Small Groups for God’s Mission: A Strategy for Adding a Neighborhood Outreach Element to Home Groups at Christian Church in the South Bay

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A STRATEGY FOR ADDING A NEIGHBORHOOD OUTREACH ELEMENT TO HOME GROUPS

Written by

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ABSTRACT

Small Groups for God’s Mission: A Strategy for Adding a Neighborhood Outreach Element to Home Groups
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The purpose of this study was to explore a strategy of small groups for God’s mission by incorporating elements of spiritual discipline that are essential to discipleship into existing Bible study groups. Spiritual disciplines such as solitude, silence, prayer, and pray-reading the Bible could help each member draw closer to God, where they may experience divine love while promoting both personal and group transformation for the readiness to participate in God’s mission. The thesis was examined and tested in the ministry setting at Christian Church in South Bay, California.

This study, which was conducted through theological reflection and examination concerning missional community in the Bible, requires a small group ministry in the life-together setting. In addition, the focus of spiritual disciplines in this setting leads to personal spiritual growth and group transformation for the preparation of joining God’s actions. Teachings regarding spiritual disciplines and small Christian communities in the early church were conducted through Sunday sermons. A pilot group was selected from the existing Bible study groups to closely explore the thesis by following the book Practicing the Way of Jesus by Mark Scandrette where experiments in identity as God’s beloved children and a life-together Christian community are outlined. Specifically, a survey was used as an assessment tool to measure readiness for joining God’s mission.

This study demonstrates that the development of a life-together small community through the practice of spiritual disciplines did increase the group readiness for joining God’s mission in the neighborhood. As the findings are from this pilot program, further exploration and practice with more test groups is required for a stronger conclusion. Therefore, it is recommended to apply the same approach of this project to more small groups in the church for further study.

Content Reader: Dr. Peter Hintzoglou

Word Count: 288
To my parents,
I-Cheng and Juping Wen,
who always encourage me to do things that please God
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GLOSSARY

CCSB - Christian Church in the South Bay located in Silicon Valley, the southern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, California.

Emerging churches - Christian communities focus on practicing the way of Jesus in the postmodern era.

First culture - The culture of a person’s parents that he or she first experiences in the family.

GenX - Generation X, those who were born from 1961 to 1977 after Baby Boomers.

Gospel programs - Church activities or events designed for gospel seekers and held in the church.

Little Flock - A Christian movement in China founded by Watchman Nee in the 1920s.

Missio Dei - A Latin term that means “the mission of God.”

Mutuality - A practice of mutual edification or exhortation in a Christian church, community or fellowship.

The Plymouth Brethren - A conservative and nonconformist evangelical Christian movement that dates to the early 1800s in England. John Nelson Darby was one of the early influential figures.

Post-Christendom - The culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses its coherence within a society.¹

Second culture - The culture in which a person’s family currently resides. It usually has little overlap with the first culture.

The Valley - Silicon Valley, in the southern part of the San Francisco Bay Area.

Third culture - The culture that emerges from a combination of the first and second cultures.

¹ Stuart Murray, Post-Christendom (Crownhill, UK: Paternoster, 2014), 19.
PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Christian Church in the South Bay (CCSB) is an independent nondenominational church located in Silicon Valley, the southern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, California. This area is one of the most important technology centers in the nation, where many high-tech companies as well as start-up firms have headquarters. CCSB is a very unique church in terms of its background, culture, and tradition compared with many other American churches in Silicon Valley.

The church is mainly formed by first-generation Chinese immigrants and their children. Most of its members came from Taiwan, Hong Kong, mainland China, and other countries in Southeast Asia such as Malaysia and the Philippines. Many church members hold graduate degrees in engineering, computer science, or other business-related fields. They are employees in local high-tech companies or investment firms in the Valley. CCSB is a typical immigrant church in the area, where Mandarin Chinese is the primary language spoken.

High-tech industries, high-paying technology jobs, and an influx of high-tech immigrant workers continue to make the Valley one of the most prosperous areas in the United States. The impact of long working hours with the stress of high-tech jobs compounded by the high cost of living has diminished the sense of identity as a Christian and missional community at CCSB. Gospel programs in the church have replaced personal evangelism in the neighborhood. Gaining biblical knowledge from Bible studies is attractive to many, but church members often lack the actual practice what they learn.

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Members at CCSB hesitate to share Christianity with their neighbors. This project intends to incorporate spiritual and discipleship training into small groups at CCSB for facilitating spiritual growth and group readiness for God’s mission.

The Thesis of the Project

The purpose of this doctoral project is to develop a small group ministry by integrating discipleship training with spiritual discipline elements into Bible study groups for neighborhood outreach. For this pilot project, small groups will be created as a home-based communities which members are required to attend each week. Spiritual disciplines practiced within a small group will facilitate personal spiritual growth and group transformation while building up a life-together community for God’s mission in the neighborhood.²

Team members are invited to discover and experience their identity as God’s beloved children, disciples of Jesus, and a life-together missional community. Additionally, spiritual practices and exercises addressed in the book Practicing the Way of Jesus by Mark Scandrette will be used for members to experience both personal and group transformation.³ Group agreements and commitments will be created for members to follow in the weekly meetings. Group leaders are responsible for the meeting schedules, locations, agenda, and group practices.

The target audience of this pilot project is church members of CCSB who currently participate in Bible study groups. In fact, one of the Bible study groups in

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² Mark Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), 70-138.

³ Ibid., 84-138.
particular may be identified as the immediate target audience in this project. The practices will take place in the homes of church members who host the Bible study group meetings each week. A classroom facility with a whiteboard and other teaching equipment is used for special practices or trainings.

**The Importance of the Topic**

This project addresses the importance of putting God’s word into practice. For many Christians, having a balanced Christian life is always a challenge as they study the Bible but lack consistent spiritual practices in their daily lives.\(^4\) This has been a constant concern among the brothers and sisters at CCSB. The members at church understand that knowledge is power, especially those that have received higher education. To gain knowledge from the Bible, therefore, becomes a very natural thing for them to pursue in the church. Thus, church leaders pay a lot of attention to the content of weekly sermons, Sunday school lessons, and Bible studies as these are important for members to learn the Bible.

Christians need to apply the Bible to their daily lives so that they can testify to the power of God’s word and experience his love, grace, and mercy.\(^5\) The church has to educate its members to be attentive to their personal lives and make sure their deeds truly conform to what they have learned in the Bible. Many CCSB members desire to put God’s word into practice, but they are unable to carry it out. As Jesus said, “the spirit is


willing, but the body is weak” (Mt 26:41). This project tries to overcome this obstacle by focusing on the practice of spiritual disciplines and God’s word together in a small group environment. Through the group practices, every member should be able to draw near to God in their personal lives as well as in the life of the community (Jas 4:8). The goal is for each participant to have power and courage to practice God’s word at home, in the workplace, community, and church.

The lack of spiritual growth in the congregation concerns the leadership team at CCSB. Church leaders realize that each member’s spiritual growth is one of the key factors that contribute to church health. Although church membership numbers may or may not reflect a healthy church, many churches including CCSB are nevertheless concerned about membership. Counting numbers in the church is easy, but it is hard to measure the spiritual growth of each individual. Furthermore, it is crucial for church leaders to lead and stimulate church members to grow spiritually. This is one of the critical tasks that CCSB leaders need to address quickly.

To every Christian, spiritual growth is a repetitive process of learning and practicing God’s word throughout a lifetime. It is also a daily practice of meditating and reflecting God’s love through his word in order for every believer to draw near to him. This requires time and effort in order to build a good relationship with God and follow him closely day by day. Therefore, it is the church’s responsibility to provide the necessary training through spiritual disciplines so that members can practice their faith in

6 All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version Bible, unless otherwise noted.


8 Howard, The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality, 205.
their everyday lives. In this project, participants have the opportunities to learn and practice spiritual disciplines together in a life-together small group environment.

**Reasons for the Interest in the Topic**

To promote an unbiased evangelism and social involvement at CCSB is a compelling reason for doing this project. Church leaders must decide how to allot efforts, time, and money between acts of social justice and evangelism. On the surface, social justice and evangelism are completely different things as one is spiritual and the former is worldly. However, according to Scripture, they are inseparable. Jesus did many things related to social justice such as feeding the hungry, healing the sick, and helping the poor. Jesus not only conducted these actions to show his mercy and love to the people, but also commanded his followers to do the same (Mt 19:21). There is always a debate in the church on the degree of involvement with social justice issues.

Traditionally at CCSB, the church makes evangelism a higher priority than social justice or community work. This perspective stems from the value placed on the eternal solution of saving human souls in Scripture, and in the process, ignoring any hope or improvement for this fallen world. As such, there is no need for any involvement to solve human issues in a society or non-church community. Cultural differences also create considerable barriers for an immigrant church to be integrated into Western society. However, no matter what the reason may be, following the teaching of Jesus to love neighbors is important to the spiritual fulfillment in both personal and communal lives (Mt 22:39).

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Furthermore, CCSB is a local church which should be part of the community. As a neighborhood church, members have the responsibility to help out their neighbors and get involved with community activities. The purpose of this project is to prepare small group members to get more involved with activities in the community. If the church does not do any good to its community as a testimony of God’s love, all its work of evangelism has no substance or foundation. On the contrary, if the church shows its love and caring to neighbors in the community, people may be attracted by the real Christian life shared by church members. This is the most impactful way to do evangelism through the life sharing with the neighbors in the community.

**An Overview of the Project Content**

The first part of this project starts with the examination on the historical context of CCSB, its ministry challenge, and a possible resolution. Specific attention is paid to the challenges and difficulties resulting from the community outreach gospel programs held in the church. This section then identifies the need for a small group ministry at CCSB by applying a missional outreach element to home groups for engaging the neighbors in the community.

The second part involves the review of relevant literature in building up small community groups. Attention is given to the theological study of spiritual disciplines for personal transformation and the purpose of a life-together community. It provides the theological analysis on both strengths and weaknesses from current church practices in terms of the new ministry initiative. Lastly, a theology of small groups for God’s mission is presented in support of this new ministry initiative.
The last part of this project presents the goals and plans of creating a pilot program for the formation of small community groups. The session includes the theological implications of the home-based community group formation and the content of the strategy on how to achieve the goals of the new ministry initiative. The criteria for selecting good leaders are identified. Leadership development and training is also described in this section. Finally, the implementation process addresses the project timeline, resources, logistics, evaluation, and assessment plan.
CHAPTER 1
MINISTRY CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

CCSB originated from a Christian assembly in the late 1980s. The church grew significantly in its first few years due to the influx of many Chinese immigrants and their families drawn by high-tech job opportunities. A fairly large number of members were deeply influenced by their local church. Values and vision of the church that are now widely practiced include biblical authority and teaching, worship-centered celebration of the Lord’s table, and mutual edification in the gatherings of all members.

Gospel programs have been developed and implemented to aid in church growth since 2009 after the separation from its original church body. Challenges emerged with the model of gospel meetings and other related activities held in church. The main challenge today is the difficulty of keeping seekers to stay in the church after gospel programs. Another challenge is the difficulty of cultivating deeper relationship with gospel seekers through life sharing. The project hopes to apply spiritual and discipleship training as a neighborhood outreach element to home-based Bible study groups in order to overcome these challenges.
History of Christian Church in the South Bay

CCSB was mainly formed by first-generation Chinese immigrants and their children. They came from different places in Asia, such as Taiwan, China, and other countries in Southeast Asia. Most of them came to the United States for graduate studies. They found jobs and then settled in Silicon Valley. The congregation of CCSB identifies with the following home countries: 48 percent from Taiwan, 28 percent from mainland China, 11 percent from Southeast Asia, and 3 percent from other locations. CCSB is not a multi-ethnic Christian community as the majority of the church members are of Chinese descent. Moreover, they are not a multicultural congregation despite coming from different social and political systems according to their home countries. Mandarin and English are the languages used in church meetings for Chinese and English-speaking congregations respectively.

An Immigrant Christian Community

Throughout American history over the last few hundred years, America has been a nation of immigrants. In various stages of the nation’s history, immigrants as groups or individuals played important roles in American society. People from China and Japan were the earliest Asian immigrant groups that arrived in America in substantial numbers. Chinese immigrants began to come to the Unites States in the early 1800s. A ban on

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1 Shao Wen, Church Rising: A New Season for the Church (TM730 Church Rising, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 5.


3 Ibid., 366.
Chinese immigration was passed when Congress approved the Chinese Exclusion Act on May 6, 1882.⁴

The Immigration and Naturalization Act was approved in 1965 and put an end to a decades-long policy of racial discrimination toward Chinese immigration to the United States.⁵ This was a turning point for Asian immigrants as they were then allowed to obtain U.S. citizenship in order to get better education and jobs. They were also allowed to freely move about the country which made a significant economic, cultural, and demographic impact in many American urban and suburban areas.⁶ Chinese immigrants used to live together in Chinatowns of many major cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago in order to support each other. Later they started moving out to other urban areas in the nation such as Silicon Valley for better job opportunities.⁷

Significant Growth Fueled by Silicon Valley’s High-Tech Boom

The technological boom in Silicon Valley over the past few decades made it an attractive place to many high-tech workers, particularly Asian immigrants. With the influx of Asian immigrants, more churches were formed comprising this population. According to the Bay Area Chinese Churches research project report in 2008, Santa Clara

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⁷ Healey, Race, Ethnicity, Gender, and Class, 369.
County had an increase of 85 percent in the Chinese population, from 65,027 in 1990 to 120,603 in 2000. The worship attendance in Chinese churches nearly doubled from 5,745 in 1996 to 10,720 in 2008. Those attending worship are 9 percent of the total Chinese population in Santa Clara County according to the 2000 US census data. Additionally, the number of new churches increased from 39 in the 1996 report to 49 in the 2008 report.

Due to cultural differences and language barriers, as well as varied religious traditions and practices, many Christian Chinese immigrants in the Valley felt more comfortable to use their native language in worship or Bible studies. CCSB started from a small Christian fellowship group of Chinese immigrants in the mid-1980s. Most members were believers before they came to this country as foreign students. Some converted to the Christian faith during their studies in various cities in the US. Many moved to the Valley shortly after graduating with advanced degrees and finding jobs with high-tech companies. The main purpose of this Chinese Christian fellowship group was for Bible studies, testimonies, and prayer so they could support one another spiritually.

The church went through significant growth in its first seven or eight years. The growth was mainly triggered by the growing tech economy in the Valley as many high-tech companies hired more people from all over the United States. As a result, some Chinese Christians or gospel seekers from the local area joined the church. This growing trend solidified after a physical church building was purchased in the early 1990s.

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9 Ibid., 6.

10 Ibid., 89.
Influenced by the Local Churches Practice

The Local Churches, founded by Watchman Nee around 1920s in Shanghai, China, had a great impact on Chinese Christians in the last century.\(^\text{11}\) They had strong ties to the Plymouth Brethren in 1920s when Watchman Nee started the movement of “Little Flock” in China.\(^\text{12}\) Their practices and beliefs were mainly established by the teaching of Watchman Nee first, then of Witness Lee. The Local Churches believe that no identifying name should be given for Christian gatherings, except for the name of the city according to the early churches in the New Testament. Members were also asked to practice subjective and personal experiences with Christ and sense the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in their everyday lives. Indeed, some church members with Local Churches upbringings do this kind of spiritual exercise from time to time. Practices such as worship at the Lord’s table, holding gatherings at various locations, and home meetings were also adopted by some emerging churches and denominational churches later on.\(^\text{13}\)

CCSB has been greatly influenced by the tradition and practice of the Local Churches throughout the years since it was formed. Though many of the founding members of CCSB had grown up in the Local Churches, they had no experience in church planting. Many had little understanding about the creeds and confessions of Christian faith and lacked the training, teaching skills, and pastoral care knowledge to serve the congregation. Therefore, the only way they knew how to run the church was to


\(^{12}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{13}\) This section was adapted from Shao Wen, *Church Rising: A New Season for the Church* (TM730 Church Rising, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 11.
follow what they had learned and practiced from their childhood church experiences. Two retired preachers from members’ extended families came and joined the church. As a result, the church’s meeting styles for worship, the Lord’s table, Bible studies, and Sunday school were adapted based on the members’ various experiences in the Local Churches.

