

Christ left us with specific instructions before returning to his heavenly throne. We read at the close of Matthew 28: "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." It seems pretty obvious that discipleship is not an option for the believer; it is a command. But what exactly is discipleship? And how can we, 21st century Christians, make disciples?

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THE CHURCH PLANTING NEWSLETTER OF THE EC CHURCH

Missional Discipleship Takes On Life of Its Own

By Kolleen Long

For Al Giles, pastor of St. Matthew's EC Church, Emmaus, Pa., discipleship and reproduction go hand in hand. He has long used the model put forward by the Navigators using triads, or a group of two to three men who meet regularly to work through discipleship Bible studies. The goal of the studies is to have each participant start a new triad, and so on in repeating generations.

Giles first used the triad format at his former pastorate (Trinity

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Several couples from St. Matthew's EC Church, Emmaus, Pa., have taken what they've learned via church discipleship groups to start a next-generation missional community, a group that meets to share their thoughts on the Bible and living the Christian life. Pastor Al Giles notes the children involved in the group have started, in their own way, a third generation group.



EC in Boyertown). "I think it was somewhat successful. We had a lot of folks jump in, especially the first round," he said. But by the second or third generation, some of these groups trailed off.

Key in the Navigators approach, Giles says, was the idea of pushing participants "to be missional, to go out and reach their neighborhood." This is a shift of thinking for some, he says, who see discipleship as a strengthening exercise that goes on inside a church instead of a way to break outside of their church walls.

Giles and Don Grable from the Navigators discussed this tendency, Giles said, "[about] how to address this and what could get us outside the walls." Grable eventually found a possible solution when he attended a 3D Movements (3DM) workshop in South Carolina. He encouraged Giles to look into this format, which emphasizes putting discipleship and mission into the hands of the everyday Christian.

A nationwide movement, 3DM often involves a two-year community experience, Giles explained. Leaders and participants gather every six months to explore what discipleship means and to make a plan to put what they've learned into practice. At the next

six-month mark, participants are held accountable and asked how they followed through on that plan.

Action takes place through huddles or what Giles terms "intentional small groups." The normal definition of a small group is more fellowship and inner accountability, more support and fellowship, maybe Bible study. But a huddle is intentionally about being and making a disciple. You're going to join this group, and you're going to grow to the point where you can reproduce into another small group."

Giles and other St. Matt's leaders went to 3DM training and committed to a plan for the next six months. This included starting a huddle with a group of men in the church who ended up meeting for several years. While this huddle did not reproduce as Giles had hoped, it did spark new growth; several of the men gained confidence in their understanding of God's word and how to use it in daily life.

A second huddle was started for women, many of them wives of the initial group's participants who saw the changes in their husband and

wanted a similar experience. And it was from both groups, Giles says, that the desire to spread outside the walls (physical and literal) of the church bore fruit.

"What's happened now is that some of the husband and wives have come together," he explains. "Two couples have formed our first missional community."

These couples have begun meeting in homes or backyards with several young adults who were marginally

involved with church life. Children are welcome (Giles said they've even started their own huddle of sorts) and participants are growing in confidence in both leading their families spiritually and sharing their faith with boldness.

"They are reproducing what we did as guys in the huddle; they are reproducing in a whole new huddle," Giles affirms. "And the cool part is, I'm not even involved in it." While he is welcome to come and hang out on occasion, others are leading the group as their pastor did before them. And that kind of reproduction is what discipleship is all about.

“...participants are growing in confidence in both leading their families spiritually and sharing their faith with boldness.”

Illinois Congregation Follows Words with Action to Become Like Christ

By Kolleen Long

At Bethel Church, Dixon, Illinois, believers are following a four-fold discipleship process. The stages – information, illustration, demonstration and transformation – follow examples laid out for us in scripture, notes Ron West.

As assistant pastor, West helps with shepherding tasks, provides pulpit

coverage, teaches Sunday School and works with the church youth group. Discipleship, he says, is "is very similar to sanctification . . . becoming like Christ, becoming more Christlike." West notes that Jesus himself offered the best example of discipleship.

INFORMATION. Jesus shared information about God and showed his

followers how to put that knowledge into action. But, West notes, "a lot of discipleship today is informational only. People are learning a lot [and] learning is a part of the process." But it must be followed by . . .

ILLUSTRATION. Many times, West says, Jesus would follow what he said (information) with a parable.

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“When someone asked him who was their neighbor, what did Jesus do? He gave them a whole parable about loving our neighbor.” This kind of discussion may take place in Sunday School or small group settings. Plans should also be made for . . .

DEMONSTRATION. Here, Christians must put into action what they've discussed and clarified (illustration). At this stage, words are replaced with actions. West quotes Romans 5:8, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” And our Christ-like actions lead to . . .

TRANSFORMATION. This is the exciting part, West says. “[When] you've got those – information, illustration and demonstration – you're doing pretty good. But the last thing is transformation. We start changing.” Transformation brings the process full circle – by learning what Christ said and putting what we learn into practice, we become

more and more like him.

What does that look like at Bethel? It's definitely a process, West says. The congregation

has a strong Sunday school program in place, with five adult classes plus more for youth and children. But more leaders are needed to continue the discipleship process.

“We need someone to take the ball, step up to the plate,” West says. “We have a lot of new people coming in, a lot of new faces, and we need a way to plug them in.”

