



Consumerism/Community

Cultivating Authentic Community

Resourcing Unit 25

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

"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." Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church* 37.

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'.

"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

"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

"The mission of the church of Christ is...to make known the love of God to men and to win them to Christ by the efficacy of that love."
E.G.White, *Testimonies* vol 3, 381

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?

Why do pastors have so few friends and is this healthy?

Building Community

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

"Two challenges exist for Christian communities:

Provide a place for existing members

Be open to making room for new members" *Robert Logan, Refocusing*

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

2 - Small groups are the best environment for people to experience community?

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.

What factors hinder effective small groups ministry in your congregation?

What would it take to turn these factors around?

3 – 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.

4 – 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.

5 – Facilitate the removal of masks
Extend grace to those who stumble
Maintain confidentiality
Don't avoid healthy conflict - Speak the truth in love

6 – Support each other
Celebrate successes together in the congregation
Uphold each other through crisis

7 – 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

8 – 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?