

AUC Ministerial Association Group Discussion Guide



Connecting

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

In the pit of the stomachs of most church leaders I know, there is this gnawing sense that Christian community has to be more natural, spontaneous and life-giving. Yet most of us in ministry today have been trained to offer up models that are often overprogrammed and contrived.
Randy Frazee *Connecting Church*

“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.

“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.

There is no better way to dismantle a personality than to isolate it
The Princess of Wales, BBC TV's Panorama

“It doesn't matter how hip the music, how funny the pastor, how postmodern the vibe, if a person comes and sits alone, feeling unconnected as an 'outsider' week after week, she won't come back.” John Burke *No Perfect People Allowed*

Community is Spiritual

It begins with a passionate love for God, but it must result in practical loving relationships with each other. A lack of community is an indicator of a spiritual issue as when God works in and through us our love for Him will be lived out in a love for His children.

One Another's

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.

Consumerism v Community

Where consumerism increases community decreases. The consumeristic worldview puts the individual at the centre. Community takes time and in a worldview where time=money often it is community that is cut.

In our culture, the consumer is the centre. The church is not immune to the consumer mind-set. By focusing primarily on meeting "market" needs, the church often functions in production mode, looking to the endless creation of the best possible programs, products and events. While such a search for excellence is, by itself, a positive – even biblical – pursuit, the machinery of endless production works against the development of community. Why is this? A continual focus on feeding "me" rarely creates the more biblical and unifying "us".

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.

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'.

Community is created through loving and healthy relationships. This is often the thing that is neglected as churches strive to create excellent spiritual products.

- Community requires being missional; consumerism demands internal satiation.
- Community shares responsibilities greater than self; consumerism demands entitlements.
- Community express itself in service; consumerism feeds an endless self hunger.
- Community leads to a shared freedom; consumerism leads to singular addiction.
- Community actively creates; consumerism passively devours.

"It is a mistake to think that the church can adopt a consumer oriented strategy, reach people, and then convert them into lovers of creative community. Too many churches succumb to this 'bait and switch' type of strategy" Kevin G. Ford *Transforming Church* 2007.

Be careful of adopting models that 'franchise/clone' the church over reaching out in a creative way with a unique identity and purpose to a specific local culture and context.

Pastors Need Community Too

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

1 - It starts by connecting people with God's heart through conversations, teaching, preaching and creating an overall environment of discipleship.

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

3 - Small groups provide an 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.

4 – 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.

5 – 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 at an appropriate level for their spiritual maturity

6 – Facilitate the removal of masks

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

7 – Support each other

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

8 – 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

9 – Model It – Live It

- Share how you personally experience community
- Celebrate the wins

Building Loving, Caring Relationships *Stephen Macchia, Becoming a Healthy Church, 98-111.*

- 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

Five Essential Building Blocks for Community *Kevin G. Ford, Transforming Church, Salt River, 2007*

1. Mentor church attenders to be “mission partners”:
 “Your everyday life is an extension of our church’s mission”
 Help people see how their Monday through Friday lives connect to your church’s mission. Church members are the missionaries. The job is not to get people to come to ‘church’ but have our people being ‘church’ in the wider community. When the wider community engages with our church members they have engaged with the ‘church’.

2. Invite input
 Gather as much as possible from as many people as possible in the life of the church. This does not mean consensus leadership but that people are included in the process.
 Connect individuals to the bigger picture by including a wide range of people in major decisions.

3. Create a structure for assimilation
 Create steps for connections. Assimilation is a highly relational process. Transforming churches build an intentional process of assimilation into everything they do.
 Don’t expect congregational meetings and ‘town-hall’ events to foster community.

4. Develop small groups

When newcomers join a small group in the first three months of connecting with a church they are much more likely to stay and become part of the community of that church.

Who would your church members call at 3am? If it is someone from the small group that church is very likely to be healthy in terms of community.

5. Ensure the church has 'hang out' environments.

A place must be found for casual interaction to take place. We need a place to 'hang out'. Too often churches facilitate worship services but not spaces for casual interactions.

Creating a Culture of Connection - John Burke *No Perfect People Allowed*

1. Pray For Community

2. Be a Loving Person – Live it

- Become a healthy individual who has the capacity to love
- Demonstrate appropriate displays of affection
- Share how you have personally experienced community
- Develop a loving relationship with God
- Develop integrity in all your dealings
- Learn good communication skills – both speaking and listening
- Pray for God to give you love for others, especially the unlovable.
- Work on issues from your past which prevent you from giving and receiving love from others.
- Pastors need loving relationships too. Too often pastors are lonely people – so many working relationships and so few friends.

3. Focus on Growing People

- Loving relationships is a function of spiritual growth as people grow in their love for God and each other
- Loving relationships requires a transformational shift from thinking that it's all about me to that I'm here for God's glory and that God is glorified through loving relationships
- 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.

