

Introduction:

Getting Over Syllabus Shock

I remember my first day of college like it was yesterday; walking to class for the first time, meeting professors and classmates and my most vivid memory - syllabus shock. Thumbing through assignment sections of my syllabuses was terrifying. I thought to myself, 'how am going to do all this work?' I did not have the experience or vision to see that the work was for the entire semester. Fortunately for me I had a mentor who helped me organize my schedule. After it was planned out, I felt better. I had structure and direction that would help me get my work accomplished and achieve my goals. To say it another way, structure and direction helped me overcome syllabus shock. Similarly, leading a missional community (MC) can be daunting. It takes a commitment of time, energy and resources.

The following resource is for you! It is intended to provide structure and direction to help ease any potential 'syllabus shock,' associated with leading a missional community.

The New Testament's teaching on life in community is clear. From the book of Acts, in which we get a glimpse of the early church, to the 59 'one another' commands that are sprinkled throughout the New Testament; the Biblical teaching is that we need one another. The call to live in community is essential to the life of the believer. As a result, the church must do the best it can do to provide opportunity for Christians to live in community. This is not an option or a suggestion. The Bible commands us to enter into relationship with one another. To disregard the Bible's teaching in this area is sin. For this reason and a few others (which we will discuss in depth later) we invest a great amount of time, resources, and effort into our missional communities and their leaders.

You are a valued leader in our church! We are excited that you have chosen to serve Mercyview in this leadership role. As a missional community leader you are the first line of pastoral care and ministry for our people. Consequently, we are committed to walk alongside you throughout your time and as a missional community leader, to provide ongoing support, ongoing coaching and training.

The following Primer attempts to answer three important questions related to missional community at Mercyview:

1. What is a missional community?
2. Why missional community?
3. How does a missional community work?

A Word from Paul:

I hope and pray this resource is helpful for you! We understand that leading an MC is a sacrifice, commitment and may be difficult at times. We are so thankful for you and your service to our church.

As we begin, this word from Paul that explains how I (Ryan) feel about you as a brother in the Lord and an MC leader.

'We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers.'

1 Thessalonians 1:2

What is a Missional Community?

A Brief Introduction

This section is designed to provide practical instruction for missional community leaders at Mercyview. We will discuss multiple aspects of a missional community including definition, goals, components, apprenticeship and multiplication. This is by no means an exhaustive resource, but aims to create practical guidelines and direction to help our leader's and missional communities thrive.

The Definition

At Mercyview, a missional community is an intergenerational small group that may be made up of both Christians and those exploring Christianity for the purpose of growing in their knowledge and experience of the gospel, to be a disciple and a discipler, to foster deep, authentic community, and to go on mission by taking the good news of Jesus to our city.

Parsing it out

Allow me to spend a few words unpacking the definition above.

- First, at Mercyview our small groups are called missional communities. The term 'missional community' requires some defining. We desire to foster deep-abiding relationships as a part of community, while going on mission; spreading the love of Christ to our city and world.
- Second, MCs are intentionally intergenerational. We believe there is much to learn from people who are in different stages of life. Additionally, intergenerational groups allow for children to be a part of missional community, as their parents see fit. It is common knowledge that people typically flock toward people with whom they share similarities. This is not necessarily bad; however, surrounding oneself with people of the same likeness (age, gender, gifting, etc.) may inhibit growth. Therefore MCs aim is to exhibit diversity.
- Third, MCs are welcoming to Christians and non-Christians. MCs gather around the central theme of humankind's intrinsic need for relationship and community. As bearers of God's image, human beings are made with an inborn, deep need for relationship. As

followers of Jesus, we believe that God has called us bring the good news of Christ to our neighbors, co-workers, relatives and whomever else the Lord may highlight. In order, to facilitate this command our MC's are regularly go on mission in order to share the good of Jesus!

Why Missional Community?

