



## Smaller gatherings at WBC: a guide

The church is called by Jesus to make disciples. In other words, Jesus asks disciples to make disciples. It is not our job to build the church; Jesus says he will do that. It is our job to make disciples. The making of disciples includes:

- The introduction of people to Jesus who do not yet know him
- The growth of those who do know Jesus in the maturity of their relationship with him. This is spiritual growth/maturity and Paul talks about this being his aim as he writes to churches.



## Making Disciples

The strongest environment for making disciples is in smaller communities because this creates spaces where honesty, accountability and trust are at their deepest and best. We do not get the same opportunities from gatherings of 20, 40 or 60 people. Indications from the early church is that these small, house-sized gatherings were the normal way of gathering. Larger groups followed as the church went from being a persecuted minority to a state-supported institution.

## Spiritual Growth

Spiritual growth depends on commitment and accountability. Being a disciple is about learning to obey all Jesus has commanded. We do this together and Jesus demonstrates this as his intention by gathering a dozen people together as his first disciples. They travel with him together and learn from him together. This is a kind of blueprint that those first disciples work from as the heartbeat of the first church.

The wider fellowship is a place of encouragement and warmth. It is something to be cherished and the chance to worship together is valuable to us. We will continue to be committed to this.

## Priorities

The priorities of the smaller gatherings are:

- Prayer
- Learning
- Accountability
- Hospitality
- Mission
- Commitment

As we try this approach, we are all going to be feeling our way forward. No one can predict how people will get on with this approach or what might prove challenging/sticky about it. And I can't predict where the sticking points will come. For those things, we are going to need to go forward with patience, kindness, respect and a lot of very practical, applied love.

# THE PRACTICAL SIDE



Every individual regularly attending a smaller gathering should commit to an area of spiritual growth, chosen by that individual, as something they feel able to talk about – and should be written down. At least once a month, the area of growth should be spoken about in the group. No one should be under pressure to talk more openly than they feel comfortable, although tender encouragement is appropriate. The idea is to set aims and seek help in reaching them.

Examples might include:

- Being more regular in spending time alone with Jesus,
- Praying aloud to encourage others
- Seeking opportunities for learning/training beyond WBC, looking at ways to grow in character or tackle a behaviour trait
- Acknowledging a repeating temptation and asking for help
- Asking for support in a difficult relationship

There should be a commitment to pray whenever gathered – to open/close a gathering, lift others to God, spend time in thanks, deliberately enjoy the silent presence of God or say grace together in a restaurant.

Worship should feature, too. This could be sung worship or something else: small group resources are available. Worship should include financial giving, which can be done by standing order.

Leadership will be needed and should be based on character rather than level of knowledge or experience. Leaders will champion the values and priorities that WBC asks each gathering to nurture. Leaders should demonstrate and foster mutual trust.

WBC online teaching should feature in the life of the gathering – whether watching the whole thing together or watching at home and asking the questions together.

There is no limit on the number of gatherings (ie not just twice a month). Folks may choose to meet weekly and to meet for different reasons at different times.

Venues are to be decided by those involved. The Sanctuary might be helpful or gatherings could move between homes, outdoors and elsewhere.

Hospitality is about welcoming everyone and building depth in relationships. Depth doesn't happen by itself but from choosing to be open and patient with each other. Some find it easier than others to talk honestly about vulnerabilities, assumptions or fears and this should not be rushed. There should be a commitment to explaining how the group does things and adapting to help newcomers feel welcome/involved.

Each gathering should identify a purpose in mission. A perpetual commitment to a single idea/activity might hinder healthy commitment, so doing something for a season is appropriate. It is important that each group is engaged in something that shares the good news of Jesus in practical ways or seek to introduce others to Jesus, making existing contacts a priority rather than only seeking new ones.

### **Gathering example 1**

This group decided to call itself 'Rhythm at WBC'. There are 8 people in the group and they meet every week on a Tuesday evening in someone's home, taking turns to host. They make a point of praying for each individual as they arrive – making prayer a part of their greeting. Using the notebook provided, they have a page per person to record prayer requests, things to be thankful for and the current area for spiritual growth. They also each record one thing they want to remember about the teaching.

