



# CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

## PART 1: DISCIPLESHIP



### **BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Part 1: Congregational Life – Discipleship by Rev Graeme Semple – Regional Pastor, West**

All of us want to be part of a flourishing church, to be part of a healthy, growing, developing and thriving community that impacts the community and the world around us with the good news of Jesus Christ. As with anything that you want to see flourish it comes about as a result of intentionally providing a context that enables growth and nurture. For the church this means providing a Kingdom culture that is: – friendly, pleasant, supportive, welcoming and nurturing. This requires regular inspection and review to be maintained. It doesn't just happen! Jesus demonstrated and modelled this in His life and the calling of individuals to a life of discipleship.

Jesus invited people to “follow Him” with the intention of investing into their lives. This investment was to reproduce the very nature and character of Himself (Rom.8:29). Jesus created and developed such a Kingdom culture and atmosphere around Himself that people from all walks of life were willing to surrender and give up their old life to embrace the new life which He offered: eternal life! (Jn. 3:15)

The concept of discipleship is therefore an intentional, lifelong, ongoing process of following Jesus, observing Jesus, listening to Jesus, learning from Jesus and living like Jesus. This is what Jesus developed when He called people to follow Him, so much so, that after the resurrection He said to them, “As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.” (John 20:21). Matthew records similar words when He recalls the Great Commission in Matt 28:19 which JB Phillips translates as: “You, then, are to go and make disciples of all nations...” Eugene Peterson in The Message paraphrases it, “Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life...” The literal understanding of what Jesus commands His disciples is therefore: as you live your life, make disciples and live in such a way that the world will see and know who Jesus is, be drawn to Him and become fellow followers of Him. This is not optional, it is a command.

Since the birth of the Church, we can see evidence of congregational life in various forms and expressions that have flourished. In each and every expression there are some key elements that reflect the true nature of discipleship that makes them flourish. They have established Kingdom values and culture that understands that discipleship is both individual and cooperative which will result in creating flourishing churches.

These key elements of discipleship as reflected in Acts 2:42 are:

1. The Apostles teaching which is all about Jesus and understanding who He is, what He has done and continues to

do. It is understanding Him in light of the Scriptures. It is understanding Him in light of our need and how He can transform our lives. Flourishing churches devote and invest themselves in the teaching of Scripture both individually and cooperatively.

2. The Fellowship – the word *koinonia* indicates that the people share a friendship to form a community (1 Jn. 1:3); they share their possessions and finances to meet needs (2 Cor.8:4); they share a partnership in the gospel to reach a needy world (Phil.1:5); they share a fellowship in the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14); they share a partnership in the grace of God (Phil.1:7); they share in a fellowship and partnership in the life and work of Jesus Christ (1Cor.1:9). Flourishing churches invest themselves in the fullness of true fellowship.

3. The Breaking of Bread – this is the symbol Jesus gave His disciples that they would always remember Him and what He did (1 Cor. 11:23ff). Flourishing churches regularly gather around the Lord's Table, The Eucharist, and Communion to constantly remind themselves of who Jesus is and what He has done. It's all about Him. Flourishing churches break bread together and always remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

4. Prayer – The many aspects of prayer – adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, intercession, fasting, and all other elements of a life of prayer. Prayer is the powerhouse of the church, it is the place of dependence on God. It is the place of victory over the enemy. Flourishing churches are praying churches.