Biblical Support for Missional Community

Introduction

Small groups in churches take on many different names and purposes. Personally, I have been a part of Sunday school, small group, house church, community group and missional community. Are these differences in name only? Have small groups just been rebranded over and over? Do these groups have different purposes and objectives? Different churches have different purposes for their small groups. At Mercyview, missional community is not a rebrand or an example of cute semantics. Missional communities have clear objectives and purposes. In addition, they have specific components, which are intended to help a missional community reach its stated objectives. The objectives and components of missional community spring from the pages of God's Word. The book of Acts is a window into the life of the early church. Through this window we have an opportunity to see how the early church operated and learn from their experiences and methods. The best place to start is Acts 2:42-47.

Description and Prescription

In college I had the privilege of playing football. During my junior year suffered a back injury. For a few weeks our team doctor told me that I was having muscle tightness. His description of what he thought about my back was not very helpful. After all, I knew my back was tight and the doctor simply telling me my back was tight, in no way helped my pain. It wasn't until I went to see a specialist that I actually got an accurate description; I had a fractured a vertebra. Once I had an accurate description of the problem, the doctor was able to give me an accurate prescription to fix it.

In Acts 2:42-47, we see a description of the early church in Jerusalem. We believe that this description may also give a guiding prescription for future local churches. Missional communities at Mercyview are patterned after the description we find in Acts 2.

Acts 2:42-47

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having

favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Let's begin by taking a moment to discuss the context of Acts 2:42-47. The early verses in Acts 2 reveal the birth of the Church. Acts 2:1-13 describes the coming of the Holy Spirit; the catalyst for the birth of the Church:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:1-4

The Holy Spirit arrived with power. The following passage, Acts 2:14-41 gives us an example of the Holy Spirit's power. Peter preached a powerful sermon in which he called the people to repent of their sin and believe in the person and work of Jesus. The results; 3,000 sinners came to faith in Christ. After the close of Peter's sermon, we arrive at our passage, describing life in the local church.

We have modeled our missional communities after what we find in Acts 2:42-47. The following is an exposition of the aforementioned passage and an explanation of biblical support for missional community.

Exposition and Biblical Support

Let's examine Acts 2:42-47 in detail. My hope is that after a thorough exposition you will come to see the connection between the passage and our missional community model. As we walk through the passage, I will draw out several themes that are indicative (true) of the early church and imperative (essential) to our missional communities.

Gospel

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching

Acts 2:42a

The early church was a community radically changed by the person and work of Jesus. The text informs us that had several key practices. First, 'they devoted themselves the apostle's teachings.' What were the apostles' teachings? In the context of Acts 2 the apostle's teachings can be found in Peter's sermon, in which he called his hearers to repent of their sin and believe in the good news of Jesus. The greater textual evidence of the New Testament confirms this idea. In 1 Corinthians 15:3,4 Paul explains that the message of the gospel is of first importance. This passage suggests that the Apostle Paul's primary teaching was the message of the gospel. In Galatians 1:8 Paul explains that if anyone changes the message of the gospel, then that person or angel should be cursed. This passage teaches the pure essential message of the

gospel. In addition to these explicit examples, there are many examples in the New Testament that outline the primacy of the gospel. We can say with confidence that the apostle's teachings in Acts 2:42 is synonymous with the gospel. Being devoted to the gospel is different from simply knowing the gospel. Devotion to the apostles teachings implies great effort in learning the implications, applications, nuances and facets of the gospel. Exploring the height, width and depth of the gospel is one of the objectives of our missional communities. This objective is called 'Gospel Fluency.' We will discuss the particulars of 'Gospel Fluency' in greater detail later in this resource. However, to state it in one sentence: We aim to help all our people learn to apply the truths and promises of gospel to their lives.

Community

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 2:42

And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Acts 2:44,45

The early church was a persecuted community. Individual Christians had little chance of making it. Community was necessary for survival.

