and live like Jesus. In the regular feedback and evaluation of small groups at NTCBC these two criteria should be front and centre.

In addition, the criteria for evaluation should be in accordance with NTCBC’s definition of church health. Within NTCBC’s ecclesiology, a healthy church is defined as fulfilling four mandates. These mandates, which we call the “four pillars of the church,” emerged from our church’s reading of the early church in Acts 2:42-47, and included the necessity for worship, education, outreach, and community.⁹ Small groups should have a measure of each of these four characteristics within them in order to be healthy and grow since they are a microcosm of the larger church body.

The exact form that the evaluation of each of the four pillars in a small group takes will vary among different groups, depending on their focus. Each group, with the

⁹ See Appendix P for a fuller explanation of these four pillars.

help of the church leadership, needs to decide how they will be evaluated. In the case of small groups within the larger fellowships at NTCBC, their main focus will be on developing community within the small group, so, along with the church leadership, fellowship committee, and counselors, small groups need to develop a set of evaluation criteria that emphasize growth in community while not ignoring the other pillars. A sample evaluation form based on Acts 2:42-47 is given in Appendix Q.

Through Leadership Renewal and Support

Continual leadership renewal and support is critical when strengthening small groups within fellowships at NTCBC. As noted in chapter 2 of this paper, small group leaders in the current system at NTCBC tend to burn out very quickly and not continue as leaders in the future. In the Hybrid Model, it is proposed to introduce a training, support, and rotation system of leadership within the small groups to facilitate long-term leadership that is continually fresh and invigorated.

Training within the small groups in the Hybrid Model will be in accordance with the biblical model of Jesus' small group of disciples who trained under His example. Jesus' main teaching method was to model and show His disciples how to live the Christian life, along with allowing them to participate in His ministry and try things out for themselves. At times, they would simply observe, such as when they would see Him perform a miracle. At other times they participated, such as when they handed out the bread that had been multiplied to feed the thousands (Mark 8:6). Finally, Jesus would send out the disciples by themselves—either on a “short-term mission” (Matt 10) or

eventually when He commissioned them to go to the nations (Matt 28:18-20) and train other disciples. In his course entitled “Raising and Multiplying Leaders in your Ministry,” Robert Logan calls this the “I do, you see” method of training.¹⁰ He summarizes this method in five simple and easily memorized steps: “I do, you see. I do, you help. You do, I help. You do, I see. You teach someone else.” Using this simple five-step method of training, small group leaders are taught and mentored how to lead by learning from more experienced small group leaders in the church. This method will start slowly at NTCBC because there are very few experienced small group leaders in the church, but it will soon multiply the number of available leaders in an exponential way.

Sometimes Jesus taught His disciples in a more formal way when He pulled them aside from the crowd to teach them a lesson. A classic example occurred after He washed His disciples’ feet in the Upper Room and then asked, “Do you understand what I have done for you” (John 13:12)? In the Hybrid Model, a more formal training session is integrated into the new small group system through regular small group leader gatherings. The basic mandate of these gatherings is to function as a small group for the small group leaders, with their “coach/pastor” as their leader. Known by various names in different small group ministry models, this gathering of small group leaders will be called “VHS” gatherings at NTCBC.¹¹ The acronym “VHS” stands for “Vision, Huddle, and Skill.”

¹⁰ Robert E. Logan, class notes from “Raising and Multiplying Leaders in your Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 15-26, 2001.

¹¹ The term “VHS” is taken from Carl George *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 136.

The “vision” portion of these meetings includes worship (i.e. *lectio divina*), encouragement, motivation, hope, and reaffirmation of small group leaders as the “mini-pastors” of their groups, and a reminder that coaches are there to help as much as possible. In the “huddle” portion of the meetings, the small group leaders report on recent activities in their groups, celebrate successes, identify problems, plan for the future, propose solutions to other groups’ problems, hold each other accountable to stated goals, and exhort one another. In the “skill” portion of the meetings, formalized teaching and training on one or more particular aspects of being a small group leader occurs.

The VHS meetings are crucial to the success of the Hybrid Model because they incorporate training, support, and leadership renewal in one meeting. These meetings will be held regularly every month and a half. They are not designed to be another burden on the small group leaders, so there will be no homework connected with the meetings. Instead, they are designed to encourage the leaders and provide a venue for continual long-term training and support. A sample VHS meeting agenda is listed in Appendix R. It is proposed that the small group leader manual designed by the Willow Creek Community Church¹² be used as the basic skeleton for the teaching portion of these meetings because this is a very comprehensive, yet easy-to-understand, manual.

Another method of strengthening the small group leaders in the Hybrid Model will be the practice of leadership rotation. This is in recognition of the very busy timetables of this postmodern generation and the young, urban professional demographic of NTCBC. In the past, NTCBC fellowships demanded a one year commitment from

¹² Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*.

small group leaders. As small groups grew larger due to leadership burnout and the reluctance of leaders to recommit for a second year, this one-year commitment proved to be increasingly daunting for fellowship members. In the Hybrid Model, small groups will be kept to a reasonable span of care (i.e. approximately ten to twelve members per group) as per Jethro's instructions to his son-in-law Moses. These groups will be encouraged to stay together year after year, and within these groups there will be three or more members who are identified as leaders. These leaders will rotate in the small group leadership in order not to burn out one or two members. For example, one leader may lead for about six months, during which time he will co-ordinate meetings and attend the VHS meetings. During the six months, he identifies another leader within the group to take over at the end, and she observes and learns from him during that time using the "I do, you see" model. After her term is over, she passes on leadership back to the original leader or someone else from within the group who has been identified as a leader and has been preparing during her leadership term. The length of each leadership term is flexible, depending on the abilities of the leader to lead.¹³ In this way, the small group stays together for the long term without burning out leaders, and it develops new leaders along the way. As leaders are developed over the long term, it is helpful to have a method of feedback and evaluation of these leaders. A sample small group leader evaluation form is given in Appendix S.

¹³ This method of leadership rotation is reflected in the way geese who fly in a "V" formation rotate leadership when the "head goose" grows weary; allowing the flock to fly continually for much greater distances than if they only had one leader. Library of Congress, Government of United States, "Why Do Geese Fly in a V?" <http://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/mysteries/geese.html> (accessed May 20, 2008).

In the Hybrid Model, group multiplication occurs when a group has developed several leaders over a long period of time and the group has also grown through incarnational outreach, the delayed inductive method of teaching, and the practice of the open chair. Once leaders have been developed and the group has grown to over twelve to fifteen people, then the group can consult with their coach/pastor about “birthing” another group, as described in the next section.

Encouraging the Growth of New Groups

Encouraging the growth of new groups outside of traditional NTCBC fellowships is a second main feature of the Hybrid Model and helps to address the goal of encouraging outreach for growth. This feature, in conjunction with the other main feature of strengthening the existing small groups within fellowships, will allow for more flexibility and growth within NTCBC. Allowing for flexibility is in keeping with a small group philosophy of organic growth and community. “Organic” means that change is not forced nor legislated by the leadership of the church in a top-down manner.¹⁴

In the Hybrid Model, master planning is avoided by not legislating a strict mandate for why small groups are formed. In this model, small groups are any group of approximately ten to twelve people or fewer who meet on a regular basis and consider themselves a small group community. In order to be recognized as an NTCBC small group, they will need to be associated with our regular VHS sessions and be under the theological guidelines of our church constitution. People who are not part of one of the

¹⁴ A reflection on the importance of being organic is given in Appendix T.

traditional small groups within the larger fellowships will be encouraged to form together in a natural, organic way. The new groups can be formed for various reasons, and their curriculum, activities, and shape will vary depending on their purposes. Similar to the other small groups within the traditional fellowships, these groups will be required to have their small group leaders attend the regular VHS sessions and be given regular feedback and evaluation for improvement. They will differ in that they will not be under the authority of any fellowship committee team. Neither will they meet regularly in a mid-sized fellowship setting.

To compensate for this omission of community at the social (mid-sized fellowship) level, the small groups outside of the fellowships will be encouraged to meet periodically with small groups of a similar nature in joint small group meetings. For example, two or three small groups with young families might meet periodically (i.e. once a quarter or four times a year) with other young family small groups in the church. Small groups can take turns hosting and planning for these larger group gatherings.

Introducing Different Types of Groups

In the Hybrid Model, when members in the congregation who are outside of the traditional fellowships express a desire for deeper community at the personal (small group) level, they will be introduced to several options for forming a small group. If others in the congregation have expressed a similar desire, they will be connected to these people in the hopes that the two can form a group together. These preliminary leaders are responsible for gathering a like-minded group of people together, either from within the

church or outside, to form a new group. If this group wants to be officially recognized, trained, and mentored by the small group ministry at NTCBC they need to send a leader to the regular VHS gatherings. Appendix U gives a short description of the various types of small groups that are possible. They are by no means an exhaustive list, but they are illustrative of how flexible the Hybrid Model can be when embracing new types of small groups within the church.

It is intended that the small group ministry leadership at NTCBC will regularly promote these types of small groups to the congregation. The purpose would be to spark an interest in small groups from within the church and to inform people of the potential to participate in and form these types of groups. A detailed comparison of the various groups is given in Appendix V.

Summary

To address the three presenting problems at NTCBC of a desire for deeper community, a need for greater pastoral care, and stagnation in growth, the factors external and internal to NTCBC were examined in Part One of this paper. Part Two of this paper showed that a common problem was the need to enhance community, and this was rooted in our *Imago Dei* – the fact we are made in the image of God. Our Trinitarian God is our model for deep community, mutual pastoral care, and incarnational outreach. The solution lies in experiencing the transformative nature of meeting with God, and a place for this to occur in the church is in its small groups.

In Part Three of this paper, a two-pronged strategy was proposed – making “meeting with God” the primary focus of all small groups at NTCBC, and restructuring the small group ministry. The specific strategies of teaching groups to practice *lectio divina* and introducing the Hybrid Model were described. In the Hybrid Model, small groups within larger fellowships are strengthened, and new groups outside of fellowships are encouraged to develop.

In the next chapter, a basic timeline and flowchart for implementation of the proposals suggested in this paper at NTCBC is suggested, along with ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall changes and a description of some preliminary results.

CHAPTER 7

BASIC TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Many management books have been written and business courses taught about the inherent dangers and pitfalls in introducing change to a well-established system like that found in a church. A strategy to develop small groups at NTCBC for community, pastoral care and growth through outreach needs a basic timeline for implementation (and a visual flowchart) so that others can see the roadmap for small groups from start to finish. While providing a stable vision, this will also aid in system changes and evaluation as well. Following is a flowchart for the implementation of the proposals made in this paper, along with a description of each stage.