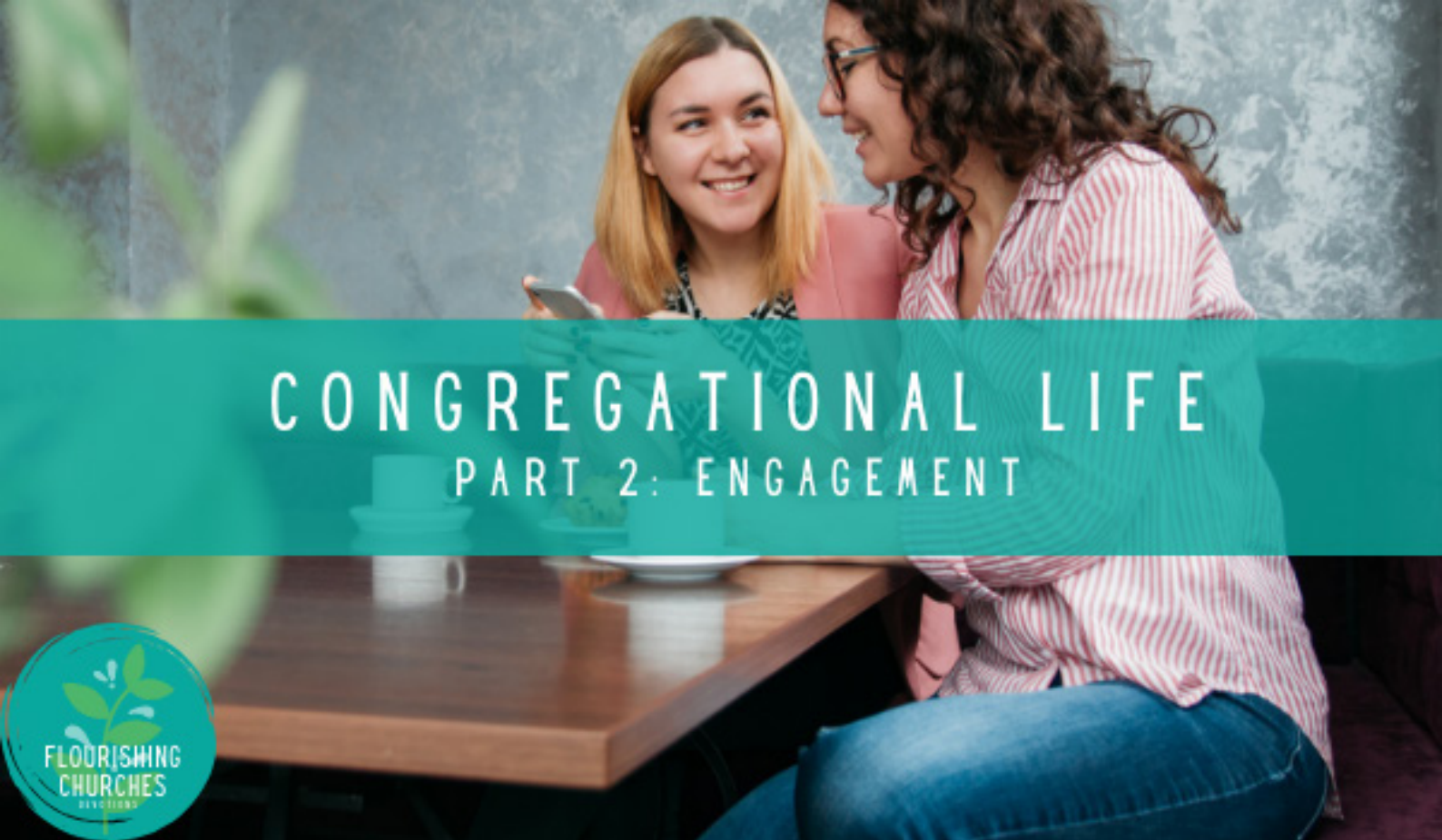
The outworking of these elements of discipleship within congregational life will assist in producing flourishing churches. Let us together invest our lives and churches in true intentional discipleship.

## Questions for consideration and discussion

1. How have you understood the concept of discipleship?
2. Which of the key elements of discipleship do you and your church need to be more intentional in and why?
3. What does it look like for you and your church, when the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Cor. 1:9 that "God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship and partnership with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord?"
4. Jesus commissioned the disciples by saying "As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you." Jesus therefore modelled a flourishing life and community that He empowered His disciples to carry on. In what ways can you and your church continue to live out this model?