The text tells us the early church was committed to 'fellowship.' The term fellowship has been turned into an abstract 'christianese' concept with little real meaning. The Greek word translated fellowship, is Koinonia. It is used in the New Testament twelve times. Every time a New Testament author used Koinonia it referenced either relationship between Christians, a Christian's relationship with God or both. This pattern holds true for Koinonia in Acts 2:42,44 and 45. We can say with confidence that Koinonia in Acts 2 refers to ongoing, deep, abiding relationship between Christians. At Mercyview, we have crafted missional community as an avenue for Koinonia, or fellowship in the local church. The missional community is the primary place within Mercyview to develop and maintain long-lasting, deep, abiding relationships.

Biblically, Koinonia requires relationship. Our missional communities provide multiple opportunities from eating meals, having coffee, playing board games or simply hanging out together to discussing God's Word, praying, spending time in worship or participating in the mission. Each is designed to help communities grow and sustain relationships. Koinonia is one of the backbones of community. We were made for relationships. As churches grow, sometimes it can be difficult to maintain a relational base. Investing in a missional community will help partners at Mercyview retain deep, abiding relationships.

The book of Acts is not the only place we find the New Testament's teaching on community. The entire New Testament speaks to the need of Christian community. There are fifty-nine examples in the Scriptures that make up the 'one another' passages. None of these 'one

another' commands are possible outside of community. At Mercyview, missional community is the primary place where we can obey the 'one another' commands.

Mission

As Jesus ascended into heaven, he spoke these words to his disciples.

You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.

Acts 1:8

This passage mirrors Matthew 28:18-20, which has been called the great commission. Jesus' final words to his disciples were intended to send them on a mission to make more disciples. In the book of Acts, we see the early church taking steps to fulfill the mission that God gave them in the very next chapter!

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46,47

A majority of the earliest Christians were Jewish. In Acts 2:46 the text tells us that they likely continued to go to the temple to worship. However, as Christians they may have used this time at the temple for mission as well. Entering the temple to worship and go on mission may have been a great opportunity for the earliest Christians to engage their Jewish neighbors with the truth of Christ.

Whether in the Temple or elsewhere the early church was clearly on mission, evidenced by verse 47;

'the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.'

Acts 2:47

They were fulfilling the great commission that was given to them in Acts 1:8. The next twenty-seven chapters in the book of Acts outlines, examines and explains how the earliest Christians went about fulfilling the mission given to them by Jesus.

We are in great debt to those earliest Christians. Without their missional efforts, where would we be? Likely, lost. Our missional communities want to pick up the missional button; not for our glory but to help fulfill the great commission.

So Why Missional Community?

So why Missional Community? The answer is actually quite simple; the Bible gives us a description and a guiding prescription of how a Christian community may ideally function. An ideal missional community seeks mirrors the early church community in Acts 2 and pursues the 59 'one anothers,' by growing in the gospel, investing in community and going on mission.

How Does Missional Community Work?

To this point we have discussed what a missional community is and the why Mercyview is committed to missional community. The following section will provide MC leaders with an in depth look at 'How' to lead a missional community.

The 3 Objectives for our Missional Communities

Gospel-Fluency

If I claimed to be fluent in Spanish, but could only speak in the present tense, would I be considered fluent? The answer is obviously no. Many people believe in the gospel. However, belief is not indicative of fluency. The gospel, like the Spanish language, is dynamic, with multiple implications, applications and facets. Many Christians believe in the gospel but have not considered the implications, applications and different facets of the gospel. My inability to speak in the past or future tense in Spanish would definitely inhibit my ability to communicate; likewise, one's lack of knowledge of the implications, applications and facets of the gospel will inhibit their growth as a Christian.

We can not assume that people know the multiple implications, applications and facets of the gospel. As a leader, you should assume that the people in your group do not know how to apply the truths of the gospel to their lives. We aim to teach them how. Our job as MC leaders is to help teach our people how to apply the truths of the gospel to their whole life. How does the gospel make you a better parent, or spouse? How does the gospel change your identity? How does it affect your ability to stop sinning? How does the gospel strip away the power of an idol? Gospel fluency seeks to answers these questions and more.