Stage	Action	Key Stakeholders	Timeline
1	Analyzing Barriers to Change	English Pastor	Immediately
2	Preaching and Teaching the Need for Deeper Communion with God	English Pastor, leadership	Immediately
3	Formation of a Small Groups Development Team (SGDT)	English Pastor, 3 lay leaders	3 months
4	Regular VHS leadership meetings	English Pastor	6 months
5	Introduction of the Hybrid Model	English pastor, leadership	10 months
6	Evaluation and Refinement	English pastor, leadership	1 year

Stage 1: Analyzing Barriers to Change

Some potential major barriers to change include a lack of commitment in key stakeholders, personal challenges, and resource deficiencies. This strategy paper has been written to address the first potential problem of a lack of commitment in the key stakeholders. It has looked at the context of the English Congregation at NTCBC, problems with the existing situation of the need for deeper community between members, weakness in personal pastoral care, and stagnation in growth. After looking at the biblical and theological foundations for small groups, it has proposed a two-pronged solution. It is recognized that people do not change easily, and it will take a substantial amount of discussion among the leaders of NTCBC in order to come to a consensus that the Hybrid Model is the right model for our church. Key stakeholders include the pastors, deacons, English Ministry Group (EMG), and the current fellowship leaders. Meetings will be held with each of these stakeholders in order to explain the main findings from this study and to seek consensus on the next steps. If the Hybrid Model is indeed chosen, then a sample implementation schedule as presented in this paper will be suggested to the leadership.

The barriers of personal challenges also need to be analyzed. I, as pastor of the English congregation at NTCBC, need to analyze how much other people and I are willing to invest in any new changes with respect to time and resources. In general, I realize that implementing the Hybrid Model of small groups will take up much of my time and energies for at least the next two years. I am prepared that, at the beginning, when training is most intensive, we may not see much numerical growth in our

congregation. I may be accused of tunnel vision and only focusing on small groups at the expense of other ministries at the church. In fact, due to my emphasis on the small group ministry and possible focus on a few key trainees who will be future coaches, overall worship attendance numbers may actually shrink for the first year. This is to be expected, although it should not be the overall trend for the next five years or beyond.

Another personal challenge to be recognized will be the shifting of my pastoral role. In the past, pastors at NTCBC have been seen mainly as shepherds, preachers, and the curers of souls. These will still be part of my pastoral duties, but, as the importance of small groups and especially the role of small group leaders grows, the shepherding and counseling portions of my role should diminish. Instead, I will be more of a coach and manager. This shift, although gradual, will be significant.

In order to properly implement small groups, there must be a large initial investment of time and resources to start up “model groups.” These groups will be examples of healthy small groups and will be used by the small group ministry in the future to show how small groups can grow, multiply, and bless the church. I have committed to finding or starting these model groups this year and the next. It is hoped that the congregation will see the immense benefits of small groups and allow me to focus on this area. At the moment, there is no position for a “Small Groups Pastor” in our congregation, but, with the growth of the congregation, it is hoped that either the youth pastor or another new English pastor can gradually shift his or her responsibilities into this area. I personally intend to free up my schedule and time by looking for more help from interns to deal with my current pastoral ministry demands. Initially, I hope to

spend at least 30 percent of my time with small group needs this year and the next. Depending on the staffing situation, that could be increased to 50 percent after that. At that point, depending on the success of the small group ministry, the staffing situation at our church and the size of the English congregation, we may have the resources to make small group ministry the main priority of one of our pastors.

Stage 2: Preaching and Teaching the Need for Deeper Communion with God

This stage in the development of small groups at NTCBC is crucial. As pointed out earlier in this paper, the root need at NTCBC is transforming meetings with God. A thirst for God comes from the promptings of the Holy Spirit as given through His Message (the Scriptures) and His messengers (preachers and teachers).

At this stage, I as the English Pastor and other key leaders need to encourage our members through our preaching and teaching to seek God's face and presence. We do this at the Wednesday night prayer meetings, at the pulpit and in the Sunday School classes, and in fellowship meetings. We teach and lead sessions of *lectio divina* in small groups, using the basic description given in Appendix J. At this stage, all resources are focused on encouraging the church to draw closer to God.

Stages 3 and 4: Formation of a Small Groups Development Team and Regular VHS Leadership Meetings

The next stage is to have the Hybrid Model accepted as a recommended direction for small groups at NTCBC by the English Ministry Group (EMG), the key leading body in the English congregation. If accepted, an initial task will be to form a core team,

called the Small Groups Development Team (SGDT). At present, a high level leadership team has already been formed to analyze our English congregation's health and look at ways to grow. This team, consisting of three key English congregation lay leaders and me, has administered the NCD survey, spent many hours discussing its results, and is in the process of strategizing and planning for the future. It is intended that, after this strategy paper is completed, and if the Hybrid Model is accepted as a possible solution, I will propose that a SGDT be formed with these same three key leaders and me as the core.

This team will develop a strategy to implement and develop the Hybrid Model of small groups in the English congregation. All three core leaders are long-term small group members and leaders at NTCBC. They all have a large commitment and heart for the ministry and are personally committed to me as their pastor. In particular, the team will be responsible for helping to implement the two key features of the Hybrid Model—strengthening the small groups within fellowships at NTCBC and encouraging the growth of new groups.

A regular VHS meeting has already been started at my home that meets every month and a half, and the SGDT will help me to conduct and further develop this meeting. By virtue of my training and experience, I will lead this VHS group for the first year or two, but it is intended that one of the team members eventually take over this group for me or birth another VHS group when the number of people attending the first VHS group grows too large.

Stage 5: Introduction of the Hybrid Model

The Hybrid Model will first be introduced to the VHS meetings in order to give the present small group leaders an idea of the changes to occur at NTCBC. This will give them a chance to ask questions and make suggestions. A very basic summary of the key insights from this paper and highlights of the Hybrid Model will be handed out to them,¹ along with copies of the appendices explaining *lectio divina*, the different types of small groups that are possible, and samples of how small groups and their leaders may be evaluated. Following the introduction of the Hybrid Model to the VHS group, it will be disseminated among other congregation members through workshops, seminars, Sunday school classes, and in the new believer's class.

It should be noted that a significant change that occurs with the introduction of the Hybrid Model is the recognition that primary pastoral care will be done at the small group level of the church. It will be expected that people try to help each other with pastoral care issues within their small groups, and that this is their primary venue for assistance and care. This needs to be stressed to the congregation, small group leaders, and church leadership, and will involve clarifying the pastor's role in the church.

Stage 6: Evaluation and Refinement

Evaluation of the health of small groups and their leaders will be conducted as described in chapter 6. In addition, overall evaluation of the effectiveness of the changes made to the small group ministry at NTCBC need to be measured. These changes are

¹ A sample outline of this session is given in Appendix X.

difficult to quantify and measure, but there are some basic statistics that will be helpful. These statistics include: the number of people in the congregation practicing *lectio divina* on a regular basis; the overall attendance in the English congregation Sunday worship services, the number of recognized small groups in the congregation (both inside and outside the larger fellowships) and the number of whole families in small groups in the church.² It is also suggested that the NCD survey, which measures the health of a church, be utilized. The first NCD survey conducted at NTCBC has just been completed and analyzed, and, if the survey is repeated every year, it will give the church leaders some quantifiable results that can be compared year after year for trends. A list of the NCD questions that relate to the three NTCBC presenting problems is given in Appendix Y. Note that some survey questions are stated in the negative.

Preliminary Results

As this strategy paper was being written, changes have occurred rapidly within the fellowship and small group structure of NTCBC's English congregation. These changes have not been regulated or directed by the church leadership; rather, they have been occurring naturally and organically as members in the congregation have been speaking with the author about small group ministry and philosophy. Several key developments have been taking shape. In the large Emmanuel Fellowship that is geared

² The reason that the number of whole families is kept track of is because of the importance of having whole families in a church. While it is recognized that "partial families" such as one-parent homes or single adults are valuable to a church, it is also recognized that whole families are also vital for the long-term stability of a church. In the Chinese culture, men in particular are influential as both heads of their household and in the overall culture.

to career adults, the leadership this year has decided to focus more on the small groups within the fellowship. In the couples' ministry, several couples' small groups have spontaneously started, and some have even birthed another couples' group.

Outside of the traditional fellowships at NTCBC, small groups have been starting to form for various purposes. Separate men's and women's LTG accountability groups have been meeting regularly, and the Wednesday night prayer meeting at church has birthed another prayer meeting on Tuesday nights. This group meets at a home more accessible to members who live far from the church but closer to each other. The second prayer meeting that meets on Tuesday nights is gradually becoming a neighbourhood group.

The focus on small groups in the Emmanuel Fellowship and the creation of other groups has given the author encouragement to start the VHS meetings, which have met a few times already. These meetings have been well received, with twenty to thirty people attending them each time. As a result, it is projected that a second VHS group will need to be started very soon, most likely to be led by a deacon, the youth pastor, or a member of the SGDT.

It is still too early to evaluate the results of this shift towards small groups at NTCBC, but it has already been noted that our congregation has started to grow in its weekly Sunday attendance. Small groups are multiplying rapidly, and people are starting to invite friends to their small group meetings.

On the negative side, there have been murmurings of regret over the decline in the number of large group gatherings at the church. People in the Chinese and English

congregations have been wondering what has become of the previously large Emmanuel Fellowship gatherings and Couples' Fellowship gatherings. People are concerned that fringe members of the church will be forgotten and lost. These concerns need to be addressed and possible refinements to the Hybrid Model considered.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, a contextually sensitive, biblically and theologically informed strategy for reforming the existing structure of small groups within the English congregation at NTCBC was presented in order to foster deeper community among members of the congregation, enhance pastoral care, and stimulate church growth through outreach. Part One described the external and internal factors to NTCBC contributing to the problems.

In response to the needs described in Part One, Part Two recognized that it is necessary to enhance community at NTCBC and showed that our Trinitarian God is our ultimate example of deep community, mutual pastoral care, and incarnational outreach. The root problem and need of the English congregation at NTCBC is for each member to have regular transformative meetings with God. A place to facilitate and encourage these meetings in the church is in small groups.

Part Three of this paper proposed a two-pronged approach to the solution - the cultivation of small groups that foster meeting with God, and a reformation of the small group structure at NTCBC. The specific strategies in this approach were to encourage *lectio divina* and introduce the Hybrid Model.

After suggesting a basic timeline for implementation of changes, including some key statistics for evaluation, preliminary results were presented. Preliminary results from changes that have already spontaneously occurred in the small group ministry at NTCBC

have been positive. They have given the author encouragement to continue with the implementation of this strategy paper while also alerting him to possible concerns and cautioning him to proceed carefully.

APPENDIX A: RATIONALE FOR CHINESE-FOCUSED CHURCHES

Many people do not understand why Chinese churches exist, and object to their presence in a multicultural city such as Toronto. Reverend Dr. Ken Fong, the Chinese American senior pastor of the Evergreen Baptist Church of Los Angeles California, has addressed some typical concerns about Asian-American ministries in a chapter of his book, *Pursuing the Pearl*, entitled “Why Specifically Target Asian Americans?” His rationale for Asian American ministries is very applicable to the Asian Canadian context and the Chinese Canadian context in particular.

No doubt there are those Christians, even among Asian Americans, who do not believe there is any need to single out unconvinced Asian Americans as a target audience for particular churches or ministries. To do so strikes these colleagues as inherently unnecessary, even unthinkable. To do so would only perpetuate the sad fact that there is not one Christian church in America, but five: red, white, black, brown, and yellow.

