Assignment Question: Critically reflect on how small groups may disciple believers in the light of an understanding of the missio Dei. Evaluate how such a discipleship process may be implemented in your context.

1. Introduction

"The Church in decline" is a statement that has found its way into popular culture as an accompanying commentary to the narrative of secularised Western epistemology.

Social commentators point to decreasing attendance figures in institutional churches (and the diminishing influence of established social institutions). In parallel they highlight increasing numbers of historic places of Christian worship closing their doors, no longer able to maintain a viable presence within their local communities.[1]

The prevailing culture of post-modernism creates an environment of *discontinuous change.*[2] Communities and individuals experience extrinsic sociological factors upon them. Fixed points of reference are eroded as a myriad of cultures morph and intertwine due to factors such as globalisation, exponential technological advance and unprecedented global connectivity.[3]

Previously trusted institutions are treated with either quiet suspicion or increasingly public derision. Post-modern Western culture has shifted away from authoritarian systems of power and control towards an increasingly liberal and egalitarian philosophy of societal governance.[4] Historically influential institutions exist in a context that is now foreign to them. Their incumbent structural rigidity is disposed towards neither change nor adaptation and has created a seemingly irreconcilable schism between mechanistic institutions and the dynamic cultures they exist within to influence.[5]

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[1] Jenkins, S. (2016). [online]. 'There is one sure way to save our ailing churches – give them away'. Retrieved June 16, 2017 15:15, from The Guardian: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/10/save-ailing-churches-desanctified-secularised

[2] Roxburgh. (2006). p. 7.

[3] Block. (2009). p. 1.

[4] Singh, A.K. (2017). [online]. 'Theresa May's UK election loss and Macron win are warnings for BJP for 2019 polls'. Retrieved June 19, 2017 14:23, from Daily O: http://www.dailyo.in/politics/modi-2019-election-brexit-macron-theresa-may/story/1/17740.html

[5] Wheatley. (1999). p. 15.

Culture has pushed the Church towards the margins of the cultural conversation and no longer desires the Churches influence. Nietzsche's philosophical statement regarding the *"death of God"*[6] has become reality across most of secular Europe. Christendom has ended.[7]

It is with this contextual metanarrative in mind that we engage with the question of how small groups (SGs) may disciple believers in the light of an understanding of the *missio Dei*.

Robinson notes, *"The ending of Christendom signals the recovery of an earlier and more pristine form of Christianity"*[8] and as such we will investigate the enduring discipleship practices and philosophies that I have encountered in my studies. I will reflect on how these principles aid the process of *spiritual formation* in believers, particularly through the vehicle of SGs and I will evaluate the implementation of these discipleship principles in my context, offering adaptive suggestions for existing systemic processes.

2. Defining terms
I will now define key terms and concepts that are implicit within the essay question.

2.1 Small Groups *(and an understanding of proxemics)*
In 1966 Hall pioneered the understanding of *proxemics*; *"how people use space, particularly in their communication with others".*[9] Searcy & Thomas further develop the concept of proxemics in relation to Christian community and the various social spaces within which it operates.[10]

A basic understanding of proxemics is there are four social spaces; public, social, private and intimate. These spaces differ based upon the proximity to which people may engage or relate to others. Each social space lends itself to deeper levels of being known as both the proximity of relationship increases and the size of the social space decreases.

There are differing opinions on what size determines a missional SG and whether they occupy the personal space (Breen[11]) or the social space (Searcy & Thomas[12]) and much of this comes down to definition of terms, philosophy

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[6] Smith. (2014). p. 100.

[7] Hirsch. (2006). p. 276.

[8] Robinson. (2006). p. 43.

[9] McNeal. (2011). p. 47.

[10] Searcy and Thomas. (2008). p. 21.

[11] Breen. (2013). p. 8.

[12] Searcy and Thomas. (2008). p. 25.

and practical implementation. A bandwidth of between 5 to 20 people is generally acceptable as a definition for a SG.

Many congregations relate primarily in the public space (through a Sunday gathering) with the interpersonal social space having been neglected.[13] It is important to comment that each of the spaces are equal in importance and that each space has specific relational dynamics that give it unique sociological strengths in comparison with other spaces. There is interrelation and connection between each of the spaces and those which we relate to in each differing space may also be present in other spaces.[14]

Mike Breen is a contemporary missiologist and pioneer of the Missional Community (MC) model. MCs being a mid-sized community, slightly larger than a SG of anywhere from 20 to 50 people. Breen makes the distinction that MCs are *"small enough to care yet large enough to dare"* whilst SGs are the proxemical context aligned towards fostering meaningful spiritual formation as opposed to collective mission (as with an MC).[15]

It is with this distinctive in mind that I will primarily focus on the formational role of SGs (as opposed to MCs) in discipling believers in light of an understanding of the missio Dei.

