

Gilmore Park United Church

Discipleship Ministries

Participant Booklet

© 2004 Anna S. Christie

The Mission of Gilmore Park United

Discipleship groups serve, in many ways, to fulfill the mission of the congregation which is:

“to lead people at every stage of their lives to know God and experience the love of Jesus”.

What is the purpose of these groups?

Discipleship groups exist as a means to share new life in Christ with the world. Ever-growing and changing, the groups seek to integrate newcomers into the faith, and help spiritual seekers to know God and experience the love of Jesus Christ in their lives. It is the intention of every discipleship group to “fill the empty chairs” and then multiply into two groups, approximately every year. In this way, discipleship groups also serve to nurture leadership in the Christian church. Every group will have someone who is learning how to lead a group, with the idea that the new leader will take some members of the group with him or her (which is a matter of everyone’s choosing) and form a new group. This will be a time of great rejoicing, as the group grows and more are added.

What happens in a “discipleship group”?

The content of a discipleship group gathering is three-fold:

1. To share our lives with others, giving and receiving support and care
2. To study the Scriptures, reflecting how we might relate our faith to our everyday lives
3. To uphold one another in prayer

Leadership

The leader (“Lay Pastor”) of your group is a trained layperson with gifts for *pastoral care*. This means that he or she is a caring person who will act like a pastor to you until you join another group. If you are in need of pastoral care you may contact your Lay Pastor during the week. If he or she is unable to meet your pastoral care needs, the Minister of the congregation will be consulted or contacted. Your Lay Pastor has read the Bible, understands group process and theological reflection, and most importantly is a committed Christian in an ongoing spiritual journey. He or she meets monthly with the Minister to further study the Bible, pray, and consult with her and other Lay Pastors on any difficult issues which may arise in the group process.

Although your Lay Pastor is here to help, your spiritual growth is ultimately your own responsibility. Remember that your Lay Pastor is probably not a professional care-giver. He or she will have personal boundaries that are clearly defined for you.

Rules for Discipleship Groups

1. We will model the love of Christ by caring for one another through kindness and consideration, encouraging one another in the faith, and speaking the truth in love.
2. We will do our best to speak only of our *own* journey, our *own* experience, our *own* shortcomings – not those of others.
3. We will not use the content of the discussions in our group as idle talk or gossip outside the group. If we share something that we wish to be strictly confidential, we will say so before we share it. **HOWEVER, we understand that if what we share may bring harm to us or to another, then it may not be kept confidential by the Lay Pastor.**

The church itself is obligated to report suspected child abuse, and is morally obligated to intervene in cases of domestic violence. If you are unsure about sharing something, speak to your Minister first who can clearly outline the guidelines for confidentiality.

4. We agree to share phone numbers, or time with one another outside the group *on a voluntary basis only*. Group members may call upon the Lay Pastor or others from time to time for help and support, but will strive to respect the privacy and family obligations of the Lay Pastor and others.
5. We will not use our group time as a platform for discussing issues about the church, nor church business.
6. We will look upon the multiplication of our group into two groups as a time of great rejoicing, and will strive for this end at all times.

Framework for Weekly Group Gatherings

1. Lighting of the Christ Candle
2. Check-in
3. Theological Reflection
4. Prayer Triads

The Christ Candle

We light the Christ candle to symbolize the presence of Jesus Christ with us through the Holy Spirit in this room. Let us enjoy the light of Christ.

Check-In

During this time, we share our lives with one another for the purpose of mutual care and support. You are not obligated to share anything you don't feel comfortable with. Following are the questions to consider during check-in:

1. At what times during the past 2 weeks have you felt the presence of a loving God? (joy, thankfulness, comfort)
2. At what times during the past 2 weeks have you experienced the absence of a loving God? (fears, hurts, loneliness, sadness)

Theological Reflection

As we explore the Scripture reading of the week, we try to approach the text with the following questions:

- How does this text make you feel?
- What does God appear to be doing in this text? (or—what is God “like”?)
- What is the human faith response that is pictured, required or implied?
- Can you sense any connection between this text and what is happening in your life/in the world this week?

Prayer Triads

Having someone else pray for you is a very powerful and incredibly moving experience. Praying for another has the power to pull us out of our own despair, as we love and serve others.

Divide into groups of three. If you cannot divide into threes, then two is better than four. You can pray in larger groups, but it takes a great deal of time to do well, and is not as intimate as a triad.