As you will discover, I am not in favor of maintaining the status quo. However, it has been my experience that some people who think they have the solution are blind to their own cultural biases. When I was in seminary, my systematic theology professor loudly proclaimed to our class that “the ethnic church in this country is an abomination to the all-encompassing gospel message. Eleven o’clock on Sunday mornings is the most segregated hour in America. We should all go to the same church.” During the break I asked him, since our respective churches no doubt read the same Bible, and worshiped the same God, if he was going to start attending our Asian American church. “Why, no,” he replied, “I meant for you to come to our church.” This fine Christian gentleman and world-class theologian could clearly imagine the cultural peculiarities of our church, but he was blind to those of his own. If many Christians still cannot ignore these, how can we expect those who are not Christians to disregard such distinctives?

I am positive that these same critics of Asian American ministries would be among the first to promote missionary efforts to specific people groups in Asia. Other than the fact that one group of Japanese lives across the ocean and the other lives across the street, what’s the difference? In both cases, more than 95 percent of these people are not Christians. Clearly, uninformed and nonspecific

evangelistic efforts are not accomplishing mission goals on either side of the Pacific. There is definitely a need for more Asian-specific approaches.¹

In his quotation above, Fong points out that planting and development of ethnic churches are rooted in intentions to reach out to a specific, targeted demographic. For example, the desire to reach the Chinese in Toronto who did not speak English or could not assimilate quickly into the non-Chinese culture around them was the primary motivation for the start of most of the Chinese churches existing in the city today. Donald McGavran, in his book *Understanding Church Growth*, states that “People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers.”² In his concept of the Homogeneous Unit (HU) Principle he describes the power of targeting a specific people group for mission. He explains that, by understanding the social structure of a particular segment of the total population, one can know what ingredients are called for in order to make churches increase through evangelism.³

¹Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 3-4.

² Donald A. McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1970), 163.

³ *Ibid.*, chapter 13.

APPENDIX B: DISTINCTIVES OF THE CHINESE CULTURE

Chinese culture is described by Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong in their article “Grace-Filled Households.”⁴ In that article Sugikawa and Wong ask and answer the question:

What are some values that are held in common by Asian American churches by virtue of their being influenced by Asian culture? From our experience we would suggest the following:

- hierarchy
- community and family
- education and achievement
- conformity and humility
- respect for tradition and elders

This is not an exhaustive list...but this simple list includes what we think are some of the core values held in common by most Asian cultures and which influence most Asian American local churches.⁵

In their statement above, Sugikawa and Wong point out five traits of Chinese culture that seem to be pronounced in Asian American churches. They identify several distinguishing characteristics of Chinese churches and help to explain the often unwritten but widely understood culture that exists within Chinese churches today. This culture affects how things are done within Chinese churches and also explains the expectations of its members, including a respect for hierarchy in church government; emphasis on community, family, education, and achievement; pressure on church members to conform to rules and express humility in conduct; and a deep respect for cultural traditions and elders.

⁴ Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong, “Grace-Filled Households,” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, ed. Cha, Kang, and Lee, 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

APPENDIX C: THE NTCBC STORY - A HISTORY OF GROWTH AND STAGNATION TIED TO IMMIGRATION PATTERNS

Numerical growth in a local church or lack of growth is often the result of many factors. Two major categories of factors are biblical factors and sociological factors. In the former category, growth is influenced by internal realities such as the doctrines, beliefs, and practices of the leaders and members of a church. In the latter category, growth is influenced by outside forces such as the number of people in the city where the church is located, economic conditions, and immigration patterns. For ethnic churches such as NTCBC, sociological factors have traditionally played a large role in the growth of the church. It is important to recognize this influence on a congregation's size and distinguish between this factor and biblical factors.

NTCBC is a medium-sized Chinese Canadian church established in 1974 in the North York suburb of metropolitan Toronto, one of many areas of Toronto considered an ethnic enclave where visible minorities tend to settle.⁶ God blessed the Chinese Church in Toronto with much growth from the 1960s to the 1990s, mainly through immigration from Hong Kong.⁷ NTCBC was no exception, growing from a founding group of twenty-four members to an average weekly attendance of about six hundred in the 1990s.⁸

⁶ Statistics Canada, Census 2001.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "History of Weekly Attendance," in "NTCBC Annual Report 2006," Toronto, NTCBC, 2006, 26.

When immigration from Hong Kong slowed down in the mid-1990s, Sunday worship attendance plateaued in most Chinese churches in the Toronto area, including at NTCBC. This was to be expected, since most Chinese churches in Toronto were founded by Cantonese-speaking people from Hong Kong. When this source of new transfer members dried up, the churches did not grow as exponentially as before.

In recent years, the overall number of Chinese speaking people immigrating to Canada has remained quite large, since Mandarin-speaking people from the mainland People's Republic of China (PRC) are immigrating in greater numbers and replacing former immigrants from Hong Kong. According to the 2002 statistics from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the PRC has supplied the biggest number of Canadian immigrants since 2000, averaging well over 30,000 immigrants per year, totaling an average of 15% of all immigrants to Canada. This trend shows no sign of slowing down, with an all-time high of more than 40,000 reached in 2005.⁹ Churches that began Mandarin-speaking congregations later than others have not grown as steadily as those who began earlier. NTCBC is one of those later churches, beginning its Mandarin congregation in 2002. As a consequence, the church has plateaued in overall attendance since the 1990s. The English congregation, for which I am the third pastor in its history, has remained at about 150 to 200 attendees for the last five to six years.¹⁰ The situation in the Chinese congregations (both Cantonese and Mandarin speaking) is even more

⁹ Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2005 statistics, "Canada – Permanent Residents by Top Source Countries," <http://www.cic.gc.ca/EnGLish/resources/statistics/facts2005/permanent/12.asp> (accessed April 18, 2008).

¹⁰ "History of Weekly Attendance," 26.

acute. Their numbers are actually on a slow decline, with people either migrating to the English congregation where their children worship, or leaving the church altogether.

THE NTCBC ENGLISH MINISTRY STORY: A CHURCH WITHIN A CHURCH

The chapters of the book, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches* include titles such as “Grace-Filled Households,” “Truth-Embodying Households,” “Healthy Households,” “Hospitable Households,” and others. The inclusion of the term “households” in the chapter titles points out a condition found in many Chinese Canadian churches, that their members and leaders see their church as a household, with the Chinese-speaking congregations being the parent-caregivers and the English-speaking congregation being the children-dependents.¹¹ At NTCBC, this is literally true for some families since the parents go to the Chinese worship services and their teens go to the English worship service, but as the English congregation has developed and grown both in size and maturity, the relationship between the Chinese and English congregations has become more like that of an adult child living at home. Furthermore, for about 70% of the present English congregation, the analogy is more akin to an adopted adult child living in the home. Many of the English congregation members do not have blood ties to the Chinese congregations. The core of the English congregation is now adults in their twenties to forties – people who are business owners, managers, and highly skilled white collar professionals with sizable responsibilities at work and home.

¹¹ Cha, Kang, and Lee, eds., *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, See in particular chapter 7, “Multigenerational Households,” 145.

In some denominations, this may not be an issue, but, in Baptist polity, key authority lies in the hands of the deacons, and, of the fourteen deacons at present in NTCBC, only three are regular attendees of the English worship service. The result is that the leadership of the English congregation (the English Ministry Group, or EMG) often experiences friction with the overall church leadership. At some times, they sense freedom to lead the English congregation, and at other times they feel a bit restricted by the overall church leadership. This situation is not uncommon for a Chinese church at this stage of their development.

It is not in the scope of this paper to discuss problems in the Chinese-speaking congregations of NTCBC or solutions to any friction that may be present between the different language groups, but it is recognized that a slow decline in the Chinese speaking congregations will have significant effects on the English congregation. Friction due to cultural and historical differences between the language groups also necessitates that all major changes in the church be accomplished with much discussion, patience, and love and must be rooted in good theological and practical reasoning.

APPENDIX D: THE CULTURAL GAP

Those from the East and those from the West have many diametrically opposite or contrasting worldviews when it comes to art, relations between the sexes, home life, attitudes toward government, religion, the economy, and science. Depending on how long a family has been in North America, the cultural gap between the overseas-raised parents and their local-born children can often be an enormous divide. This problem is common in first-generation immigrant families and often results in emotionally-divided and distant families. First-generation immigrant parents can feel that their second-generation children

are no longer malleable and silent in their families and in their communities. Influenced by American culture and its social values, these young adults are asserting their opinions, claiming their rights and even challenging their elders' traditional value systems and perspectives. Many immigrant parents and community leaders, meanwhile, are hurt and alarmed by their young people's actions, causing some to react by digging deeper into their traditional mode of thinking and practice. As a result, the generational and cultural gulf between the two generations widens while tension escalates.¹²

The consequence is that many members of a CBC (Canadian-born Chinese) congregation like that of NTCBC's English congregation are "emotional orphans" who have a deep need for close community to replace that which is lost from their parents. They long to have "heart to heart" and deep conversations with their fathers or mothers.¹³

Unfortunately, they are unable to do so because of language and cultural barriers. Each side, raised up in either the East or the West, is unable to understand the other. There

¹² Cha, Kang, and Lee, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 147.

¹³ Conversation by author with several CBC over many years of pastoral ministry and counseling.

may be plenty of social interaction and small talk, but little connection that is heartfelt and deep.

APPENDIX E: THE “IDENTITY PROBLEM” FOR CANADIANIZED
CHINESE CANADIANS

Cultural identity is a major question for Asian Americans as they are growing up. This is partly due to anti-Asian sentiments that Americanized Asian Americans grow up with. There is “a curious double standard that pervades much of the thinking of many white Americans. To characterize this attitude, only those with ethnic roots in Europe are considered to be true Americans.”¹⁴ As one Asian American stated in the *New York Times*, “We’re still not fully integrated into the mainstream because of our yellow skin and almond eyes. Much has changed in 100 years (since the exclusion act [of 1882]), but we still cannot escape the distinction of race.”¹⁵ The Chinese Canadian experience is very much the same.

For the most part, the Canadian public does not make a cultural distinction between “Chinese in China” and “Chinese Canadians,” and it maintains a differential approach towards “Chinese Canadians” and “European Canadians.” It would take more than the entrenchment of individual rights and the announcement of a multiculturalism policy to change such cultural distortions and stereotypes.¹⁶

Since an Americanized Asian American and a Canadianized Chinese Canadian always looks oriental, they can be easily stereotyped by others. In the case of those who can only speak English and are raised in North America like myself, this makes us an enigma to others. We are part of a curious “bridge culture or race,” not quite fully white

¹⁴ Hsu, *Americans and Chinese*, 11.

¹⁵ Diana Fong, “America’s ‘Invisible’ Chinese,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1982, <http://select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F40C15FE3D5C0C728CDDAC0894DA484D81> (accessed April 18, 2008).

¹⁶ Peter S. Li, *Chinese in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), xiii.

or fully Chinese. The term often used to describe persons like myself is “CBC” for Canadian-born Chinese or “CRC” for Canadian-raised Chinese. CBCs are also known as “bananas” because they look yellow on the outside, but are white on the inside. A common Chinese term for a CBC is a *chook sing*, referring to a bamboo open at both ends (i.e. without connection to either culture).

