What are Homegroups For?

There is a theory that for good relationships and mental health everybody should be part of a **cell**, a **congregation** and a **celebration**.

The **congregation** is the wider church family. Robin Dunbar, British anthropologist came to the conclusion that people can maintain meaningful connections with groups of up to about 150 people.

The **celebration** is our involvement in a larger group such as an annual conference, or a rally at the Albert Hall. This reminds us that we are part of something bigger, a movement, something significant at a national, international level. This boosts our confidence and renews our enthusiasm.

The **cell** meets our need for intimacy. The ideal group size is 7 – 12. Here we can ask questions, discuss, share our experiences, talk more openly about our struggles. There is a teaching and learning element – but homegroup is not the place to show off your amazing knowledge, or to push your particular views on secondary theological issues.

Here are the 4 main reasons why I think Homegroups are so potentially valuable.

1

Homegroups expand the variety of ways to explore and learn.

Not everybody learns the same way. Some are visual learners. Some learn 'hands on'. Churches usually only use the 'lecture' method where one person speaks and the others listen. It's not the done thing to interrupt, or say 'I don't understand that' or 'I don't agree with that'. So, in practice there is little opportunity to follow up.

Homegroups allow us to:

Ask questions. Discuss. Hear the views of others. Learn from the experience of others.

2

Homegroup is less daunting place place to develop skills and build confidence.

Everybody has gifts and abilities, how do we discover what they are? How do we develop them? Smaller groups are a less daunting arena than when everybody is there.

3

Homegroup is a place to give and receive friendship, support and encouragement.

There are about 50 'one anothers' in the New Testament. Love one another (John 13:34-35). Build each other up (Rom. 14:19). Care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25). Show hospitality to one another (1 Pet. 4:9). Pray for one another (James 5:16). Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11). Stir up one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24). In a smaller group, we have more opportunity to do some 'one anothering'

4

The challenges of Homegroup give us opportunity to grow in grace and maturity.

Homegroups are not without their challenges. It can be difficult to find a group that is a good fit, and some people find it hard to share in a group setting. There can be differences of opinion and clashes of personality. But, listening to alternative points of view, and learning to appreciate people who are very different to us, are key elements in developing Christian character and maturity.

In almost all other parts of our lives relationships are built on mutual attraction, common background or shared interest. The church is different. The church is the most diverse community. In homegroup, we are meeting with people who otherwise we are unlikely to meet. The early church had slave-owners, meeting with slaves – as brothers! Greeks and Jews – whose cultures and outlook on life were entirely different. Males and females – who is some cultures of Jesus time would not normally be in the same room.

Paul's statement in Galatians 3 is revolutionary, scandalous, incendiary:

[28] There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28)

Considering the diversity, it is not surprising that there are so many injunctions, not to judge, to bear with each other, to forgive each other, not to grumble. But it is exactly as we learn to love each other despite our differences, as we learn to accept each other rather than try to change each other, learn to appreciate the good rather than focus on the bad – that our own characters are refined, developed and matured.

As the grit in the oyster makes the pearl – so it is the very trickiness of these close relationships that helps us develop the fruit of the Spirit: love joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.

Here are some of the 'one anothers' of the New Testament.

☐ be devoted to <u>one another</u> in love. (Romans 12:10)

☐ Therefore let us stop passing judgment on <u>one another</u>. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. (Romans 14:13)

☐ Accept <u>one another</u>, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:17)

☐ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with <u>one another</u> in what you say and that there be no divisions

among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

☐ Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11)

☐ serve one another humbly in love.(Galatians 5:13)

☐ Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. (Ephesians 4:12)

☐ Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

☐ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16)

☐ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

☐ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)

☐ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, (Hebrews 10:24)

☐ Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (James 5:19)

☐ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. (1 Peter 3:18)

☐ Offer hospitality to <u>one another</u> without grumbling. (1 Peter 4:9)

Can I add here?