

A Brief Introduction to **GROWTH GROUPS AND PASTORATES**



“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.” Ephesians 4:15

God-Centred Community

Relationship Based

Outward Looking

Worship Focussed

Transformed by Word and Spirit

Helping Each Other

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY

The idea of community lies at the very heart of the Biblical picture of the church. As the Body of Christ, we are called to a depth of relationship with each other that goes way beyond the casual or superficial. In the New Testament the *community* of believers who love, encourage, admonish, forgive and submit to one another is repeatedly shown to be the place where Christian character develops and faith matures. In fact, the Bible has very little to say about individual ‘spiritual growth’ but speaks rather of a body of people growing towards maturity *together*.

Within TBC we recognise that we have grown to a size where we are no longer able to function as a single community in any meaningful sense. We desire for ourselves the full richness of the New Testament picture of church but our Sunday meetings alone, as valuable as they are, are just not able to bring us this. Quite simply, if we are to be church together we need to meet together regularly both in Sunday church and also in small communities. Our very definition of church must change. Our church is not a large body which splits into small groups, those groups *are* the church.

With this in mind we are developing a network of small church communities within the wider body of the church. There is nothing new about this idea, indeed we can see a similar pattern in the New Testament as the larger fellowships met in smaller numbers in each other’s homes (see Colossians 4:15 or Romans 16:5).

WHAT IS A 'GROWTH GROUP'?

The vision is for TBC to develop as a network of vibrant Christian communities within which each believer is encouraged into a deeper faith and a closer walk with God. A 'Growth Group' is a small community of believers who have committed themselves to the values underlying this vision, the name is simply an acronym for the values...

There will be many kinds of Growth Groups. Some will be open to all, others will bring together people with a similar interest or something else in common, in the same way that Clips or the Twenties and Thirties group do amongst our current home-groups. We certainly hope that all of our current home-groups will become Growth Groups and that many of the other support groups, discipleship groups and informal fellowship groups meeting across the church will do so too.

Becoming a Growth Group is not about following a set program or a rigid methodology, rather it is about committing together to a set of values. The way these values are worked out in practice will vary from group to group, reflecting the rich diversity within our church – we would expect to see as many different practical expressions of the Growth values as we have Growth Groups. All that we will require is that each group regularly asks itself "Does everything that we do week by week genuinely reflect the values that we hold?"

THE GROWTH VALUES

God Centred Community

God Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit must be at the centre of all we are and do. We recognise that it is only through constant prayer and the ongoing guidance of the Spirit that our Growth Group will become and remain a community that honours God.

Relationship Based

The Bible calls us a family, and Growth Groups are a celebration of our relatedness. The group will become a place where each member is valued, loved and disciplined in an atmosphere of submission and trust. We value openness and honesty with regular time given over to allowing each member to talk about themselves, their walk with God, their struggles and joys: to tell their story. Prayer and ministry become a natural focus of the meeting.

We believe that every Christian has God-given gifts and is called to be a minister rather than a passive recipient of ministry. Within our Growth Groups we will encourage discernment and development of both charismatic and 'natural' gifts, in a safe, loving environment. Every member will be positively encouraged to try new things, perhaps to lead a bible study or lead the group in worship, to organise refreshments or to help with group administration. The role of the leaders will not be to do everything, but to be encouragers, trainers and facilitators as the whole group becomes actively involved.

If a Growth Group is to maintain this high level of relationship between the members there will be implications for the size of that group. Once a group reaches a certain size they will be encouraged to 'reproduce' into two groups. In the same way that a parent often feels a profound sense of loss when a child grows up and leaves home, this organic kind of growth is sometimes painful but, nevertheless, is a natural and positive part of the group's life.

Outward Looking

Each group exists not only for its own blessing, but to be a blessing to others – to the wider church, our local communities and the world. Recognising that the whole church is called to proclaim and embody the good news of the gospel we will positively seek out ways that we as a

group can be involved in the church's mission to seek the lost and serve the poor. We will also actively support each member as they seek to make Christ known in their home, workplace or social circle.