Further comments about the distinctives of SGs will be made in section 4.2 of the essay.

2.2 Disciple *(discipleship & spiritual formation)*
Hull defines the term *disciple* as being a learner or follower of a significant master or teacher. Within a Christian context to be a disciple is to be *"a reborn follower of Jesus."*[16]

The process of discipling has a two-way dynamic to it. Disciples are to go on a life-long journey of following Jesus and being obedient to his teaching whilst also outwardly living their faith in the world and intentionally creating and embracing opportunities to disciple others.

These distinct inward and outward actions of discipleship involve active and willing participation with a process that fosters deeper *spiritual formation*, outworked communally through shared rhythms and practices. Zscheile defines spiritual formation as:

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[13] McNeal. (2011). p. 49.

[14] Searcy and Thomas. (2008). p. 23.

[15] Breen. (2013). p. 52.

[16] Hull. (2006). p. 32.

> "the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God, and becoming conformed with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of the world."[17]

Doornenbal helpfully adds that the process of *spiritual formation* has within it both an internal (personal development) and external (focus on the world) and that in his studies he has struggled to find a concrete working definition for the term.[18]

I will make use of the term disciple or discipleship as a generic catch-all for individual and community growth in Christ-likeness in observable outward practices. The term spiritual formation will be used to indicate the growth of the inner world of the disciple.

The individualistic culture of the West places the individual at the centre of everything, so discipleship practices that intentionally seek to operate within a communal context (i.e. SGs) are a sign of a counter-cultural relational way of life.

2.3 Believers
It is important to note that *believers* are Christians and as Hull states there is *"no biblical evidence for a separation of Christian from disciple."*[19]

The term *believers* within the question infers that the discipleship principles and process are for those already committed to following Jesus. With this in mind I will not explicitly explore the role of SGs in discipling non-believers as that is outside the remit of the essay question (although this is a topic worthy of further study).

2.4 Missio Dei
The theological concept of *missio Dei* is that God is a God of mission. This is expressed in the divine Trinitarian nature of the God who sends. All mission is Gods mission, whether it is Christ being sent by the Father into the world, the Holy Spirit being sent by Jesus Christ, or the Holy Spirit commissioning and sending the family of Gods on mission into the world. The Church is born out of and exists for the mission of the missional God. Mission is not a separate activity of the Church but it is the fundamental essence of the Churches existence. As God is a missional God so His Church is a missional Church.[20]

A further insight to add, in light of its correlation to the nature of SGs as a form of diverse community is the concept of *missio Trinitatis.* Simply stated as the mission of the Trinity. Hardy notes that this concept tells a much richer and

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[17] Zscheile. (2012). p. 7.

[18] Doornenbal. (2012). p. 232.

[19] Hull. (2006). p. 33.

[20] Wright. (2006). p. 62.

fuller story about the diverse community of God calling all cultures to multicultural mission in partnership with Himself. This is perhaps a missional narrative that may connect meaningfully with a Western society that is both multicultural and pluralistic.[21]

With an understanding of these terms we will now start to formulate some principles for our missional SG discipleship process.

3. A simple model for a complex system

It is evident that the concepts of missio Dei, and their application, could create complexity within a discipleship system. Indeed, the church as an organic and dynamic community of people is a complex living system. Doornenbal comments on the nature of *complexity theory* and how in nature and in organic systems (as opposed to mechanistic ones), they naturally find their order and out of complexity comes simplicity.[22]

As we consider the implementation of a SG discipleship process I contend we must seek to identify a framework of simplicity. A collective model that is instantly memorable, works across diverse contexts and cultures whilst acting as an overarching framework for the missional life of the disciples it seeks to influence.

3.1 Up, in and out

Breen observes the life of Jesus, as accounted in the New Testament Gospels, as having *"three distinct dimensions to his life"*[23], expressed most simply as *upward*, *inward* and *outward*. Disciples of Jesus likewise should have observable upward, inward and outward rhythms to our lives.

We will now explore what each of these distinct dimensions signifies and make some comment on how each dimension could be expressed in a SG discipleship process.

