

## **Connecting in Community**

### **How to Get and Stay Connected**

When you lead a missional community, it is only a matter of time before you hear some form of this statement; 'I don't feel connected.' What do you say? How do you respond to this statement? What are your initial thoughts about the statement? Do you feel like you need to try and cater to the person's needs? Do you feel like you should confront them about consumerism? Do you know what to say at all?

What does being connected mean? How does one get and stay connected? How should we counsel those in our groups who approach us with this concern? Let me suggest that to be connected is contingent upon at least two things; opportunity and investment.

#### **Opportunity**

At Mercyview, we will always create opportunity for people to be 'connected' in community. The primary avenue by which people can connect in community is missional community. A missional community is an intergenerational small group focused on growing in knowledge and application of the gospel, cultivating a safe and authentic community and engaging our city with the good news of Christ.

Dgroups are an additional opportunity for connection. Dgroups at Mercyview consist of 2-3 believers of the same gender who mutually pursue holiness by studying the Bible, confessing sin and praying together. Dgroups require intentional effort and investment in one another. Theologian John Owen said, 'be killing sin, lest it be killing you.' In response, Mercyview has crafted Dgroups to provide opportunity to courageously combat sin and its effects.

Missional communities and Dgroups provide formal and informal opportunities for people in the local church to establish and maintain relationships. Formal opportunities consist of the missional community gathering, the group's missional endeavor, dgroup gatherings, corporate worship and or any other church sponsored gathering.

As a result of these formal gatherings, informal gathering opportunities may arise as members of the group pursue relationships with each other. Informal opportunities might be something like going to dinner or drinks, getting coffee, going bowling or on a camp out. Informal gathering opportunities are critical for people to grow and maintain intimate relationships.

#### **Investment**

If I decided to spend my entire paycheck on electronics, clothes, shoes, books, etc., would I be ready for retirement when that time comes? The answer is no. Conversely, if I invest a portion of my income wisely, then I will likely receive the reward of a sound

investment at some point in the future. Similarly, if a person does not invest their time and energy into community, then they will not likely receive the return of 'feeling connected.'

Relationships take intentional effort; they take investment. In the beginning of nearly every relationship there is a period of awkwardness or a feeling-out process. Helping your people understand that all relationships require investment is critical. As leaders, we must help our people understand and put into practice pursuing each other for the sake of building and maintaining relationships. Connecting in community requires personal investment in the group and its people.

### **Two Way Street**

The truth is that being connected is a two way street. Mercyview will always provide opportunity for people to 'connect.' The worship gathering, missional community, dgroups, equipping opportunities, ministry to men and women, holiday celebrations and church-wide missional endeavors all serve as formal opportunities where people can connect. As relationships are born and fostered, informal opportunities will arise, provided people are willing to invest in each other.

All the opportunities in the world are meaningless if the individuals in our church are unwilling to invest in them and one another. As leaders, we must provide vision and empower our people to invest.

Connecting in community requires opportunity and investment.

### **Sneaky Consumerism**

There are consumers at Mercyview. That may seem blunt, but it is true. Consumerism in missional community may be a little more sneaky than consumerism in corporate worship. The latter shows up to take from a corporate worship gathering, while the former may recognize their need to engage in the church on a deeper level. However, when they arrive at a missional community their attitude or posture toward the group may be strikingly similar to the corporate consumer's attitude toward the corporate worship gathering. The consumer in the missional community comes to take from the group or believe the group exists to meet their needs or preferences. They rarely, if ever, actually contribute to the group. The missional community consumer may even push back against being called to contribute or participate.

In order to overcome consumer tendencies, leaders must call their people to invest in each other and actively contribute to the group. Investment overcomes consumerism. Mercyview is not a place where one can simply take from community. We must consistently call our people give, to invest.

### **What it means for you**

You will eventually run into people who will tell you that they ‘don’t feel connected.’ You may feel the need to immediately cater to the person’s desire. There may be a legitimate deficiency in your group that you should address. However, be aware of the presence of consumerism. If the person wants you to somehow connect them, instead of themselves pursuing and investing in relationships, then you may want to consider asking the following series of questions:

**Questions:**

1. What are you seeking?
2. What do you want?
3. In whom are you investing?
4. What is stopping you from investing?
5. How do you plan to connect?
6. What do you mean by ‘connected?’
7. What does it take to be ‘connected?’
8. What does being ‘connected’ look like to you?
9. How can I assist you as you work to connect?
10. How can I pray for you?

**Strategies for Connection**

1. Shared Leadership: Provide opportunities for group members to invest by taking leadership of a particular facet of the missional community.
2. Active Participation: Call the members of the missional community members to participate in different facets of the group.
3. Dgroups: Dgroups that form from inside of missional community provide additional opportunities to connect through additional relationships.
4. Outside the Group: Encourage the people in your group to pursue each other outside of the formal missional community gatherings.