As we reach out, we will also aim to draw in. Growth Groups will be places where newcomers are welcome, whether enquirers from outside the church or long-established Christians. However deep our relationships and however blessed our fellowship, we will not allow ourselves to become a closed community even if it means that our one group has to go through the pain of becoming two.

Worship Focussed

Worship is our only appropriate response to God and is therefore an essential ingredient of our time together in God's presence. It is important that we do not limit this by trying to re-create the ways we worship on a Sunday. Rather we will explore the immense variety of ways that we can express our love and devotion to God, and discover those that are appropriate to our unique group setting. There is plenty of room for creativity and experimentation in our worship.

Transformed by Word and Spirit

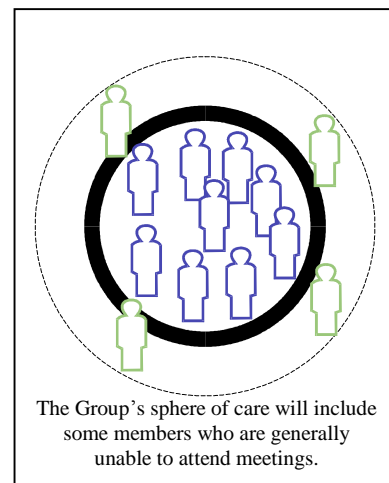
We expect that as we meet and explore God's word and pray and minister together, we will be changed. When we study the Bible the focus will always be on applying what we discover to our lives and honestly exploring where each of us need to respond to what God is saying. The question is never "what have we learned?" but "what have we become?"

As God speaks, through his word, during times of worship or directly by his Spirit, so we need to respond. As a group we will look for opportunities to minister to one another and to allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us and guide us in our prayer and response.

Helping Each Other

Each Growth Group will become a community of care, the sphere of which extends far beyond the 'official' group meetings. When a group member has cares or concerns, is unwell or feeling down, has practical needs or matters for prayer it will be to their group that they will naturally turn. Both individually and collectively, we will constantly look out for practical ways of supporting and caring for one another.

The pastoral role of a Growth Group will extend to caring even for those who are unable to attend any group meetings. Each group will include a small number of members who, for reasons of health, mobility or home situation, are rarely if ever able to come to meetings. Nevertheless, these individuals will come under the umbrella of care that the group provides and will be involved in the life of the group as far as possible. This may include visiting the housebound or occasionally meeting at a different time or place to bring in those whose work or family commitments keep them away from regular meetings.



