



Thinking About Community

All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." John 13:35.

"While preaching and programs may draw people to church, it will be supportive relationships which provide the glue for attenders to stay and engage in greater spiritual growth." *Robert Logan, Refocusing Church.*

"The most effective response to declining interest in the Church is to reimagine Christian community in a way that gives priority to belonging. Before attempting that, however, we need to see how big the problem facing us really is." *Richard Rice, Believing, Behaving, Belonging, 62*

What new insights did you learn about 'community' from Anton VanWick's talks at inspire?

How are you going about growing a deeper experience of community in your congregation/s?

God's Heart For Community

If you had to answer in a single word what God's dream for human beings is, what would you say? The Bible writers would say **Community**. The whole Bible is the story of God's ongoing attempts to create community; how sin destroys it and how God does whatever it takes to make a way for that community to be experienced again. T

Community is at the very essence of God's nature. God, as expressed in the trinity, already existed as community. God created us for community and until we understand how this works we will keep chasing the wrong things.

God is expressed as we live out his dream of community where there is a love for God that is reflected in a deep love for His other children.

Our Need For Community

Community is not optional for Christians. We are called to belong, not just believe. We are not meant to live isolated lives; instead, we are to be a part of Christ's family, to be members of His body.

"The yearning to attach and connect, to love and be loved is the fiercest longing of the soul... Our need for community with people and the God who made us is to the human spirit what food and air and water are to the human body." John Ortberg, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get To Know Them*, 18

It's ironic, sad and dangerous that in our quest to get ahead by societies standards we most often sacrifice the things that matter most.

Time spend in a growing relationship with the God of the universe.

Time spent in stewarding a vibrant marriage

Time spent in parenting children who need Time over more things

Time spent with our church community and wider community, connecting with the people God has called us to impact.

Sacrificing Community

We live in a society that puts more emphasis on individualism then it does on community. You and I get caught in this self-serving trap and with it lose the vitality that comes through genuine community. We look for happiness in places where God did not design for us to find it. We think that achieving the next goal will take us closer to happiness. The truth is that happiness comes from experiencing community with God and others. We sacrifice life-giving community in our quest to 'get ahead'?

Individualism, isolation, and consumerism all work together to ensure we do not have the time to live in community. In the midst of overcommitted schedules and congested cities, we feel alone. Although we drive on overcrowded freeways we live in isolation. We live and work in a sea of humanity, but we end up missing out on the benefits of regular, meaningful relationships. We end up groping in the world's selfish agenda

because we do not value the time that it takes to experience God's light in the context of community. The answer: "People need to be involved in meaningful and constant community or they will continue on indefinitely in a state of intense loneliness." Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church*, 33.

Barriers to Community

- Individualism
- Consumerism - It's All About Me Thinking
- Hurry
- Our Cultural Definition of Success.

The Church As a Picture of Community

Our church is primarily called to be God's Missional Community.

God has called the church to create environments where authentic community can take place. As a church, it is only when we live in authentic community that we can model what happens when people live by God's guidelines. The church must run counter-clockwise to the world and in place of individualism value interdependence, in place of consumerism value service, in place of things value deep relationships with people. This would truly be the revolution our society desperately needs..

"The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be a church. This is a God-ordained gathering of people that is so strong the even 'the gates of hell will not overcome it'." (Randy Frazee, *Making Room For Life*, 31)

Community is at the heart of God's plan for humanity. All of God's commandments and what we believe about God can be integrated into the context of community.

"Although many Adventists have a strong sense of personal community on the practical level, we have never worked this out on a theological level. We do not have a fully developed understanding of why Christians need each other, how they should relate to each other, what it means to

live as the body of Christ. This omission in our theological development leaves us without resources in the face of a serious threat to the Church in North America." *Richard Rice, Believing, Behaving, Belonging, 203*

In presenting a series of studies, an evangelistic series or leading an evangelistic small group we need to think through the implications of what we teach for everyday life. Most times that will be a function of 'community'.

Consumerism/Community

Consumerism is so deeply rooted in our culture that it has become part of the air we breathe. The journey from consumerism to community is not easy or obvious. But it is vitally important. A continual focus on feeding "me" rarely creates the more biblical and unifying "us".

Many churches are based around consumerism. We become a dispenser of religious goods and services where people 'come to get' instead of mission stations where people are 'launched to give'.

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Cultivating Authentic Community

Loving relationships will be the mark of the Church which will tell the world of a loving God.

The 'one anothers' exhort us to be in loving relationship with each other, giving practical ways to show that love. For example:

- Romans 12:10 – Love one another with mutual affection. Honour one another about yourselves.
- Ephesians 4:2, 32 – Bear with one another in love; forgive one another.
- Galatians 6:2 – Carry each other's burdens.
- Ephesians 5:21 – Submit to one another.
- Colossians 3:16 – Teach and admonish one another.
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – Encourage one another and build each other up.
- Hebrews 10:24 – Consider how to spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
- James 5:16 – Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so you may be healed.