3.1.1 Up

Jesus demonstrated an authentic deep relationship and ongoing connection with his Father as well as responsiveness to the Holy Spirits leading in the everyday.

For disciples: Encouraging communal processes of spiritual formation that deepen an understanding of who disciples are in their identity as followers as Jesus, as well as their position as children of God and cultivating an increasing attentiveness to the leading of the Holy Spirit in the personal life of the disciple that influences their faith community and transforms the world.[24]

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[21] Hardy. (2016). p. 131.

[22] Doornenbal. (2012). p. 145.

[23] Breen. (2013). p. ii.

[24] Roxburgh. (2011). p. 118.

3.1.2 In

Jesus was intentionally invested in the life of those he called to follow him, his disciples.

For disciples: Disciples are to embody the biblical understanding of *koinonia* (fellowship) that was the early Churches way of relating*.*

Maddix & Akkerman note:
> The early church recognized the communal reality of holy living, mutual support, and sacrificial service that is expressed in the New Testament view of koinonia. A missional community combats the current cultural norms of independence, self-interest, and privatized faith for an order of interdependence, shared responsibility, and mutual instruction.[25]

My proposed process of SG discipleship will encourage practices which foster this counter-cultural expression of communal life towards spiritual growth.

3.1.3 Out

The Gospel narratives describe Jesus inhabiting a broken world and calling for a two-fold response, individually and systemically. Individuals were invited into a transformative way of life that would bring oneness with God through repentance and new life. Secondly, Jesus came to transform systemic injustice through his teaching and demonstration on the realities of the Kingdom of God.[26]

For disciples: Jesus way of life challenged the *social imaginaries*[27] of his day. Jesus continually reached out to the margins of society, brought hope and justice to the poor and shunned opportunities to create an earthly name for himself whilst making known the rule and reign of his eternal Kingdom.[28]

Table MM1 visually demonstrates how the up, in and out dimensions relate to a Christians posture towards God, other disciples and the world.

MM1	↑ UP ↑	→ IN ←	← OUT →
Relationally	Relating to God	Relating to disciples	Relating to the world

3.2 Developing a missional framework

It is my personal observation that the system of up, in and out has far wider implications for the missional church than just in relation to Jesus or his

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[25] Maddix and Akkerman. (2013). p. 75.

[26] Breen. (2013). p. iii.

[27] Roxburgh. (2011). p. 59.

[28] Wright. (2012). p. 30.

disciples relational posture towards God (up), each other (in) or the world (out).

I contend that this missional paradigm can become an overarching matrix to aid discipleship and contextual mission on multiple levels. These principles apply for the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities as well as helping to clearly define their systemic organisational practices. This framework also compliments the proxemic understanding of the intimate, personal, social and public spaces as described in section 2.1.

Furthermore, it is my observation that the foundational discipleship principles we will soon explore can be grouped together within the three dimensions of the missional matrix to aid in communication and discipling believers.

4. Identifying missional small group discipleship principles

We will now identify the practices and principles that will enable SGs to disciple believers in light of an understanding of the missio Dei.

I have studied various historical discipleship principles from the early church through to contemporary times and have selectively chosen foundational discipleship and formation principles which I believe are contextual and in a sense timeless and reflect the principles of the missio Dei. Each of these principles was evident in several sources and historical contexts.

Further to my assertion in section 3.2 that a missional matrix (up/in/out) can complement and simplify the communication and outworking of these missional discipleship principles I have made use of the missional matrix and grouped each practice and principle together under the overarching dimensions of the up, in and out.

4.1 Why disciple in a Small Group?
I have already touched on the spatial reality of group dynamics and we have noted the missing component within contemporary western church contexts of the personal and social space.

Breen notes the spatial realities of a group functioning within the personal space lends itself more to fostering deeper connections than a social space (like an MC), which is better suited towards missional engagement through increased resources.