APPENDIX F: DIFFERENT LEVELS OF COMMUNITY

Every human being desires community, but not necessarily of the same level at the same time.

You know the “fringe Christians” – those whose church involvement tops out with Sunday morning worship and the occasional potluck? What they need is a small group, right? Let’s face it – small groups work for some, while others find all the fulfillment they need in public worship. What kind of community do people want? What does it take for churches to cultivate environments where all levels of community spontaneously emerge and thrive?¹⁷

In the quotation above, Joseph Myers identifies the desire for different levels of community in the minds of various churchgoers. His book *The Search to Belong* highlights the difference between these levels of community and makes the case for seeking to enhance community at each level.¹⁸ Recognition of these levels of community is vital in order to understand the desire for community among the CBC population in Toronto and how small groups can address the need for community at the deeper levels.

Defining the Need for Community at Three Different Levels

Before looking at the specific needs of the English congregation that relate to their concern for community and how small groups can address this vital need, it is important to recognize that people may have different definitions for community. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, perhaps the simplest definition of community would be a group of people where one feels that one belongs in some way. In other words, ‘belonging’ is essentially another word for community. Communities are present

¹⁷ Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), back cover.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, chapters 3 and 4.

wherever people connect, identify with one another, are committed to each other in some way, participate with one another, and find their connection significant.¹⁹

In many churches there are three main levels of community: the congregational level, the fellowship level, and the small group level. These correspond roughly to Myers' definition of public space, social space, and personal space. The English congregation at NTCBC is no exception. Every Sunday morning, we have a large crowd of people who join together in singing, worship, and listening to the preaching of the Word at the congregational level. During the week (usually Friday or Saturday night) about half that number will meet at the fellowship level in various groups of between 20 and 50 people. At NTCBC we call these fellowships. Furthermore, most of these fellowships are subdivided into groups of about 10 to 15 people who meet about once a month at the small group level.

All three levels serve different purposes in people's lives. The larger congregational gatherings on Sundays give people a sense of celebration and joyful worship within a crowd of believers. People feel that they are part of the larger church body. Myers, in describing people who go to weekly bingo, could just as well be describing the people who go to the weekly congregational gathering:

On one level it's all about lining up five numbers and yelling "Bingo!" Yet this is not only about playing a game and winning a few bucks. These people come week after week, month after month, and year after year to connect with others in public space that is significant for them.

Some theorists suggest that it is impossible to make significant connections in public spaces. Don't tell these people that. Their connections burrow deep. I doubt that they visit each other's homes or get together outside of

¹⁹ Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 25-26.

the bingo hall, yet they care for one another—all in public space. They may not know each other's names, but they are not strangers. They are family.²⁰

The people who come to Sunday worship at NTCBC feel part of a movement and sense that they are part of God's people in Toronto, Canada, and throughout the world. Local and global issues are presented in the bulletin and announcements. Preachers and missionaries are brought in from around the world. Whole families, from children to grandparents, are present in the worship services on Sunday. This is a real community in every sense of the word. Every person who comes regularly to the English worship service has a real claim on the hearts and mind of everyone else that comes. The congregational level or public space is needed by everyone, and so is the next level, the fellowship level or social space.

Fellowships cater to the basic human need for social interaction. Corresponding to Myer's definition of "social space," fellowships are vitally important. As Myers points out,

In many ways, social belonging is the "small talk" of our relationships. We denigrate social belonging as superficial. We surmise that nothing significant takes place in social relationships.

However, if you don't think much of small talk, try living without it for a while. One of the chief complaints of those in so-called commuter marriages is the inability to discuss the inane. One commuter wife observed that "you have a lot of immediate impressions and little jokes and observations that you can't save for a week. You can't reconstruct that kind of trivia in an effective way. I find the loss of that material really annoying." Another geographically displaced wife lamented lost opportunities "to share in everyday things like 'What did you have for lunch today?'"²¹

²⁰ Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 40.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

At NTCBC we have designed our fellowships or social spaces to encourage people to interact with others close to their current age and life stage. We have a fellowship for teenagers, a fellowship for university and college students, a fellowship for career adults, and fellowships for couples: couples with young children and established families. These groups are very attractive to newcomers to the church who do not know many people and desire to fellowship with people who are similar to themselves. It is a non-threatening environment for them because they do not need to share too intimately with others in the group, and can simply enjoy the programs presented to them and gradually get to know people within the group. Fellowships provide a place for people to make friends who become the modern-day equivalent of what used to be called a “neighbour.” “A neighbour is someone you know well enough to ask for small favours — to walk the dog or pick up the mail. We meet briefly on the way out the door or during an evening walk. These relationships bring to a neighbourhood safety, comfort, and connectedness.”²²

Fellowships also provide a safe selection space for people to decide with whom they would like to grow into a deeper relationship. At fellowship, people present just enough information about themselves that would allow others to decide whether they want to connect more deeply with them or not. If they do, then people often go to the third level of depth of community, the small group level.

For those who have been in a fellowship for a while, there is often a desire to connect in a deeper way with certain members of the group. This is where small groups

²² Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 46.

are most helpful. As we often advertise to those interested in joining a small group, this is the place where someone can go from surface friendships into deeper community. The goal of small groups is to foster the development of surface relationships into true biblical *koinonia*; from head to head to soul to soul connections; from independence to interdependence; from invulnerability to vulnerability; from non-disclosure to self-disclosure; and from non-accountability to inviting accountability. We tell people that to live in small group community is to: know and be known; love and be loved; celebrate and be celebrated; serve and be served; do life deeply together; live in radical loving relationships; touch souls and live in fulness of life.

It is recognized that those who come to NTCBC are at different stages of their Christian walk and maturity level. Some find the entire fulfillment they need at the present in the Sunday morning congregational gatherings and may not desire to attend a fellowship or a small group for various reasons. Others like to go to Sunday worship service and a large group fellowship, but find small groups too intimidating because they are not ready to open up to others in such an intimate environment. The leadership of NTCBC wants to affirm to these two groups of people that they are still valued, vital members of our church. If someone comes to any meeting of NTCBC, and even if it is only twice a year at Easter and Christmas, in some sense that person “belongs” here and is part of our community. If someone is bedridden and cannot attend Sunday morning worship regularly, that person can still be part of our community through prayer and visits from the congregation. Formal membership at NTCBC has certain criteria, such as

agreement to our basic statement of faith, but this does not mean a person cannot belong to NTCBC in some way and be part of our community.

At the same time, it is the desire of the leaders of NTCBC to encourage people to experience all three levels of belonging: congregation, fellowship, and small group. We feel that all three levels are beneficial to all believers. It is the desire of this paper to help the leaders of NTCBC design a functional and attractive small group ministry that would draw as many people to the small group level of intimacy as possible, while not losing the benefits of and participation in the other two levels.

APPENDIX G: ONE-ANOTHERING IN CHRIST²³

Romans	12:5	Belong to one another*
	12:10	Be devoted to one another
	12:10	Honor one another
	12:16	Live in harmony with one another
	12:18	Live at peace with one another*
1 Cor	15:7	Accept one another
	1:10	Agree with one another
	4:6	Don't take pride over against one another*
	10:24	Look out for one another*
	12:25	Have equal concern for one another*
Galatians	16:20	Greet one another with a holy kiss
	5:13	Serve one another
	5:15	Don't devour one another*
	5:26	Don't envy one another*
	5:26	Don't provoke one another*
Ephesians	6:1	Carry one another's burdens*
	4:2	Bear with one another*
	4:25	Speak truthfully with one another*
	4:32	Be kind to one another
	4:32	Be compassionate to one another
Philippians	4:32	Forgive one another
	5:19	Speak to one another with psalms, hymns & spiritual songs
	5:21	Submit to one another
	2:4	Look to the interests of one another*
	Colossians	3:9
3:13		Bear with one another*
3:13		Forgive one another
3:16		Teach one another
3:16		Admonish one another
1 Thess	4:9	Love one another*
	4:18	Encourage one another*
	5:11	Encourage one another
	5:11	Build up one another*
	5:13	Live in peace with one another*
Hebrews	5:15	Be kind to one another*
	10:24	Spur on one another
	10:25	Meet with one another*
	10:25	Encourage one another
	13:1	Love one another*

²³ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations*, 289-290.

James	5:9	Don't grumble against one another*
	5:16	Confess your sins to one another*
	5:16	Pray for one another*
1 Peter	1:22	Love one another
	3:8	Live in harmony with one another
	4:9	Offer hospitality to one another
	5:14	Greet one another with a kiss of love
1 John	1:7	Have fellowship with one another
	3:11	Love one another
	3:16	Lay down your lives for one another*
	3:23	Love one another
	4:7	Love one another
2 John	5	Love one another

* These statements have been changed from "each other" to "one another"

APPENDIX H: THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

NTCBC is part of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ).

Pastors in the Convention are taught that the BCOQ considers itself as part of the Radical Reformation of the sixteenth century.²⁴ During that period, several distinctives emerged as part of this movement, and one of those distinctives was a firm declaration and belief in the priesthood of all believers.²⁵

Part of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is an affirmation that all believers have a responsibility to minister to one another and the world around them. As stated by William Jones in the chapter entitled “The Priesthood of All Believers” in his book *What Canadian Baptists Believe*:

Every Christian has a ministry, both to other believers, and to the wayward world. Some may tend to reject that heavy responsibility. Others recognize that God gives his children no tasks for which he does not prepare them fully. To meet the challenge of being priests to the world, God has provided the members of his body the church-gifts appropriate to the requirements of priesthood and ministry.²⁶

Unfortunately this is not an easy doctrine for church leaders to follow in practice, as explained by Henri Nouwen in his book *In the Name of Jesus*. In that book, Nouwen identifies three great temptations of Christian leadership. Meditating on the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11), Nouwen saw the Devil’s temptation as a temptation

²⁴ Harry A. Renfree, *Heritage and Horizon: The Baptist Story in Canada*. Mississauga (ON: Canadian Baptist Federation, 1988), 2.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ William H. Jones, *What Canadian Baptists Believe* (Hamilton, ON: ChiRho Communications, 1989), 8.

to be relevant, a temptation to be popular, and a temptation to be powerful.²⁷ The latter two temptations, to be popular and powerful, tend to encourage church leaders to concentrate authority and power for themselves rather than releasing authority and empowering others in the church to do ministry. As Ogden points out,

Nearly 500 years ago Martin Luther, John Calvin, and others unleashed a revolution that promised to liberate the church from a hierarchical priesthood by rediscovering “the priesthood of all believers”.... Luther made such explosive statements as, “Everyone who has been baptized may claim that he already has been consecrated a priest, bishop or pope” and “Let everyone, therefore, who knows himself to be a Christian be assured of this, and apply it to himself-that we are all priests, and there is no difference between us.”²⁸

Yet today, there is often an over-reliance on paid clergy for pastoral care. One way to address this issue, and to return to NTCBC’s affirmation of the priesthood of all believers, would be to encourage and develop a strong small group ministry at the church. A proliferation of small groups, with their emphasis on lay leaders within each group showing pastoral care to their group members, helps to ameliorate the common error of concentrating power and ministry only among church leaders and paid clergy. Small groups are consistent with the Radical Reformation’s insistence on the priesthood of all believers since small group leaders, when trained properly and functioning in their roles of pastoral care, are essentially the “mini-pastors” for their congregation of small group members.

