



Discipleship at St. John's

On September 21st, 2013, 43 members of St. John's gathered at Kingfisher Bay Retreat Centre, and following a day of presentations decided that they would support their priest in defining a new emphasis and direction for ministry in the parish. This new direction is one of **intentional discipleship**. Discipleship is about following and trusting Jesus in every aspect of our lives. It is the ongoing process of being transformed to be more and more like Jesus by learning and engaging with others in the mission of God.

Why Intentional Discipleship?

Given that St. John's, like many Christian churches all over the western world, is experiencing decline, we have determined that we need a major cultural shift in the parish. The culture in which we live has changed greatly over the last several decades and the methods we have been using to grow the church have not been effective. As a result, we must move away from a focus on trying to build and maintain the church congregation through attractional programming and worship styles. We must be more deliberate in discipling our membership to follow Jesus as an everyday walk of faith and obedience. It is through this deliberate and intentional activity that we believe transformation will take place. Transformation will occur in our own lives as we are challenged to follow Jesus in ways we had never imagined; transformation will occur in our community as we live our faith in very real ways with our friends and neighbours, and transformation will occur in our congregation as the impact of our witness draws others to the love of Christ.

We must be intentional because to make disciples in a culture bombarded with so many other distractions and conflicting messages takes a sustained focus. Also, we can easily get fooled into thinking that disciples will appear as a result of our regular church activities. Mike Breen (former Rector of St. Thomas' Church, Crooke's, U.K. and now head of 3 Dimensional Ministries or 3DM) has said, "**If you make disciples you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.**" (*Building a Discipling Culture. p. 12*)

We recognize that many members of our congregation are already doing things in response to God's call on their lives, and that discipleship is not necessarily something new for them. This new and deliberate focus for the congregation is not meant to demean or undermine what these individuals have been doing. What we hope to do is to channel our energies in an organized fashion so that disciple making becomes a defining characteristic of the culture of our congregation.

How will this be accomplished?

St. John's will embark on a deliberate path of implementing a model of discipleship which will include at least three elements of discipling. These elements recognize that in order to learn anything such that it becomes natural to us, there needs to be a) information b) instruction and c) imitation. Each member of our congregation will be encouraged to participate at some level.

1. Reading the Bible – there are many people for whom reading the bible is a difficult and sometimes impossible undertaking. However, the bible is foundational for instruction in living daily as a member of God's Kingdom, and reveals to us the nature of both God and humanity.
 - a. Classes will be held which will help people interact with this most important and essential resource, beginning with introductory sessions, and then moving on to the more practical applications of reading scripture.
 - b. Structured gatherings around reading and discussing books related to Christian life and practice will also be offered.
2. Huddles – following the 3DM model of discipleship (for more info see www.weare3dm.com) a group of 6 to 8 individuals will be invited into a covenant relationship under a trained leader for a minimum commitment of a year. Through this weekly gathering, individuals will be challenged to hear and respond to God in their daily lives and will also be nurtured in the leadership of others. This process follows the model which Jesus gives us in the Gospel accounts of his ministry. The outcome of this activity is that eventually all members of the congregation will be offered an opportunity to engage in this process.
3. Missional Communities – An important aspect of deliberate discipleship – listening to God and responding to His call on our lives – is to be involved in missional activities. Missional Communities are groups of approximately 20 to 40 people. These Missional Communities are like extended families of disciples engaged in the mission of compassionately reaching out to those around them to share the good news of Jesus through both words and actions. Missional Communities will be encouraged as an outcome of the discipling process.

What can I do to participate?

You are encouraged to prayerfully consider the call of discipleship in your life and pick up a registration card from the table in the narthex of the church. Please indicate on that card what you feel God would have you do in response to this opportunity.

**Please note that participation in a huddle requires an interview with the huddle leader during which you will be asked to indicate your willingness to make a time commitment and to submit to the leadership of the huddle leader.*