Application may be difficult. We are not often taught to apply abstract truths and concepts to concrete, everyday life. This is may be one reasons why some people and churches slip into to moralism. It is much easier to tell people to do and not to do, than to teach a person to live in obedience that flows from the application of the gospel.

Some examples of Gospel-application...

- Steadfastly loving a person or people who are difficult to love (Because Jesus loved you when you were unlovable. Romans 5:5-10)
- Trusting in Christ for approval over the approval of others.
- Although you may be abandoned by others, you are never alone. In fact, Jesus was abandoned for you, ensuring that you will never be alone.

- Jesus fully obeyed the law, which gives you grace when you break it.

Authentic Community

Community is a buzzword in today's culture. Why? Fundamentally I would suggest that it because all people are made in the image of God and therefore have an intrinsic need for community. In our western culture that prioritizes individualism, fostering community is essential to the life of the local church because it is counter cultural. Our MC's are the primary way for a person to engage in community at Mercyview.

Community that lacks authenticity is deficient. In the context of a missional community, authenticity and safety are directly correlated. When one feels safe, one may feel more comfortable to share real sin, real issues or struggles. We want people to feel safe to share their real struggles, real fears, and real issues. Therefore, authenticity is a mark of a healthy missional community. Without authenticity a missional community may feel stunted and frustrating.

At this point you may be saying, "that's great, but how to do I make people be authentic?" The short answer is; you can't. However, you can cultivate environments that allow people to feel safe and be authentic. People need safe places where they can let down their guard, be themselves, confess and repent of sin, and be encouraged. It takes intentional effort to create such an environment. A combination of modeling authenticity, prayer, heart seeking questions and informal gatherings will help your MC cultivate a safe, authentic community.

Sustainable Mission

Mission

As you consider missional opportunities for your group, evangelism and the opportunity for discipleship must be an integral component of your group's missional endeavour. Ministries of mercy and justice also have an important role to play in mission. Think creatively about how you plan to make disciples while seeking justice for people. Mission may look like partnering with an existing ministry, serving a person in the group or intentional spending time with lost friends together.

Sustainability

Missional communities should spend time brainstorming about mission. Sometimes brainstorming sessions can turn into grandiose dreaming about mission. Groups do this for a couple reasons. First, the need is great and our people have big hearts. Second, mission is hard, it's messy and sometimes scary. As a result, the group may daydream about grandiose missions that never actually materializes. In reality, after the grandiose brainstorming session the group is no closer to finding a mission than it was before the session.

In order to combat this, leaders must consider sustainability. Your group's mission must be something that ten to twelve people can do for the foreseeable future.

To recap; when thinking about a mission for your group; think about Jesus's words in Matthew 28; make disciples. This is first step in mission. Second, think about sustainability. Third, be patient . Making disciples may take a long time and be challenging. Do not allow the enemy or your impatient flesh to distract, disrupt or discourage your efforts.

Action Steps

As the group pursues the three objectives, you can take action steps to further the process along. The following are examples:

Gospel Fluency

1. Proclaim the gospel; this means talking about it, its implications and its results.
2. Explore different facets of the gospel; it saves, it sanctifies, it comforts, it encourages, it challenges, it humbles, it excites, it sends.
3. Apply the gospel; examples may include:
 - I am consistently selfish and self-centered, whereas Jesus selflessly submitted to the Father's will and suffered and died for me!
 - Jesus won by fulfilling the Law, demonstrating perfect obedience, giving you the freedom to lose when you fail to fulfill the law.
 - Old Identity vs. New Identity in Christ. Ephesians 2:1-10 is a wonderful passage that shows the dichotomy between dead rebellious sinner and a son or daughter in Christ.
4. Ground Imperatives in Indicatives. Paul grounds commands in gospel truths and identity.
 - *Imperatives*=what you should do
 - *Indicatives*=what God has done for you or your new identity in Christ
 - This is how Paul and the other New Testament writers motivated the church in light of the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit. The New Testament authors offered *imperatives*, but these commands are always grounded in *indicatives*. Whenever you encounter an imperative or command in the New Testament, you will always find an indicative or truth concerning what God has done or your identity in Christ in the context of the passage.