²⁷ Henri Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

²⁸ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 17.

APPENDIX I: THE IMPORTANCE OF CLEAR, SPECIFIC GOALS

Forming clear, concise goals is important for many endeavors in life. For example, without a goal in soccer or hockey, no one can score, and there cannot be any sense of accomplishment or victory. In the realm of business, numerous management books about vision and direction underscore the need for concrete goals in a corporation's plans. The popularity of the books, *The Purpose Driven Church*²⁹ and *The Purpose Driven Life*³⁰ by Rick Warren highlight the desire of church leaders and members for purpose, meaning, and direction in their church and life. The Bible itself, in Psalm 20:4, Proverbs 12:5, Proverbs 16:1-3; 9, Romans 15:23-24, Isaiah 32:8 and 1 Corinthians 9:26, indicates that godly people are expected to make plans.

Various people have different definitions for the term "goal." Their definition may include aspects of what others label "vision," "direction," "plans," "purpose," and other related terms. In this study, the term "goal" is used in the sense of the main purpose, emphasis, and direction that small groups should strive for. It is related to vision in that a clear goal draws a picture of a desired outcome. This vision gives power and inspiration to a church's activities. As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry has said, "If you want to build a ship, don't summon people to buy wood, prepare tools, distribute jobs, and organize the work, rather teach people the yearning for the wide, boundless ocean."³¹ In the Bible, visions, dreams, and messages from God inspired and energized His people to do the

²⁹ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

³⁰ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

³¹ As quoted by Christian Schwarz, *Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998), 26.

work of the ministry. Likewise the goals of the small group ministry at NTCBC are designed to give focus, give direction, energize, and inspire small group members and leaders.

APPENDIX J: THE STEPS OF *LECTIO DIVINA*³²

- **Preparation.** Begin by finding a passage of Scripture to pray with. You can choose a passage based on a lectionary, a daily devotional, or by simply selecting a passage on your own. Make sure the Scripture is not too long. Next find a quiet place to pray where you won't be distracted or interrupted—a place where you feel safe and comfortable opening up to God. Often it's helpful to light a candle or set out a sacred object, something beautiful that quiets your spirit and reminds you of God's nearness.
- **Silence.** Once you've found a place to pray, take a moment merely to rest, relaxing into God's presence. With each breath become aware of God's love for you. Say a simple prayer offering yourself to God and welcoming whatever the Holy Spirit has for you.
- **Reading.** Read the passage once to get oriented to the text. Then read it slowly a second time, and a third, listening for a word or phrase that seems to shimmer or stand out in bold—a word that seems to address you. It may be a word that draws your attention through either attraction or repulsion.
- **Meditation.** Once a word or phrase has been given, repeat it to yourself, allowing the rest of the text to fall away. As you prayerfully repeat it, different thoughts, feelings, and images may arise. Allow this word to touch all that arises—thoughts, hopes, memories, images, and feelings. What do you notice? What is being offered?
- **Oration.** Let yourself express prayers of petition or gratitude as they arise. Your meditation on the word may uncover a place of pain or regret. Pray about it to God. You may notice a person or situation that needs prayer. Pray that to God, too. Honestly express your deepest thoughts, feelings, and desires in dialogue with God. Pray yourself empty.
- **Contemplation.** Finally, allow yourself to simply rest in God, like a child resting in her mother's lap. Lay down all of the insights, words, and images you've encountered and simply dwell in the presence of God. Sink into God beneath all your thoughts and feelings.

As you engage in *lectio*, you may find you prefer a different progression than the steps of prayer I've just laid out. For example, you may find yourself praying out all kinds of concerns at the beginning of the prayer. Or you may find yourself in a place of rest and trust after reading Scripture and then only find a word addressed to you from the text as you end the prayer. There's nothing wrong with that. "Pray as you

³² Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry*, 85-87.

can, not as you can't," Dom Chaplain once said. You're merely seeking to come to the Scripture with an open heart, seeking to be with God. You read the words of Scripture. You rest for a period of time. You leave with a word addressed to you. The prayer is that simple.

APPENDIX K: CONTRASTING THREE REPRESENTATIVE SMALL
GROUP MODELS³³

	Church WITH Small Groups	Church OF Small Groups	Church IS Small Groups
Purpose	Help people find a place in church	Core of church as community	Primary expression of the church
Group Membership	Not required for church membership	Essential for church membership	Required for church membership
Role of Group Leaders	Mostly reactive leader	Proactive Shepherd- Leader	Pastoral Shepherd- Authority
Use of Curriculum	Chosen by leader	Recommended by staff or by leader	Designated by staff
Church Authority	Low	Low	High
Church Monitoring	Low	High	High
Evangelistic Activity	Possible	Encouraged	Expected
Well-known examples (cf. Appendix L)	Neighbourhood, ABF	Meta-Church, Free Market, Common Cause, Purpose Driven	Cell, G-12, House Church

³³ Robinson, "Choosing a Small Group Ministry Model."

APPENDIX L: COMPARING SOME EXISTING SMALL GROUP MODELS³⁴

Cell Model³⁵ (Website: www.touchusa.org)

- Evangelism is the focus; all life is in the cell
- Leadership development is key; larger group gatherings of cells

G-12 Model³⁶

(Websites: www.comiskey.org; www.cellchurchsolutions.com; www.bccn.org)

- Groups of twelve are training groups; cells used to find leaders
- Three groups per week, plus training, plus encounter weekends

House Church Model³⁷ (Website: www.hccentral.com)

- Decentralization is key; leadership is cooperative
- Based on a family gathering, children included

Free-Market Cells³⁸ (Website: www.newlifechurch.org/smallgroups)

- Short-term groups, driven by needs and interests
- Affinity is the organizing principle, leadership is fluid

Meta-Church³⁹ (Website: www.metachurch.com)

³⁴ Robinson, "Choosing a Small Group Ministry Model."

³⁵ Ralph W. Neighbour Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1990).

³⁶ Joel Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosions: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply* (Houston, TX: Touch Publications, 1988).

³⁷ Robert Banks and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home: A New Base for Community and Mission* (Claremont, CA: Albatross Books, 1986).

³⁸ Ted Haggard, *Dog Training, Fly-Fishing, and Sharing Christ in the 21st Century: Empowering Your Church to Build Community through Shared Interests* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002).

³⁹ George, *The Coming Church Revolution*.

- Leadership development through apprenticing
- Promotes open chair and birthing; intentional discipleship

Neighborhood Model⁴⁰ (Website: www.theconnectingchurch.org)

- Assimilation by neighborhood; mapping church's members
- Evangelism via natural relationships; some affinity groups

Adult Bible Fellowships⁴¹ (Website: www.abfresources.com)

- Small groups formed out of Adult Bible Fellowships
- Adult Bible Fellowship is primary place for building community

Common Cause⁴² (Websites: www.fbcir.com, www.fellowshipassociates.com)

- Small groups initially formed for fellowship – up to 3 years
 - Groups then take on a cause into the community.

⁴⁰ Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups to Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

⁴¹ Knute Larson, *The ABF Book: Adult Bible Fellowships* (Akron, OH: Chapel Press, 1997).

⁴² Robert Lewis, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001).

APPENDIX M: THE FAMILY, A BIBLICAL MODEL OF A LONG-TERM, COMMITTED SMALL GROUP

Soon after God created man, He stated, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). So God created Eve from Adam, and thus started the first family and human small group community. The creation of the woman fulfilled God’s purpose for the formation of community. Some people believe that, since Eve was to be a “helper” to Adam, she was simply to be an adjunct to him for his convenience, and, therefore, the relationship they had was not one of a community of equals. According to Bilezikian, this is an erroneous reading of the text.

A careful reading of the Genesis text indicates that the “helper” was not provided as a convenience for the man’s use, to make his life easier or more pleasant. She was not just a complement to his life... To reduce the creation of woman to a complement or addition to the man’s otherwise self-sufficient life is to betray a grievous lack of understanding of the biblical doctrine of community.⁴³

God’s creation of the family small group reflects the existence of the Trinity small group. Both are based on love, made of equals, and designed to live and function together as one. The family is designed to be a self-contained, replicating, life-long small group.

One defining characteristic of the family small group is its insistence on long-term commitment between the two founding members, the husband and wife. They begin a family small group when they make a covenant with one another at the time of their marriage, and they are expected to keep this covenant until their dying day. It is this strong bond of commitment within the family that is commonly known as the foundation

⁴³ Bilezikian, *Community 101*, 20.

of society. The Chinese culture, which is the background to NTCBC, recognizes this. An old Chinese proverb states, “If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation. If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.”⁴⁴

Small groups reflect the biblical example of the family community when they expect commitment from their members and a long-term desire to grow together. They also reflect the family’s tendency to multiply when they birth other small groups.

⁴⁴ Chinese Proverb, in “Quotes,” *Quotiki*, <http://www.quotiki.com/quote.aspx?id=15404> (accessed April 30, 2008).

APPENDIX N: THE POWER OF SMALL GROUPS FOR GROWTH: THE METHODISTS AND HOUSE CHURCHES IN CHINA

The Methodists

Church history helps us identify the valid, essential practices of our faith from the cultural-bound elements. In order for NTCBC to recognize that small groups are applicable to more than just our modern, ethnic Chinese context, it is informative to see the importance of small groups in the rise of Methodism, a non-Chinese movement that occurred in a previous century. Methodists were influential in the development of the churches in the Holiness Movement, including the Evangelical Missionary Churches, Salvation Army, Free Methodists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Nazarenes, and the fastest growing churches at the present time, the Pentecostals. All of these denominations are descendants of the Radical Reformation, as is NTCBC.

During a time in church history of decline and stagnation, the Methodist movement was used of God for revival in North America and Europe.⁴⁵ Small groups were an integral factor in the growth and development of Methodism. They addressed a particular need for community at that time, just as we have in today's postmodern culture. John Wesley, founder of the Methodists, developed a system of societies, classes, bands, and select societies which were essentially formalized small groups.

While remaining loyal to the Church, he went beyond its walls to reach the people who rarely attended services or participated in any aspect of its life. He went to the people whose lives were most directly affected by the changing economic and cultural reality of the time. The industrial revolution was transforming Britain

⁴⁵ Williston Walker, Richard A. Norris, David W. Lotz and Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), 596-606.

from an agrarian to an industrial society. Increasing numbers of people were moving from the land to the town and city to work in factories, mills, and mines. Many left behind family and friends in their search for work and means to support themselves and their families. For many of these folk who lived hard lives in grinding poverty, *the Methodist societies and class meetings became their support network and spiritual home*. [Emphasis mine] Wesley and the Methodists brought the good news of Christ and universal grace to the people neglected by the established Church.