Pastors need loving relationships too. Too often pastors are lonely people so many working relationships and so few friends.

- How can you model community in your congregation?
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Building Community

“It begins with a passionate love for God, but it must result in practical loving relationships with each other.”

1 – A common vision helps to develop a common ethos or culture and a common effort.

Unless Christian community is being developed at the grassroots level, things done to develop community at the large group level will begin to have a hollow ring and may be perceived as hype.

2 – Provide ways for people to get to know each other better

- Encourage personal interaction between meetings
- Encourage serving toward one another
- Create environments where the congregation can laugh and have fun.

3 – Help newcomers establish relationships within the church.

- Unless a person can develop 5-7 relationships within the church, they probably will not stay.
- Personal invitations,
- Sponsor
- Newcomers group
- Invite them to visit a small group
- Ministry involvement.

4 – Facilitate the removal of masks

- Extend grace to those who stumble
- Maintain confidentiality
- Don't avoid healthy conflict - Speak the truth in love

5 – Support each other

- Celebrate successes together in the congregation
- Uphold each other through crisis

6 – Authentic Christian Community is inclusive

- Visitors are followed-up
- Seekers and believers are integrated together
- Relationships remain open – no cliques

- People are sponsored into relationships

7 – Model It – Live It

- Share how you personally experienced community
- Celebrate the wins

Building Loving, Caring Relationships

- Express Unconditional Love and Acceptance
- Encourage Authenticity, Transparency, Honesty, Integrity
- Exhibit Grace, Mercy, Forgiveness
- Communicate and Resolve Conflicts
- Establish Means for Bearing Each Other's Burdens
- Welcome Diversity into Your Fellowship
- Equip Families through Intentional Ministries

Stephen Macchia, Becoming a Healthy Church, 98-111.

Reflecting

How are you modelling loving relationships?

What opportunities does your church provide for people to go beyond the "Hi, how are you?" stage of relationship?

How do you consistently and systematically invite newcomers to be a part of a small group?

How do you train small group leaders to develop community?

When and how to you celebrate community?

What is the quality of relationships among people on ministry teams? How can you strengthen those relationships?

How are you assimilating newcomers into community?

How are loving relationships encouraged in each ministry of the church?

God's Dream For His Church

Article for Intrasyd

If ever our world needed to see a church that genuinely loves God and one another it is now. In a world characterised by individualism, isolation and consumerism God created the church to express His heart and be characterised by love toward one another. The world desperately needs to see 'loving and lovable' Christians.

The church must run counter-clockwise to the world and in place of individualism value interdependence, in place of consumerism value service, in place of things value deep relationships with people. This would truly be the revolution our society desperately needs. You and I are called to be part of this revolution.

Romans 12, reminds us that we can be dragged down to this societies level of immaturity without even thinking. You and I can get caught in this self-serving trap. We look for happiness in places where God did not design for us to find it. The truth is that happiness comes from experiencing community with God and others. Isn't it ironic that these are the very things we sacrifice in our quest to 'get ahead'?

In the Natural Church Development church health measurement of 82 Adventist congregations in Australia, loving relationships scored very low and was only just ahead of holistic small groups as our lowest factor.

Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Jesus said people will know we are His disciples by our love, John 13:35. Loving relationships in the church is so important that in the New Testament more attention is given to it than heaven! Loving relationships are the mark of the Church that will tell the world of a loving God. While programmes may draw people to a church event, it will be the supportive relationships that are developed which will provide the glue that will enable people to stay and engage in greater spiritual growth. We cannot expect to impact Sydney in a significant way while if we go on living isolated lives.

Community is not optional for Christians. We are called to belong, not just believe. We are not meant to live isolated lives; instead, we are to be a part of Christ's family, to be members of His body. The church is not a place for people to gather occasionally for religious services. It is not one more social institution. The church is God's dream for His most cherished creation. "The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be a church. This is a God-ordained gathering of people that is so strong the even 'the gates of hell will not overcome it'." (Randy Frazee, *Making Room For Life*, 31)

When we think of the word 'church' often pictures of a building, service or organisation come to mind. While these are aspects of what it can mean to be a church, they are not primarily what the church is called to be. When Paul thought of the church, his first picture was of a living, growing, functioning body, a community on a mission. The word that we most often translate 'church' in the New Testament is actually the Greek word for community. The New Testament describes the church in terms of worshipping, sharing, growing and serving *together*.

Community is at the very essence of God's nature. God, as expressed in the trinity, already existed as community. God created us for community and until we understand how this works we will keep chasing the wrong things.

The whole Bible is the story of God's ongoing attempts to create community; how sin destroys it and how God does whatever it takes to make a way for that community to be experienced again. In the Old Testament, God's plan for the Children of Israel was to be a healthy, truth-revealing community. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul often writes about the church working together as a body and being a community of believers – in fact he refers to it as a community of light (I Thessalonians 5). God is expressed as we live out his dream of community where there is a love for God that is reflected in a deep love for His other children.