Blessings,

Rev Graeme Semple  
BUV Regional Pastor



# CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

## PART 2: ENGAGEMENT



### BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Life Part 2 – Engagement by Rev Robert Hayman – Regional Pastor, East

As I sit and think about what it is that “Engagement” adds to a flourishing church, I look out to my garden which for this time of the year is looking quite good. You could say it is flourishing despite it being the middle of winter and the frosts are heavy and regular. The grass is a bit brown because of the frosts and the flowers aren’t plentiful and new growth is of a minimum. But taking into account the season things are looking pretty good.

I am sure that if you stop and reflect on Congregational engagement in your church, it might not be as quite as obvious or to the level it was 12 months ago. This season we are in will change our expectations and opportunities. But it does not change the importance or impact that engagement within our congregations have on the health and vitality of our churches.

So much of our normal engagement use to happen on Sundays as we met for worship, mid-week as we attended or were involved in different ministries, small groups in people’s homes and the various other incidental meeting and catch ups that happened throughout the week. Most of these are no longer happening and yet engagement is just, or even more, important now than it has ever been. Having said this, even in “normal” times when there are lots of people around, interactions each day and meeting, ministries and the like it does not make engagement any easier. In fact we can hide behind all these interactions and tell ourselves we are engaged, when really we “see people but they look like trees” (Mark 8:24). Regardless of the season, true engagement only comes when we are intentional.

Jesus walked around and was engaged with people, individuals amongst the crowds of people. In John 5:1-8 we read the story of the paralysed man who had been waiting at the pool for 38 years trying to be the first into the pool when the waters stirred so he could be healed. Jesus came onto the scene and saw the crowd around the pool all wanting healing (we assume), His eyes however fixed on the one person. Jesus walk in, over and around many others to get to the one man and asked him “What do you want?” Jesus healed him and they both walked away, leaving many others still sitting by the pool waiting.

This is a bit confronting, but also very liberating. Jesus could have stood outside the crowd and healed them all with a simple declaration, but that would have not been engagement. They would have all left physically well but still spiritually blind and lame. However, Jesus saw the individual and engaged with him. Notice, He did what He did so often, ask the obvious question to the lame man “what do you want?”. This is where the engagement happens, not the

healing. Jesus did not, nor did He ever assume that the obvious need was what the individual really wanted/needed. Jesus was very intentional in His engagement with others.

Sometimes we can be overwhelmed with situations and needs. In this season, there are so many who need to be engaged that we become paralysed and think the task is too big, too hard. We can all follow the example of Jesus and look at the individuals around us, rather than the “crowds”. We may walk past many to get to the one that God is drawing us to engage with at this time. Andy Stanley puts it this way, “Do for one what you would like to do for the many”.

During this season, we need to be even more intentional than ever to engage with individuals. This should come out of a growing relationship with have with God as He engages with us each day, starting with the question – what is you want/need?

## Questions for consideration and discussion

1. What does engagement look like in this season, what are some creative ways to engage with people?
2. As you reflect on Jesus’ ministry, what insights come to mind as you think about how He engaged with people?
3. Who is it that God is asking you to engage with this week?
4. How can we ensure that no one is left “alone and forgotten” as we engage with the one?
5. What’s the one thing you are going to do this week to engage with someone?

Blessings,

Rev Robert Hayman  
BUV Regional Pastor



# CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

## PART 3: HOSPITALITY



FLOURISHING  
CHURCHES  
DEVOTIONS

### BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Life Part 3 – Hospitality by Kimberly Smith – Generations & Emerging Leaders Pastor

I was recently invited to lunch at my friends' house. As I walked up the front steps, the door flung open and the eldest child, Miss 5, greeted me holding a plastic tiara and a patterned sarong for a robe. "Put these on Queen Kimmy!", she urged and then turned back into the house yelling "Queen Kimmy is here – make way, make way for the Queen!" The entry way of the house was laid with red fabric – maybe a picnic rug and a towel – and she waved her arms, ushering me along the path she had created.