Wesley has much to offer the postmodern church. The dawn of the twenty-first century has much in common with the eighteenth century industrial revolution. This is also a time of great social dislocation and rapid change. Wesley's discipleship system [small groups], if adapted to the needs of the age, can be just as effective today as it was two hundred years ago. This is true because, while the times have changed, the nature of God and of human beings and the Scripture way of salvation have not. Wesley's system emerged from those realities and eternal truth. This makes it just as applicable today and tomorrow as it was yesterday.⁴⁶

In this quotation, the author Steven Manskar recognizes that, although times have changed since the days of Wesley, fundamentals about God and humans have not changed. Small groups addressed a vital need for support and community (called "spiritual home" above) in Wesley's day, and that is also true today. Growth was a result, and this happened not just in North America, but around the world.

House Churches in China

The growth of the Church in China in the last five decades has been nothing short of phenomenal, and much of the growth has been attributed to the rapid multiplication of the millions of "house churches"—small groups of believers meeting in homes "underground" and not registered with the Communist government.

⁴⁶ Manskar, "Small Groups and Accountability."

Estimates of the total number of Christians in China today vary, but I believe a figure of between 80 million and 100 million Protestants to be realistic, in addition to at least 12 million Catholic believers meeting in both registered churches and illegal house church gatherings.... The growth of the church is spectacular and unparalleled in Christian history when it is considered that there were only 700,000 Protestants and three to four million Catholics in China at the time the Communists took power in 1949.⁴⁷

In his book *China: The Church's Long March*,⁴⁸ Adeney joyfully documents the strengths the house churches developed during their years of hardship under the Cultural Revolution. They show how ministry can flourish within small groups despite persecution and without outside influence or help. Adeney points out that the Chinese house churches learned to be indigenous; were rooted in family units; were stripped of nonessentials; emphasized the lordship of Christ; had confidence in the sovereignty of God; loved the word of God; were praying churches; were caring and sharing churches; depended on lay leadership; had been purified by suffering; and were zealous in evangelism. All these strengths developed in the Chinese small group house churches under persecution. The format of small groups facilitated this development and the tremendous numerical growth of the Church in China when large, institutional churches were legally forbidden by the government.

⁴⁷ Paul Hattaway, Brother Yun, Peter Xu Yongze, and Enoch Wang, *Back to Jerusalem* (Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2003), 13.

⁴⁸ David H. Adeney, *China: The Church's Long March* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1985), 146-165.

APPENDIX O: THE NEED FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

The social level of community is sometimes all that a fellowship attendee desires. We want to avoid the tragedy that Joseph Myers describes in the opening chapter of *The Search to Belong*.

When our pastor rose to make the announcement, I suspected we were in for it again. “We’re going to be a church *of* small groups,” he told us, like a child pleading for his parents to read from the well-worn book one more time. “A church *of* small groups instead of a church *with* small groups.”

My heart sank. Been there; done that.

I remembered attending a small group several years earlier....

By the third week I had had enough. I did not want to return to share my deepest thoughts. I did not want to give obvious answers to predictable questions from the published small group material. I did not want to play one more icebreaker game.

I was not getting closer to anyone. Instead, I was getting angry. This group was expecting more from me than I wanted to deliver. And this group was trying to deliver to me more than I wanted.

A church of small groups? Sounded like forced relational hell to me.⁴⁹

Although harsh, Myers’ words have the ring of authenticity, and mirror the thoughts of some people who attend NTCBC.⁵⁰ To these people, going to a large fellowship fulfills their social needs, and being part of a small group is more than they want at the moment. Myers himself is not against small groups, but only against forcing people into small groups and making them the only option in a church.

⁴⁹ Myers, *The Search to Belong*, 9-10.

⁵⁰ When the author shared Myer’s quote with several NTCBC members, their reaction was one of understanding and concurrence.

APPENDIX P: FOUR PILLARS OF ANY NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

According to NTCBC's faith tradition and interpretation of Scripture, we believe that Acts 2:42-47 contains a summary of the life of the early church⁵¹ and a basic description of the fourfold purpose of the Church. These have been called the four "pillars" of the church, and it is NTCBC's belief that everything we do as a church must somehow relate to one or more of these four pillars. They are how we define why we exist, and the status of these four pillars in our church is how we measure whether our church is healthy or not. Acts 2:42-47 states that the early church:

... devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In the passage above, it can be seen that worship was a large part of the early church. Worship is what NTCBC considers the first pillar of the church. By worship, we include praise, the sacraments, and prayer. "They devoted themselves to ...the breaking of bread and to prayer... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes...praising God" (Acts 2:42, 46a, 47). It is easy to see the worship aspects of praise and prayer in this text, but it may be more difficult to recognize the sacraments in this passage. NTCBC sees the "breaking of bread" in the

⁵¹ I. Howard Marshall, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 83.

passage to include, but not be exclusively limited to, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

As the *Interpreter's Bible* explains

We have mention of the “breaking of bread”, picked up in vs. 46 by the words “breaking bread in their homes.” The association of this in vs. 42 with “teaching” and “prayers” shows that it has a religious significance, and immediately following the reference to fellowship it appears as the peculiar symbol of that fellowship. For this same word *κοινωνία* is, of course, the word used of the “communion of the blood of Christ” and the “communion of the body of Christ” at the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:16).⁵²

Recognition of worship as part of NTCBC's four-fold pillars of a New Testament church is part of our ecclesiology. Small groups are not inconsistent with NTCBC's ecclesiology in this regard because they are encouraged to incorporate some aspect of worship in their meetings—either through prayer, the singing of songs, group contemplative prayer such as *lectio divina*, or other forms of worship together.⁵³

In addition to worship, NTCBC considers teaching and education to be the second pillar of the church. This aspect is seen in the Acts passage which states that “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching” (Acts 2:42). I. Howard Marshall, commenting on this passage, simply states that “according to the New Testament witness Christian gatherings were for instruction.”⁵⁴ Small groups adhere to this part of our ecclesiology by including Bible studies, guest speakers, workshops, book studies, and other forms of education in their meetings.

⁵² Theodore P. Ferris, *Acts-Romans*, vol. 9 of *Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1954) 51.

⁵³ Administering the sacraments of the Lord's Supper and baptism is limited in our church's polity to ordained pastors or deacons.

⁵⁴ Marshall, *Tyndale Commentary: Acts*, 85.

Thirdly, outreach is considered one of the pillars of the church. Acts 2:43-47

states:

Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need...enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

In this passage, several aspects of outreach to the community are described. The “wonders and miraculous signs” are reminiscent of “those words used to describe the mighty works of Jesus.”⁵⁵ In both cases, one reason for the miracles was to bring attention to the truths of the gospel and reach out to the lost around them. This is described in John 20:30-31, which states that “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Here the author of the gospel of John explains that the miracles recorded in his gospel are specifically included in order that the reader may be a believer.

Outreach was also present in the way the early church cared for one another and for the needy around them. While describing the early church in Acts 2, Marshall states that “the evangelistic activity of the church continued daily. As the Christians were seen and heard by the other people in Jerusalem, their activities formed an opportunity for witness.”⁵⁶ These activities included “the way in which the believers lived together and

⁵⁵ Marshall, *Tyndale Commentary: Acts*, 84.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 86.

practiced some kind of joint ownership of possessions. What this means is made clearer in verse 45 where it appears that people sold their possessions so that proceeds might be used to help the needy.”⁵⁷ It is no surprise that the early church enjoyed “the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47). Small groups can be consistent with this third pillar of outreach by reaching out to newcomers to join their group and doing acts of service to someone or group in their community.

The last pillar of a New Testament church, and probably the most pertinent and relevant to small groups, is community. Community is described in the Acts 2 passage when it states in verses 42, 44, and 46:

They devoted themselves ...to the fellowship... All the believers were together and had everything in common... Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

The early church moved from surface friendships into deeper community through spending time together both at the temple and in their homes. “The first impression we get, then, is that of a society whose members lived together and had everything in common.”⁵⁸ Defining community and the need for community was discussed in chapter 2 of this paper, and it was mentioned that addressing the need for deep community at the personal level is one main goal of small groups. This is entirely in line with our church’s ecclesiology and this fourth pillar of what we believe as the church’s mandate. It should

⁵⁷ Marshall, *Tyndale Commentary: Acts*, 84.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

be noted, though, that literally living together is not necessarily the goal. As Marshall points out while commenting on Acts 2:44, “We should not conclude that becoming a believer necessarily entailed living in a tight-knit Christian community.”⁵⁹

NTCBC’s “four-fold pillars of a church” are based on what we see as the general purposes of a church as described in the New Testament and demonstrated in particular in Acts 2:42-47. We believe these four pillars of worship, education, outreach, and community are central to who we are and why we exist. A small group ministry is consistent with these four pillars and, therefore, fits into our ecclesiology.

At NTCBC, all four pillars have been a part of our small group ministry, but the main reason we have had small groups at NTCBC in the past is to foster greater and deeper community. Worship is the focus of our Sunday morning worship services. Teaching and education is well developed in our Sunday school ministry, and formal outreach happens when the church is involved with overseas missions, local evangelism or social concerns. Community is fostered in the large fellowship groups at the social level, but it is in the small groups where deeper community and caring are supposed to occur.

⁵⁹ Marshall, *Tyndale Commentary: Acts*, 84.

APPENDIX Q: SAMPLE SMALL GROUP EVALUATION⁶⁰

The goal of small groups at NTCBC is to encourage each member to meet personally with God. We want to encourage members to practice the time-honoured spiritual discipline of “holy reading” of Scriptures called *lectio divina* and to grow to “love more like Jesus and be more like Jesus.”

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love...My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” (John 15:9, 12).

“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21b)

Use the following scale to evaluate your small group to determine its effectiveness in the following areas:

1=Serious Concern 2=Needs Improvement 3=Good 4=Very Good 5=Excellent

Evaluating our Main Concerns in the Small Group

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 1. <i>Meeting with God</i> – practicing <i>lectio divina</i> | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. <i>Loving like Jesus</i> – an atmosphere of love in the small group | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. <i>Living like Jesus</i> – encouraging members to holiness | 1 2 3 4 5 |

Evaluating the Four Pillars in the Small Group *Reference: Acts 2:42-47*

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 4. <i>Community</i> - building supportive, mutually accountable relationships | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. <i>Worship</i> -praising God for who He is and what He has done | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. <i>Worship</i> -listening to and sharing intimately with God; interceding for | 1 2 3 4 5 |

⁶⁰ Some questions from Robert E. Logan and Thomas T. Clegg, from class notes, “Releasing Your Church’s Potential,” Fuller Theological Seminary, June 5-9, 2000, 7-29.

others and God's work in the world

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 7. <i>Education</i> - learning and applying God's Word | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. <i>Education</i> -designated leaders giving vision and direction | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. <i>Outreach</i> -using spiritual gifts and loving each other in practical ways to meet needs | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. <i>Outreach</i> -impacting our society and sharing the good news so that people become Christ's disciples | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. <i>Outreach</i> -people being added to our numbers | 1 2 3 4 5 |

General Evaluation

1. What are the primary strengths of this group?
2. How could the group improve?
3. What additional training and/or resources are needed?