The future of our church depends on how well we develop true community. Imagine being part of a church that really did take loving relationships seriously? The price for not being in community is

enormous - lonely unaffected lives, a church full of people warming pews and looking on but never being changed.

On a scale of 1-10 where would you rate your commitment to building community in the church family? What would need to change in your schedule to lift the priority of community in your life? What would it take for you to do something today that grows community in your church? What about that encouraging word or card? What about that supporting visit? What about seriously praying for one another and relationships in your congregation? What about joining or hosting a small group? Maybe you need to start with building community in your home? Loving Relationships are too important for you to not make a difference now.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 we find that even in death God still works in community. We do not arrive in heaven in dribs and drabs but as a community raised or joined together at the second coming. It is at this point we will really understand the community that God created us to be part of.

Pictures of 'Church'

Article for Kellyville FYI Magazine

What is the first picture that comes into your mind when you think of the word 'church'. For many people it's a building, service or organisation. We say 'see you at church' or 'we are going to church'. The New Testament church would have found these sentences a little odd. While buildings and services are aspects of what it can mean to be a church, they are not the big deal.

For the apostle Paul church means a community on a mission. The Greek word we most often translate 'church' is the word 'community'. Paul describes the church as Christ's body where we all join together to encourage, pray for, serve and grow with one another. The New Testament describes the church in terms of serving, worshipping, sharing, growing and serving *together*. Paul reminds us however that we're not just any community. We are a community with a life-changing mission. Together we allow Christ to work in and through us to impact the world.

The Revolution

The church must run counter-clockwise to the world and in place of individualism value interdependence, in place of consumerism value service, in place of things value deep relationships with people. This would truly be the revolution our society desperately needs.

The church we read about in the New Testament was not so much about a service but how being part of the 'new community' transformed all of the believers life. Church was wherever members of that community were. This means that Kellyville church is not really a building on Spurway drive. Church really isn't the programme we attend in 'Church side' or 'Access'. Kellyville Church is the body of believers who make up this community.

It also means that when anyone comes into contact with you they have come into contact with Kellyville church. Your life is the mission. You are the revolution our society desperately needs. Kellyville church this week will be at work, at school, at Castle Towers, at the hairdressers. Wherever people of this body end up that's where Kellyville church is.

Constantine and Pictures of Church.

So how did we change from church being primarily about people to it being about buildings, services and organisations? In AD 306 Constantine became Caesar of the Roman Empire. For various reasons Constantine made Christianity the state religion. Up until now people really had to want to be Christian because they could literally die for their faith. Now everyone had to be Christian - not because they had fallen in love with Jesus but they had no choice. The Christian church went from being a persecuted community meeting in homes to having state given buildings. Church became a service everyone had to turn up to once a week. The service became a ceremony everyone had to watch rather than a community everyone participated in. The 'priest' became those who did church while everyone else looked on rather than the 'priesthood of all believers' that Paul had talked about. No one did evangelism because everyone had to be Christian anyway. 'Evangelism' was something that 'professionals' did far away on the edge of the empire. Church became a once a week service that really didn't impact people's lives. All you had to do was show up, pay up and then go home.

Unfortunately many Christians today still think of Church with Constantine pictures. Church is a once a week service in a building that you show up to, pay up and then go home. You don't invest your life into this community. You don't let 'church' change your lifestyle. Ministry is for the pastors and your job is to watch. Evangelism is for someone else to do in a far away place. This is not the revolution that God created the church to be.

The Church – A Light in the Darkness

The church is to show the world what happens when a group of people do life God's way. The church is to be a place where, in the face of a self-oriented society, a light would shine that allowed people to see what life really is all about. Our church is called to be a city on a hill that shows Sydney what can happen when people allow God to work in and through them.

The church is not a place for people to gather occasionally for religious services. It is not one more social institution. The church is God's dream for His most cherished creation. What is there like the church? No accomplishment, no organisation, no country, no other group of people has the ability to meet a person's deepest longings in the same way the church can. Ellen White describes the church as "the object upon which

God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theatre of His grace." (*Christian Service*, 13)

"The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be a church. This is a God-ordained gathering of people that is so strong the even 'the gates of hell will not overcome it'." (Randy Frazee, *Making Room For Life*, 31)

Being God's Community

Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Loving relationships are the mark of the Church that will tell the world of a loving God. While programmes may draw people to a church event, it will be the supportive relationships that are developed which will provide the glue that will enable people to stay and engage in greater spiritual growth.

The future of our church depends on how well we develop true community. We can only get by for a while on skilled communication and programmes to meet needs. Unless we sense that we belong to each other we will become stale, irrelevant, and a place where people suffer alone. The price for not being in community is enormous - lonely unaffected lives, a church full of people warming pews and looking on but never being changed. Light rarely being shone and a world that continues in darkness. We have been given the incredible privilege of being Jesus' hands, His feet, His eyes, and His heart together. He works through us to impact the world.

How are you investing your life into others in the Kellyville church family? What pictures of Kellyville church do people get when they meet you at work, school or wherever you end up this week?