Struggling with Cultural Identity Crisis

Cultural identity is a serious matter that each immigrant in this nation must face. Especially for Asian Americans, it is very challenging to find an identity in this society due to the major differences between Eastern and Western cultures. In addition, adapting to second culture from a distinct first culture often means embracing pain, rejection, or discomfort. Generally, Chinese Americans are proud of their rich cultural heritage. However, this is not a conceivable reason for Chinese immigrants to reject or to not engage the culture they currently live in. On the contrary, Chinese immigrants at CCSB should consider themselves as members of the current society and actively participate in their community activities in order to establish their identity.

A few major reasons that hinder the church members of CCSB from integrating into the broader American community include the fear of losing their Chinese cultural heritage and fear of racism and discrimination. The language barrier also impedes good communication to properly voice concerns, thoughts, or even complaints over mistreatment. Consequently, they do not spend enough time and effort to fully integrate

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into American society and culture. The American culture is viewed as something secondary to live with but not participate in.

In order to avoid the struggle of cultural identity crisis, CCSB has to establish itself as a member of society. As a member of the community, they are responsible for addressing social concerns and issues, but from a Christian point of view. Though no culture is perfect, it is difficult to adapt to a second culture from a first homogeneous one. However, through the participation and involvement with the broader society, second culture can be enhanced and become third culture. Third culture not only recognizes people’s ethnic identity, but also embraces multiple cultures.\(^\text{16}\) Therefore, CCSB needs to actively adapt the culture they live in and transform each member into a third-culture person, which reflects the heart of God and purpose of his mission.\(^\text{17}\) According to Dave Gibbons, “for third-culture people, home is where Jesus is” and “God is third culture.”\(^\text{18}\)

**Vision, Values, and Practices**

The vision of CCSB is to build a community of God’s love with life together and grow up into Christ Jesus by making disciples of all nations (Eph 4:15; Mt 28:19-20). CCSB values the Bible as the highest authority above all other teachings, theories, or doctrines regarding Christian belief and practices. Through the word of God in the Bible, church members build one another up through mutual edification and life together as a community in Christ Jesus (1 Thes 5:11).


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 38-40.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 39.
CCSB emphasizes biblical teaching for the congregation to gain knowledge about God’s love, grace, mercy, faithfulness, and righteousness, so that they may live out God’s word in their everyday lives. Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God and sharing the Christian life with those who are marginalized in society is the goal to practice as a faithful servant of God (Lk 16:16). The marginalized are church members’ neighbors in the community, those who are poor, oppressed, abused, and needy. In addition, the practice of worship centered at the Lord’s table and the exercise of mutual edification among church members are the strengths of the tradition and ecclesiology of CCSB.

Biblical Authority and Teaching

CCSB believes that the Bible is inspired by God as the divine revelation “and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The Bible is the highest authority on all things and shapes teachings and practices. Therefore, they affirm that the Bible is the word of God for every Christian to follow. They reject any new teachings, revelations, or doctrines other than those already recorded in the Bible (Rv 22:18-19).

The leadership team of CCSB encourages church members to study and understand the Bible while practicing the teachings of the Lord in their everyday lives so that they may grow spiritually. The word of God is the bread of life which can equip the children of God to do good work (2 Tm 3:17). Leaders in CCSB strive hard to enhance the church’s programs as an opportunity for the congregation to gain the knowledge and understanding of Scripture. Notably, during Sunday sermons each week, expository
preaching is the normal practice for explaining and systematically teaching the Bible. Through the teaching of God’s word from Sunday sermons, Sunday school, and Bible studies, church members know the will, mind, and purpose of God. By working together and practicing God’s word together, church members may fulfill their vision at CCSB.

Worship Centered around the Lord’s Table\(^\text{19}\)

One of the good practices at CCSB is the worship services which are always centered at the Lord’s table. The table meeting in remembrance of the Lord is always the first meeting held in the church when members are gathered every Sunday morning. It is the belief and tradition of CCSB that this is the most important gathering of the church in Christ. The Lord’s table, in fact, is a divine institution that Jesus Christ instituted before he was crucified (Lk 22:19). The bread displays the body of Christ which was broken for the partakers and the wine is the blood of his covenant poured out to forgive their sins (1 Cor 11: 24; Mt 26:28). Therefore, every week church members of CCSB come to the Lord’s table to remember the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus for them.

CCSB observes the Lord’s table on the Lord’s Day each week to display their obedience and submission to Christ.\(^\text{20}\) They partake at the Lord’s table to reaffirm their position and standing before God in his covenant established by the blood of Christ (1 Cor 11:25). Therefore every church member in CCSB is invited to the Lord’s table on

\(^{19}\) This section was adapted from Shao Wen, *Church Rising: A New Season for the Church* (TM730 Church Rising, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2016), 18-19.

Sunday morning for the fellowship with one another in Christ.\textsuperscript{21} As a matter of fact, it is not the church, but Christ who invites them to come to the feast and enjoy his provisions.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, no host from church leaders may conduct the Lord’s table meeting when brothers and sisters are gathered. It is Christ who is the host.

The table with the bread and wine is placed in the center of the meeting hall before communion begins on Sunday morning. All chairs are placed around the table of the Lord as a circle or in four sections so that all participants may face the table for the fellowship and communication with one another.\textsuperscript{23} When members offer their praise and thanks through prayer and song, they go directly toward the Lord in communion. The setting of the Lord’s table allows the participants of communion to talk and see one another face to face around the table. The Lord’s table meeting is an opportunity each week at CCSB for church members to constantly reinforce in Christ and edify one another in the Lord.

**Mutuality in Church Gatherings**

Practicing mutuality during the church gatherings is another opportunity for brothers and sisters to edify one another at CCSB. The practice of mutuality was recorded in the Bible and exercised in earliest churches. 1 Corinthians 14:26 says “when you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a teaching, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.” In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul says “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 243.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 244.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 259.
\end{itemize}
edification” (Rom 14:19). The Apostle Paul also asked the Thessalonians to encourage one another and edify one another, just as they were doing (1 Thes 5:11). Therefore, church members are confident that God works in them and inspires them so that they may edify and build one another up.

The church is the body of the Christ and they are all members of the body (Eph 1:23; Rom 12:5). In addition, God’s grace has been given to each one of them as Christ apportioned it so that they may grow and build up the body of Christ, the church (Eph 4:7, 12, 16). Since God has equipped and prepared each member for building up the body of Christ, the church ought to provide proper venues and opportunities for mutual edification, exhortation, and admonition in church gatherings.

CCSB realizes the importance of the function of mutuality for building up one another in the church. Therefore, the church provides a few opportunities for members to practice mutuality. In the Lord’s table meeting each week, every participant has the opportunity to offer a prayer, select a hymn for the congregation to sing, make a proclamation, or give a testimony. There are also opportunities for testimonies, fellowship, or exhortation from among the congregation for ten to fifteen minutes after a sermon is delivered. A Bible study meeting is another opportunity for group members to conduct the practice of mutuality.

Challenges from Gospel Programs Held in the Church

24 King James Bible, “Therefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, …”

25 David Fitch, Notes from “Missional Ecclesiology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, February 2015.
There are some major challenges with regard to the gospel programs held in the church over the past few years. First of all, in a post-Christendom era, the messages of the church are ignored in society as there is “no cultural given authority and respect.”

It gets progressively harder to invite seekers to come to gospel meetings at CCSB. Second, it is difficult to keep seekers in the church even if they have attended the gospel programs more than once. The church constantly struggles in cultivating a deeper relationship with seekers. Lack of a life sharing opportunity with gospel seekers is the main challenge in the church.

Difficulty in Inviting Seekers to Church

The number of gospel seekers who were invited to come to the church’s gospel programs has continued to decline in recent years. In the traditional practices at CCSB, the church normally holds a gospel meeting each quarter that includes a barbeque or picnic. All these gospel events were prepared and organized by different functional teams in the church. From the statistics on seekers, there were more seekers who showed up for the gospel activities a few years ago. However, in the past two years, the number of seekers went down drastically to less than three and then down to zero.

A few major reasons may explain the decline of seeker attendance for the church’s gospel activities. American society in general is moving quickly into the post-Christendom era. The federal, state, and local governments as well as big corporations pay less attention to the core values and ethical concerns of the churches in America.

26 Ibid.

Major media companies in the United States often do not support the Christian faith and practice. Many media companies in the nation promote secularism over Christianity. The movement toward secularization in society has a great impact on immigrants as well. Life for immigrants is usually tough and difficult and they work hard just to make ends meet. They spend their small amount of leisure time watching media from the entertainment industry instead of going to church. This trend might explain why more people ignored or rejected gospel tracts handed out to them in front of supermarkets or shops for the invitation of gospel events.

Difficulty in the Retention and Conversion of Seekers

Retaining members in the church is a challenging task for most church leaders today. It is even more challenging to keep in the church gospel seekers who attended just one or two programs, not to mention converting them to Christianity and integrating as a church member of CCSB. In the end, the church’s gospel events might be called a success merely by the presence of some gospel seekers even if they did not stay.

According to the statistics on attendees to church’s gospel programs, all seekers can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of those who know a little bit about Christianity from Christian relatives or friends. Those seekers desire to find a church that suits them in terms of philosophy or style. Many are recent newcomers to the Valley. People in the second group are those who accept an invitation from their friends to attend gospel programs. The third group consists of new immigrants from Asia who have no background in Christianity. They have no knowledge of the gospel. They view a gospel event held in church as merely a social activity.
Of these three groups, gospel seekers in the first group have a higher possibility of staying for some time. However, even though they have background knowledge and might be actively looking for a church, the retention turned out to be quite low. The likelihood for seekers from the second or third groups to stay is very slim. These findings led CCSB to conclude that the church’s gospel programs did not align with what the seekers were looking for which resulted in an inability to retain gospel seekers. It was even harder to keep gospel seekers to stay for the long term and become church members. Some additional factors might be influential as well. Perhaps the seekers did not benefit from these gospel programs directly. They did not view the church’s environment as a satisfactory place for them to stay. They felt that their life was not connected to what members did in the church.

Difficult in Cultivating Deeper Relationship with Seekers

According to Genesis, humans are created as relational and communal beings.\(^{28}\) Since they are created in the image of God, humans can establish a relationship with God.\(^{29}\) They need to build not only a good relationship with God, but also with people around them. When people establish good relationships with one another, they start to have a feeling of belonging. This kind of relationship among members is crucial for every group to exist. This holds true especially for a church or a Christian community.

The leadership of CCSB realizes the importance of establishing relationships with seekers who have previously attended the church’s gospel programs. Normally, the


\(^{29}\) Ibid., 170.
church had certain people assigned to accompany gospel seekers who had come to church for a gospel event. The reason for this practice was so that throughout the whole gospel meeting, seekers would not be alone. After the gospel meeting, seekers’ contact information was collected for further contact from the church in the near future. This kind of process for dealing with gospel seekers by making phone calls or paying a visit afterwards seemed routine to most of the churches. However, from the results of making contact later on, there was little enthusiasm from most of the seekers to return to future church gospel meetings. These responses discouraged the gospel team of CCSB. A relationship between church members and seekers was stunted as there was no common vehicle or platform for cultivating it.

Lack of Life Sharing Opportunities

Gospel programs held in the church may be counted as a life sharing event with the seekers. However, strictly speaking, these gospel programs are too formal for people to share their personal life stories. The gospel program at CCSB includes a love feast and a formal meeting which begins with singing, testimonies, a gospel message, calling, and praying. Every section of the program has at least one host to lead it. These well-organized gospel programs require a lot of time and effort with the necessary preparations in advance for a smooth flowing gospel program. The regular church members who become involved with gospel programs have life sharing opportunities more so with each other than with the seekers.

The purpose of gospel programs is to convince the seekers to believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord and as their personal savior. Therefore, the program is designed with
the purpose of winning over the seeker with vivid life testimonies, singing, and a compelling gospel message. However, gospel programs in the formal setting of church lack a life sharing element. Sharing one’s life and faith with another is the most important part of the Christian life. Sharing Christian life with gospel seekers, inviting them to join the church, and doing life together are the most powerful ways to lead people to God. The inability to connect on a personal level within the confines of a formal gospel meeting is a limiting factor for both seekers and church members.

**Resolutions to Apply a Missional Element to Home Groups**

To avoid the challenges of gospel programs, the church must not heavily rely on gospel meetings for evangelism. With fewer seekers attending and lack of life sharing opportunities, gospel programs that try to become more attractive to seekers by adding additional budget or other resources may not work. An ideal place to invite gospel seekers is in a small group where people do life together. Typically, meeting in homes gives group members a better chance to intimately experience and share life together. Therefore, a paradigm shift in evangelism is required at CCSB from church gospel programs to small groups. Developing a small group ministry by adding spiritual discipline elements for discipleship training to the Bible study groups is the solution for solving this ministry challenge.

**Bible Study Groups at Homes**

There has been a long history of Bible study ministry at CCSB since the church was formed. Meeting in homes instead of the church building is a tradition of Bible studies at CCSB. Many church members enjoy learning about the Bible in a small group
environment. In addition, homes provide the most comfortable setting for group members to study Bible topics, give testimonies, or share difficulties in their everyday lives. Meeting at homes is also good for members to practice hospitality by providing and sharing food and drinks among the group.

One of the most important goals of Bible study is to remind each member to live out God’s word in daily life. Gaining a knowledge of Scripture is only the first step toward this goal. It is a pointless endeavor if group members have no ability to practice and follow the teachings learned from Scripture. Therefore, adding the practice of spiritual disciplines in the Bible study groups will enable members to experience God’s grace, mercy, and love in their daily lives. Ultimately, learning as a disciple of Christ and sharing life together within a small group, members will then join and participate in God’s mission in the neighborhood.30

Adding Spiritual Practices

Spiritual disciplines are important for a small group to practice together to promote personal spiritual growth and group transformation.31 Particularly in Bible study groups, understanding Scripture in order to grow in the knowledge of God is a primary goal for each member. However, it is quite common for Bible study groups to ignore the balance between gaining knowledge and practicing God’s word. Spiritual exercises such

30 Scot McKnight, A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God’s Design for Life Together (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 111-112.

31 Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus, 70.
as stillness prayer, solitude, silence, singing, serving, pray-reading Scripture, testimonies, and walking with God are crucial for members to practice and live out God’s word.\textsuperscript{32}

Practicing spiritual disciplines daily may bring people closer to God and help them know God’s will and mind. Pray-reading Scripture helps each individual to reflect God’s love, kindness, grace, and mercy. At the same time, it encourages people to follow and practice the way that Jesus Christ lived.\textsuperscript{33} Meditation and reflection on God’s word facilitates spiritual growth and promotes spiritual transformation.\textsuperscript{34} When these disciplines are practiced in a small group, it promotes group transformation for the participation of God’s work and mission in the neighborhood.

Applying Discipleship Training

Discipleship training is essential for every Christian to become an apprentice or follower of Christ. It is like what Jesus did to his disciples in a training period of three and a half years. The disciples were trained by Jesus through his actions and teachings. A Christian by definition is a follower of Christ. Every Christian should consider himself or herself as a disciple of Jesus throughout his or her lifetime. Dallas Willard gives a simple and an important definition of a disciple when he states that “I am learning from Jesus to live my life as he would live my life if he were I.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 111-1144.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 70-83.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 81.