One person must take the lead (be the first to begin). You are going to pray for the person on your right so whoever begins will ask the person on his/her right "what do you need prayer for today?" Everyone in the triad will take turns describing what they need that day. Then everyone joins hands and closes their eyes. The leader begins by praying for the person on his/her right. **Prayers can be simple. You don't need fancy or special words. It can be one sentence if you like. There is no "wrong way" to ask God to help this person. Just say whatever comes naturally.** Once the first person has finished, *he or she will squeeze the hand of the person to their right.* Then that person continues, praying for the one to their right. The last person, when finished, squeezes the hand of the leader again, and the leader says, simply, "Amen". ("Amen" just means, "let it be so")

Group readings for the year 2004

March 7	Psalm 27
March 21	Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32
April 11	John 20: 1-18
April 25	Acts 9: 1-6
May 9	John 13: 31-35
May 23	Acts 16: 16-34
June 6	Romans 5: 1-5
June 20	Luke 8: 26-39
August 8	Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16
August 22	Jeremiah 1: 4-10
September 12	Luke 15: 1-10
September 26	1 Timothy 6: 6-19
October 10	Jeremiah 29: 1, 4-7
October 24	Joel 2: 23-32
November 7	Luke 20: 27-38
November 21	Colossians 1: 11-20
December 5	Isaiah 11: 1-10
December 19	Matthew 1: 18-25

On most Sundays following the discipleship group gathering, you will hear a sermon on the text you have discussed in your group.

APPENDIX A -- We Are Not Alone

"We are not alone – we live in God's world."
(Opening statement of the United Church creed)

I am not alone. I am loved and cared for. I am a precious child of a loving God. The ultimate Problem is that I feel separated from God. To be separated from God is hell. The Good News is that Jesus Christ also suffered and felt separated from God. He experienced grief and loss, just like we do. He was beaten, tortured, humiliated, abandoned, and ultimately killed. Hanging on the cross, he, too, felt abandoned by God, crying out: "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The Good News is that Jesus Christ is God-with-us. He lived the hell we now feel, and ultimately conquered it by rising from the dead. He is still alive in Spirit, answering our prayers. If he can conquer the evil of this hell, this separation from God, then he can conquer for us all that troubles us. Jesus Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit in the world, offers us *new life* – full of joy, peace, fulfillment and wholeness.

"In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us – we are not alone." (UC creed closing statement.)

The Problem

Deep down inside every one of us there is an Ache. We may be so used to it that we have buried it. Or we may be so aware of it that it hurts or tortures us daily. This is because we feel separated from God. Whether or not we are aware of our condition we feel it and we live in response to the Problem...and it can be hell.

Many of us seek to overcome the Problem by seeking "band-aid solutions" – fulfillment in the temporary, or the worldly. We think if only we can get that job, or money, or possessions, or that special relationship – or if only we could get one of those things *back* – then we would be fulfilled. We may believe that if only we could fix other's problems, or control their behaviour, then we'd be alright. Whatever it is we seek after, **it is a substitute for God.**

Many of us realize the hopelessness of striving for ultimate relief in our own limited ways. This may lead to despair.

In despair, we may realize that we cannot heal the Ache ourselves, so we seek *inwardly* to smother it by taking it out on ourselves. We may do this with alcohol, drugs, promiscuity, overeating, perfectionism, over-work, or other ways.

In despair, we may realize that we cannot heal the Ache ourselves, so we may seek *outwardly* to destroy the Ache by projecting it onto other people. We may do this by trying to control others with our anger, or through "helping" others to

the point that they cannot even help themselves. We may project our Ache onto our partners, our children, our friends, or our co-workers.

But the Problem remains. We feel separated from God. That causes a great Ache inside us, and we cannot heal that Ache ourselves.

The Solution

The Good News is that the Creator of the universe, our Creator, is a compassionate and loving God who loves us and feels our Ache with us. It is only God who can overcome the Problem and heal our Ache. God reaches out to us in order to reunite us to God's own self. God reaches out to hold us and embrace us. In Jesus Christ God became human and suffered the ultimate tragedy. God, in Jesus Christ, has felt the Ache with us. God truly knows our pain, not in theory, but for real. Through Jesus Christ we are reunited with God permanently. Nothing can ever separate us from God again. This is a gift given to us by God. This is what Christians call "grace".

We begin the path of healing by accepting this Grace and by saying "thank-you" to God for this gift. We begin the path to healing by turning our broken lives over to God, whom we know in Christ Jesus our Lord. We can begin by praying this simple prayer:

Jesus, I give my life over to you right now.
I trust you to make me whole and keep me safe.
I promise to strive to follow you faithfully
and turn my pain into love for others.

APPENDIX B – Prayers

Prayer for New Beginning

© 1997 Anna Christie

Dear Lord,
Please let today be a new beginning.
It is no special day or occasion;
It is only the day I have chosen to let you renew me forever.
Come Lord Jesus
Come Holy Spirit
Help me today to dwell on your power,
And not my fear.
Help me today to live in love
And live in the hurt and pain no longer.
Through the chaos
Grant me your peace.
Through the grief and sorrow,
Grant me your joy.
Enable me to see beauty,
And experience thanksgiving.
Fill me with hope.
Be my inspiration for the road ahead.
Grant me courage as my only crutch.
I praise you forever, O God, my Savior.
Amen.