The public space (i.e. a larger Sunday worship service or a setting of over 50 people) dynamics mean an outside influence is required for connection, it is much less relational and communication is primarily one-way.[29]

These realities underline the need for Christian leaders and disciples to understand the complex interplay of factors such as theological knowledge,

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[29] Breen. (2013). p. 85.

personal and communal formation principles as well as practical wisdom such as social science theory relevant to their context.[30]

Maddix & Akkerman make the following distinction of missional SGs, as an expression of *koinonia*. Firstly, they have a sense of shared responsibility and mutual accountability. This fits within the *inward* dimension of the missional matrix as it regards the SGs relationships with one another. Secondly, SGs value the Churches practices as primarily *communal*. This is the *upward* dimension, growing together in spiritual formation under God. We will explore some specific communal upward practices in a moment but it is important to note that communal activity across a diverse multicultural community is a counter-cultural practice that speaks of a different paradigm of relating and avoiding tribalism. Thirdly the growth of the SG is not a means in and of itself but it is for the sake of Gods mission in the world. That the community would share the good of who they are in bringing peace and restoration to a broken world as the *outward* dimension of who they are missionally.[31]

4.2 Developing upward practices and principles
These are the communal upward practices and principles that will aid a missional SG in their spiritual formation as they grow in an understanding of who they are together in relationship with God.

McLaren notes that:
> "spiritual practices are about life, about training ourselves to become the kinds of people who have eyes and actually see, who have ears and actually hear."[32]

4.2.1 Engage in theological reflection & prayer
For centuries New Testament believers have used the source text of the Holy Bible as their framework of faith. The practice of what Roxburgh terms *dwelling in the story*[33] and van Gelder calls reflecting on *"scripture, tradition, experience and reason"*[34]. These practices enable SGs to grow in their understanding of their place in Gods big story.

Theology needs to be outworked in context. Bevans asserts that all theology is contextual.[35] We each bring unique perspectives to the biblical text based

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[30] van Gelder. (2004).

[31] Maddix and Akkerman. (2013). p. 75-77.

[32] McLaren. (2008). p. 16.

[33] Roxburgh. (2011). p. 120.

[34] van Gelder. (2004).

[35] Bevans. (2002). p. 3.

on our own stories and experiences. When theology is outworked in community it is richer and fuller for it.

Roxburgh speaks of the convergence of the three stories: There is Gods story which is the meta-narrative of scripture *(up)*, there is our own unique story as a faith community *(in)*, and thirdly there is the contextual story of the place we have been sent to *(out)*.

Together God calls SGs to discern in prayer where the Holy Spirit is already at work in the world. As a SG integrates this contemplative corporate practice they will grow deeper in an understanding of who they are as Gods people within the local context and how God is inviting them to respond towards their context.

The Gospel narrative of Luke and the accompanying book of Acts are cited by many missiologists as key texts for communal contemplative exploration towards grasping an understanding of Gods contextual mission in and to the world.[36]

4.2.2 Sacramental acts
Participation in sacramental acts such as welcoming new believers into the community of faith through the ritual of baptism and through experiencing shared times of communion are all formative acts that contribute towards a SGs collective sense of identity together in relation to God.

In particular the Eucharist (thanksgiving meal) is a formative communal activity of looking back with thanksgiving to the work of Christ, receiving God's grace for the present and looking forward to the eternal feast that awaits believers.[37]

McLaren notes that *"most of the truly important skills we learn in life come through training, practice, and tradition or community."*[38]

Practices of shared worship and rituals are all sacramental moments that are to be experienced within community and passed on to believers as their familiar inheritance.

4.3 Developing inward practices and principles
These are the inward practices and principles that will aid a SG in growing together as a diverse community of believers to reflect what Boff calls the *"mystery of inclusion"*[39] that is Trinitarian community.

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[36] Bosch. (1991). p. 84.

[37] Hull, (2006), p. 90.

[38] McLaren. (2008). p. 80.

[39] Boff. (1988). p. 15.

4.3.1 Contributors (not consumers)

One of the central pillars of missional thought is the drive towards organic systems and away from institutional (or mechanistic) systems that require external command and control.[40] One of the biggest factors in a lack of missionality in most western contexts is the misunderstanding that there is a clergy-laity divide. This creates a consumeristic notion that believers come to receive spiritual services from qualified (or trained) individuals rather than considering themselves responsible spiritual contributors to the life of the community.

SGs will need to foster an environment that stimulates maturity and self-determination across the community. This is a notion that Wesley pioneered in the 17th century and he is considered by many to be the father of SGs.

It is important to note that leadership is still a key attribute within the church, but leadership should be an extension of discipleship, not a replacement for it. Leadership should be for the many, not for the few. A more collaborative approach to decision making and discerning next steps on the journey require what Frost and Hirsch call *"a new kind of leader".*[41]

4.3.1 An expressed commitment to growing together

For any SG to be truly transformative is needs to adopt the mind-set that is a community that is on a life-long journey of learning. All disciples are continually being transformed into the likeness of the one they are following.