\textsuperscript{35} Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, 283.
According to Willard’s definition, there are two parts of being a disciple. The first part is learning continuously from Jesus and the second part is to live a life like Jesus lived. In summary, discipleship contains both lifetime learning and practicing from Jesus’s teaching. In the context of a small group ministry in this project, learning Scripture is the main purpose of Bible study groups. Applying discipleship training to the Bible study groups focuses on how to practice what Jesus said and did in the Bible. In fact, practicing spiritual disciplines is the first and foremost training for discipleship. Through practicing spiritual disciplines, group members will know how to live a Christian life based upon what Jesus taught. This is the apprenticeship model as defined by Willard since each group member is an apprentice of Jesus.\(^{36}\) They learn piece by piece Jesus’s teachings and then practice them together in a small group.

Engaging Neighbors through Life Sharing

The purpose of learning Scripture in a Bible study group is for members to live out God’s word in their everyday lives. The best place to live out God’s word together is in a home where group members meet each week. When members gather in their homes, they learn how to live a life together according to the teachings in the Bible. By talking to one another, sharing life stories, serving food, and having meals together, a life-together community is formed. Members bring food and drinks to share with others and learn how to serve one another through a love feast. Sometimes, people share their troubles, sorrows, or frustrations so they may get comfort and encouragement from other group members.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 289.
members. According to Willard, members need to put the teachings of Jesus into practice in their real lives so that problems can be eliminated.\textsuperscript{37}

Transforming a home-based Bible study group into a life-together community for God’s mission is the solution to the challenges of church gospel programs. By life sharing within a group every week, homes where members meet are comfortable places to invite their neighbors to join and experience their Christian life. They may also go out into the neighborhood around their homes and share their lives with the neighbors. By helping their neighbors and getting involved with activities in the neighborhood, Bible study groups can cultivate relationships gradually and naturally. Once a good relationship is established, neighbors or gospel seekers may feel comfortable enough to join the fellowship in their homes. This is the most natural way of doing evangelism in the neighborhood by a life-together, home-based community group.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 284.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines literature concerning the development of small community groups for neighborhood outreach. It begins with the essence of spiritual disciplines that will transform life and the way leaders do ministry in the church. For every follower of Jesus, spiritual growth is always the most important task in the Christian life. In the first section, three main spiritual disciplines, solitude, silence, and prayer, are discussed heavily in books by Henri J.M. Nouwen and Dallas Willard.

The second section explores the notion of building small life-together communities. The discussion includes the main purpose of small groups and the answer to God’s missional calling through both personal and group transformation. Lastly, the third section explores discipleship practices in order to live out God’s word and participate in God’s mission. To live a life like Jesus lived and practice the way Jesus practiced is the ultimate goal for small group members. Sharing Christian life with neighbors and joining God’s mission in the neighborhood is the right way for small groups to practice.
Spiritual Development with Some Local Churches Traditions

Every Christian can experience spiritual transformation through the practice of spiritual disciplines according to the book The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard. All spiritual disciplines are important for a healthy Christian life and very few are considered indispensable according to Willard.¹ These few indispensable spiritual disciplines described in the book The Way of the Heart may prevent Christians from being shaped by the world. In this section, these two books will be reviewed and examined carefully for the benefits of the spiritual development.

The Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry, Henri Nouwen

Henri Nouwen was a renowned author and spiritual counselor who wrote many books on Christian spirituality. He was an ordained priest born and educated in the Netherlands, and a professor who taught at Notre Dame, Yale and Harvard.² Dr. Nouwen’s popular book entitled The Way of the Heart stresses the importance of the spiritual disciplines practiced by the Egyptian Desert Fathers and Mothers in the fourth and fifth centuries. These spiritual disciplines, namely solitude, silence, and prayer, are foundational for “our contemporary search for an authentic spirituality.”³ They are particularly essential for the people who are called to be ministers of Jesus Christ nowadays to learn, reflect, and practice.⁴ The following review of Nouwen’s work, The

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¹ Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines, 158.
³ Nouwen, The Way of the Heart, cover.
⁴ Ibid., 91.
Way of the Heart: Desert Spirituality and Contemporary Ministry, includes a brief summary of the book’s contents along with its strengths and weaknesses, its contribution to this project, and the limitations of the resources according to the ministry challenge.

“Practicing solitude, silence, and unceasing prayer will help Christians not be shaped by this world, but strengthen them to serve and speak the word of God” is the author’s main argument in the book The Way of the Heart. These three spiritual practices are essential elements for the spiritual life of ministers of Jesus Christ.\(^5\) All three disciplines are tightly interwoven and interact with one another. Not one of these three key disciplines can be ignored or missed while practicing the others. Furthermore, one should follow a certain order while practicing them all together. It begins with solitude, followed by silence as it “completes and intensifies solitude.”\(^6\) Prayer starts right after solitude and silence since they together establish the proper environment for unceasing prayer.\(^7\)

As violence, hatred, and evil powers continue to increase in the world, Nouwen argues that fleeing from the world as the Desert Fathers did was the solution to restore their lost identity as God’s servants.\(^8\) He explains what it means for a Christian to flee from the world through the discipline of solitude. The desert is a place where people may find themselves truly alone. They may clear their own mind, sort out their own thoughts,

\(^5\) Ibid., 14-15.
\(^6\) Ibid., 43.
\(^7\) Ibid., 69.
\(^8\) Ibid., 22.
and face their true self as naked, broken, sinful, and deprived.\(^9\) This is an excellent way to retreat from the busy world and get closer to the Lord. However, it would be more helpful to suggest how frequently and for how much time a person should practice the discipline of solitude. Nouwen asked a similar question about how to live out his vocation as a priest to Mother Teresa and the answer was one hour a day in adoration of the Lord.\(^10\)

According to Nouwen, silence is an indispensable discipline and it is much more important to have silence of the heart than silence of the mouth. Prayer may not take place until solitude and silence are achieved, as both are the context for prayer.\(^11\)

However, prayer could silence their heart when one is in trouble or angry. Therefore, it is important to know how these three disciplines interact with one another. Particularly in this busy world, Christians may need to practice solitude, silence, and prayer all together at any time, place, or situation. Solitude may be conducted during a meeting, conference call, or conversation with others while silence and unceasing prayer may be practiced at the same time in the heart.

The contributions of this book to the project are three-fold. Firstly, it provides the fundamental spiritual disciplines for small group members to practice. Whether they are alone in their everyday life or getting together as a group, these three practices are essential to the spiritual life. Secondly, spiritual growth and personal transformation is the initial goal of this project; one of the objectives of solitude is as “the furnace of

\(^9\) Ibid., 27.

\(^10\) Ibid., 31.

\(^11\) Ibid., 69.
transformation.” Thirdly, the idea of this book came from a seminar at Yale Divinity School where Nouwen conducted and practiced together in a group of people with different religious traditions. It certainly will help this project to follow the same practices in the small group context at CCSB.

The lack of experienced spiritual mentors or directors who can lead the practice of the disciplines is the first limitation. It takes time to train and cultivate leaders in spiritual leadership. The second limitation is the relatively little time spent for group spiritual practices when members meet each week. Personal spiritual practice in everyday life is the key to the success of this project.


Dallas Willard was a renowned teacher and author of a few popular books including *The Divine Conspiracy*, an award-winning book. He was a brilliant Christian thinker, theologian, and scholar who had been “an eloquent voice for the relevance of God in our daily lives.” In *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Willard gracefully presents a feasible way of spiritual transformation that is achievable by all through the practice of spiritual disciplines as Jesus did. The following review of Willard’s work, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, includes a brief summary of the book along with a survey of strengths and weaknesses, major contributions, and some limitations in application to this project.

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12 Ibid., 25.

Since the suffering and distress of humankind is everywhere in the modern age, Willard brilliantly points out that both the problem and solution are spiritually related.\(^\text{14}\) Therefore, there is a need to provide clear and feasible methods for the transformation of humankind. He confidently argues that ordinary people can form communities filled with love and power by the grace of Christ.\(^\text{15}\) Consequently, Willard presents the methods of spiritual life anchored in the gospel of New Testament, so that people can be transformed into Christlikeness. The only thing Willard argues for people to do is to follow the life that Jesus lived on the earth in order to become like Christ. The practices of how Jesus lived are “solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God’s word and God’s ways, and service to others.”\(^\text{16}\)

Willard stresses the secret of living as Jesus lived in his entire life is an easy yoke. Christians need to adopt Jesus’s overall lifestyle instead of following the steps he did “when he was on the spot,” such as loving enemies, going the extra mile, or turning the other cheek.\(^\text{17}\) However, this idea may generate confusion for readers on how to follow Jesus and in what way. It is hard to give a complete picture of Jesus’s overall lifestyle for people to follow while ignoring some of his teachings and behaviors on certain occasions. Christians know it is not easy to follow Jesus since they fail in their own lives from time to time. However, hope and faith in Christ is what Christians need in order to overcome


\(^{15}\) Ibid., ix.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 5.
all the difficulties. The book may need to stress more about the grace, mercy, and love of Christ as he perfects a Christian’s faith and hope in living a life as he lived.

According to Willard, to live a spiritual life does not mean to oppose or deny the body; the spiritual and the bodily lives are complementary, but not opposed to each other.\(^{18}\) He emphasizes that the flesh is not the fallen human nature, as the first sin leads people to trust their flesh instead of God.\(^{19}\) When people trust their flesh, it is their carnal mind, but not the flesh, according to Willard. This concept is hard to explain as things in the world: “the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world” (1 Jn 2:16).\(^{20}\) It would be better to elaborate more about the nature of the human body and the flesh in terms of living a spiritual life.

The contribution of this book is tremendous to the project. First, Willard laid out sixteen main disciplines for the spiritual life. All of them are critical for small group members to practice and follow. Secondly, Willard’s book emphasizes how to live a life as Jesus lived. It is a life Christians live everyday by following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Salvation is life, according to Willard, for Christians to live out daily.\(^{21}\) Thirdly, the emphasis on making theology practical to all who would like to practice the disciplines is critical to their spiritual life. Some church members at CCSB have an aversion to the term theology.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 90.

\(^{20}\) KJV Bible, 1 John 2:16.

The lack of sources on teaching theological topics to laypeople from the Bible is the first limitation to this project. It is important for group members to establish the concept that theology matters and is connected to their spiritual life. Another limitation is time, since sixteen disciplines are hard to practice in a group gathering format. These disciplines need to be practiced in group members’ everyday lives individually.

**Life Together: Community for God’s Mission and Group Transformation**

Building small groups as a life-together community is a challenging task for most churches as every Christian has different ideas, backgrounds, and cultures. It would be an even harder task to transform small life-together communities for God’s mission in the neighborhood. But forming such communities and sharing life together is the design and purpose of God according to Scot McKnight. Sharing life together within a small group is essential to be able to share the Christian life with neighbors.

In this section, three books related to the building up of a Christian community are examined. The first book focuses on the Christian life within different people in the church. The second book emphasizes the small groups’ awareness of their mission and purpose. The third book stresses the embodiment of the church’s message and life in postmodern culture. These books are *A Fellowship of Differents* by Scot McKnight, *Small Groups with Purpose* by Steve Gladen, and *Emerging Churches* by Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger.

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22 Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents*, cover.

A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God's Design for Life Together, Scot McKnight

Scot McKnight is a professor at Northern Seminary and a renowned New Testament scholar. McKnight is an author of numerous books, including the award-winning titles *The King Jesus Gospel*, *Kingdom Conspiracy*, *The Jesus Creed*, *One Life*, and other Bible commentary books. In the book *A Fellowship of Differents*, McKnight shares a compelling story of his upbringing in the church and presents how a church is supposed to be according to God’s design. The following review of McKnight’s work includes the main argument of what the church and Christian life is all about and how Christians are shaped in the church.

McKnight points out that most Christians think the church is just a place to go on Sunday for a sermon, worship, communion, or possibly Sunday school classes. The rest of the week seems to have nothing to do with the church. Lacking a normal Christian life is a common problem that many church members encounter today. McKnight indicates that a right way to see the church is to view it “as a salad in a bowl.” Many early Christian churches were made up of people with different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. A local church must be inclusive like the early Christians churches described in the book of Acts.

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24 McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents*, cover.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 12.
27 Ibid., 14.
McKnight argues that a local church shapes and molds Christian life for the people in the church. The church is a fellowship of “differents” and Christian life is about learning how to live together in the kingdom of God. However, the church may also be shaped by people with different methodologies, particularly church leaders who have different views of Scripture. Non-denominational churches have more freedom and leeway to make changes within the church. More importantly, people in the church are shaped by one another through mutual edification and learning. However, a common challenge facing the church today is how it handles controversial topics such as homosexuality, abortion, the death penalty, and other social issues. It is exceedingly difficult to come to a collective agreement when church members have very different stances on these topics. Church members need God’s grace, mercy, and love for dealing with these controversial issues. Unfortunately, it is difficult to address these issues lightly without causing discord among the church body.

According to McKnight’s extrapolation of 2 Corinthians 1:20, the church is God’s “space for yes” in Christ and a space for God’s grace. This space of grace is metaphorically a salad bowl or “in Christ” based on the Apostle Paul’s term. A local church looks like a salad bowl, tossed and mixed, so to speak, with others who are also in Christ. God’s grace transforms them and gives them courage and power to live with others in a faith community. Therefore, more examples need to be given in the book of

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28 Ibid., 24-25.
29 Ibid., 29-37.
30 Ibid., 39.
31 Ibid., 40.
how God’s grace transforms people in their Christian life in addition to McKnight’s explanation of what the early church did (Acts 2:42-47). It is important to see how Christians live a life together and share their life with others.

If the church is a salad bowl as McKnight says, then small groups are smaller-sized salad bowls. In small groups, members with different social, cultural or racial backgrounds may experience life together based on God’s grace and love. McKnight believes that “the best word for the church is *fellowship*, which simply means that they share life with one another.”32 This is the main contribution to the project from this book as everyone in a small group needs to learn how to live together and share life together. Small group members live in the Spirit with God’s word and see how God transforms them in their everyday life. Practicing the Lord’s table during these small group gatherings connects each one of them to Christ.

*Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities*, Steve Gladen

Steve Gladen has been a pastor of the small group community at Saddleback Church since 1998. He developed the small group community and founded the Small Group Network for small group ministry leaders in 2006.33 As Rick Warren, senior pastor of Saddleback Church, says in the forward of this book, small groups are the heart of their church. It is the center place for discipleship training, ministry structure, worship enrichment, evangelism, and fellowship.34 With many years of working in the small

32 Ibid., 111.


34 Ibid., 7.
group ministry, Gladen put together his stories and implementation strategies for small
groups into this book. The following review of Gladen’s work, *Small Groups with
Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities*, includes the arguments about the key
principles of building healthy small groups along with its vision and goals.

Gladen believes that methods of building small groups in the church may vary in different contexts. The strategy and methods for establishing small groups at his church may not apply to other churches. However, the same principles are transferable as they are based on the truth, the word of God. He stresses establishing small groups to be purpose-driven and effective while having bold faith, internal focus, potential in leadership, simple systems, church-wide alignment, growth, empowered members, and a master teacher curriculum. On the surface, these principles of small groups are focused on administration, leadership, structure, and end results. The main purpose of small groups should focus on how to live the way Jesus lived, so that group members may become disciples of Jesus. Personal spiritual growth and group transformation for God’s mission should be the goal of small groups. Small group is also the best place for members to live together as a community. By sharing life with one another in a small group, members can learn how to share life with other people. Once these clear visions and goals are set clearly in small groups, strategic principles and feasible methods can be implemented next.

Bold faith is the first principle for establishing small groups at Saddleback according to Gladen. Rick Warren is a great example as he followed the lead of the Holy

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35 Ibid., 23.

