

# Christ Church Communique



The Monthly Newsletter of Christ Church

February 2006

## Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships

Discipleship is not an option in the Christian life, but rather, *is* the way of the Christian life. Simply put, to be a Christian means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ. As such, every Christian is a disciple, and bears both the responsibility and divine ability to be what Christ desires and commands.

Christ Church takes seriously our Lord's commission to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20)—mature, obedient, disciplined followers of Jesus Christ. We also take seriously the pattern of discipleship as revealed throughout Scripture. In the short, discipleship is presented as occurring within the context of small groups. As such, we will accomplish the purpose of making disciples at Christ Church by employing Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships as a vehicle through which every member may develop into a mature and obedient follower of Jesus Christ. In turn, consistency and accountability in the Christian life will be accomplished by supplementing our small groups with one-on-one mentoring.

### What is a Small Group Fellowship?

Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships are small communities of six to twelve people meeting in homes throughout the East Bay during the week. These groups serve as our primary Christian communities—the first place to which Christians turn for living out the Gospel and applying the truths of God's Word to their lives in their quest to become a mature and obedient follower of Jesus Christ. These will also serve as the heart of the Christ Church community care network. All groups will be led by lay-leaders from the congregation who receive training, oversight, support, and continuing education.

Each Neighborhood Small Group Fellowship expects to encounter God, through Jesus Christ, in its midst—in His presence, in His power, and in His provision—nurturing transformed lives through mutual study, support, encouragement, and service. Our groups will pursue a rich and broad agenda. They are designed to be much more than Bible studies—they will include prayer, worship, fellowship, sharing of what God is doing in our lives, sermon review and application, spiritual formation, accountability, and opportunities for service and outreach.

While some churches augment their ministries with small group opportunities on the side, Christ Church will be centered on our Neighborhood Small Group Fellowship. In a real sense, our small groups *are* the church. Therefore, belonging to a Neighborhood Small Group Fellowship is the way to truly belong to Christ Church.

## **What are the Purposes of Small Groups?**

### ***1. A place to live out the Gospel and apply Scripture to our lives***

We need others to help us live out the Gospel and apply the truths of God's Word to our daily lives. The implications of our faith in Christ are broad—indeed, so broad that we cannot hope to understand and apply them by ourselves. As we remind one another of God's grace and the disciplines of Christian living, we help each other to open our lives to His transforming presence, power and purposes, and encourage and support one another toward maturity in Christ-likeness.

### ***2. A place for caring for each other***

We are taught in Scripture to: "encourage, serve, rejoice, weep with, correct, instruct, sing to, build up, accept, and love one another." At all points, Scripture illustrates that these commands are best lived out in the context of personal relationships in a small group setting. In turn, Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships naturally become the frontline for community care and concern at Christ Church.

### ***3. A place where gifts are exercised***

A Neighborhood Small Group Fellowship is a place where spiritual gifts, including a vision for ministry and service, are discovered and developed. Group participants are encouraged not merely to "consume," but rather to invest themselves in deep, meaningful relationships with group members—loving, encouraging, and supporting each other in Christ.

### ***4. A place where newcomers are meaningfully assimilated***

A Neighborhood Small Group Fellowship is a place where newcomers to Christ Church are meaningfully assimilated into the life and ministry of the church. The NSGF setting is ideally suited to helping new people develop a comfortable, supportive, and encouraging network of relationships while they are in the process of becoming better acquainted with the church and its ministries. Each week, newcomer communication card details will be passed along to the appropriate NSGF leader for follow-up, visitation, and assimilation.

### ***5. A place for community outreach and service***

In most churches, an unsaved person's first exposure to the church is through a morning worship service. However, inasmuch as morning worship services are specifically designed as settings in which believers gather for the corporate worship of God, Sunday morning worship services ought not be the first place to which unbelievers are invited. By contrast, the Christ Church NSGF setting is an ideal setting to which believers may invite their unsaved neighbors, friends, and family members to explore the truth claims of Christianity. In addition, each NSGF will have opportunities to be involved in community service within their neighborhoods.

## **Group Commitment**

Nowhere do the scriptures contemplate living the Christian life in isolation. Rather, at all points, the Christian life is regarded as best lived within the context of a covenant relationship with fellow believers. As such, all members of Christ Church are automatically assigned to a small group, and regular, consistent attendance is strongly encouraged.

Most Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships will meet weekly at a time and place that is convenient for most members of the group. If you find that your work or other commitments prevent you from coming on a regular basis, your group facilitator will be happy to work with you to either find other ways in which you can be involved with your group (e.g., helping make follow-up calls, bringing refreshments, etc.), or help you get connected with a group that meets at a more convenient time. In all cases, all members of Christ Church are strongly encouraged to actively participate in a Neighborhood Small Group Fellowship.

## **Visiting a Group**

Most groups are comprised of those living in the same neighborhood. However, you may have come to Christ Church with a friend or relative and prefer to connect with his or her small group. Generally, this can be arranged—just let the church office know of your preference. Please remember that Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships require your time and effort in order to become a rich and meaningful aspect of your life. Therefore, make an investment in your group: attend regularly; actively participate; offer constructive suggestions to your leader; invite some of your own friends to the group; and when the time comes, consider starting or hosting a new group.

## **Group Organization**

### ***Neighborhood***

Most Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships are comprised of those living in the same neighborhood in order to encourage support, assimilation, and friendship. Most groups will enjoy a healthy ethnic and age diversity, allowing members to benefit from the varied backgrounds and life experiences of their fellow believers.

### ***Special Focus***

Christ Church will occasionally have specialized groups such as women-only and men-only groups, moms' groups, and intergenerational (including children) groups. Career-based groups (e.g., a group for medical or financial professionals) gather people in similar vocations for support, encouragement, and collaboration. We also plan on forming groups for students, and, as needs arise, specialized groups focusing on racial unity and other topics.

### ***Timeline***

Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships will be facilitated by trained lay-leaders from the congregation, most of whom have been identified through the Christ Church "Opportunities for

Service” sign-up sheets. These group facilitators will participate in the New Leader Orientation on 10-11 March 2006 prior to the first meeting of the groups. The first formal Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships will meet the week of 12 March 2006.

### **Conclusion**

The Christ Church Neighborhood Small Group Fellowships will soon become a central feature of our life together. Lives will be transformed...people will become connected...communities will be served...needs will be met...newcomers will be assimilated...leaders will be developed...friendships will be deepened...believers will be nourished...faith will be informed...the Gospel will be proclaimed...Christ will be emulated...God will be glorified. I can't wait to get going. Are you ready?

Grace, peace, and joy,

Robert W. Evans



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