Authentic Community

1. Leaders model authenticity: As the leader, you have to take the first step. This is a prerequisite for leadership. If this is a struggle, then seek help from another leader who will coach you.
2. Pray: Foster an environment where people are comfortable and capable of praying for heart level issues and concerns..
 - Pray in the moment: Immediate prayer communicates that your community values praying for each other enough to take time and pray.

- Pray Scripture: Nothing may be more encouraging or helpful than a message from God's Word.
- Listen: Since we believe that God still speaks, then we should set aside time to listen. Do not be afraid of silence; use it. Take a few moments to ask God to speak.
- Lay Hands: Lay hands on the shoulders of the person for whom you are praying. Laying hands while praying is biblical pattern that communicates blessing, anointing, and ministering to fellow believers (Gen.48:13-20, Acts 8:17,18; Acts 6; Hebrews 6:2).

3. Create a Question Asking Culture: It is common in Christian community to make nebulous statements or vague prayer requests to the group. A question asking culture is one that asks questions that encourage people to share their hearts. Good questions zero in on heart issues.

- Here are few questions: How does that make you feel? How can we pray for *you*? How do you make sense (or cope) with the situation? What is most difficult about the situation? What is scary about it? Where are you turning with your fear? Does the Bible speak to the situation? How do you view God in the midst of the situation?

Asking follow up questions may make some people feel uncomfortable. However, it is critical as you seek to know your people. Individuals who are known by each other are more inclined to be authentic. Be slow to give advice (unless the person asks for it). Instead ask question that will help the person come to the correct decision.

4. Grace and Truth: John 1:17 teaches that Jesus is the perfect embodiment of grace and truth. If you examine Christ's interactions with people, then you will find that he told people the truth while offering them grace.

Examples of grace and truth played out include; Jesus' interactions with the disciples throughout the gospel narratives, the Samaritan woman, Jairus, the woman with the blood disorder and even Paul in Acts 9! The Bible and personal experience tell us that people believe, do and say crazy things. They will need grace and truth; give it to them!

5. Outside Time: Members of the MC must spend time together outside of group meetings. Getting to know members in different contexts is a critical to building authentic relationships.

Sustainable Mission

1. Consider the great commission: We go on mission to make disciples. Find opportunities for the group to share the gospel with others.

2. Do Mercy, Seek Justice: Consider partnering with an existing ministry to serve an underserved population.

3. Make a plan: Take concrete actions steps to put mission into practice.

4. Think sustainability: A mission that can be accomplished by 10 people can do for the foreseeable future.

5. Empower others: Identify group members who are gifted in particular areas. Cast vision, train and release them into leadership.

Components of a Missional Community

A missional community does many things. It studies the Bible, it prays, it worships, it goes on mission, it shares meals, it does all of these things and more. Multi-faceted groups will feel pulled in one direction at the expense of the others. The following discussion will help you pursue each component in balanced fashion.

There are 5 components of a missional community at Mercyview. The components function as a road map to help a missional community move in the direction of the three objectives (Gospel Fluency, Authentic Community, Sustainable Mission). In addition, the 5 components help the MC leader create a spiritually balanced culture. All of us have strengths and weaknesses. Many people prefer to operate in their strengths, while avoiding weaknesses. However, if we want to grow, then you must spend time sharpening our weaknesses. The 5 components are a practical grid to help you practice strengths, sharpen weaknesses, while striving for balance in the group. The 5 components are as follows (in no particular order):

- Word
- Prayer
- Worship
- Fellowship
- Mission

Word

Typically we will be discussing a passage of Scripture from the previous week's sermon. Discussion surrounding the sermon will allow for greater connection with the text and its resulting themes, implications, application, etc. Discussion materials will be provided to MC leaders with sufficient time to prepare for the discussion. Leaders are encouraged to use resources to prepare and make their own mark on the discussion. From time to time a missional community will discuss a resource like the Gospel Centered Life, Gospel Centered Community, etc. In these cases, preparation and direction of the discussion will be straightforward.