36 Ibid., 24-34.
Spirit to start a small group in Los Angeles in a difficult situation around 1980. A few years later, Saddleback became a megachurch. The Apostle Paul also encouraged his closest co-worker Timothy by saying that God did not give his children “a spirit of fear and timid, but of power, love, and self-discipline” (2 Tm 1:7). In fact, Christians should be bold in Christ for doing everything regarding God’s kingdom. A small group is the best place to exercise members’ boldness in Christ because of its size and dynamics. Empowering members is a very practical and powerful way to train and cultivate future leaders in a small group environment.

This book benefits the project in many areas, particularly in how to build healthy small groups in the church. However, it is debatable whether small groups should have church wide alignment. At first, it would seem appropriate for small groups to try to align together with church’s overall strategy. However, this kind of alignment may constrain the freedom, creativity, and capability of small groups in their own individuality. Two valuable practices of taking spiritual assessment and creating a spiritual health plan would be promising next steps for group members to grow spiritually.

_Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures_, Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger

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37 Ibid., 24.
38 New Living Translation Bible (NLT)
39 Gladen, _Small Groups with Purpose_, 61.
Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger are faculty members at Fuller Theological Seminary. Gibbs is a professor of church growth and Bolger is an associate professor of church in contemporary culture in the School of Intercultural Studies.\(^\text{40}\) Gibbs is also the author of numerous books, including the award-winning title *Church Next*. The following review of Gibbs and Bolger’s work, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Culture*, includes the argument for emerging churches and the differences between other denominational or non-denominational churches.

In the postmodern era, the predicament of the church continues to worsen on every front. A new kind of church is rising up from among the traditional churches. These emerging churches claim to be different from traditional churches by changing focus from the church to the kingdom.\(^\text{41}\) They put stress on joining God as God is working in the world, instead of church planting.

According to Gibbs and Bolger’s definition, emerging churches are “communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures.”\(^\text{42}\) There are three core practices: “identifying with the life of Jesus, transforming secular space, and living as community.”\(^\text{43}\) On the surface, it is hard to distinguish the real differences between emerging churches and traditional churches based on definitions and practices. Strictly speaking, no church can deny the practices of identifying with Jesus’s life, transforming society, and living as God’s community. Otherwise, they are not a church of Christ.

\(^{40}\) Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, cover.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., 42.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 44.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 43.
Nonetheless, the real differences may lie in the focus and objective of church practices. A traditional church may already conduct these core practices with different concepts and approaches compared to what emerging churches currently focus on.

Gibbs and Bolger believe that welcoming strangers, serving with generosity, participation, creativity, leading as a body, and taking part in spiritual activities could be triggered by core practices. These concepts are not new to the traditional church, as they are in the teachings of the Bible. Going out into the neighborhood instead of asking people to come to the church as the key to the *Missio Dei* is not merely the appeal of emerging churches. The focus on the kingdom of God in places where people are and joining God to advance his mission is a great practice of emerging churches.

Appropriately, emerging churches claim that evangelism is not an event that is funded, organized, and planned to attract gospel seeker, but rather a way of life. Ideally, traditional churches should focus less on church programs and events, and even less on bigger or fancier structures for church gatherings. The church should be viewed as “a people rather than a place, a community rather than a meeting” as it is a family in Christ and not an institution.

The contribution to the project from this book is significant, as emerging churches focus on decentralizing communities. According to Gibbs and Bolger, small groups are the essential meeting of church; in this project, small groups are akin to many small

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44 Ibid., 45.
45 Ibid., 79.
46 Ibid., 97-99.
emerging churches as a community.\textsuperscript{47} In this small community, group members share life and participate in communion together while edifying and serving one another. This could be the best and most natural way for a traditional church to revive its membership through small groups, acting as many small emerging churches.

**Discipleship Practices for Neighborhood Outreach**

To live out the word of God is to practice the way of Jesus and live the way Jesus lived. Group members in a life-together community not only share their lives with one another, but also with their neighbors. Small groups need to cultivate connections in their neighborhoods by helping and engaging with their neighbors. In this section, two books are examined on how to conduct the experiments and connect to ordinary community life. The books are *Practicing the Way of Jesus* by Mark Scandrette and *The New Parish* by Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen.

*Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*, Mark Scandrette

Mark Scandrette is an author of several books, most of which focus on practical spirituality. He and his wife are founders of ReIMAGE, a center for integral Christian practice and spiritual formation based in San Francisco.\textsuperscript{48} Scandrette is also a passionate coach and teacher, who inspires and offers spiritual direction to many young leaders from various Christian organizations or churches. In the book *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, Scandrette presents a compelling perspective on action-based group practices and clear

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{48} Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, cover.
guidance on how to start an experiment. The following review of Scandrette’s work, *Practicing the Way of Jesus: Life Together in the Kingdom of Love*, covers the main argument about what the practical way is to follow Jesus and its main challenges.

Scandrette has a great passion for inspiring Christians to practice the way of Jesus. He believes that spiritual transformation is to live out the word of Jesus by putting his teachings into practice in everyday life. Scandrette once invited a group of friends to practice two teachings in the Bible, “sell your possessions and give to the poor” (Lk 12:33) and “anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none. If you have food, anyone who has food should do the same” (Lk 3:11). Sandrette’s group practiced these teachings by selling their possessions and giving to the poor.

Sandrette’s approach begs the question of whether Christians should follow the teachings in the Bible in a literal sense or not. It may not be justified to interpret some Bible teachings literally. If all disciples of Jesus sold their possessions and gave to the poor, they may then need help from other people, possibly hindering their mission. This certainly was not the original intention of Jesus in Luke 3:11. As followers of Christ, they need to know the key principles or guidelines of Jesus’s teaching in the Bible. Group members need the guidance of the Holy Spirit for each experiment Jesus practiced as “the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor 3:6). Furthermore, every teaching of Jesus conveys a central theme and critical message to the readers. A faithful follower of Jesus is one who can grasp the key points of the Bible and then carry them out in everyday life.

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49 Ibid., 24.

50 Ibid., 12.
In essence, knowing the key messages of Jesus’s teachings in the Bible is paramount to following and practicing them. Scandrette also brings up an excellent point about a renewed perspective of Jesus for group members to grapple with in order to follow his practices. Christians must understand that Jesus is not only a great teacher, but also a messianic savior. Both identities are important for group members to follow the practice of Jesus. The balance between knowledge and practice is critical for Christians. The central message of this book is to compel every Christian to experience the kingdom of love, rather than to just think or understand the teachings of the Bible. Scandrette stresses the importance of living a life that is based upon “a holistic understanding of Jesus,” so that Christians may be transformed in their everyday lives.

The contribution of this book is significant as some experiments are applied directly in the project. The details of conducting individual or group experiments in the book are helpful to small groups. By making small gradual changes, small groups can begin the experiments immediately. Some group practices, such as experiments in identity, purpose, security, and community, are key for building small groups as a life-together community. The second portion of the book and the appendixes are practical manuals for small group leaders to reference and adopt. This is an excellent book for those who are looking for help on both personal spiritual development and group transformation.

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51 Ibid., 21-23.

52 Ibid., 22.
Paul Sparks, a community organizer and social entrepreneur, is the co-author of the award-winning book *The New Parish*. In the early 1900s, Sparks pastored a GenX fast-growing church and experienced life sharing together as the key to grow in maturity. Tim Soerens, a pastor and director of the Parish Collective, helps and teaches ministry leaders. Dwight J. Friesen is a professor, author, and former church-planter who teaches new parish leaders at the Seattle School of Theology and Psychology. These three authors put together their personal experiences, strategies, and ideas on creating new parishes in the neighborhoods. The following review of Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen’s work includes a brief summary of the book along with a survey of strengths, weaknesses, and the contributions to this project.

The authors stress the importance of the parish, a platform for a new way of being the church, where a local church is rooted in the neighborhood and connected to the people’s struggles and the land. The emphasis of a new parish should be on its relationships with neighbors and the land in order to live out its faith in everyday life. The authors believe that traditional churches may become consumer-oriented and homogeneous over time if they do not connect with people’s struggles in their

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54 Ibid., 8.

55 Ibid., 206.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 21-22.
neighborhood. Most churches refer to themselves as local churches as they are part of the community and are getting more involved with local activities. Even mainline churches have relationships with local people, society, and community. Arguably, the idea and concept of the new parish seems to be similar to what many other churches are currently doing, such as praying for the neighborhood, helping out with the community, and participating in local activities. The new parish’s momentum come from below while the traditional church comes from above in terms of leadership and organization. In this sense, there is a fundamental difference between a new parish and traditional churches.

The new parish focuses on connecting to the ordinary community life through their gatherings instead of putting their hope and trust in human technique or strategy. The authors believe the practices and liturgy of the church will be transformed if it is connected to the community’s everyday life. In this way, the church will not be reduced to just a weekly worship gathering event. Even though traditional churches conduct some events for helping their community, these are still considered a part of church programs. As such, these church programs are not part of everyday life. Therefore, the authors suggest an adaptive process by integrating the postures of listening, discerning, and acting together for the purpose of a “faithful presence in the neighborhood.” Listening, discerning, and acting are three elements which form a complete cycle for a new parish to follow. The cycle may repeat itself for a church to be present endlessly in

58 Ibid., 24.
59 Ibid., 68.
60 Ibid.
61 Ibid., 132.
community life. This is a great process for a local church to practice being present in the community and also share Christian life with neighbors.

In conclusion, every church needs to adopt the way of the new parish by being present and rooted in the neighborhood. In this way, they may connect to places around the church, while leading a life connected with the local community. This process may be the biggest contribution to the project over time. However, the focus at CCSB is on the process of listening, discerning, and acting in the neighborhoods around the church and where members live. By focusing on this process, it takes time even to go through the cycle once. Therefore, listening is the focus in this project for small groups to practice. Every week members may listen to the stories of Scripture when small groups meet. At the same time, members may share their own stories as well as the stories of places in the neighborhood.
CHAPTER 3
A THEOLOGY OF SMALL COMMUNITY GROUPS FOR GOD’S MISSION

This chapter develops a theological foundation and framework for small community groups to promote neighborhood outreach. It begins with the layout of the theological basis for a small home-based Christian community as described in Acts 2:42-47. In a small community, members are being built up and transformed through intimate fellowship, mutual edification, serving one another, and communion. By life sharing within the small group, a life-together community may be prepared and ready for the mission of God. An analysis of strengths and weaknesses is discussed regarding the practice of members gathering at CCSB as influenced by the Local Churches.

This chapter explores the model of life-on-life discipleship training through life sharing developed by Jesus for his disciples. From the examples of the disciples recorded in Mark 1:14-45, small group members may have a similar training for the experience of being a disciple of the Lord. Finally, the chapter presents the biblical principles of discipleship regarding the seventy-two as they were sent out and empowered by Jesus to bring peace and the kingdom of God to their neighborhoods.
A Community with Home-Based Small Groups (Acts 2:42-47)

A new Christian community emerged in Jerusalem after the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost. Before his ascension to heaven, Jesus commanded his disciples to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit that the Father had promised (Acts 1:4). When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, the disciples were enabled with power to speak in tongues and testify of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:4). They gave powerful testimony to people that Jesus was the Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). The Apostle Peter was empowered by the Spirit and charged people to repent and to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. Three thousand people accepted Peter’s message and were baptized on that day (Acts 2:41). This event marked the birth of the first Christian church after the Holy Spirit came down at Pentecost.

Even though the word “church” was not mentioned, Luke describes what a church is in 2:42-47.1 This newly formed community in Christ was the earliest church established by the power of the Holy Spirit. The disciples demonstrated the power received from the Spirit as witness to Jesus among all new believers. They gathered together not only in the temple courts but also in their homes for fellowship, worship, teaching, communion, and spreading the gospel in the neighborhood (Acts 2:46). There were no specific buildings or names of the communities mentioned for their gatherings in verses 42-47. Their homes seemed to be the common places for each individual group to meet daily.

The First Christian Community

A new Christian community was formed right after the baptism of three thousand people. Immediately, a real Christian community life began from among these newly added believers. The four key characteristics of this Christian community are listed in Acts 2:42 as teaching of the apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. New believers practiced their faith in Christ by living together with one another in the community according to these four activities. This was the earliest Christian community life described in the Bible from among the new believers.

A genuine Christian life does not focus only on the spiritual life but also deals with the physical needs from among new believers. The breaking of the bread mentioned by Luke was to address their need for regular meals. It is not necessarily only a ceremonial act in the worship for communion according to Conzelmann. As described in verse 46, the new believers get together every day, broke the bread together, and ate meals together in their homes. These aforementioned activities might also be related to their worship service in their homes as Kistemaker and Hendriksen suggested.

Community Features: Teaching, Fellowship, Breaking of Bread, and Prayer

Imparting knowledge of the faith through teaching was the first and most important function of the community for new believers. Without proper teaching, these three thousand new members would not have known how to live out their beliefs in their normal lives. Even though each one of them received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), they

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still needed to be taught and led to grow their faith in Christ. Wrong teachings or ideas on early Christianity certainly would have caused confusion, conflict, even fights that would have damaged this newly formed community. As a matter of fact, teaching started even before this new community was formed. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Peter and other eleven apostles stood up and preached to the crowd (Acts 2:14). The apostles taught both Jews and coverts to Judaism who came from all over the world as well as those who lived in Jerusalem about the gospel (Acts 2:9-11). From Scripture, it is apparent that the apostles were the leaders and teachers of this new community. Some elements involved in teaching ministry included preaching, training, coaching, leadership, and organization.

The apostles were commanded by Jesus as teachers to make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything Jesus taught them (Mt 28:18-20). Empowered by the Holy Spirit in their teaching and preaching, the apostles delivered the gospel that pierced the hearts of the hearers (Acts 2:37). In addition, the apostles’ leadership was strong in leading this new community, evidenced by the new believers devoted themselves to the disciples’ teaching (Acts 2:42). These fundamental components of leadership, teaching, and preaching were essential for this nascent Christian community to take root and grow.

Fellowship was the second characteristic of the new community when members gathered together. The word fellowship indicates sharing everything in their everyday life.

\(^5\) Ibid.
both physically and spiritually. It was a fairly new experience for the believers to live a communal life in this Christian community whether it was in their homes or in the temple courts. They participated in worship services publicly by learning the teaching together from apostles, while also breaking bread together and eating together joyfully (Acts 2:46).

Community members shared their faith and Christian life with the people they met in the temple courts or in their neighborhoods as the number of new believers increased. They were closely connected together in their daily life through the teachings of Jesus taught by the apostles. They also lived out the word of God by helping and supporting one another enthusiastically in their daily lives. This demonstrated the unity of Christ among the new believers in this early Christian community.

Breaking of bread was the third feature upheld in the new Christian community. The most important purpose of breaking bread was to remember the Lord who was crucified for all sinners. It was a formal Lord’s Supper or church communion celebrated during the worship service when all community members gathered together. According to Kistemaker and Hendriksen, the breaking of bread was one of the liturgical elements and appeared in the order of worship: teaching (preaching), fellowship, Lord’s Supper, and prayers. However, the breaking of bread could also be their regular meals held at their homes each day (Acts 2:46). The celebration of the Lord’s table held in their homes

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7 Ibid., 49-50.

was truly an extension of God’s presence and his blessing from the church to their homes. These homes, ultimately crucial locations in community life, shared all functions of the newly formed church.

Prayer was the fourth feature in the community when they gathered in either temple courts or their homes. Prayers offered in the temple courts could be the formal prayer normally conducted by the Jews at certain hours of the day. A similar story about Peter and John going up to the temple to pray at the time of prayer was recorded in Acts 3:1. Devoting themselves to prayers in both temple courts and their homes demonstrated their faith in this new community. The prayers might be involved in several different occasions, such as worship services, the Lord’s Supper, normal daily meals, or regular meetings in their homes.