APPENDIX R: SAMPLE VHS MEETING AGENDA

Before meeting	Informal chit-chat over food in home
Half hour	<p><i>Vision</i></p> <p>(Worship, prayer, lectio divina, singing, encouragement, motivation, hope, and reaffirmation.)</p>
One hour	<p><i>Huddle</i></p> <p>(Small group leaders report on recent activities in their groups, celebrate successes, identify problems, plan for the future, propose solutions to other groups' problems, hold each other accountable to stated goals, and exhort one another.)</p>
Half hour	<p><i>Skill</i></p> <p>(Formalized teaching and training on one or more particular aspects of being a small group leader by the coach.) Emphasis should be given to the three main areas modeled by our Triune God that relate to the three presenting problems of this study:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (1) The Deep Community within the Godhead (2) Mutual Pastoral Care within the Godhead (3) Incarnational Outreach

APPENDIX S: SAMPLE SMALL GROUP LEADER EVALUATION⁶¹

Use the following scale to evaluate your small group leader to determine his or her effectiveness in the following areas:

Focus	weak	strong
1. Calling to group leadership confirmed	1	2 3 4 5
2. Biblical relationships and priorities established	1	2 3 4 5
3. Personal and spiritual disciplines practiced	1	2 3 4 5
4. Time appropriately managed (goal-setting)	1	2 3 4 5
5. Financial stewardship practiced (lifestyle management, giving)	1	2 3 4 5
Shepherd		
1. Actively listen and affirm	1	2 3 4 5
2. Encourage and exhort with love	1	2 3 4 5
3. Make personal visits outside the group	1	2 3 4 5
4. Pray for individual needs	1	2 3 4 5
5. Facilitate care-giving within the group	1	2 3 4 5
Edify		
1. Plan the agenda for the meeting	1	2 3 4 5
2. Get the group started (icebreakers, sharing questions)	1	2 3 4 5
3. Lead people in prayer and worship	1	2 3 4 5
4. Facilitate biblical understanding and obedience	1	2 3 4 5
5. Use questions effectively	1	2 3 4 5

⁶¹ Logan and Clegg, class notes, "Releasing Your Church's Potential," 7-30.

6. Develop group cohesiveness and healthy group dynamics 1 2 3 4 5

7. Help people discover their passion and use their gifts 1 2 3 4 5

Disciple

1. Facilitate discipling relationships and character development 1 2 3 4 5

2. Build relationships with the unchurched and introduce them 1 2 3 4 5

3. Cast vision for reaching out and including pre-Christians 1 2 3 4 5

4. Mobilize group members to make disciples 1 2 3 4 5

5. Develop servanthood through group outreach and service projects 1 2 3 4 5

Apprentice

1. Spot and recruit apprentices 1 2 3 4 5

2. Model group leadership 1 2 3 4 5

3. Share group leadership 1 2 3 4 5

4. Observe and debrief 1 2 3 4 5

5. Train in ministry skills 1 2 3 4 5

6. Form people into clusters for multiplication 1 2 3 4 5

7. Release and commission teams for group planting 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX T: THE NEED TO BE ORGANIC IN MINISTRY

Joseph Myers discusses the concept of being organic in ministry in-depth in his book *Organic Community*. In that book, he points out that

Shaping an environment where people naturally connect is more like creating art than manufacturing a product. It marks a major shift: from programming community (i.e. following a *master plan*) to using principles of *organic order* to develop an environment where community can emerge.⁶²

Here Myers explains that developing community in a church does not necessarily involve programming or legislating every last detail. Instead, it involves “shaping an environment” in which people naturally connect. A large part of shaping this type of environment involves giving permission to people to form new small groups by themselves, rather than deciding beforehand how the small groups will form.

Myers is not against planning, but making a “master plan” that determines what forms all the small groups will take. In his words,

By “master plan,” I mean a specific kind of plan. I’m not suggesting we throw out plans or planning, just *master planning*. Master plans describe a specific color and numbering system and then instruct you to paint inside the lines. Master plans intend to control the future. Master plans provide specific answers to future questions that have not yet been asked—that may *never* be asked. A master plan does not allow for flexibility, uncertainty, or serendipity — ingredients of the “aha” moment.⁶³

⁶² Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2007), 26-27.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 28.

APPENDIX U: VARIOUS TYPES OF SMALL GROUPS

Affinity Groups—Like Attracting Like

In accordance with the Homogeneous Unit Principle, as described in Appendix A, it is natural that people would want to gather in small groups with people similar to themselves. For example, young adults like to gather with other young adults, and seniors like to gather with other seniors. This gathering of similar people, and especially those similar in age or life-stage, is called an “affinity group.”

As with all the other groups listed in this appendix, when people form an affinity group, it does not mean that others are never welcome, nor does it mean that a group will always stay the same way. Rather it may mean, for example, that a group of young adults may want to form a small group, and, as they grow older together, their group may transition into a married group. The main characteristic of affinity groups is that they originally form because of a common characteristic and their members have a mutual desire to grow together in their Christian walk. As the group grows closer together over a long period of time they themselves will decide what form the group will evolve into.

Neighbourhood Groups—Ministering to Those Nearby

Neighbourhood groups form by location. When a group of people who live near to each other all want to join a small group, they can form into a neighbourhood group. This group has the advantage that people live close by each other, so travel time and inconvenience is kept to a minimum.

Neighbourhood groups often consist of several family units. This type of group is also excellently positioned to make a difference in its geographic area, either through participation of its members in a local service ministry or by inviting other neighbours to the regular meetings. Newcomers are often much more willing to join a group when they already know the people in the group and are of the same basic socio-economic level and demographic status.

Seeker Groups—A Common Journey for Truth

In a seeker small group, most members are those either new to the faith or investigating Christianity. Led by a mature Christian who is gifted in evangelism, along with several other Christian helpers, this group is focused on discussing answers to spiritual questions, learning the basics of the gospel, and encouraging its member to cross the line of faith. Seeker groups have the luxury of going slowly and simply through the Bible in their teaching and studies because all members of the group recognize that they are there to help members learn the basics of Christianity. An excellent resource for this type of group is Gary Poole's *Seeker Small Groups*.⁶⁴

In his book, Poole explains how to launch seeker small groups, attract seekers to these groups, and lead discussions. He gives plenty of sample lessons and discussion topics, as well as answers to some typical questions asked by seekers. Using his book as a guide, most people can follow his suggestions and form a seeker group easily. This

⁶⁴ Gray Johnson Poole, *Seeker Small Groups: Engaging Spiritual Seekers in Life-changing Discussions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003).

type of group will directly address one goal of NTCBC's small group ministry of encouraging outreach.

Service Groups—Fellowship in the Trenches

Service groups consist of people with a common focus on helping others in some way. Most ministry teams at NTCBC can be formed into a service group, such as the worship teams, usher teams, mission teams, counselors, and Sunday school teachers. The Hybrid Model recognizes that ministry in a church is seldom a solitary affair. As Roberta Hestenes states in the title of her book, the goal is to turn committees into communities.⁶⁵ When this happens people serve better together, the relational aspect of service is acknowledged, and more gets accomplished in the long run.

Since there are already many ministry teams at NTCBC, the plan is to encourage the existing leaders of ministry teams to consider their team as a service group. This will be done through personal conversations and wide distribution of Hestenes' book. By encouraging a team to consider themselves as a small group rather than as separate individuals who happen to serve together, the goal of fostering deeper community among NTCBC's members will be enhanced. In addition, as the group members care for one another, pastoral care will be increased and the historical doctrine of the priesthood of all believers will be emphasized. In a service group, it is important to affirm the value, worth, and contribution of each member of a team.

⁶⁵ Roberta Hestenes, *Turning Committees into Communities* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991).

Twelve Step (Self-Help) Groups—A Healing Community

Some groups are formed by a common need. They may be called recovery groups, grief support groups, post-abortion groups, etc. At NTCBC, these self-help groups can be categorized under the general term of “Twelve Step” groups, the name coming from the classical twelve steps first described by Alcoholics Anonymous and now used by many other self-help groups.⁶⁶ These groups have proven to be a tremendous help to their members and effective in addressing major needs, as evidenced by the great proliferation of these groups in society. They are characterized by the expectation of members to be open, honest, and transparent with one another and to support one another in times of weakness and need.

Twelve Step groups address all three of the needs of NTCBC by fostering deeper community within members of the church who attend these groups, encouraging outreach by being open to members of the outside community who need help, and enhancing pastoral care through trained small group leaders. Due to the high needs of those who normally attend these types of groups, it is important for leaders in Twelve Step groups to be well trained to address the needs of their group members. Counseling courses such as those found in a seminary or through the Stephen Ministries is highly recommended.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Alcoholics Anonymous, “Twelve Steps,” <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/steps.html> (accessed May 13, 2008).

⁶⁷ For more information about Stephen Ministries refer to <http://www.stephenministries.org/>.

Life Transformation Groups—Disciplined Accountability

Life Transformation Groups (LTGs) are a specific type of same-gender accountability group designed by Neil Cole in his book *Cultivating a Life for God*.⁶⁸ The distinctives of this group includes a weekly meeting of about one hour's duration involving mutual confession of sin, reading of Scripture in large portions in community, and targeting prayer for a few souls. A detailed description of the LTG concept is found in Appendix W. This sample points out that LTGs are

a simple way to release the most essential elements of a vital spiritual walk to people who need Jesus to change their lives from the inside out. It is a grassroots tool for growth that encourages and supports people to follow Christ by fueling internal motivation rather than applying external pressures and ploys. This tool empowers the common Christian to accomplish the uncommon work of reproducing spiritual disciples who can in turn reproduce others.⁶⁹

The author introduced the concept of LTGs at his former church about eight years ago. Some of the original groups are still continuing today and have birthed several other groups.

⁶⁸ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999).

⁶⁹ Appendix W.

	Affinity Groups	Neighbourhood Groups	Service Groups	Seeker Groups	12 Step Groups
Members	Believers seeking a structured discipleship process	Believers and non-believers	Believers and non-believers	Predominantly non-believers	Believers and non-believers
Curriculum (suggestion only)	“Walking with God” series (by Willow Creek)	Leaders work with coaches to choose curriculum	Leaders work with coaches to choose curriculum	Determined by questions of members	Determined by ministry director
Open Chair (how to invite newcomers)	Used at breaks in curriculum	Used regularly to add members	Used regularly to add members	Always has an open chair	Used primarily to form new groups
Emphasis	Develop spiritual disciplines, memorize Scripture, disciple others	Build community, invite new members	Complete the task, invite new members	Lead people to Christ, disciple new converts	To support members as they work through personal difficulties
Multiplication	Apprentice leads new disciple-making group	Groups grow and birth after 24-36 meetings	Groups grow and birth at variable rates depending on the ministry	Apprentice leads new seeker group or new believers group	Apprentices are trained to form new groups
Duration (suggestion only)	18-24 months	Continue to grow and birth	Continue to grow and birth	Average length is about one year	Varies according to personal needs and purpose of group

⁷⁰ Based on chart from Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 28.