Missional community is not the forum for an MC leader to exercise a teaching gift. A discussion requires dialogue. In a discussion, it is your primary task to facilitate the group's conversation. Ideally, we want most group members to participate in the discussion.

A group discussion, like a flock of sheep, needs a shepherd to tend, guide and correct. You are the shepherd. Keep your eyes and ears open and do not be afraid to keep the group on task.

You will, run across people who will distract from the discussion. You can overcome distractors through several means. First, set up ground rules for the discussion. Brainstorm what ground rules would be helpful for your group and hold people to them. Second, when a person offers something that is off topic, ask them to connect it to the topic. Third, if a person consistently uses distant language, ask them to connect what they have said with their own life. Finally, if a distractor persists, then you may need to pursue a private conversation with them.

A discussion can be difficult to facilitate. However, if you get others involved and stay on topic, then you will likely enjoy fruitful time together.

Prayer

Prayer may be the most vital component for the purpose of building a community. Prayer, by its nature is intimate. It knits hearts, minds and souls together. In addition, it ministers to people in ways few other activities can. Few things communicate one's care for another person more than prayer. Many times, due to our backgrounds, we may only consider group prayer in only one or two ways. It is my intention to offer ten examples of group prayer that may help you diversify group prayer in your missional community.

1. The Psalms: Sometimes we just don't know what or how to pray? Luckily, we have the Scripture; specifically the book of Psalms. The Psalms address nearly the full gamut of human emotions, struggles and circumstances. There are 150 Psalms from which to choose!

2. The Bible: There are many prayers, promises, exhortations and encouragements in the Scriptures. Some Biblical prayers include: Ephesians 1:17-19, Ephesians 3:16-19, Philippians 1:9-11, Colossians 1:9-11, 1 Corinthians 1:4-9, 2 Corinthians 2:3-7.

If a person is a believer, many of these promises, exhortations, encouragements are for them! Use your knowledge of the Bible to pray the God breathed promises, encouragements and exhortations over your people. Example: Someone in your group has stated that they are feeling paralyzed by anxiety and worry. Pray the words of 1 Peter 5:6,7¹ over them.

3. Valley of Vision: The Puritans had an incredible grasp of the Bible, theology and the human condition. The Valley of Vision is a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions. It is arranged by topic and is a tremendous resource. Topics include: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Redemption and Reconciliation, Penitence and Deprecation, Needs and Devotions, etc. There are other resources similar to the Valley of Vision that may be helpful for your time. If the resource teaches what the Bible teaches, use it!

4. Smaller Groups: Divide the group in half, or some other configuration. Lead one small group in prayer, while having your apprentice or other member lead the other group. Everyone

¹ Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

has number over which they are not comfortable speaking or praying. By breaking into smaller groups you are providing more opportunity for people to pray.

5. Men and Women: Break up your MC into smaller groups of men and women. In gender specific smaller groups people are typically more willing to share heart-level issues, sin struggles, marital strife, relational brokenness, resentment toward God, etc.

6. A.C.T.S: This acronym stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

- **Adoration** is to adore God, to worship him and to fulfill the commandment to love him with all of our heart, mind and soul. As we spend time in adoration, we praise God for who He is - our Creator, our Sustainer and our Redeemer
- **Confession** allows one to clear away the things in the relationship between an individual and God. All of us have sinned. The apostle John writes in his first epistle 'If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'
- **Thanksgiving.** From childhood we are brought up to say 'Thank You' when someone does something for us or gives us a gift. Each moment God is blessing us, every minute we can recall the wonderful things that God has done for us and the gifts that we have been given, namely the gospel!
- **Supplication** or **Intercession.** Finally, we come to ask God for our needs and the needs of others. During this section, encourage group members to offer heart level needs. Be ever ready to steer requests and needs to the heart.