The Lord’s Table Celebrated at Homes

The celebration of the Lord’s table has been one of the most important elements of gatherings of the church since the first Christian community was established on the day of Pentecost. It is one of the formal liturgical elements in worship service conducted mainly in the church. However, in this first Christian community, the Lord’s table was also celebrated in their homes. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper in homes had a profound significance for this newly formed Christian community. Homes of church members became an extension of the church to carry out the church’s major functions, particularly in remembrance of the Lord and fellowship with one another. In other words,

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home gatherings might be viewed as small house churches, or an earlier version of small groups, in various locations for conducting church activities. The Lord’s Supper is a communion service that celebrates the bond with Christ as well as the bond with one another.\textsuperscript{11} It is a feast initiated by Christ to celebrate believers’ liberation from their sins and reconciliation with God. The Lord’s table is always the center of their Christian life in the community.\textsuperscript{12} It is sensible to have the breaking of bread held at the homes of church members as they may practice confession of sins and reconciliation before the presence of the Lord in the communion. Spiritual blessings experienced through partaking of the Lord’s table in the church will also be given in their homes too.

\textbf{Signs of Communal Life at Homes}

Seeing miracles and wonders was the first remarkable sign of the communal life in the community. Many signs performed by the apostles demonstrated that the divine presence was always with this newly formed Christian community (Acts 2:43). It was clear that God was the true initiator of making those miracles and wonders through the hands of the apostles.\textsuperscript{13} As miracles occurred in their communal life, all members testified what Peter spoke to them about God’s promise in the prophecy of Joel (2:17). They experienced the presence and power of God through everyday life in their homes just as the apostles had taught them. As a result, every one of them was filled with reverence and awe after seeing the miraculous signs and wonders (Acts 2:43). Their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Ibid., 244.
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devotion to teaching from apostles, fellowship among believers, breaking of bread, and prayers indicated the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding them in their daily community life. This was truly a Christian community of the Spirit.14

Having all things in common was the second remarkable sign of their communal life (Acts 2:44). It is not clear from Scripture whether the believers lived together or not. However, it did indicate a close relationship established among the new believers as they were together daily and shared everything they had. They even sold their property or possessions to give to those in need. No one in the community claimed to have his or her own goods, as everything they owned was shared. Members had equal rights to access goods and resources they needed in their everyday lives. Equality and fairness was demonstrated in the community. The believers’ following in the teachings of Christ served as another example of a true community of Christ.

Life sharing was the third remarkable sign among the believers in this Christian community. Whether they were in the temple courts or in their homes, sharing Christian life went on continuously day by day. Firstly, all believers shared their wealth by selling their possessions or properties and giving the money to the poor and needy (Acts 2:45). Secondly, many saints opened up their homes as a sharing place for community members’ gatherings or meetings (Acts 2:46). Thirdly, they shared their lives starting from their homes by breaking bread and eating meals together every day (Acts 2:46). Fourthly, they not only shared their meals with church members in their homes, but also

14 Faw, Acts, 57.
divided their food and distributed to other believers from house to house daily. They also shared their new faith with the people they met in the temple courts. A life-sharing believers group at various homes gained favor from the people they encountered in their neighborhood. God added more people daily to this community through his presence in miracles and wonders.

Forming home-based small groups was the fourth remarkable sign of this new Christian community. This early church had a total of three thousand new believers (Acts 2:41) in addition to one hundred and twenty original members (Acts 1:15). It would be difficult for the church to gather a congregation of more than three thousand people in one place. Therefore, homes became the convenient places for church members to meet for teaching, worship, communion, fellowship, and prayers.

Consequently, the church was divided into many home-based small groups for them to gather and fellowship. This arrangement was the strength of this earliest Christian church in Jerusalem. All functions of the church were shifted to believers’ homes instead of a single large church building. Church members had more opportunities to get to know one another and share sorrows or joys in their lives. Essentially, homes became the frontline of the church and bastion of spreading the gospel to their communities. By sharing the Christian life from small group members with their neighbors, homes played a critical role to welcome gospel seekers to join and participate in their Christian life. Consequently, they won the favor of their neighbors and numbers continued to increase daily (Acts 2:47).


Strengths and Weaknesses of Members Gathering Tradition

The tradition of members gathering at CCSB was influenced by the practice of the Local Churches. The Local Churches’ tradition was heavily influenced by the Plymouth Brethren where the strength of the community was in their simplicity of coming together as disciples of Jesus without any outward ecclesiastical formality.\(^\text{17}\) When they gathered to share God’s word, they improvised without preparation; a barn, storage room, or home could serve “as a basilica.”\(^\text{18}\) The Lord’s table was held in various places where church members were gathered with their homemade bread. This kind of practice was very close to what the early church did in Acts 2:42-47. These were the strengths the Local Churches inherited and practiced. CCSB adopted these practices for the gatherings of church members and the practicality of building up the church.

Some weaknesses have been observed at CCSB in the gatherings of church members at various locations besides the church building. As every believer is encouraged to share freely at any time in the gatherings, it is hard to control the content shared by members and manage the time. In general, leadership appears to be much weaker than other denominational or independent churches. Social involvements and community activities were seldom discussed or mentioned in these gatherings. Church members are doing well to look after the needy exclusively in the church. However, the lack of sharing life with neighbors in the community as the early church did is a key weakness that CCSB leadership needs to address and eventually overcome.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.
**Life Together: Discipleship Training (Mk 1:14-45)**

To have life together among brothers and sisters is the hallmark of a Christian community. The psalmist said: “How good and pleasant it is when God’s people live together in unity!” (Ps 133:1). In Bonhoeffer’s most inspiring and uplifting book *Life Together*, he challenges every Christian not to take for granted in that “the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians.”[^19] He stresses that Christians can live together as a community only “through and in Jesus Christ.”[^20] However, Jesus did not do all things for his ministry by himself to preach the gospel and win over the lost. Instead, he called a small group of people to join his ministry as his disciples and companions to fulfill his mission on earth that God the Father had commanded him to do (Jn 8:28-29).[^21]

The opening verse of the Gospel of Mark clearly states the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God (1:1). John the Baptist prepared the way and straightened the path for the Lord, Jesus Christ, as the prophet Isaiah prophesied (1:2-3). Consequently, Jesus came from Galilee and was baptized by John in the river of Jordan (Mk 1:9). At the same time, both the Father and Holy Spirit testified openly that Jesus was the Father’s beloved son (Mk 1:11). Then Jesus was sent into the wildness to be tempted by Satan for forty days (Mk 1:12). Starting from verse 14 in the first chapter of Mark, Jesus returned triumphantly from the desert after the test of Satan and officially began his public ministry for the kingdom of God.

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[^20]: Ibid., 21.

God Calling People

Defeating Satan’s temptation and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Jesus started his public ministry with the official announcement and proclamation of the good news of God (Mk 1:15). Jesus went into Galilee and started his work for the kingdom of God. The region of Galilee includes Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus, and other towns near the Sea of Galilee, such as Capernaum and Bethsaida. Jesus was not only the announcer of the kingdom of God, but also a promoter of the kingdom.22

The kingdom message Jesus announced had profound meaning to the people of Israel as God’s kingdom they were longing for would be coming rapidly. As a kingdom promoter, Jesus summoned the hearers to follow him “in his new way of being the true people of God.”23 The great urgency of the kingdom message was to repent as the kingdom was near. Asking for repentance does not necessarily mean changing the behavior as a moral act.24 Instead, it indicates a complete turn from one’s previous life to a new way of living that Jesus has initiated according to his divine message.25 Those who accepted the divine message and lived a new way of life would become the people of

Immediately after Jesus proclaimed the message of the kingdom, he started to call his own disciples to join him as his helpers in doing God’s work (Mk 1:16-20). Jesus knew that he himself would not be the only person to promote God’s kingdom. He also

22 Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, 199.

23 Ibid., 200

24 Ibid., 247

needed the help of his disciples. Therefore, the first thing Jesus did was to form his ministry leadership team through the calling of his first disciples. Two episodes of Jesus’s calling his disciples were recorded in Mark 1:16-17 and 1:19-20. The first call of Jesus was to two fishermen, Simon and his brother Andrew, while they were casting their net into the Sea of Galilee (Mk 1:16). Jesus called the two brothers to become fishers of men by commanding them to follow him (Mk 1:17). As soon as they heard the call from Jesus, they followed him and discarded the nets. The same story happened to Zebedee’s two sons John and James while they were mending their nets (Mk 1:19). After the sons of Zebedee heard the call, they immediately followed Jesus and left their father and hired workers (Mk 1:20).

These double narratives of the calling story that Mark recorded are similar to the story of Elijah calling Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19-21). Elisha was a plowman when he was called by the prophet Elijah. He slaughtered his oxen and cooked the meat by burning his plowing equipment (1 Kgs 19:21). Elisha’s action of killing oxen and burning the equipment for living represented his determination to follow Elijah. Simon and Andrew had the same determination to follow Jesus by leaving their nets when Jesus made the call, as did James and John. However, the difference was that these four disciples came and followed Jesus right away, but Elisha asked Elijah’s permission to say goodbye to his parents before following him (1 Kgs 19:20). The first four disciples realized the great urgency of the call and dropped all they had to follow Jesus immediately. Jesus’s calling

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26 Ibid., 157.
27 Ibid.
message of “come to follow me” and “I will make you fishers of men” assembled his first ministry leadership team for God’s mission.

Coming after Jesus

With the call of his first disciples while walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus quickly formed his ministry leadership team. Without any delay, Jesus brought his team which included Peter, Andrew, James, and John to Capernaum. There they taught and preached the good news of the kingdom (Mk 1:21). Since these four newly called disciples were previously fishermen, they were unfamiliar with teaching and spreading the gospel. At this stage, they were apprentices of Jesus and had to follow their teacher closely in every work of his ministry. Jesus brought his apprentices along and taught them on every occasion so they might learn from him.

The very first work Jesus did was recorded in two accounts (Mk 1:21-28) right after his ministry team was formed. From Galilee then to Capernaum, Jesus conducted his first teaching and exorcising in a synagogue (Mk 1:21, 23). The people in the synagogue were utterly astonished by the teaching of Jesus because he taught them with great authority, unlike the scribes (Mk 1:22).

People were dumbfounded when Jesus drove out the evil spirit from a demon possessed man in the synagogue (Mk 1:27). The evil spirit recognized Jesus’s identity by saying “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (Mk 1:24). Nevertheless, the demon confronted Jesus face to face instead of submitting to his divine authority. Jesus reprimanded the unclean spirit and ordered it to be silent and get out, a twofold absolute

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authoritative command. In both accounts of teaching and exorcism, people’s astonishment of the authority and power of Jesus implied that he was, indeed, the son of God and the Messiah.

By following Jesus through Capernaum, his four disciples learned how Jesus conducted his powerful teaching with great authority when even the evil spirit obeyed him in the synagogue. Immediately after they left the synagogue, Jesus went into Simon and Andrew’s home with James and John (Mk 1:29). There he healed the fever of Simon’s mother-in-law by taking hold of her hand and raising her up. The crowds were amazed and started bringing people who were sick and demon possessed to Jesus. The whole city of Capernaum was gathered together at the door of Simon’s house (Mk 1:32-33). After Jesus healed many of the sick and drove out demons, he found solitude in a quiet place to pray and refresh his power from the Father early in the morning on the next day (Mk 1:35). When Simon and his team members came out looking for Jesus, he told them to go other places to preach and proclaim the good news as this was the very reason why he came (Mk 1:38). The four disciples followed Jesus throughout the Galilee, teaching, healing, and preaching the gospel (Mk 1:39).

A Life-on-Life Discipleship Training

Jesus knew the importance of creating a small group as his ministry leadership team so that they might work together to accomplish his work on earth. He quickly called his disciples and formed the team right after he proclaimed the good news of the kingdom

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31 Ibid., 175.
and before beginning his ministry work.\textsuperscript{32} Jesus was not only a great teacher, but also a wonderful leader who guided his disciples in every circumstance in everyday life. He knew one day his disciples would become great leaders to lead other followers of him and continue his work on earth after his crucifixion and return to the Father (Jn 14:12).

Mark 1:14-35 demonstrates that Jesus developed and practiced a specific pattern of discipleship training with his disciples through their everyday life. He knew that his disciples needed life-on-life training to learn how to teach and preach the good news of the kingdom. While they lived, ate, conversed, and worked together, the disciples learned from their master and teacher as much as they could.

Jesus developed a unique pattern of discipleship training that began with teaching and preaching in the good news of the kingdom, then added healing people, exorcising evil spirits, and finally culminated in a retreat to a quiet place. The same pattern of discipleship training is again found in Mark 1:38-45. Furthermore, starting from chapter two, the same pattern is repeated with teaching, preaching, and healing from Mark 2:2-5, calling his disciples in Mark 2:14-15, exorcising an evil spirit, and then withdrawing to a quiet place in Mark 6:31-32. This life-on-life discipleship and leadership training developed and practiced by Jesus provides church leaders a great model to follow. Church leaders must learn from Jesus how to train their ministry and leadership teams through a life-on-life training model.

Gospel Outreach through Life Sharing

The four disciples constituted the first ministry leadership team of Jesus. While they were busy following Jesus and learning how to teach the kingdom, preach the good news, heal the sick, and exorcise demons, there were other people already spreading the good news throughout Galilee in their own villages or towns (Mk 1:28, 33, 45). The formal training for the disciples of Jesus took time and was essential before they went out by themselves to continue the work independently. The life-on-life discipleship and leadership training developed by Jesus was a fundamental life-sharing approach for any gospel outreach.

It is interesting to note that those who first spread the good news of Jesus were not disciples, but rather those who were immediately affected by Jesus’s good news and miracles. They would be the first to spread the gospel to their friends, family, and townspeople (Mk 1:22, 27, 42). Furthermore, those who were healed by Jesus were the people to spread the gospel by sharing their stories with others, most notably a leper healed by Jesus who proclaimed freely and spread the news widely (Mk 1:40-45).³³

The story of the man with leprosy began when he came to Jesus and begged to be healed (Mk 1:40). Jesus had pity on him and healed the leper immediately (Mk 1:41). There was no indication in Scripture that the cured leper did what Jesus commanded by showing himself to the priest and offering sacrifices, which was also commanded by the law of Moses (Mk 1:44).³⁴ Instead, this healed leper began to proclaim the news freely and spread the word everywhere (Mk 1:45).

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³⁴ Ibid., 179.
Consequently, all who were cured from various diseases and healed from demon possession most likely answered the calling of Jesus and joined his mission much like his disciples did (Mk 1:16-20). In addition to those who received healing, the spectators also spread the good news when they shared with people that they saw Jesus performing miracles (Mk 1:28, 32-33). Indeed, sharing their lives about what they saw, heard, and received from Jesus was the most powerful and effective approach for gospel outreach.

A Group of Sent People (Lk 10:1-20)

God the Father sent his begotten son Jesus to this world to save his creation (Jn 3:16-17). God was the sender while the Lord Jesus was a sent person. To fulfill the mission of the Father, Jesus always kept in mind that his work was to do the will of the Father who sent him. Jesus always remembered that accomplishing the Father’s will was a priority even higher than keeping his own life. Jesus did not have his own will, works, and words, as they were God’s; even his own life was up to the sender, his Father.

Those who believe in Jesus believe in the one who sent him, that is the Father (Jn 12:44). Those who listen to the words of Jesus listen to the Father (Jn 14:10). The Father and the Son, the sender and the sent one, have the same mind, purpose, and mission.

After Jesus was raised from the dead, he appeared to his disciples and commanded them “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). In the great commission, Jesus also commanded his disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). God is a sending God as the Father sent Jesus. The Father and Son

35 Ibld., 180.

sent the Holy Spirit, and finally, the triune God sent his people into the world.  
Consequently, God can be viewed as a “missionary God” and “the church as a sent people.”  
Before Jesus was crucified, he sent out the twelve (Lk 9:1-6) and another group of seventy-two disciples to the world (Lk 10:1-20).