Breen notes that as believers are invited into a covenant relationship with God likewise any SG that meets will should be in covenant with one another, both transformatively and missionally. This covenant should be expressed because in our western context covenant and commitment are foreign concepts that have been eroded through years of rampant cultural individualism.

Inevitably any faith community that gathers diverse people together will come into conflict, both with the world it is placed in as well as within itself. However, where there is an expressed covenant commitment in place to work differences through we begin to see the multi-faceted nature of Gods coming Kingdom being demonstrated through everyday people in dynamic relationships with each another. Savage and Boyd-MacMillan underline this need for covenant and conflict, *"People we don't care about at all don't elicit enough reaction from us to lead to conflict. We just move on."*[42]

For an SG to transition away from a Christendom paradigm to a missional one they need to embrace what Frost and Hirsch call a shift towards *apostolic*

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[40] Hirsch. (2006). p. 77.

[41] Frost and Hirsch. (2003). p. 165.

[42] Savage and Boyd-MacMillan. (2010). p. 13.

leadership.[43] Historically the Church has been dominated by leadership gifts that are biased towards maintenance than mission (that of the pastor/teacher). Apostolic leadership is defined as being catalytic, entrepreneurial and setting the foundation for the other gifts to flourish.[44]

I contend it is imperative for a SG to identify the spiritual gifts within its members so that the apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic gifts take a lead in prioritising the outwards missional edge of the SG whilst the pastor and teacher gifts facilitate the inward care and upward spiritual formation of the SG.[45] These disciplines should not in be outworked in isolation but as communal activities so that the SG flourishes.

4.3.2 Shared resources (a visible rebuke of consumerism)
As each SG meets it is to be intentionally mindful of the practical needs amongst its members. There should be an observably high-degree of mutual care that goes beyond the norms of society.

SG disciples journey in their understanding that material possessions do not define their identity. Cray notes that Consumerisms *"primary impact in our society is to offer an experience which makes religion seem unnecessary".*[46]

4.4 Developing outward practices and principles
These are the principles and practices which will aid a SG in growing deeper in their understanding of who they are in relation to the world and how they are to engage with it.

4.4.1 Aware of its position in the world
An increasing understanding in the missio Dei will see SGs grasping concepts such as *incarnational missional impulse* which is a sending of Gods people into a broken world. The SG is aware it has to be intentionally *incarnated*, or *presenced*[47] amongst the people it is trying to reach rather than *attractional* and calling those people away from their cultural context to conform to ecclesiocentric church gatherings, meetings, groups or activities.[48]

This sending nature of the church is to the margins of society, as Roxburgh and Romanuk note that *"God is always found in what appears to be the most*

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[43] Frost and Hirsch. (2003). p. 165.

[44] Roxburgh and Romanuk. (2006). ch. 2.

[45] Hirsch. (2006). p.158.

[46] Cray. (2007). p. 77

[47] Sparks, Friesen, et al. (2014). p. 117.

[48] Hirsch. (2006). p. 129.

godforsaken of places"[49]. So too the SG is to be found in the godforsaken places of the local context.

Bosch notes the *"church may be said to have a bipolar orientation, 'inward' & 'outward'."*[50] There is a rhythm to the life of the SG that sees it *gather* for upward and inward formational disciplines and *scatter* for mission.[51]

The big understanding that underpins all of this coming and going is that there is no divide between the sacred and the secular world, everything is spiritual. Cray notes that SGs are to live as colonies of heaven[52], Wright underlines there is no wedge between religion and the world because of Jesus heavenly Kingship[53] whilst Hiebert stresses Newbiggins view that the message of the Kingdom of God is that the Church is a foretaste, a future sign of the eternal reality of Jesus Kingdom.[54]

4.4.2 Meaningfully engaging the world

The biblical practice of hospitality, which when directly translated from the Greek means *"Love of strangers"*[55]*,* is a powerful expression of transformative humility and vulnerability. It has a double direction to it in that we are able to be changed ourselves as we enter into a hospitable relationship with the other[56], making ourselves vulnerable to them, whilst at the same time we reflect the inclusive dynamic of the missio Trinitatis in welcoming in close those who are different to ourselves.[57]

As we embrace the difference that is in the world around us we enter into the peace of heaven, bringing hope and restoration to the worlds brokenness, and in so doing we find healing for ourselves, not just individually but communally as broken lives find healing in Christs community.[58]

Outward SG practices should reflect this holisitic view of Trinitarian mission, a mission driven by compassion to reflect the heart of a relational God.