The A.C.T.S model is a grid that may help the group or an individual focus on other topics in prayer besides requests. It helps focus prayer on God, his character and what he has done for us. The order of the A.C.T.S. model is important. Make sure to devote a significant amount of time to each section. It would be very helpful for the group to have their Bibles out and be ready to look up Scripture as the Holy Spirit brings it to mind.

7. The Hot Seat: Volunteer yourself, spouse or trusted group member to sit in chair in the middle of the room. Have the person briefly share about a struggle, life circumstance or joy. Then instruct the group to take a few minutes to pray silently; asking the Lord to reveal something that may encourage the person in the prayer seat. Practically, this may mean asking the Lord to reveal a passage of Scripture, word or thought that would encourage the person. Finally, ask God to build your faith!

Don't be afraid of silence; use it to listen. After some time, lay hands on the person and pray. Pray appropriate scripture, pray encouragements that God may have brought to your mind for the person, pray for their need, pray for their heart, etc. Admittedly, this technique requires a few things. First, you may need to help your group do some unlearning. Laying on of hands, and listening to the Holy Spirit are not weird or spiritually creepy, out of control or abusive. The Holy

Spirit is God and we believe he speaks.² Shouldn't we listen? Second, it may be helpful to recruit someone beforehand to volunteer for the 'hot seat' vs. simply asking for volunteers.

8. Stop and Pray: This is the 'hot seat', minus the actual seat. Stop to pray for each request and/or person as they offer the request or after you have asked heart level questions that may reveal a deeper need. Don't wait until the end and lump everyone together.

9. Prayer Walk: Gather in your neighborhood or a place that God has placed on your heart. Walk through your neighborhood praying as the Lord leads. Topics may include: prayer for neighbors by name, prayer for restoration of the neighborhood, prayer for reconciliation, prayer for God to reign and rule in the hearts of your neighbors, prayer for missional opportunities in your neighborhood, prayer for relational bridges into your neighbors lives, etc. If you encounter people on your walk, pray for for them!

10. Pray for the Person on your Right (or left): In an effort to encourage everyone in the group to participate in prayer, have members of the group pray for the person next to them. This will help everyone in the group participate in prayer. Help people understand the importance of praying for the heart.

There is a place for email prayer chains, or quick prayer times at the end of a gathering. However, these should function as supplements to your group's in-depth, focused prayer time. A group that doesn't intentionally and consistently pray for each other in the gathering will never reach the level of intimacy of a group that routinely prays for each other during their gathering.

Worship

John Calvin said true knowledge of God leads to worship. We agree with Calvin and believe worship is one of the natural overflows of true knowledge of God and the gospel. Worship is imperative for missional communities at Mercyview.

Worship is not just singing, but it certainly is singing. If anyone in your group has musical talent and desires to lead worship, extend an invitation for them to lead worship in the group. What if your group does not have a person who can lead? Luckily worship is more than singing! Here are some other options for worship in your MC

- The Psalms: This may look quite similar to praying through a Psalm. There are no better examples of worship than the Psalms. For example, Psalms 120-134 were actually composed as songs. These Psalms are typically referred to as the 'Psalms of Ascent.' Scholars believe that pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem sang these Psalms.

² When the Holy Spirit speaks to a person, the message will always be consistent with the Bible. Paul tells the Thessalonians in 1 Thess. 5:19-21: 'Do not quench the Spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good. Abstain from evil.' The Holy Spirit and the Word of God always agree. If something does not agree, then disregard it.

- Valley of Vision: The Puritans had an amazing grasp of the Bible and the human condition. The Valley of Vision is a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions. It is arranged by topic and is a tremendous resource. Topics include, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Redemption and Reconciliation, Penitence and Deprecation, Needs and Devotions, etc.
- Other resources: There are hundreds of fantastic devotionals that may be utilized in an MC for the purpose of worship. If the resource teaches what the Bible teaches, use it!
- Meditate on worship song: Play a song and worship together. After ask the group to discuss details from the song that stood out to them.
- Journal: You may play a song, read a passage of Scripture or pray. During this period of time ask people to write down their thoughts about the songs, passage or prayer time. Corporate journaling can be a great exercise to listen for the Lord to speak through other members of the group!