A People Sent with Power and Authority

The sending of the seventy-two disciples (Lk 10:1-20) followed immediately after the sending of the twelve recorded in the previous chapter (Lk 9:1-6). The main purpose of life-on-life discipleship training that Jesus conducted was to send them out into the world to do the work of the kingdom. Those disciples had followed Jesus for quite some time and they had seen and learned how Jesus conducted his teaching, preaching, and exorcism on many occasions. It was the time to send them out for some real practice and at the same time to bear fruit for God’s kingdom. The twelve were just sent out in the region of Galilee where Jesus ended his work on earth.  
The time for Jesus to be taken up to heaven was approaching and he was determined to go to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51).  
While walking from town to town toward Jerusalem, Jesus appointed and sent the seventy-two disciples ahead of him to every village and city (Lk 10:1).

Before the seventy-two were sent out, Jesus gave them some necessary teachings to strengthen their courage and faith as his true followers. These teachings were recorded in Luke 9:57-62. Jesus taught his disciples that going out to proclaim the kingdom of God


was far more urgent than taking care of family business (Lk 9:59-60). Those who were unqualified to follow Jesus would be left out and unfit for the service of the kingdom (Lk 9:60). Jesus equipped the seventy-two disciples with power in their teaching, preaching, and healing (Lk 10:9).

In the previous chapter, Jesus also gave them power and authority to cast out demons and heal all kinds of diseases (Lk 9:1). They were given authority to crush Satan and defeat the enemy (Lk 9:19). As the first ministry leadership team of Jesus, the twelve disciples were sent out first in chapter nine. Then the seventy-two disciples would be equal to six small groups sent out by Jesus in chapter ten. In the example of the harvest, even with six small groups, the workers were still few. They ought to pray to the Lord earnestly for sending out more workers to the field (Lk 10:2). The mission field now is the neighborhoods or communities where small groups of CCSB may work and harvest.

**Being Alert and Travelling Lightly**

Many people would be surprised by the statement Jesus made to the seventy-two. The first two words in the sentence of the sending mission were “go” and “behold,” followed by “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves” (Lk 10:3). This was Jesus’s warning to be watchful and alert while they were out in the field. They were indeed much like lambs in a world full of wolves where there was the danger of

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persecution and even death for their mission (Mt 10:17). In a similar way, it is hard for small group members to distinguish the criminals from the needy and poor as they try to help in the neighborhood. Regardless, the only hope for them is to trust the Lord as he is their shepherd. The Lord will take care of their safety by protecting them and delivering them from all dangers and harms.

Due to the dangers on the way and the urgency of the Lord’s mission, Jesus asked the seventy-two disciples to eliminate all unnecessary personal belongings (Lk 10:4). Taking no purse, bag, or sandals would help them travel lighter, faster, and safer without any delay. This was another opportunity for the seventy-two to practice their faith and see if the Lord would provide for them in time of need.\(^42\) The implication of travelling lightly for the churches in modern times is that they should not worry about the budget or other materials in supporting gospel outreach programs. In terms of traditional structures or organizations of the church today, church leaders may look at them with an open mind, be flexible, and be ready to make changes to support God’s mission, as suggested by Roxburgh.\(^43\)

Peace to Houses and Blessings at the Table

“Peace to this house” was the greeting Jesus commanded the disciples to pronounce first when entering a house (Lk 10:5). There is a deeper meaning to this than a normal greeting because the Lord sent his disciples to bring his real peace to the household.\(^44\) Only those who were willing to receive and accept the peace of the Lord


\(^{43}\) Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, 53.
were worthy to get hold of it as a son of peace in their households (Lk 10:6). Jesus already reconciled everyone to God through his crucifixion so that they might have real peace with God in Christ (2 Cor 5:18). Small group members are his ambassadors sent by the Lord for bringing his peace to every household in the neighborhood (2 Cor 5:20).

Staying in the same house and eating and drinking whatever they provided was the second command given by Jesus (Lk 10:7). According to Roxburgh, Scripture suggested that the seventy-two were called to practice being strangers or aliens who would need to be accepted by homes as guests in the mission field.45 At the table, disciples received the family’s hospitality and listened to their life stories. Disciples became listeners to hear the troubles, sorrows, or difficulties of their daily lives.46 They had no control in the conversation. The house approach is drastically different from the gospel programs held in today’s church, where seekers are invited and given a “kind of pitch” prepared in advance.47 The church has expanded its boundaries from a church building to the homes of gospel seekers. These homes may include other locations, such as coffee shops, senior homes, community centers, or even fast food restaurants in the neighborhood. The Lord’s table also extends from the church to members’ homes (Acts 2:46) and households of seekers.

God’s Mission, His Calling and Sending


45 Alan J. Roxburgh, Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 141.

46 Ibid., 143.

47 Ibid., 147.
The mission of God, *Missio Dei*, was the focus from the mid-twentieth century “as the foundation for the mission of the church.”⁴⁸ In fact, it is not the mission of the church, but “the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church...” according to Moltmann.⁴⁹ The shift from a church-centered to a God-centered view has changed not only the concept about the mission, but also the way of doing and achieving God’s mission today.⁵⁰ The former view made the church into “promoters or sales force” to grow, build, expand, or extend the reign of God and did not align with God’s mission.⁵¹ It is rather the church that is called and sent by God in order to join and participate in his mission.

The word “mission” stands for “sending,” therefore, God’s mission means the sending of God.⁵² Thus, the church is sent by God and “God’s mission is calling and sending us, the church of Jesus Christ” into the world to proclaim the good news of Jesus.⁵³ Carrying out the mission of God, the Lord called and sent the seventy-two into the mission field with his power and authority. Jesus who is “the Lord of harvest,” has the authority and complete sovereignty for sending his followers to harvest (Lk 10:2). Sending the seventy-two in pairs to each town certainly provided them with timely help, encouragement, and support. Therefore, small group members of CCSB may also ask the Lord to send them two by two into their neighborhood for God’s mission.

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⁵¹ Ibid., 93.
⁵² Ibid., 4.
⁵³ Ibid., 5.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PLAN
Chapter 4 describes the design and development of a ministry plan for home-based community groups. It begins with the theological implications of the formation for home-based groups according to the theological reflection discussed in chapter 3. Fellowship among group members at homes, life sharing through an integrative spiritual life, and engaging in a moving Lord’s table are three main elements for home-based small groups. This chapter covers the goals of community group formation and the strategy on how to achieve them. A description of spiritual practices will be further enumerated for community groups to experience group identity and transformation.

Finally, the chapter presents the target population of project pilot groups and the potentially extended population from every member in the church. It also describes the criteria of leadership for the selection of group leaders. Leadership development is critical to this pilot project and a good leadership training program is paramount to the success of this project for leaders to form and lead small groups. All group leaders should be trained and supervised by senior ministry leaders in the church.
Theological Implications of Home-Based Community Group Formation

The theological reflection presented in chapter 3 lays out a solid theological foundation for a small group ministry for God’s mission in the church. It examines and concludes that the early Christian community, namely the first church, had many small groups which conducted nearly all the functions of a church. Most importantly, they were based at homes which allowed for intimate life-on-life discipleship training in a small group for spiritual formation, leadership development, and gospel outreach. The church truly embodies a people sent by the Lord to the world, namely their neighborhoods, to participate in God’s mission.

Fellowship at Homes

The purpose of creating small groups is to provide the opportunity for fellowship with one another at their homes. Home is the most comfortable and natural place for people to get together and share their life stories. The true meaning of fellowship is to have a “common union” together “with the Lord and with one another.”1 As members are gathered for fellowship, their spiritual acts like worship, prayer, and studying God’s word signify their union with God and with one another. Sharing life stories and participating in all activities together truly is the beauty of the fellowship in a small group. As suggested by Newman and Nida, this fellowship may show “the communal spirit” when members share their stories with one another.2

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1 Faw, Acts, 48.
CCSB’s Bible study groups essentially serve as a platform for building a small group ministry. In this process, Bible study groups need to add more fellowship activities such as holding a love feast, experimenting in group identity, and conducting spiritual practices. In addition, both leadership and discipleship training within a small group are crucial for building each other up as disciples of Jesus. They may not be identical to the early Christian community, for example, it may not be feasible for every group member to sell their possessions to help the needy. However, the Spirit is always there for small group members to achieve the goal of helping others not only within the group, but also in their neighborhood. The ultimate goal is to extend this kind of fellowship from a small group to the neighborhood.

Life Sharing via an Integrated Spiritual Life

The main purpose of fellowship in a small group is to live out the word of God. This is how believers of Jesus live their lives together according to the teachings of the Bible. In the early Christian community, they got together every day in the temple courts as well as their homes for worship, prayer, teaching, fellowship, and breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 46). Community members conducted their daily activities together no matter if they were spiritual or physical acts. Furthermore, they not only lived their life together daily, but also shared everything they had.

Living life together in a small Christian community is pleasurable and uplifting. As group members have the same belief and faith in God’s word, sharing their life stories together has an amplified effect for being followers of Christ. As a true disciple of Christ, members are encouraged and compelled to share Christian life with their neighbors in a
local community. Because of life sharing in the early Christian community, the Lord added new members to their groups every day. In CCSB Bible study groups, members likewise need to strengthen their life sharing practice not only within a small group, but also in the neighborhood.

Lord’s Table on the Move: From the Church to Homes and Neighborhoods

The breaking of bread is a communion service of the church which is held normally on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), or the Lord’s Day. At CCSB, the Lord’s table is held every week and it is the center of the worship service on Sunday morning. Scripture also clearly describes the breaking of the bread held daily at homes in the early Christian community (Acts 2:46). The shift of the Lord’s table from church to homes is an important concept, especially in contemporary times. The breaking of bread at homes essentially brings the blessings of the Lord and his fellowship to the home-based small groups. It is crucial for each church to build a small group ministry and move the Lord’s table to homes.

Sharing meals from among small group members in their homes is a term for the breaking of bread, also known as the Lord’s table. The host and group members who bring food to share have the opportunity to serve others and practice hospitality. Sharing food can be practiced every time group members meet for fellowship in their homes. It is not only an act of fellowship itself, but also a practical example of life sharing. Those who receive the food blessed by the Lord have fellowship with the Lord and with one another. God’s love, grace, mercy, and other blessings are brought upon the small group through their service. Once a small group is touched and genuinely holds the Lord’s table
in their hearts, members can then go out and bring the blessing and peace of the Lord’s table to their neighbors.

APreferred Future: Small Group Ministry as the Primary Gospel Outreach Ministry

The preferred outcome of this new initiative is to successfully build a small group ministry at CCSB. The goal is to prepare Bible study groups for the readiness of God’s mission. These small missional groups are home-based and ready to join God’s work. It would be ideal to make all Bible study groups of CCSB into the church’s primary gospel outreach ministries to the neighborhood.

Many challenges await in holding gospel programs in the church. CCSB should shift the focus gradually from gospel meetings or activities held in the church to home-based small groups. Going into the neighborhood and sharing God’s peace and blessings with the neighbors is a biblical way of doing evangelism for small group members. By establishing a small group ministry at CCSB, the challenges caused by gospel meetings such as the lack of life sharing opportunities or the difficulty of retaining seekers in the church may be eliminated.

**Goals**

Five goals are outlined for this new ministry initiative by creating small groups in CCSB. The purpose of setting these goals is to help the church achieve the new vision of a small group ministry to become the primary gospel outreach ministry in the neighborhood. These goals contain fundamental blocks to build up each individual as a follower of Jesus and at the same time transform each Bible study group to a small missional community. Therefore, understanding the identity of each individual and group
is critical for each member to hear and respond to the calling of God. By learning and living out God’s word in a small group, members can experience personal and group transformation as well.

Experiments in Identity: God’s Beloved Children

Many Christians are unsure about their identity in the Lord. Identity is not only the sense of who they are as a Christian, but also as a believer. According to Scripture, those who receive Jesus and believe in his name have the right to become God’s children (Jn 1:12). In addition, Christians are children of God, as testified by the Holy Spirit to their spirit (Rom 8:16). They are God’s beloved children and may call God their “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). Therefore, the Apostle John cried out “how great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 Jn 3:1). Indeed, Christians should realize from Scripture that their identity is as God’s beloved children.

To experience identity as God’s beloved children as a reality is wholly different than knowing and accepting the idea. To have a better and deeper understanding of their identity as God’s beloved children, Christians must experience all good things from God in their daily life. The best way to experience God’s love and care is to develop intimacy with him by meeting God in solitude and prayer. Jesus set a great example for his followers by praying to the Father in solitude when it was still dark in the early morning (Mk 1:35). A solitary walk with God in the neighborhood to experience the beauties of his creation is another way to appreciate this identity. As Mark Scandrette suggested,

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3 Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus, 104.

4 Yau, A Winning Combination, 21.

5 Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus, 103-122.
“imagination, creativity and the appreciation of beauty can be power tools for connecting our identity as God’s beloved with the details of our daily lives.”

Experiments in Group Identity: A Life-Together Missional Community

In the earliest Christian community discussed in the theological reflection, the believers lived life together. They shared their meals, prayed, and worshiped together. They received teachings and had fellowship together. Additionally, even possessions were shared amongst them. These small group members realized their identity as a life-together community. There was no distinction or rank between members in the group as all were God’s beloved children. They understood that their identity as an individual Christian had great significance to the group identity. If every group member today discovers and experiences their identity as God’s beloved child, then a life-together community can be experienced naturally in a small group.

In the earliest Christian community, new believers shared their lives not only with community members but also with those they encountered in the temple courts or on the street. They shared meals with them as well as the good news of Christ and their members increased through new converts added by the Lord. Therefore, a church’s small groups may need to do the same to experience the same group identity as a missional community.

To Live Out God’s Word in the Community

The most pleasant thing in a small Christian community is to live lives together in peace and unity as the psalmist wrote in Psalms 133:1. It is truly a big hurdle for

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6 Ibid., 107.
community members from different educational, economic, and social backgrounds to have their lives together as brothers and sisters. However, believers can share their lives with one another in the community based upon the word of God. In the Bible, it is said that “man does not live on bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:1). Jesus tells his disciples that the words he has spoken to them are spirit and life (Jn 6:63). In this way, for a small group to become a life-together community, every member must live out God’s word.

In Bible study groups of CCSB, every member already has a strong desire to know more about God’s word. Members who have been in Bible study groups for many years learn biblical teachings week by week. However, group members lack the practice of God’s word in their everyday lives. In today’s society it is a challenge to live out God’s word for every Christian, even for those that participate in small groups. In this new initiative, members are encouraged to put God’s word into practice in their daily lives.

Hearing and Answering God’s Calling as a Disciple of Christ

The identity of Christian community members is not only as God’s beloved children, but also as a chosen people belonging to God (1 Pt 2:9). The Apostle Peter reminds all believers that they are a people called out by God from “darkness into his wonderful light” (Col 1:13). Every believer in this definition is part of God’s people, called out from the darkness. All Christians are called out from this dark world into the light that is the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Lord is like a great shepherd who calls his sheep by their names so that those called may follow him (Jn 10:3). Therefore, everyone in a small group is called by the Lord to be his disciple.
Thus, members in a small group are always reminded about the significance of God’s calling to every one of them. By conducting spiritual practices together, members may have more opportunities to hear God’s calling in the deepest parts of their hearts. Hearing God’s call to be his disciple is the first step toward becoming a true follower of Jesus. The next step is to answer and respond to God’s call, a crucial task for small groups to develop. This is another critical goal of creating small groups in CCSB.