4. Assimilate New People Extraordinarily Well

- New people will be the most likely to remember what it was like to be a 'new' person
- Help newcomers establish relationships within the church. Unless a person can develop 5-7 relationships within the church, they probably will not stay.
- Invite them personally to socials
- Assign sponsors to help in the connectedness process
- Invite them to the newcomers class

5. Vision Cast for Connection

- We must constantly remind those in our small groups and serving teams not to become an ingrown clique. "Our secret weapon for reaching people is you".
- Be on watch for people standing alone. It's a tricky task to master because although people long to be connected they really don't want to be singled out, put on the spot or assaulted. They want opportunities to connect if they desire it, but they want the option of an 'out' as well.
- Teach about the importance of relationships. Teach in applicable ways the "one-anothers" of scripture.
- Have people from small groups share how they are experiencing relationships/community

6. Shape Committees and Ministry Teams to be More Relational

7. Organize and Reorganize

- Some people resist organizing for connection, feeling it should just be spontaneous or it will feel forced and impersonal. But what you have to realize is that a lack of organization or vision for connecting others can actually create the most unfriendly, uncaring of communities because that's where people drift if not led proactively the other way.
- Welcoming Teams, Assimilation Plans, New Members Tea, Small Group Integration, Ministry Involvement.

8. Create Connection Points

- Connection through compassion
- Connection through pain
- Connection through service
- Connection through affinity

Remember that the church will drift back into individualism without a continued re-focus on connectedness.

How is Love Expressed in a Church?

From Vintage Church
Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears
Crossway, 2008

Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1

John 4:8

In the very nature of God there is a continuous outpouring of love, communication and oneness

Love in Learning

Out of love for God the church seeks to know more of God's heart. Loving churches intentionally study God's word to grow in 'the mind of Christ'. Loving churches encourage and resource the disciplines of Bible reading and memorization.

Love in Obedience

A loving church practices obedience. Information must lead to transformation. While the word 'obedience' bring negative connotation, Jesus connects love and obedience. Obedience to Him flows out of love for Him. Loving churches do not just teach the word but put an emphasis on application and how a particular truth translates into everyday life.

Love in Solitude

A loving church practices solitude. Encourage your church to take time away from external stimulation, noise and busyness. While church services, Bible studies, classes and service projects are important, a loving church also leaves time and gives permission for people not to be out every night of the week doing church activities but also to get some time for solitude.

Love in Fellowship

A loving church practices fellowship, living life together devoted to being a community of people to depend on when times are tough and to rejoice with when times are good. Develop fellowship groups and make sure they are encouraged and supported in the life of the church.

Love in Service

Encourage personal service along with larger scale service projects. In service, church members grow in their heart for people. Serving together builds fellowship in the church while focussing people outward.

Love in Appropriate Speech

A loving church practices appropriate speech. Teach your church about the importance of loving communication in their homes, to each other and everyone they meet, email or text. The key is to make time in God's word so that our words echo His.

Love in Sabbath Keeping

A loving church practices Sabbath rest. On Sabbath we make it a priority to grow in our loving relationships with God and people. On Sabbath we recalibrate our lives around God's value of people.

Love in Worship

In worship we actively love God about all else as our greatest treasure and source of joy. A loving church leads people to grow in Biblical stewardship where their whole life is an act of worship. Worship is taught and modelled not just as a corporate music 'event' but rather the whole way we approach life.

Love in Evangelism

A loving church practices evangelism. Evangelism is speaking and showing the transforming power of the grace of the gospel of Jesus to people who do not yet know Him. Evangelism is the natural overflow of a life lived in joy as a worshiper of God. It is not a 'duty' but something we get to do as a 'delight'.

Love in Mercy

Mercy is the capacity to feel and express unusual compassion and sympathy for those in difficult or crisis situations and to provide them with the necessary help and support to see them through tough times. A merciful church seeks out, welcomes and aids those who are needy, hurting, sick, disabled, suffering, dying, mourning or elderly with visible compassion to demonstrate the love of God.

Love in Hospitality

Hospitality is the ability to welcome strangers and entertain guests, often in your home, with great joy and kindness so that they become friends. Lead church members to consider hospitality when they are deciding where to live because they see their home for both personal and communal purposes.

Love in Prayer

A loving church is filled with innumerable spoken and unspoken prayers, continually prayed out of love for God and people. Model, teach, encourage and create environments that encourage prayer.

Love in Giving

A giving church views all of its individual and collective wealth as ultimately belonging to God. Money is often talked about and seen as simply a tool. The church models generosity. Model and teach people how to steward their time, talents and treasure. In a loving, giving church, people not only give generously to their church, but they go beyond that to share God's grace in the form of giving money and possessions to individuals.

Love in Humility

A loving church practices humility. 'Clothe yourself with humility toward one another' ~1 Peter 5:5. People do not drift into humility it must be modelled and taught.

"Churches that are not loving have often given up the gospel of grace for the practise of religion."

“The world desperately needs to experience loving communities that go against societies consumeristic individualism but rather express Trinitarian love where people connect to and live out the inner life of the Father, Son and Spirit on their mission of fulfilling the great commission.”

Reflecting

- How is your congregation/s growing people in their connection with God's heart?
- 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?
- What indicates an atmosphere of love in your church?
- What is the reputation of your church in the community?
- When was the last time you went out to do something “just for fun” with another person besides your spouse or significant other?
- How are you assimilating newcomers into the existing community?

Appendix 1

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.

Appendix 2

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?