Fellowship

The Fellowship component is broad. It may include a meal, and/or snacks, an icebreaker/get to know you question or simply non-formal hangout time. It includes time in and out of the formal MC gathering. Examples of non-formal gathering fellowship ideas may include an MC game night or an out of group hangout. These occasions are great opportunities to deepen relationships in the MC; they are also natural occasions in which to invite new people. Inviting someone into an MC can be intimidating. The fellowship component is intended to allow people to get to spend time together and invite new people into the MC in a less intimidating environment.

Some ideas for fellowship may include:

- A meal (in and out of the gathering)
- Snacks/coffee (in the gathering)
- Icebreaker/get to know you question (lighthearted or serious)
- Game nights (board games, cards, etc.)
- Out of gathering hangouts (coffee, drinks, movies, etc.)
- Gender specific hangouts
- Scheduled informal conversation prior to the start of MC (about 15-20 minutes of informal conversation)

You should incorporate some type of fellowship into your weekly gathering; allotting a minimum of 15-20 minutes for the group to reconnect, share stories and simply spend time in conversation. Fellowship is crucial for creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. This component is an imperative aspect of every MC and must be intentionally pursued.

Mission

At Mercyview, evangelism and discipleship are the leading edge of mission. This means that we want to share the good news of Jesus with people to make new disciples. We also strive to do mercy and seek justice for the vulnerable.

Making disciplines does not happen in a vacuum. It happens in real life through actual means, relationships, circumstances and initiatives.

Some ideas for mission may include:

- Partnering with existing ministry
- Partnering with a school
- Partnering with a community agency
- Partnering with a long term care facility
- Serving needs of your neighborhood
- Creating a 'Third Place'
- Initiative evangelism in your neighborhood

Mission may be the most challenging of all the 5 components. As leaders, we must consistently point our people back the cross in order to give proper motivation for mission.

Obviously, a missional community cannot do each of these components every week. We desire that each component to be done well and given appropriate attention. In addition, we want to honor our people's time by starting and finishing at the stated time. As a result of the aforementioned commitments, an MC leader must divide time wisely and come up with a rhythm that incorporates all the components of a missional community.

Weekly Rhythm

A weekly MC gathering may look like the following:

- A time for the group to talk and reconnect
- A combination of the 5 components (Word, Prayer, Worship, Fellowship, Mission)

Monthly Rhythm

We value you as an MC leader and want to serve you by giving you the freedom to choose what your group does week-to-week. Additionally, our MC's monthly rhythm is designed to help you foster community in your group through balance, consistency and flexibility. In a typical four-week month a missional community should gather formally three times. Formal gathering includes a combination of the 5 components of an MC. The fourth week is a flex week. The flex week is designed to give the MC leader and group freedom to:

- Meet
- Rest
- Engage missionally
- Spend time together informally (restaurant, movie, game night, etc.)
- Leader initiated hangouts with groups member(s)
- Gender specific hangouts

Striving for Balance

Different people value different things in a small group. Values may be tied to background, personality, personal preference, past experiences, etc. People, including leaders have preferences and strengths. Most people tend to give preference to the things at which we excel. The 5 Components are designed to help balance your time, energy and vision for your missional community. God will place people with different expectations, desires, strengths, backgrounds, preferences etc. in your MC. One of your responsibilities as a leader is balancing time, effort and expectations. Evaluate the members of your MC, their strengths, preferences while maintaining a balanced vision and practice.

Conclusion

As the the title of this resource suggests, it is a primer, or introduction. During your time as a leader you will continue to learn and be supported.³ My hope is that the process and structure above have given you a more clear understanding as well as provided manageable steps for leading a missional community.

³ In monthly coaching meetings and workshops we will unpack greater detail and specific nuances of the missional community leadership.