Experiencing Personal and Group Transformation in the Community

The final goal for community members is to experience personal spiritual growth and group transformation through their everyday lives in a small group. Experimenting in identity as God’s beloved children by conducting spiritual practices together may help members build a closer relationship with God. Personal transformation is really a life-changing process that shapes group members to be more like Christ. These changes may occur first in their inner life and then reflect through their outer life. In this way, both inner and outer lives are transformed. By building an intimate relationship with the Lord, they may bear the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, peace, joy, and kindness in their heart (Gal 5:22-23). The fruit of Spirit will manifest in them through their outer lives in a small group and local community.

In a small group, personal transformation of each member plays a key role in the transformation of the group as a whole. In other words, without life-changing individuals, it is not possible to have a transformed group. The primary goal of this new ministry initiative is to shape Bible study groups of CCSB from knowledge-seeking to life-sharing based communities. Therefore, it is crucial for each small group member to realize the
importance of both personal and group transformation. If the Bible study groups of CCSB truly transform into life sharing communities, it will become natural for them to share life with their neighbors. This is the ultimate goal for members to realize in becoming a life sharing missional group.

**Content of the Strategy**

The content strategy for the new ministry initiative includes the planning and guidelines for small group formation. The governance of running a small group are described in the community group agreement and commitment. Additionally, the resources for spiritual practices from Nouwen’s and Willard’s books are presented. Finally, resources for the experiments in a Christian community are examined from McKnight’s, Gibbs and Bolger’s, and Scandrette’s books.

**Community Group Agreement and Commitment**

By forming a small group, some basic rules and commitments must be defined to ensure the smooth flow of group events and activities when members are gathered. Ideally, these rules and agreements are known before engaging in the activities and are thus followed accordingly. Some small groups like to put these rules and commitments together as a covenant or contract of the group. This allows potential members to have a true understanding of expectations and therefore join the group with sincerity.

However, among those attending small groups, some are gospel seekers and friends. For this reason, there is no need to put the rules and commitments into a contract or covenant form. Having common rules, mutual agreements, or etiquettes on how to conduct group meetings and other activities should be sufficient. Logistics is also
important as in the time and place to have group meetings. Leaders and co-leaders play an important role in guiding group members through these matters.

Resources for Spiritual Practices

Nouwen’s book *The Way of the Heart* is one of the main resources for spiritual practices for small groups. The beauty of this book is its simplicity and directness in leading a believer’s heart closer to God through three basic spiritual practices: solitude, silence, and prayer.⁷ The material of the book was used and practiced in one of the inspiring seminars led by Nouwen at Yale Divinity School.⁸ An advantage of using the book is for personal spiritual development. The desire and heart of the followers of Christ may be realized through the simple and practical spiritual disciplines addressed in the book. Without proper inspiration and encouragement, it is difficult to have true fellowship and life sharing within a small group.

Another resource comes from Willard’s *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, where many spiritual practices are examined. The most important message from Willard’s book is to realize the importance of spiritual disciplines that change the lives of Christians. It is the way God shapes and molds them to be more like Christ through their everyday life in the community. This is a great resource, accessible to everyone in the group for spiritual formation and transformation by living the way Jesus lived.⁹ This book stresses discipleship, especially the apprenticeship of Christ, so that Christians may follow closely how Jesus lived.

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⁸ Ibid., 7.

Spiritual Practices: Sharing God’s Word, Testimony, Prayer, Singing, Caring and Serving, Hospitality, and Communion Celebration

The key element of promoting personal spiritual formation and group transformation is developing spiritual practices in the small group. The goal of exercising spiritual disciplines is to draw group members to God more closely in their daily lives. Spiritual disciplines need to be practiced not only in the group, but also by individuals when they are alone. The three fundamental disciplines that Nouwen discovered from the Desert Fathers and Mothers should ideally be practiced by each member from time to time when they are alone.

Solitude and silence are required for each team member to practice alone each day. Other spiritual disciplines can be incorporated into the Bible study group meetings held every week. The spiritual disciplines also include reading God’s word, singing together, praying for one another, practicing hospitality, serving the saints, and eating together. All disciplines are focused on how to share their lives together. Therefore, every member is encouraged to participate in the practices developed in the group. Everyone is welcome to bring fruit, dessert, or drinks to the group for the purpose of practicing hospitality and serving one another.

Resources for Experiments in Community

The book Practicing the Way of Jesus by Mark Scandrette is the main resource for conducting experiments in identity within the small group. The goal for the small group to discover and experiment in their identity as God’s beloved children.

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Scandrette, Practicing the Way of Jesus, 103-122.
Besides some spiritual practices suggested in the book such as silence, prayer, and solitude, a few other experiments are added in group exercises. A practice of stillness prayer is a good spiritual discipline to add into each member’s daily exercise. A solitary walk with God for fifteen or thirty minutes each week is another way to experience God’s presence and the beauty of his creation. Some exercises like applying analysis and solutions from the Bible to one’s general fears, worries, and struggles can be a great way to experience God’s love, care, and mercy.

McKnight’s book *A Fellowship of Differents* and Gibbs and Bolger’s *Emerging Churches* are other resources for group experiments in community. Each member should be reminded that the small group is like a mixed salad bowl in that everyone has unique interests, personalities, social and economic backgrounds. McKnight provides some basic ideas and methods that allow members to have a true fellowship, most importantly, the concept of sharing life with one another. *Emerging Church* has many similar ideas of small groups where evangelism is a way of life, instead of a particular event of the church. In conclusion, the book provides direct contributions to small groups for various experiments in community.

**Target Population and Leadership**

This is a pilot program for the new ministry initiative in the church. A group of people are selected to participate in this experiment. For this project, the focus is to build

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11 Ibid., 121.
12 Ibid., 120.
13 McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents*, 121.
small groups for God’s mission through spiritual disciplines and discipleship training. The ultimate goal is to strengthen and expand the church’s gospel outreach ministry through small groups. As a result, these small groups are mainly converted or enhanced from the Bible study groups in the church.

Pilot Project Population: Church Leaders and Bible Study Group Members

Those who currently attend the church’s Bible study groups are considered ideal candidates for the pilot program. However, it is not necessary to view this requirement as all exclusive. All else who are interested in joining the pilot team are welcome. To promptly begin the project, no new small groups will be formed just for this pilot program. Instead, an existing Bible study group has been selected as the pilot team for this project.

The ideal size of the pilot team is around fifteen members including leaders. The advantage of selecting one of the existing Bible study groups as the pilot team is to have in place the already adequate training and support for both group leaders and members. In addition, with just one group, there will be less chance of possible uneasiness if other Bible study groups are included.

Extended Population: All Church Members

The extended population that participates in this project includes church members who are willing to take part in some of the practices and experiments. To experience personal spiritual growth is the goal for the extended population. Some of the basic spiritual disciplines, such as solitude, silence, prayer, and other desert experiences were
preached in a few Sunday sermons already. Members should be able to follow the instructions to practice them in their daily lives.

Experiencing personal transformation within oneself is the first step to promote transformation in a small group. It is also crucial for each member to experience his or her own spiritual transformation in the group. Other Bible study groups of CCSB that are willing to practice some spiritual disciplines and experiments are welcome to join, as it paves the way for the adoption of the new initiative in the future.

Leader Selection Criteria: Faithfulness, Willingness, Eagerness, Trust, and Endurance

Faithfulness is the most important quality among the five essential criteria for being a small group leader. A leader must be faithful to Christ as his follower and servant before he or she may lead other people. Small groups of the church are not the same as other social groups in terms of its objectives and goals. A small group leader ought to be a good and faithful servant of the Lord just as the servant with five talents whom Jesus praised (Mt 25:20-21). If a leader is faithful to a few tasks assigned, God may entrust this leader more responsibilities in leading a group (Mt 25:23).

A willingness to lead is the second criterion for being a small group leader. To be a great leader is to serve people, but not be served (Mt 20:28). Therefore, a leader should have the willingness to serve group members and carry out the work needed in a small group.

Having eagerness to help group members is the third criterion required for being a leader. A person who has a strong desire to assist other people has great potential to be a good leader. A good leader of a small group is one who is eager to take care of every
group member. A small group leader always pays special attention to those who need help.

Trust is the fourth element that a small group leader should possess. An efficient leader can build trust within the group. The best way of building trust in a group is leading by example. A leader may not be able to lead if he or she has not had a chance to experience these things.

Endurance is the fifth requirement for being a small group leader. This may be the toughest element for those who want to be a leader. Having the fortitude to face any complaints from group members is not easy. It is also difficult for a leader to have patience and perseverance to receive criticism or blame. A good leader should be able to resolve these issues in a good manner and continue to lead group members forward.

Leadership Development: Trained and Supervised by Ministry Leaders

Leadership development plays a critical role to the success of this new ministry initiative. All leaders of small groups need to be trained properly before the pilot group begins. The leadership training program will detail the roles and responsibilities of a small group leader and co-leader. Ministry leaders of CCSB will provide guidance on how to lead a small group.

Tips and directions for managing group activities, such as conducting spiritual practices and sharing God’s word are also presented in the leadership training. The main resource for the guidance of small group exercises or experiments comes from the book *Practicing the Way of Jesus* by Scandrette. The administration and leadership materials
are from Gladen’s book *Small Groups with Purpose*. All leaders ought to be trained and supervised by the ministry leaders of the church.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

This chapter outlines the implementation process of the new ministry initiative. It begins with a summary of the pilot project which includes the initial planning for small group formation, document preparation, leader selection and training, and pilot project groups. The pilot project is divided into four phases: planning and documentation, leadership development, initiation of pilot small groups, and evaluation and analysis. The activities of future planning including the revision of the project plan and the identification of new leaders are also discussed.

Leadership development including responsibilities, roles, tasks, and guidance are elaborated in this chapter. Additionally, group material resources, a meeting place, and other logistics support are presented. Finally, there is a discussion on the assessment plan which contains feedback from a questionnaire, one-on-one meetings, interviews, and evaluation among group members and leaders.
Pilot Project Summary: Initial Planning and Document Preparation, Leadership Selection and Training, and Pilot Small Groups

The initial planning work is to draft the documents required for this new ministry initiative. The planning document initially defines the vision statement of the small group ministry at CCSB. A clear vision statement of small groups helps members realize the direction in which they are heading but still build up small groups to a life-together community. Becoming a disciple of Christ by practicing the way of Jesus is the end result desired.

Another necessary document for the project is the guidelines and commitments of a small group while members are gathered for meetings or other activities. These are basic rules or common ground for each team member to follow in meetings to avoid confusion. Ideally, each member should be encouraged to follow the guidelines and requirements for meetings and spiritual practices. For the leaders, additional documents define the criteria for selection process, taking into account responsibilities and roles within a small group. Based upon the qualifications for being a small group leader, potential candidates can be identified and selected.

Once small group leaders are selected, the leadership training begins. The first part of leadership training focuses on how to lead a small group efficiently with the responsibilities and roles of a small group leader as the guidelines for the training. The second part of leadership training emphasizes how to effectively lead a small group in spiritual practices and experiments. Spiritual practice such as solitude, silence, prayer, and pre-reading are based on Nouwen’s book *The Way of the Heart* and Willard’s *The
Experiments in identity are conducted based on Scandrette’s *Practicing the Way of Jesus.*

Forming a pilot team is a critical step after the leaders are selected and trained. Ideally, a leader forms his or her own group based on guidelines and commitments. A leader may select group members through personal invitation, email, or phone calls. The next step is to find the best time and place for the group to come and meet each week. The suggested places for group members to get together are in homes as the home-based group is the focus for this project. The leaders need to call their first meeting with all members and establish administrative and logistic support before the small group starts.

**Project Phases**

The project comprises four major phases that are crucial to this new ministry initiative. They are planning, formation, execution, and evaluation. The planning phase starts with the outlines of the activities in each phase and the draft of initial documents required for the project. The formation phase includes leadership selection, training, and forming a pilot team. The pilot group begins its meetings and activities in the execution phase.

**Initial Planning and Document Preparation**

The initial planning phase defines the vision, mission, and objectives of the project. A project timeline is also defined for the implementation process. The initial planning also outlines four major project phases and the activities in each phase. The

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2 Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, 103-122.
development of initial documents includes project requirements, guidelines and commitments of a small group, criteria of leadership selection, and the leader’s responsibilities and roles.

The preparation of the training materials from Nouwen, Willard, and Scandrette’s books begins in this stage. Three core spiritual disciplines practiced by the Desert Fathers and Mothers are the key spiritual practices in this project. The details of conducting group experiments come from the book *Practice the Way of Jesus* by Scandrette. In addition, a self-study project focusing on the missional challenges in American immigrant churches in Silicon Valley provides some valuable information for the project planning.

**Leadership Selection and Training**

The main activities in the formation phase are to select leaders, conduct leadership training, and form the pilot team. The qualification for being a small group leader is based upon the leadership selection criteria. There are five criteria to evaluate someone for leadership consideration: faithfulness, willingness, eagerness, trust, and endurance. A good leader is faithful to God, willing to lead, and eager to serve members with trust and endurance.

Leadership training focuses on the responsibilities and roles of a small group leader and the practice of spiritual disciplines. The goal is to equip a leader with the necessary leadership skills to lead a small group. Small group leaders must understand leadership roles and responsibilities well in order to effectively lead a team. Getting familiar with group experiments and spiritual practices is the key to successfully lead
members for these exercises. The last activity of the formation phase is to gather the pilot team through the guidelines and commitments of a small group.

Initiation of Pilot Small Groups

Once the team is formed, the pilot small group begins. The leaders need to plan how to hold the meeting and conduct each activity accordingly. Handouts and worksheets for spiritual practices prepared by small group leaders are important for members to understand and follow. The goal of the small group is to experience spiritual growth and promote group transformation, and it is important to maintain a positive atmosphere.

The leader and co-leader need to work together in order to help each other in group discussions and spiritual practices. The role of a facilitator is crucial to support the leader in a guided discussion or spiritual practice for the encouragement of participation and interaction. A facilitator needs to be neutral in a group discussion while helping each member move toward a desired outcome. Normally, a co-leader plays the role of facilitator.

Evaluation and Analysis

The evaluation phase involves feedback from team members who participate in the pilot program regularly. A survey form is readily available for members to provide their input at the end of this pilot project. The feedback of the group is essential for leaders to know the areas they need to improve upon for the next project. Church leaders also have a chance to assess the concerns and issues raised from the pilot group.

Measuring spiritual growth is an important process since personal and group transformation is the goal of this project. Group members have a chance to assess their
spiritual conditions at the end of the project. Every member may see how much progress has been made according to the results of spiritual assessment. The leadership team of CCSB needs to evaluate all feedback and make appropriate modifications for the subsequent project of this new ministry initiative.

New Leaders Identified with Revised Plan

Identification of new leaders and the revision of the project plan are two important tasks in the post-project phase. The purpose of this phase is to identify and equip potential leaders with updated documents for future projects. New leaders, greatly needed for a growing church, may bring forth new ideas and innovative thinking to the leadership team. They give fresh input to grow the church not only spiritually, but also physically over time.

In the post-project phase, there is a great opportunity for church leaders to identify and cultivate new leaders for leading new small groups. New leaders may lead his or her new group by following what they learned from the previous project. The second necessary task is to revise the project plan. Leaders need to enhance the planning, training, and implementation documents accordingly for future projects based on the feedback of the group.

Leadership Development

The main purpose of leadership development is to equip new leaders with an understanding of responsibilities, roles, and essential skills for leading a small group. This learning and training process is critical for the church to cultivate leaders with ideal
leadership qualities and skills for the small group ministry. The leadership development focuses on the tasks and guidance used for conducting group activities and spiritual practices.

Leadership Roles: Coordinator and Facilitator of Group Activities

There are two main leadership roles in a small group, namely, a coordinator and a facilitator. As a coordinator, the leader needs to organize all group activities and events. A schedule should be made to keep all planned activities on track. The coordinator needs to make sure all members have the information needed for each group activity or event. Distributing necessary information such as materials for group practices and meeting places to members in a timely manner builds a well-organized team.