APPENDIX W: SAMPLE INTRODUCTION TO LTGS⁷¹**What is a life transformation group?**

A Life Transformation Group (LTG) is a simple way to release the most essential elements of a vital spiritual walk to people who need Jesus to change their lives from the inside out. It is a grassroots tool for growth that encourages and supports people to follow Christ by fueling internal motivation rather than applying external pressures and ploys. This tool empowers the common Christian to accomplish the uncommon work of reproducing spiritual disciples who can in turn reproduce others.

Here is a simple overview of what an LTG is:

- LTGs meet once a week for approximately one hour.
- LTGs are groups of two or three (the addition of a fourth person is the beginning of the second group and multiplication is imminent.)
- The groups are non co-ed, but gender specific.
- There is no curriculum, workbook, or training involved.
- There is no leader needed in the group.
- Only three tasks are to be accomplished in a LTG:
 - 1 **Sin** is confessed in mutual accountability.
 - 2 **Scripture** is read repetitively in context and in community.
 - 3 **Souls** are prayed for strategically, specifically, and continuously.

The LTG is simple, yet powerful. It incorporates the values of community, internal life transformation, and reproduction of disciples.

Who should be in an LTG?

There are only two suggested qualifications for starting or joining an LTG:

1. A desperate need for Christ (Luke 5:29-32).
2. Faithfulness in the process itself (2 Tim 2:2).

These two criteria balance one another to keep the group on track both with healing for hurting people and health for helping people. To compromise either of these principles will slow down or derail the effectiveness of the group.

⁷¹ Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*.

Making & Multiplying Growing Disciples

An LTG is made up of two or three people, all of the same gender, who meet weekly for personal accountability for their spiritual growth and development. It is recommended that a group not grow past three but rather multiply into two groups of two once the fourth participant has proven faithful to the process.

The strength of two or three

Here are several Biblical reasons why a smaller unit of two or three is better than a larger group when it comes to making and multiplying disciples.

1. COMMUNITY (Eccl 4:9-12): life change does not occur in a vacuum; it happens in relationships with others. From the beginning God has said that it is not good to be alone. We need each other for strengthening and support (Prov 27:17).
2. ACCOUNTABILITY (1 Tim 5:19): few things would get done in life without some degree of accountability. The New Testament lists at least twenty-eight “one another” commands. There’s no doubt we need one another to live the life Christ intends for us.
3. CONFIDENTIALITY (Matt 18:15-17): it is easier to maintain confidentiality in a group of only two or three rather than a group of ten to twelve. The Lord specifically designated that two or three is the best for the confession of sin.
4. FLEXIBILITY (Matt 18:20): it is much easier to coordinate the calendars of only two or three rather than a typical small group of fifteen. An LTG can meet anywhere!
5. REPRODUCIBILITY (2 Tim 2:2): it is easier to reproduce a smaller and simpler group than a larger and more complex entity. Perhaps that is why the Lord commanded us to make more disciples rather than cell groups or churches (Matt 28:18-20)
Transformed disciples in community is the very base unit for the kingdom of God.

There are only three tasks to be accomplished in an LTG. They are...

1. SIN IS CONFESSED IN MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Christians need one another (Heb 10:24-25). There is strength in relationships that are built around supporting one another. The first thing the LTG does together is ask each other the Character Conversations Questions. The meetings start here because it is easy to lose time talking about other things. It is also helpful to begin with the confession of sin which tends to sanctify the rest of the meeting. The questions are straightforward. Each person takes turns answering the same questions. The group must be a safe place to be honest in. The confession of sin prepares the soil of people’s hearts for the word of God being read each week.

2. SCRIPTURE IS READ REPETITIVELY, IN CONTEXT, AND IN COMMUNITY

The power of this system is in the unleashing of God's word in the lives of people. Jesus made it clear that the word of God is the seed of new life (Luke 8:11, 15). To expect lives to change and bear fruit without first planting the seed is foolish and will end in disappointment.

Each group decides on a book of the Bible that they will agree to read that week. The goal is to create an internal appetite for the rich word of God, so a larger volume of Scripture is desired. It is recommended that you strive to have 25 to 30 chapters of reading each week as a goal. Sample reading exercises would be as follows... If the group selects a smaller book such as Ephesians or Jonah the group should read it five times in a week. A moderate sized book, such as Romans or 1 Corinthians can be read twice in a week. A more lengthy book, such as Acts or Proverbs can be read once in its entirety in a week.

When the group comes together the next week they ask one another if the reading was completed. If any one person was unable to finish the reading that week then the whole group does the same reading again for the next week. This is not a bad thing. Reading entire books in repetition, in context, and in community will yield rich rewards!

This is one good reason to challenge the participants with a larger volume of reading, which will likely not be completed each and every week. Thirty chapters tend to take about four weeks for a typical group to finish reading together at the same time and move on to another. Once all complete the reading in the same week they then choose the next book to read together. A group can decide together what the next book will be or alternate who chooses the book each time.

3. SOULS ARE PRAYED FOR SPECIFICALLY AND REGULARLY

The LTG card, which functions as a Bible bookmark, has the Character Conversation Questions printed on one side and the Strategic Prayer Focus printed on the other. Each member of the LTG is to identify two or three people whom the Lord lays on their hearts that need Jesus. The names of these people are then written down on the cards of every member of the group. Each person in the group prays throughout the week for those on the list. It is best to choose one name from the list each day and pray for them. There is a strategic prayer guide included to assist in the process. Those who begin to seek Christ become perfect candidates for the next LTG, and multiplication of the group can occur naturally and spontaneously, and in a way that the whole group can rejoice in together.

CHARACTER CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

These questions are to be asked of one another in a weekly meeting of accountability (Proverbs 27:17). They are to stimulate conversations of character and confession of sin in a safe environment, which values honesty, vulnerability, confidentiality, and grace.

1. Have you been a testimony this week to the greatness of Jesus Christ with both your words and actions?
2. Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material or allowed your mind to entertain inappropriate sexual thoughts about another this week?
3. Have you lacked integrity in your financial dealings or coveted something that does not belong to you?
4. Have you been honoring, understanding, and generous in your important relationships this week?
5. Have you damaged another person by your words, either behind their back or face-to-face?
6. Have you given in to an addictive behavior this past week? Explain.
7. Have you continued to remain angry toward another?
8. Have you secretly wished for another's misfortune?
9. _____
(Your personalized accountability question)
10. Did you finish the reading and hear from God?
What are you going to do about it?
11. Have you been completely honest with me?

APPENDIX X: OUTLINE OF TEACHING SESSION ON THE HYBRID MODEL

- Our common problem: the need to meet with God

Lectio divina

- Small Groups – a place to meet God for transformation

A place for transformation

A place for mutual pastoral care

A place for incarnational outreach and to gradually meet Jesus

A place for mutual accountability

- The Hybrid Model – a church *with* small groups and *of* small groups

Strengthening small groups within fellowships

Regular feedback and evaluation

Leadership renewal and support

Encouraging the growth of new groups

Introducing new types of groups

- Questions?

APPENDIX Y: NCD SURVEY QUESTIONS RELATED TO
NTCBC SMALL GROUP MINISTRY GOALS⁷²

Note that the statements followed by (neg.) denote negative statements where a low score from the thirty respondents is desired.

Fostering Deeper Community among Members

I enjoy the benefits of working on a team in our church.

I know that other church members pray for me regularly.

I often tell other Christians when I have experienced something from God.

Times of prayer are an inspiring experience for me.

My small group helps me with the challenges of my life.

In my small group we spend lots of time on things which are irrelevant to me. (neg.)

I am a member of a group in our church where it is possible to talk about personal problems.

I am a member of a group in our church where others will pray with me if I need it.

I am a member of a small group in which I feel at home.

In my small group we trust each other.

I find it easy to tell other Christians about my feelings.

In our church it is possible to talk with other people about personal problems.

There is a lot of joy and laughter in our church.

The atmosphere of our church is strongly influenced by praise and compliments.

I can rely upon my friends at church.

I know of people in our church with bitterness toward others. (neg.)

⁷² Christian Schwarz, *Natural Church Development Survey* (NCD International).

When someone in our church does a good job, I tell them.

I share with various people in our church about my spiritual journey.

If I have a disagreement with a member of our church, I will go to them in order to resolve it.

Enhancing Mutual Pastoral Care

Our pastors have too much work to do. (neg.)

The leaders of our church prefer to do the work themselves rather than collaborate with others. (neg.)

The leaders of our church concentrate on the tasks for which they are gifted.

Our leaders are spiritual examples to me.

The volunteers of our church are trained frequently.

The small group and ministry leaders in our church each mentor at least one other person.

The leaders of our small groups are trained for their tasks.

Our leaders show concern for the personal problems of those in ministry.

Our leaders regularly praise and acknowledge volunteers.

The leaders of our church support individual Christians in their evangelistic endeavors.

Our leaders are clearly concerned for people who do not know Jesus Christ.

Our church provides practical help for new Christians to grow in their faith.

I know that someone in our church will hold me accountable for meeting the commitments I make.

Encouraging Growth through Outreach

Our worship service attracts unchurched visitors.

In the groups I belong to it is easy for newcomers to be integrated.

Our small groups actively seek to multiply themselves.

We encourage new Christians in our church to get involved in evangelism immediately.

The evangelistic activities of our church are relevant for my friends and family who do not yet know Jesus Christ.

I pray for my friends, colleagues and relatives who do not yet know Jesus Christ, that they will come to faith.

There is a lot of creativity in the evangelistic activities of our church.

Our church tries to help those in need (food, clothing, education, counsel, etc.)

New Christians find friends in our church quickly.

I know of a number of individuals in our church who have the gift of evangelism.

I try to deepen my relationships with people who do not yet know Jesus Christ.

When new people come to church events, we approach them openly and lovingly.

APPENDIX Z: BIBLICAL REFERENCES FOR THE ONENESS AND
COMMUNITY OF THE TRINITY

One in Nature			
Attributes of God	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Deity	Rev 21:3-7	John 1:1	Acts 5:3-4
Self-existence	Ex 3:14-15	John 8:58	Gen 1:2
Eternality	Ps 90:2	John 17:5	Heb 9:14
Omniscience (all knowing)	Jer 17:10	Matt 9:4	1 Cor 2:11 Is 40:13
Omnipresence (everywhere)	Jer 23:24	Matt 28:20	Ps 139:7
Omnipotence (all powerful)	Ps 62:11	Heb 1:3	Job 33:4 Ps 104:30
Goodness	Rom 2:4	Eph 5:25	Neh 9:20
Holiness	Lev 11:44	Acts 3:14	John 14:26
Truthfulness	John 7:28	Rev 3:7	1 John 5:6

One in Work			
The Works of God	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Creation	Ps 102:25	Col 1:16	Gen 1:2
Inspiration	2 Tim 3:16	1 Pet 1:10-11	2 Pet 1:21
Birth of Christ	Gal 4:4	Heb 10:5	Luke 1:35
Salvation	John 1:13	John 1:12	John 3:5-8
Indwell Believers	Eph 4:6	Col 1:27	1 Cor 6:19
Protect Believers	John 10:29	John 10:28	Eph 4:30
Help for Witnessing	2 Cor 3:5-6	1 Tim 1:12	Acts 9:17-22

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