Sometimes they put on worship music while they are gathered and often they sing along to a song to join in with the worship. One person in the group has a copy of Stuart Townend's book '50 Worship Ideas for Small Groups', which they use sometimes.

They decided they would watch the online teaching together each week and discuss the questions – but they always make sure they have updated the notebook first. And when the teaching discussion is done, they each note something in the notebook. They commit to praying by the door as they leave – mentioning each individual by name.

Every few weeks, they get together on a Saturday as well. Sometimes they go for a walk together and sometimes they go out to eat – making sure to say grace.

At the moment, they have decided to make a local quiz night their mission commitment. They've agreed to go every other week for six months and see if being deliberately present as disciples in that setting might help build relationships with those that don't know Jesus.

### **Gathering example 2**

This group chose the name 'Electrons @ WBC'. There are 6 people in the group and they meet every Wednesday evening at The Sanctuary. They choose to gather near the front window in case they see anyone they recognise and can greet them. Someone brings cake each time they meet and acts as host – encouraging the group to pray at the start and end of the gathering.

They use the WBC YouTube Evening Prayer resources when they meet and aim to use them every day at an agreed time – using WhatsApp to try to pray together even though they're in different places. Not everyone can do it every time, but they are committed to staying connected in this way. One of the group has a guitar and they always sing a couple of songs that they know when they meet in person.

They agreed to watch the teaching during the week and to do the discussion together. Using the notebook provided, someone takes notes from the discussion and they agree to pray for each other about what the teaching has been saying to them.

They have decided to all sign up to help with Community Meal as their mission commitment – and will then review the decision in a few months' time. They also commit to finding someone at the Community Meal who they will try to build a stronger friendship with and sensitively witness to them.

The group also gather on 1st and 3rd Sundays to walk together. Sometimes they look for lovely views to visit and sometimes they prayer walk around a part of the community.

### **Gathering example 3**

This group doesn't have a name yet – but they're working on it.

They meet at the Sanctuary every 1st and 3rd Sunday morning at 10.30am and there are 10 of them. They commit to watching the teaching every week – either all together when they are gathered or in some other way – either in 2s and 3s or by themselves. They have a WhatsApp group that they use to share their thoughts about the teaching and the questions when they are not gathered together.

The group has decided to run an invitation-only get-together for lonely and vulnerable people at The Sanctuary every other week on a weekday afternoon – offering friendship and acceptance. They also commit to pray at this group – on the hour – but in gentle and accessible ways.

They use the notebook provided to record prayer requests, the ways they want to mature as disciples and the things they want to learn about. They plan to build in ways to learn about these things, either in their Sunday gatherings or at some other time.

They also use the WhatsApp group to share a verse and a prayer each day, taking it in turns to provide this and keeping it short and simple.

### **Gathering example 4**

This group have chosen the name 'The Smithy @ WBC'. They like the idea that they are a bit like a workshop for making and mending themselves and each other. There are 9 people in the group and a couple of children.

They meet every week, but not always at the same time. On 1st Sundays in the summer, they can be found at the market on the Esplanade in Watchet, where their mission commitment is to provide an accessible place of prayer and friendship – for market visitors and stallholders. They're working on how it will shake down and they're only committed to doing it for a year, to find out how it goes. In the winter, they are thinking about putting together a skittles team.

They use the notebook provided to keep up to date progress on prayer requests and spiritual growth. They've decided to call the spiritual growth bit 'Hot Metal', in keeping with their group name – but also to remind themselves that they have to stay close to Jesus (like staying in the flame) if they want to be mouldable by him.

They use WBC's YouTube to play worship songs that they join in with when they gather, which is often in people's homes.

Whenever possible, they eat together and like to share communion once a month. They watch the teaching during the week and take turns to lead the discussion, based on the questions. The group encourage each other to make notes before they gather to discuss the questions. And they also have a WhatsApp group for prayer, encouragement and for sharing what stood out to them from the teaching.