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[49] Roxburgh and Romanuk. (2006). p. 17.

[50] Bosch. (2002). p. 119.

[51] Hastings. (2012). p. 87.

[52] Cray. (2007). p. 164.

[53] Wright. (2012). p. 34.

[54] Hiebert. (2008). p. 280.

[55] Helland and Hjalmarson. (2011). p. 187.

[56] Roxburgh. (2011). p. 137.

[57] Shepherd. (2014). p. 55.

[58] Roxburgh. (2011). p. 158.

MM2	↑ UP ↑	→ IN ←	← OUT →
Formationally	Communal theological reflection, prayer, Eucharist, baptism, worship	Mutual accountability, life-long learning, covenant commitments, conflict resolution, APEST gifts, shared resources	Missional impulse, incarnational, presenced, reaching poor,gathered & scattered, KoG paradigm, hospitable, embracing difference

5. My context

We will now explore my local context and see how all that we have explored could be implemented there.

5.1 Our history

In 2013 our Church community relaunched as Cornerstone City Church (CCC)[59]. It had originally been planted in 1993 as Medway Family Church. It made use of mid-week communities that were called SGs. These were weekly fixed meetings in people homes that focused around the four W's of word, worship, welcome and witness. As a congregation we discerned that through these SGs we had become inward, self-serving and lacked incarnational missional impulse.

We underwent a gradual process of journeying as a leadership team in grasping foundational missio Dei principles over several years. This influenced our decision to remove support for our SGs and to start training and encouraging people to explore starting MCs. We also resituated our congregation to a larger and more public landmark site for our Sunday gatherings and subsequently tripled in Sunday attendance.

5.2 Our present reality & where we are in *'light of an understanding of missio Dei'*?

We undertook a practical theology process of observing and critically reflecting on the Churches missional practices[60] and we found we had a lack of momentum and congregational participation with our implemented MC model. I undertook an academic research project in 2016, the findings of which strongly suggested a lack of missional understanding across our Church community.

We identified that further training was needed to establish missional principles and that a model of simplicity was required. We also ascertained that it would

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[59] Cornerstone City Church. (2013). [online]. Retrieved June 16, 2017 14:22, from Cornerstone City Church: http://www.cornerstonecity.co.uk/

[60] Swinton and Mowat. (2006). p. 6.

be prudent to identify the APEST gifts across our congregation by making use of an online spiritual gifts test.[61]

5.3 Where we are with 'small groups'

With the understanding that the language we use will create our culture[62] I reference our historic use of SGs and the negative connotations the terminology carries within our context. In our congregation SGs have historically meant inward-facing, passive, self-serving and static pastoral care groups. This is not a reason to avoid implementing SGs but it would be prudent to consider these contextual circumstances.

The personal and social spaces should be the vehicle within which to develop an understanding of missio Dei but we could avoid creating unnecessary barriers to participation by adopting different terminology than calling them SGs. Even to redeem the language would create an extra stage to the process of implementation which is unnecessary.

5.4 Not being philosophical purists

As we came into an understanding of missio Dei as a church leadership team we also adopted an MC model. The challenge of re-orienting an inward facing community outwards towards its community, primarily through the adoption of a new philosophy of mid-week community wasn't successful. As a Church we had some small successes but as an exercise of implementation it was a systemic failure. Engstrom critically identifies a four-stage evolutionary journey that has been observed as congregations grapple with similar issues of implementation to our own.[63]

We should not remain philosophical purists and instead critically reflect on what is necessary to further encourage and foster a deeper understanding of the missio Dei without being too caught up on one specific model (i.e. MCs).

Because of the negative connotations both SGs sand MCs have in our community we should adopt an overarching term of 'Groups & Communities' to accommodate both the personal and the social space dynamics. These generic and unbiased terms will aid in communication and vision casting.

Our long-term strategy should still be towards the implementation of a more purists view of an MC model but we must also acknowledge our cultural low commitment levels which lend themselves to shorter-term more transient communities. Once we are in close enough relational proximity we can

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[61] Five Fold Survey. (unknown). [online]. Retrieved June 16, 2017 14:22, from Five Fold Survey: http://www.fivefoldsurvey.com/

[62] Newbigin. (1989). p. 29.