As I was seated on the couch ("Kimmy, this is your throne!") her dad came to offer me a drink. She rebuked him and ordered him to address me correctly, "Oh, right, Queen Kimmy, may I be so honoured as to bring you a drink that would be to your satisfaction?" He looked over to Miss 5 who gave him the nod of approval.

Our time together proceeded with various changes in character and role plays of all sorts which made for a highly entertaining couple of hours! (And the lunch was delicious!)

In our Flourishing Church Framework, the focus on Congregational Life includes the aspect of hospitality.

I wonder what comes to mind when you read that word? Perhaps you think of a hospital or maybe you immediately think of the hospitality industry – cafes, restaurants and hotels. Your thoughts might go to images of dinner parties with friends, or to specific people who embody hospitality in the way they conduct their lives and open their homes. Like my little friend, Miss 5, quite literally treating me like a queen!

Hospitality is defined as the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.

1 Peter 4:9 says, "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." In attaching this exhortation to the 'one another', Peter makes it clear that hospitality is not an industry, a business, a role, or a location. It's something we are all encouraged to engage in – a heart posture we would all seek to hold. In Romans 12:13 Paul says, "Always be eager to practice hospitality."

The Greek word used here is philoxenos. It's a hybrid of two words. Philo which means friend and xenos which means stranger. These words are an interesting pairing. In fact, they are opposites! But in that, we understand the fullness of

the act of hospitality.

To treat a stranger like a friend or to make a friend of a stranger.

What if that defined every single person's experiencing of encountering a Christ follower or a community of believers? What if our churches were places where people of every walk of life felt like a friend? What if the strangers in our country, our neighbourhood; our streets, found a place of friendship and inclusion amongst us?

In Luke 19 Jesus encounters a man named Zacchaeus. Previously unknown to Jesus, Zacchaeus had heard He was coming through Jericho and climbed a tree to get a better vantage point. 5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. Despite the incredulity of the crowd (that Jesus would meet with someone of Zacchaeus' reputation), Jesus went to his home. The encounter was one that catalysed radical transformation in his heart and life. "Salvation has come to this house!", declared Jesus.

It wasn't just an invitation to a meal, but to a shared life. Jesus wasn't looking to be invited merely into Zacchaeus' home but also his heart. He demonstrated a way of living and interacting that went beyond words and teaching, to profound effect.

There is something powerful in the transaction of welcome, generosity and open-handedness that facilitates a deeper work. In the rest and warmth of genuine kindness, hearts are softened and opened.

In this season of isolation and 'social-distancing' many of our usual avenues of offering hospitality may not be open to us. But somehow, in our communication, in the things we choose to prioritise and promote, and in how we allocate time and money, we must still be intentionally shaping a community of welcome, inclusion and warmth. Where strangers are treated as friends and every effort is made to make a friend of a stranger.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. How would you assess yourself or your church in regard to hospitality? (What would others say about their experience of you/your church?)
2. What examples of hospitality do we see demonstrated in Jesus' ministry? What was the impact of those occasions? What can we learn from his modelling?
3. If you look close to home – to whom might God be directing you to offer hospitality? (Consider your household, your street or local neighbourhood, the people in your sphere of contact and influence.)
4. Paul says we must "practice hospitality" because it often goes against the natural gravitational pull to be more self-focused. What would Jesus reveal that you might need to lay aside in order to make space in your heart and life to extend the welcome of God?
5. What is one practical action you could take this week to treat someone 'like a queen (or king)'?

Blessings,  
Kimberly  
BUV Generations & Emerging Leaders Pastor



# CONGREGATIONAL LIFE

## PART 4: DIVERSITY

### **BUV Flourishing Churches Devotions Congregational Life Part 4 – Diversity by Rev Chris Barnden**

Every Friday night my wife and I turn to Better Homes and Gardens on the TV as one of our regular programs to enjoy. The home renovation section is lost on me, but I'm always interested in Graham Ross' garden spot.