Meanwhile, a facilitator needs to help and support the leader during an activity such as a group discussion or spiritual practice. A good facilitator is not only a good listener, but also a team player who can accommodate different ideas or comments. Ultimately, the role of a small group facilitator is to help members transform and grow through spiritual practices or group discussion.

Leader Responsibilities: Connecting, Preparing, Serving, Caring, and Encouraging

The organizational structure of a small group includes a leader and a co-leader. Both are responsible for their team’s encouragement, coordination, activities, and growth. A group leader is in charge of the whole team and a co-leader provides assistance to the leader. Their main responsibilities are in five areas: connecting team members, preparing materials of group activities, serving the whole team, caring for every member, and building the team up.
For group discussion and spiritual practices, both leader and co-leader need to prepare the related material before the group meets. Serving the group with love, sincerity, and trust is key to building an effective and cohesive team. Caring for each member through prayers, encouragement, and comfort grows the team. In addition to the five areas listed above, leaders ought to be a good example and role model to all members.

Leadership Tasks: Preparatory Reading from Scandrette for Spiritual Experiments

In order to have an efficient and fruitful group practice, leaders always need to familiarize themselves with the best understanding and techniques for conducting group exercises. The book *Practicing the Way of Jesus* by Scandrette provides many valuable insights on how to initiate and lead group experiments. Leaders need to do preparatory reading from the book related to group practices. In the second chapter of the book, different levels of experiments are discussed to help leaders prepare and plan properly before the practice starts.³

In chapter six, the detailed process of conducting group experiments is described such as identifying collaborators, designing experiments, and facilitating sessions.⁴ As the author indicates, it is important to have a brief statement of vision, goals, and detailed content of an experiment to share with group members. The goal is not to share the information with members but to invite them into the practice for transformation.⁵

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³ Ibid., 31-35.
⁴ Ibid., 84-99.
⁵ Gladen, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 72.
Leadership Guidance: Tips and Guides of Best Practices by Senior Church Leaders

Getting guidance from senior church leaders is an important process for small group leaders. Small group leaders always need to remember that they are not a commander on the field, but rather a servant of God. Gaining trust from group members is crucial to build a cohesive team. With the trust earned from the team, leaders may become role models for their members. A way for leaders to gain the trust of the team is to be good listeners while genuinely loving and caring for each other.

Steve Gladen suggests that leaders must not lead the group alone.\(^6\) An effective leader values teamwork and leads the group together with one or more other people. In a sense, each team member is his or her own leader since they are a minister in the sight of God.\(^7\) A leader always encourages and stimulates passive members to move from watching to serving. One way to prevent group members from being passive is to keep group activities fun and engaging. Lastly, as strong role models, leaders cannot lead members to a place they have never been themselves as “the credibility of a leader is dependent on their lived experience.”\(^8\)

**Resources**

The resources of the project are mainly for logistical support when members get together for meetings and group activities. A physical meeting place is decided initially, then leaders should gather the materials and equipment needed to support group

\(^6\) Ibid., 80.

\(^7\) Ibid., 83.

\(^8\) Mark Scandrette, Notes from “Practicing the Way of Jesus,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 2015.
activities. Finally, there is the preparation of a table for the love feast.

Meeting Place and Equipment

The meetings take place in homes as the home-based small group is the focus of the project. Four families take turns opening their homes each week. Rotating meeting places allows the group to fairly share the load of preparing and hosting. Leaders make sure every member gets the meeting information on time. A training room is also available to use for leadership training or special group activities.

The training center room provides audio and video support. A whiteboard is available for members to watch video clips in the training room as well as to present information with notes for everyone to see. Members can bring their own laptops or iPads to the meeting which is sufficient for audio. The training room is also equipped with folding tables, stackable chairs, and a podium. This kind of setting in the training room is good for a breakout session.

Setting a Table with Food and Drinks

A table is prepared for group members to enjoy after the meetings. Hosting members normally are responsible for food and beverage preparation. Non-hosting members are welcome to join by bringing fruit, dessert, or drinks. Usually, everyone stands and serves one another. Members enjoy fellowship around the table in the Lord while eating and drinking together.

Setting a table with food and drinks is a love feast held at homes in a small group. Every group member is invited to join a love feast. Everyone is welcome to participate in meal preparation. This is an opportunity to practice hospitality among group members.
Knowing how to serve members well in a small group is a necessary training and practice for serving neighbors in the neighborhood.

**Assessment Plan**

A single survey form is created as the assessment tool for obtaining feedback from members. In addition, the evaluation process also includes group conversation, one-on-one meetings, and private interviews with team members. A detailed analysis is conducted based on all the responses from members.

**Assessment Tool: A Single Questionnaire**

Developing a survey questionnaire is a key element in the evaluation process. There are two areas of focus in this survey form for team members to provide their feedback, namely personal spiritual growth and group transformation. From these results, leaders may get an idea of the spiritual status of the group. It also indicates areas where church leaders could improve on in leading small group members to grow spiritually.

The questionnaire is adopted from Gladen’s *Small Groups with Purpose* regarding the tools of spiritual health assessment. There are three categories designed in the survey form: spiritual development, discipleship training, and group fellowship. All three are interrelated to one another in terms of spiritual formation and group transformation.

**Evaluation Discussion**

An evaluation discussion through group conversation with leaders provides another way of obtaining feedback. Group members are encouraged to speak freely about their concerns or issues from group activities to administration and leadership. Group
members may offer recommendations for improvement learned through the current
project. The review method of group conversation complements the survey questionnaire
in the evaluation process.

Another assessment method is through scheduled one-on-one meetings or
interviews with members. Both scheduled meetings and interviews may not be a formal
process of getting feedback from members. However, this assessment method provides
an opportunity for members to express concerns that may not be obtained in the first two
assessment tools. Leaders may select certain group members and request feedback on
specific areas in the form of one-on-one conversations.

Results and Analysis

The following are survey results from the responses of fifteen pilot group
members in the assessment tool. The evaluation survey was conducted in August 2017.
There are three categories of the survey with their assigned table numbers, respectively:
spiritual development, discipleship development, and group fellowship development. The
rating scale of each survey item ranges from 1 to 7, from “seldom” to “always.” In the
following tables (1, 2, 3), lowercase x is used for the pre-project survey and capital X is
used for the post-project survey.

Table 1. Spiritual Growth Assessment Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual Development</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I spend a regular time with the Lord alone daily (solitude)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I practice silence in most situations (silence)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I practice stillness prayer to the Lord and look for his direction x X
I have a desire to read God’s word every day (His word) X x
I pray and connect to the Lord frequently even in difficult times x X

Table 2. Discipleship Development Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipleship Development</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I allow God’s word to guide my thoughts and change my actions</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I still can praise God in difficult times, see them as opportunities to grow</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I make my decision by seeking God’s guidance and direction</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often think of God as his beloved children in my daily life</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Fellowship Development Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Fellowship Development</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I share my life stories with group members or people I meet.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I always like to share the story of Jesus with someone I encountered.</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I try to find opportunities to serve group members, friends, or family members.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a desire to take care of people when they need help.</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to these survey results, personal spiritual development is the weakest area among the three categories in terms of total scores. Eighty percent of the spiritual development items are in the “occasionally” and “seldom” ranges. The low scores of practicing solitude, silence, and stillness prayer indicates the difficulties in keeping up with these disciplines in participants’ daily life. Nevertheless, the positive sign is that the score of practicing solitude and silence are up from “seldom” to “occasionally.” The lowest score of doing stillness prayer confirms that it is the most difficult discipline for members to practice daily. The only item that falls into “frequent” range is the desire of reading God’s word daily. Appropriately, this points to the value of the Bible within the CCSB community.

Overall, based on survey results, both discipleship and group fellowship developments are trending in a positive direction. The strengths of the group members include allowing God’s word to change their thoughts and actions, trusting God during difficult times, embracing their identity as God’s beloved children, and serving and helping one another. Although a weaker area was initially the sharing of their life stories and the story of Jesus with others, the members did improve from “seldom” to “occasionally” during this project period. Based upon the analysis of the results, this project does help members improve their weaknesses in all three categories.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to explore a strategy of small groups for God’s mission. The focus was to integrate elements of spiritual discipline, essential to discipleship, into Bible study groups. The pilot group was selected at CCSB for launching this new ministry initiative. The initial planning, leadership development, pilot group formation, and evaluation of the project took eleven months to complete (October 2016 to August 2017). The basic survey model of descriptive method was used for gathering data from group members. The single questionnaire adapted from Gladen’s *Small Groups for Purpose* served as a data collection instrument. All fifteen members in the pilot group were the respondents for the survey questionnaire.

**A Summary of Outcomes**

The overall outcome in the category of spiritual development indicates an 11 percent improvement for all disciplines. The formula for calculating average improvement percentage is to add up all the gains from each discipline and divide by the total score. The highest score of each item is seven, with the total score calculated by multiplying seven by the total number of disciplines. The practice of solitude, spending a regular time alone with the Lord, resulted in an increase from “seldom” to “occasionally.” The practice of silence in most of the situations also increased from “seldom” to “occasionally,” a 14.3 percent improvement. The lowest scoring was the practice of stillness prayer, although it did show marginal improvement. The practice for three core spiritual disciplines, namely solitude, silence, and prayer, improved by 14.3
percent. The discipline of having a desire to read God’s word daily remained high in the “frequent” range.

In the category of discipleship development, there is an overall improvement of 14.3 percent. This is the area that had the highest improvement rate among all three categories. Allowing God’s word to guide their thoughts and actions, praising God in difficult times, and thinking as God’s beloved children are disciplines that improved by 14.3 percent. In the group fellowship development, two disciplines of sharing life stories with group members and sharing the story of Jesus had a 28 percent improvement, the highest among all items. All other items had no improvement.

A Summary of Insights Gained

The rate of improvement for both spiritual growth and group transformation in this project period was 14 percent. It is the best achievement that the pilot group accomplished in the project. As the goal of this new ministry initiative is to experience both spiritual and group transformation, these results proved evidence that the pilot group achieved the purpose of this project in both areas. Some valuable insights gained from this study are related to spiritual growth, life-together community, and missional group. Personal spiritual growth takes time to develop, as shown by the low improvement rate in the category of spiritual development. Spiritual growth is different in that gaining knowledge or teachings from the Bible can be achieved in a much shorter period. Therefore, it is necessary to continue practicing spiritual disciplines as it is a lifelong process.
Spiritual growth has a positive correlation with daily Christian life through sharing life stories and the story of Jesus. The spiritual growth at 11 percent may have been triggered by a 29 percent improvement on the sharing of life stories and the sharing of the story of Jesus. This demonstrates that Christians ought to pay attention to spiritual disciplines and practice them often in their daily lives. Finally, this study pointed out the importance of promoting spiritual development and life sharing with others. The lowest scores received in both areas showed the weakest areas that group members needed to improve upon. These areas displayed a drastic increase in score especially in the life sharing aspect. This was a significant finding in the study, validating the importance of this new ministry initiative.

Next Steps, Implications, and Future Plans

There are two important tasks in the post-project phase after the evaluation process. Identifying new leaders for leading future small groups from pilot team members is the first step. New leaders must participate in the activities of a small group before they may be considered for leadership selection. They must learn leadership skills such as planning, coordination, collaboration, and other techniques from previous leaders. The second step is to revise the project plan and update other related documents, such as group agreements, commitments, and responsibilities of a small group leader. The current small group leaders may need to review the whole pilot program and identify the areas that need to be revised in the project plan. Leaders need to examine the project timeline, duration, and activities of each phase for proper adjustments as necessary.
Implications of this Project for CCSB

One of the most important implications of this pilot project is the expansion of Bible study groups’ functions to include spiritual development, group transformation, and community activities. The original focus of Bible study groups at CCSB was to learn God’s word chapter by chapter in each book of the Bible. It is necessary for a Christian to know the teachings of the Lord. However, putting God’s word into practice should be the ultimate goal of Bible study. Lack of practice of God’s word is a common concern in Bible study groups at CCSB. This project aims to help members address and overcome this problem while encouraging each other to grow spiritually in a life-together community.

Another important implication is that the small group ministry may become CCSB’s primary gospel outreach ministry to the neighborhood over time. Due to the challenges of gospel programs held in the church, building small home-based missional groups is the ultimate solution to overcome these challenges. By living out God’s word through practicing the way of Jesus in their everyday lives, group members may bring God’s blessing, peace, and love to their neighbors. This is exactly the command Jesus gave to his disciples, “as the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (Jn 20:21). A home-based small group is sent by the Lord into their neighborhood. They join God’s mission in the neighborhood and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit.1

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1 Roxburgh, *Joining God, Remaking Church, Changing the World*, 40.
Plans for the Future

Three plans that closely support each other are discussed below. The first action item is to continue small group leadership development and training for new leaders. A good potential leader takes time to be trained from other experienced leaders. A key element of cultivating good leaders is through personal spiritual development. Small group leaders are not only administrative leaders or facilitators but spiritual leaders of their members. Small group leadership must come from the leaders’ “lived experience” for authenticity and they must be a role model for members.\(^2\)

The second plan is to add more Bible study groups into this new ministry initiative. As more groups get involved, more leaders will be needed for the future of this project. Therefore, the first plan regarding leadership development and training is crucial for supporting this new project. Estimate of resources and logistical support is included along with the projected timeline. Finally, the third plan is simply to encourage more church members to join a new small group.

**Recommendations and the Implications of This Project for the Larger Christian Community**

Building a small group ministry to include all church members in small groups is the first recommendation to the larger Christian community. The church can be viewed as a large Christian community formed by many small groups. In the early Christian community, many small groups were created for fellowship, teaching, praying, and worship (Acts 2:42-47). As such, the church is responsible to provide a place for church

\(^2\) Scandrette, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, 87.
members to connect with one another in a small group context. A church is not simply a building for members to gather for worship on Sunday. A church should rather be like a life-together community. In this community, members can share their life stories and seek God’s comfort and love together.

Creating home-based small groups is the second recommendation to the larger Christian community. Home is the best place for small group members to meet regularly, just as the early Christian community did. Most activities held in the church including the Lord’s table can be shifted to homes. The families that open their homes for groups to meet get the opportunity to practice hospitality and serve one another.

Focusing on spiritual formation in small groups is the third recommendation. This is applicable to all church members, not just those in small groups. To be a follower of Christ, members need to practice the way of Jesus and live out God’s word in their everyday lives. Therefore, personal spiritual growth is crucial to each member. Conducting a spiritual health assessment is recommended for each church member to do regularly, perhaps once or twice a year.

The Implications of the Project

The implication of this study for the larger Christian community is that the Lord’s table is on the move. Normally, the Lord’s table is held in place at the church where all church members congregate in remembrance of the Lord. In this project, the Lord’s table is moved to homes of families where small group members meet and receive God’s blessings, peace, and love through fellowship in the Lord. Truly this is the medium intended, in which small group members may go out into their neighborhood, bringing
with them the blessing of table fellowship. Through life sharing in the neighborhood, small group members may bring God’s kingdom, peace, and love to their neighbors.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus commanded his disciples to be his witnesses in Jerusalem first, then throughout Judea and Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth. In the same way, the Lord’s table is centered in the church first, then extended to homes of small group members, and finally to the neighborhood. A small group is a people sent by the Lord to the neighborhood where they will carry out God’s will. They will bring his love, peace, blessings, and kingdom to their neighbors, and finally, to all the world. This is the mission of God, the Missio Dei.


______. Notes from “Missional Ecclesiology,” Fuller Theological Seminary, February 2015.


Notes from “Practicing the Way of Jesus,” Fuller Theological Seminary, October 2015.


Wen, Shao. “Church Rising: A New Season for the Church.” A seminar paper for TM730 Church Rising, Fuller Theological Seminary, August 2016.