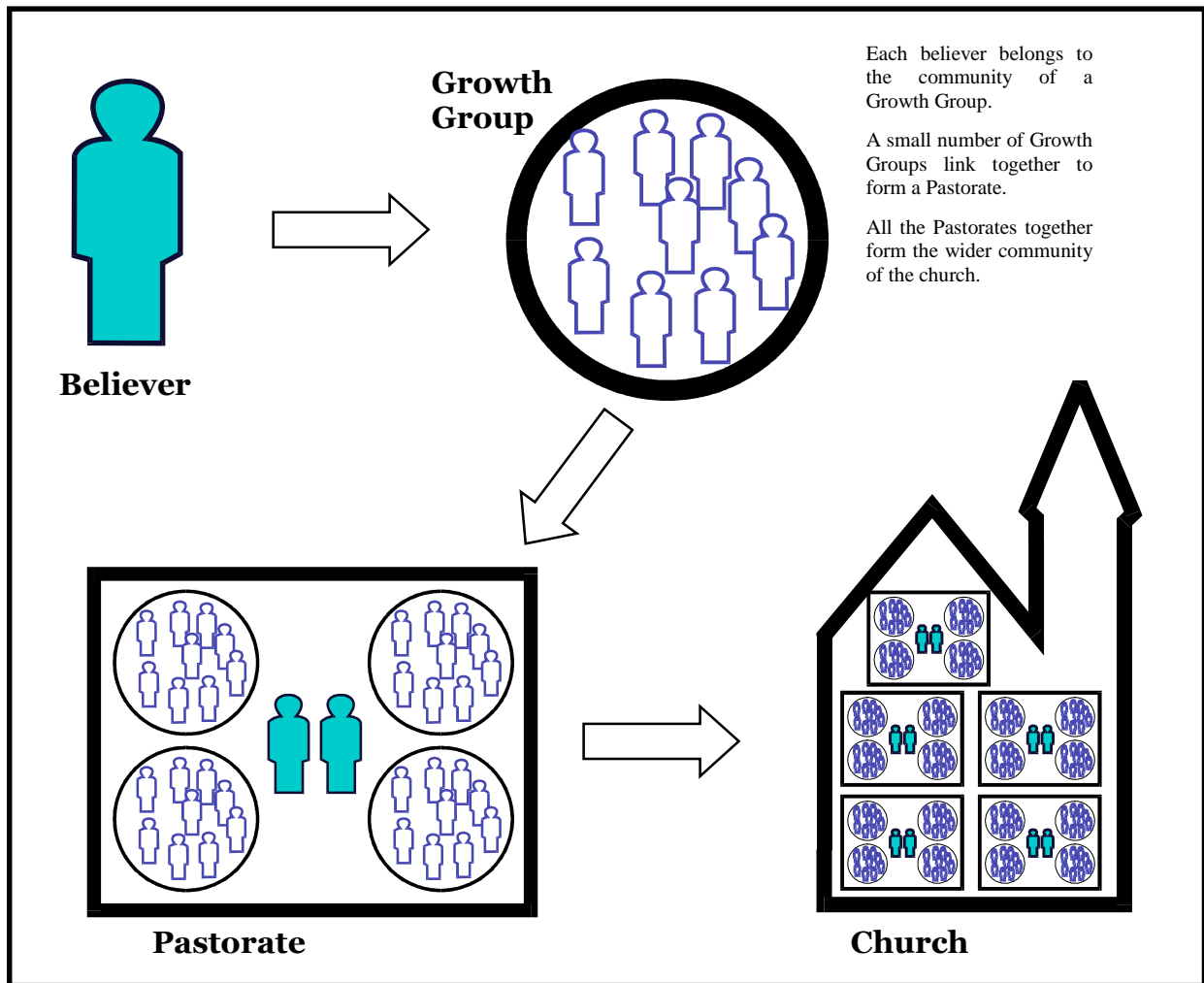
THE ROLE OF THE GROWTH GROUP LEADER

The role of the group leader will be quite different to that of a home-group leader. First and foremost the Growth Group leader will have a pastoral role. As the group commits to encouraging every member to develop their gifts and play an active part within the group, the leader will *do* less while encouraging, training and facilitating more. As they do this they will also take responsibility for identifying and training assistant leader(s) to work alongside them.

WHAT IS A PASTORATE?

Growth Groups will be one key element in a new church-wide pastoral strategy, the other key element will be 'Pastorates'. A Pastorate will be a cluster of between two and five small groups, under the care of one or more Pastors. In this context a Pastor will be a lay member of the church who is recognised as having the appropriate spiritual gifts and leadership experience and then appointed by the leadership to this role. This will replace the current system of geographically based 'Pastoral Coordinators'.

Relationships between groups within a Pastorate and meetings of the whole Pastorate will be left to the individual groups and Pastors concerned, however there is plenty of scope for occasional joint activities – socials, praise nights, outreach events... or whatever. It is certainly envisaged that when a Growth Group reproduces into two, both will remain within the same Pastorate to enable close links to be retained.



THE ROLE OF THE PASTOR

The Pastor's role will first and foremost be to oversee, mentor and care for the leaders of the groups within his or her Pastorate, which could include a mixture of Growth Groups, traditional home-groups and other small groups. It will be the Pastor to whom a group leader will initially turn for advice, support and to refer pastoral issues that have arisen within the group which go beyond the scope of what the group can handle. The Pastor's brief will also include a role in helping individuals to find and settle into the right small group as well as assisting in the identification of future Growth Group leaders, assistant leaders and Pastors.