I love to see the sheer variety of plants we can plant in our garden, both native and exotic plants, plants with glorious flowers of wonderful colours, and plants with striking foliage and all the varied growing conditions to have each plant flourishing and blooming at their best.

What strikes me as most beautiful is when Graham tours a garden showing a whole range of plants and shrubs planted together as one garden. To me, what makes a garden so beautiful and appealing to the eye is the diversity of shapes and colours growing and cascading together in the garden. Bold dynamic plants mixed in together with small delicate shrubs, with an endless variety of textures, colours and shapes, and all adding to the overall beauty of the garden.

The prophets Isaiah (58:11b) and Jeremiah (31:12b) refer to the restored people of God as like a well-watered garden. I find this picture of a garden an apt metaphor for the church. In the church of Jesus we are people of all manner of preferences and personalities, people of varying characteristics, cultures, histories and vocations. However, in the name of Jesus we have been brought together to be both a community shaped by the gospel, and a witness to the communities around us of the peace and joy of God's kingdom. And this is challenging!

Just as every single plant, large or small, robust or delicate, through simply doing what it's been created to do, adds to the beauty of the garden, so every believer, every member of the church, by being what God has re-created us to be, contributes to the richness of life in the Christian community – the church.

Many of our churches have multiple cultures represented in our community, each of whom add to the richness of our life together. When we learn to listen to each other, and through listening, try to better understand each other, we flourish together through increased understanding of God's ways, through encouraging each other's contribution, and through broadening our appreciation of what God is doing among us and within us.

I have had many opportunities to read the Bible together and to pray with sisters and brothers of other cultures. As

a typical western Christian I had thought that my way of reading and understanding Scripture was the right way, that my way of understanding how God moves, guides, and acts among us was the right way, and that my view of the church was the right view.

But God challenged my unthinking assumptions, and my prejudices, and opened my mind by helping me to accommodate different perspectives, teaching me that other views were not necessarily wrong, just different. My life and my faith have become the richer for learning those lessons.

But we're not thinking exclusively of cultural diversity here. For example, by learning to appreciate diverse views, different personalities, different ways of understanding how God works among us, by listening respectfully to each other, especially listening to those who see things differently to ourselves, our own appreciation of God's gracious ways among us is enlarged, is deepened.

By not assuming that my view of life and faith is always right, or even the only legitimate view, is a first step towards flourishing in my own spiritual life. By understanding that the church is not a western cultural invention, but the marvellous cascade of a myriad of cultures called together to work out life together as a community in the name of Jesus and empowered by his Spirit, we become open to experience the amazing blessings God has for us, and free to blossom and flourish according to God's deep desires for us.

To use a different metaphor for a moment, the Apostle Paul described the church as like a human body, with all manner of organs, bones, sinews, tendons and muscles working together in harmony to create a healthy integrated whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We all know how uncomfortable and painful it is, and how limited we become when one part of our body, even a small, insignificant tendon or muscle is not working as intended. And we know, that's exactly how uncomfortable church can be sometimes, and how we prevent our church from flourishing healthily when we fail to value each other appropriately.

Instead, as members of Christ's church we offer ourselves, and welcome each other with all our diverse histories, cultures, our personalities, experiences and our skills to create a healthy, beautiful garden lovingly tended and cared for by the Lord, and growing, blooming, and blossoming to God's delight.

## Questions:

1. What are some simple things you can do to welcome diversity in your church community?
2. In what ways do you think your church life is being inhibited because the diversity of members is not valued or encouraged?
3. How can we encourage diversity in our leadership?
4. How can we encourage the quieter members of our church to make their contribution to the broader life of the church?
5. What can you do to provide opportunity to receive the blessing of the quiet voice and not just the loud?
6. How might we better respect the cultural diversity in our church family?
7. Where your church has multiple cultures represented, in addition to cultural events like "International Day" how can you promote and celebrate diversity in the life of your church?

Blessings,  
Chris  
BUV Regional Pastor – Metro