Prayer for Healing from Fear

© 2003 Anna S. Christie

Lord Jesus,

I am afraid.

Even with as much courage as I can muster, I am still afraid
For I am powerless to take this affliction away.

But you, O Lord are the source of all power
You are the source of all Love.

You are the source of all healing.

Heal this wound, I pray...

Send forth your grace and your strength
Through your Holy Spirit dwelling within me.
May courage spread like searing light

from the centre of my being
to every extremity.
May it be a well-spring of strength,
a mighty force
more powerful
than that which tears me down
and holds me back
from living life to the fullest.

Come, Holy Spirit
Come with your healing power.
Soothe and calm me;
Embrace me as a mother tenderly holds her trembling child.
Stand me up firm as a rock:
a fortress reflecting your glory.

In this moment,
all this day,
tomorrow,
and forever

Make me whole, I pray.

Amen.

Prayer for Faith
Marianne Williamson

Dear God,
May I have faith.
May I not be tempted to forget Your power.
May I not be tempted to forget Your love.
May my mind not stray to the might of the destroyer but remember instead the
might of the Lord.
Tomorrow, You shall show me.
You shall have the last word, the final say,
And so I shall not worry.
You shall redeem me,
I shall resurrect.
You shall bring forth new life from all apparent death.
You create from what the darkness has destroyed, for Your power is infinite,
Your forgiveness total, Your mercy complete.
So shall it be that I might fall, but I shall not remain down for my Lord is with me.
He shall lift me up.
He shall create a new day.

He shall bring me home.
Praise God.
Amen.

“Breath Prayers”

These brief prayers, some taken from Scripture, can be memorized and used throughout the day for strength and a connection with the Holy.

1. Your grace, O God, is enough for me.
2. Forgive me, Lord Jesus
3. Come, Lord, Jesus, heal this wound.
4. O God, in the abundance of your compassion, take this burden away.
5. Come, Holy Spirit.
6. I am made in your image, O God. Help me to love myself.
7. Thank, you, God, for loving me as your own child.
8. The joy of the Lord is my strength
9. God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power and of love and of a sound mind.
10. I am beautifully and wonderfully made.

APPENDIX C -- Help from the Bible

Where do I look in the Bible for help, comfort, advice?

PSALMS!

There are 150 psalms, right in the middle of your Bible. Each one is less than a page long. The psalms were written by different people in ancient times (before Jesus was born). They reflect all of the theology of the Old Testament, which was Jesus' bible. Jesus quotes psalms often. Psalms are like little poems or songs. They express many different emotions from fear to triumph to thanksgiving to anger. Your own feelings will be echoed in many psalms. Try reading a psalm and letting it "speak to you". You don't need to start at the beginning.

THE GOSPEL

The story of the life of Jesus is repeated by four different authors – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each is a bit different, but any one will give you a complete story of Jesus' life and teachings, and is quite short considering the whole Bible is about 1500 pages long! Try beginning with Luke and reading it all – it's about 40 pages long and takes an average reader about 2 hours.

For a shorter piece that contains a "nugget" of the teachings of Jesus, read Matthew, chapters 5-7 (about 4 pages long).

THEOLOGY

You may wonder how Jesus fits in with the whole story of creation and human history. The apostle Paul, who wrote most of the New Testament, writes a sort of general letter outlining Christian theology to the Romans. It's heavy! But the intellectuals among you will find it fascinating. The book of Romans is about 20 pages long.

How do I read the Bible?

Many people take the Bible literally. In the United Church, we normally read the Bible as "metaphor" or *symbolically*. We also "filter" the message of the Bible with *reason, experience, and tradition*.

Much of the Bible is historical story, but it is certainly culturally conditioned. The people of the day were trying their best to explain human history in terms of their relationship with God. This is called *theological reflection*. We must do the same! Understand that the Bible is not a book of history or science. It is a book of faith, inspired by God, and written by humans.

As you read the Bible, pray and ask God to open up the words for you *today* so that it brings meaning into your life. The Bible is not a set of rules for the purpose of discipline, it is a wonderful rich heritage of our faith, a *gift from God*, given for the purpose of grace in our lives.

The Bible is God's Word to us today – alive and powerful in a mystical way. Let it speak to your life.

GILMORE PARK UNITED CHURCH
8060 Number One Road
Richmond, BC
V7C 1T9

www.gilmoreparkunited.org
gilmorepark@telus.net

604-277-5377

Office Hours: Monday—Friday 9 am—1 pm

WORSHIP: Sundays at 10:30 am

“OUR MISSION is to lead people at every stage of their lives to know God and to experience the love of Jesus through the work, witness, worship and fellowship of our congregation.”