[63] Engstrom. T. (2015). [online]. 'Group formation process graphic'. Retrieved June 19, 2017 16:41, from Todd Engstrom: http://toddengstrom.com/category/missional-community/

influence through the implementation of discipleship processes which deepen an understanding of the missio Dei.

Hull identifies the positive role that these shorter term SGs can have although he also notes they are inadequate in establishing deep communal practices. He acknowledges their place along a journey towards a more meaningful expression of Christian community being formed.[64] I agree with his comments and suggest we make note of them in our context.

6. Implementing a contextual missional small group discipleship process

I will now evaluate and offer suggestions for how we might meaningfully create SG dynamic opportunities for believers to grow in their understanding of the missio Dei.

I will make use of the missional matrix (referenced in section 3) to show how we could adapt our practices in each of the three main spaces where we currently function organisationally as CCC. See table MM3 for a visual representation.

6.1 Upward

We have already identified that the bulk of our congregational engagement is with our Sunday gathering. If we were to place another meeting at another time most would not come. It is my proposal that we still gather together for corporate worship and communion but that after this we then break out into several smaller rooms for specific workshops in contextual theological reflection around missional themes.

We could do this for a period of three months so that the sessions could be repeated to enable maximum engagement and also to prevent people trying to avoid it by missing a week or two.

Sessions would need to be facilitated by catalytic type leaders that understand mission Dei concepts of being and discipling. These sessions would generate a sense of vision towards gathering together in more meaningful 'Groups and Communities' (named generically to avoid the negative contextual connotations with SGs and MCs). Groups and Communities could be led by small teams of like-minded individuals that are prepared to go on a journey of learning in how to facilitate a group in missio Dei principles.

6.2 Inward

DNA Triplets are an already existing concept within CCC. DNA is an acrostic that stands for discipleship, nurture and accountability. DNA Triplets are small accountability groups of three to four people that are self-organising and designed to multiply organically. They operate within missio Dei practices which we have already expressed within our missional matrix such as covenant relationships, conflict resolution and a desire to grow together.

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[64] Hull. (2006). p. 228.

I propose we adapt our DNA Toolkit[65] to incorporate specific questions around the three dimensions of the missional matrix and the practices we have already established as being foundational in section 4.

I also propose that each DNA Triplet is encouraged to undertake an online Spiritual Gifts test[66] together and reflect together on the nature of the results. These results may be submitted to our church leadership to enable us to facilitate specific training and support for certain gifts, in particular the apostolic, prophetic and evangelistic ones which have been traditionally neglected by our historic discipleship pathways.

6.3 Outward

With an acute awareness of our historic failings around the implementation of a MC model it is my proposal that we create a new generically termed space called 'Groups & Communities'. This enables us to be able to facilitate SGs that are more inward and focused on discipleship in missio Dei principles whilst also encouraging existing MCs to develop their upward, inward and outward rhythms as a longer-term initiative.

Groups and Communities could meet over a period of 4 to 12 weeks in term times. Although in some ways this wars with the understanding of having a long-term commitment to covenant it actually enables people to enter into a more culturally acceptable shorter-term covenant as a stepping stone to influence towards the longer-term.

As Engstrom notes we need to be aware that our context is not ready to jump in and embrace MCs in their purist form (due primarily to the high level of the covenant commitment) so we should use SGs as a stepping stone towards it under the guise of 'Groups and Communities'.

MM3	↑ UP ↑	→ IN ←	← OUT →
Organisationally *(CCC proxemics)*	Sundays *(public space)*	DNA Triplets *(intimate space)*	Groups & Communities *(personal / social space)*

7. Conclusion

These proposals towards fostering a deeper level of engagement for CCC across its primary space are only a surface attempt to try and engage with a much deeper issue.

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[65] DNA Toolkits can be viewed on the CCC website: http://cornerstonecity.co.uk/admin/resources/dna-toolkit-online.pdf

[66] Five Fold Survey. (unknown). [online]. Retrieved June 16, 2017 14:22, from Five Fold Survey: http://www.fivefoldsurvey.com/

I believe that as we continue to outwork practical theology in our local context we will begin to see a much deeper understanding of the mission Dei being outworked across our congregation.

We have had some systemic challenges that have hindered our attempts to create a more missional people.

I am thankful for this opportunity to reflect and ask questions of our practice locally as well as to grow in my own understanding in who I am in relation to the mission Dei, in relation to my fellow believers and in relation with my local context.

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