“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

PRAYING FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Day of Prayer for Church Planting, the first Sunday of each month

Pray for our church planters by name. Ask God to:

- Meet the personal needs of our planters and their families.
- Provide adequate windows of time for rest and renewal.
- Remove harmful distractions from the planters' lives.
- Energize our planters for effective leadership.
- Oversee the protection of our planters from Satan's attacks.

Pray for our church works by name. Ask God to:

- Keep the leadership team's eye on the goal – disciples for Christ.
- Remove obstacles preventing significant community contacts.
- Oversee and maintain the unity of the leadership teams.
- Energize the planting teams for effective community ministry.
- Meet the financial needs of our planting ministries.

Currently, we are supporting and/or encouraging . . .

6 Planters and 7 Plants

- Ephrata, PA . . . House of Blessings (Abe Montanez)
- Harrisburg area, PA . . . Restore Community (Brian Parker)
- Lehigh Valley, PA . . . Horizon (Bud Daneker)
- Philadelphia, PA . . . Comunidad Biblica (Rolando Diaz)
 - Allentown, PA location
- Pottstown area, PA . . . Journey53 (Rick Christman)
- York, PA . . . Iglesia Cristiana (Carlos Kelly)

2 Restarts / Revitalizations

- Slatington, PA . . . Trinity (Brian Kern)
- Tallmadge, OH . . . New Direction (Tim Ream)

2 Informal Partnerships / 4 Missional Works / 0 Potential Adoptions

- Lancaster, PA . . . Iglesia De Dios Ven A El (Luis Ramirez)
- Millersville, PA . . . The Gathering (Juan Carlos Morales)
- Palmerton, PA . . . Gaming Grotto (Chris Bronico)
- Reedsville, PA . . . LifeTree Café (Jeff Byerly)
- Sinking Spring & Mohn's Hill, PA . . . Two Lifetree Cafés (Jerry Artz, Mohn's Hill & Mike Snedeker, Sinking Spring)
 - “Off the Avenue” and “Canal Street”



Thoughts on Discipleship

By Brian Parker
Church Planting Pastor,
Restore, Harrisburg, Pa.

How do you, personally, define discipleship?

When asked about discipleship I like to combine the definitions of two great disciple makers - Michael Frost and Mike Breen.

Discipleship is "rooted in a deep belief in the universal reign of God through Christ. To be a disciple is to acknowledge that reign and to embrace the lifelong journey of submitting every aspect of one's life to His good, just and peaceable reign, as well as alerting others to God's kingship by both word and deed (Frost)" as we "LEARN to be like Jesus while equipping and encouraging others to do the same (Breen)."

It is important to think of discipleship as a process. If we make the great commission a program to be completed in eight weeks or three months, discipleship becomes something to be accomplished, not an ongoing endeavor. Jesus gave us the great commission using participles, implying we are always in the process of being disciplined. Discipleship is a journey, not a destination.

What role does discipleship play in the life of Restore's community?

I once heard someone quote Dallas Willard as saying "Every church needs

to be able to answer two questions: What is our plan for making disciples? How is our plan working?" When we planted Restore, Willard's questions on discipleship challenged us, guided us and helped shape Restore as a Church. And discipleship continues to play the primary role in the life of Restore.

We believe that the discipleship process is relationally intensive. When we study the Scriptures, we see that learning the ways of

Jesus and living the way of Jesus are exclusively relational. So we have intentionally created rhythms where relationships are built, thrive and grow.

Can you explain what this looks like? What's happening at Restore right now?

This summer we have [focused] on the book of Acts through the lens of health. To be healthy all living things must move, breathe, be aware or sensitive, grow, reproduce, excrete (or confess) and feed.

During this time we have seen people recommit to reading the

scriptures more frequently, discipling their families more intentionally and praying about who God is guiding them to disciple and then reaching out to that person and inviting them into an intentional discipling relationship.

What are challenges in pursuing discipleship?

People - people are busy, uncommitted, broken and overbooked. Just as we are. At Restore we strive to balance invitation and

challenge. Sometimes it is simply praying for a person or relationship and inviting them to go deeper in their relationship with us individually and/or Restore as a community. Or, challenging them to be sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit and committing to obedience and deeper discipleship.

And what are the benefits?

I believe discipleship is a gift we invite others into, not a duty we perform. The benefits are watching someone be transformed into the image of Christ.

“LEARN to be like Jesus while equipping and encouraging others to do the same.”

resource box

Basic Steps Toward Christian Maturity

Ron West of Bethel Church recommends this series of 10 studies from Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ. The small books are ideal for individual or group studies and are an excellent starting point for new believers.

Navigators

The goal of the Navigators is to know Christ and to make him known. (Sound familiar?) Through training events, written Bible studies and even YouTube videos, the group provides solid Biblical training for new and mature believers. (www.navigators.org)

3D Movements

This global movement proposes changing the world via discipleship and ordinary people like you and me. (www.3dmovements.com). Interested in learning more? Contact Al Giles of St. Matthew's EC Church; consider attending a Discipleship and Mission Learning Community planned for September 24-26, 2015, in Baltimore, Md.

Reading resources

Brian Parker of Restore recommends additional books for those interested in missional discipleship: *Search & Rescue: Becoming a Disciple who Makes a Difference* by Neil Cole, *The Master Plan of Evangelism and The Master Plan of Discipleship* by Robert Coleman, *The Great Omission* by Dallas Willard, and *Building a Discipling Culture, Multiplying Missional Leaders* by Mike Breen.