

Session Six : working on the social dimension

One another

There is only one Biblical text, as far as I can see, which encourages us to meet together regularly as the gathered church :

“Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.”
(Hebrews 10:24-25)

God has called us to meet together as his people. It is not enough to “go to church”, to be sitting next to someone and exchanging a few words of greetings. The revitalisation team needs to think out how members of the church can begin to take responsibility for each other. In fact, the words “one another” occur twice in this passage from Hebrews. And as you will see in the following list, this expression can be found many times in the New Testament (generally, but not always, to translate the Greek word *allelous*). Here is one way of classifying them:

Attitudes

Love one another	John 13:34-35, 15.12, Romans 13:8, 1 John 4:12
Accept one another	Romans 15:7
Submit to one another	Ephesians 5:21
Bear with one another in love	Ephesians 4:2, Colossians 3:13
Forgive one another	Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13
Spur one another on towards love and good deeds	Hebrews 10:24
Be kind and compassionate to one another	Ephesians 4:32
Live in harmony with one another	Romans 15:5
Have brotherly affection for one another	Romans 12:10
Be at peace with one another	Mark 9:50
Honour one another above yourselves	Romans 12:10, Philippians 2:3

Words

Speak to one another by singing	Ephesians 5:19
Encourage one another	1 Thessalonians 4:18, 5:11, Hebrews 10:25
Admonish one another	Colossians 3:16
Confess sins to one another	James 5:16
Pray for one another	James 5:16
Instruct one another	Romans 15:14

Actions

Care for one another	1 Corinthians 12:25-26
Be hospitable to one another	1 Peter 4:9
Serve one another in love	Galatians 5:13
Bear one another's burdens	Galatians 6:2

How can the revitalisation team help the church members to begin to take responsibility for each other, living out these "one anothers"? Here are a few ideas on how to nurture the church as a community.

1) By teaching what the church is according to the New Testament – a place where we can “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) as a corporate, collective undertaking.

2) By using the times we meet to help Christians get to know each other better. This can vary from church to church, but regular church meals are an important component. People can talk about trivial things or the difficulties they are facing as the conversation flows. They can also talk about the teaching they had heard during the service before the meal and pray informally together.

3) By challenging people to build relationships with each other. At the very least via social media, but even more by word of mouth (phoning for example) and best of all face-to-face. Individual initiatives are excellent but the church leaders can offer some practical ways to do this, by organising prayer triplets or small “growth groups”, or by setting up small weekly home groups for sharing lives through Bible study and prayer together.

Hospitality

Hospitality is a very practical way of getting to know people and encouraging them. This is especially so in big cities (but also in rural areas) where there is so much loneliness. These two verses apply particularly to hospitality offered to fellow Christians :

- “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practise hospitality” (Romans 12:13)
- “Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9)

Hospitality is a requirement for all Christians and leaders are included in this. To be hospitable is on the list of the criteria needed to be recognized as an elder (1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8). This doesn't mean preparing exceptional meals which try to impress guest with the quality of the cooking, but just sharing your family life, for example. Or it might include inviting someone in need to live in your home for a while.

The Greek word “koinonia”, usually translated “fellowship”, actually includes the sharing of material possessions and could be translated “solidarity”.

And hospitality is just as important in our evangelism. Jesus showed us the way. In the Gospel of Luke there are accounts of eight meals, and more than half of them were with people who were not his disciples:

- Luke 5:27-39 In the home of Levi, the tax collector
- Luke 7:36-50 In the home of Simon the Pharisee
- Luke 11:37-54 In the home of another Pharisee
- Luke 14:1-24 In the home of a prominent Pharisee
- Luke 19:1-10 In the home of Zacchaeus

How can people ask us questions (Colossians 4.5-6 and 1 Peter 3.15) if they don't know us and have the opportunity to talk with us? Meal times are social occasions when people talk (how many business deals are confirmed over a meal, how many men proposed marriage to their wife over a meal?).

In fact, being with Christians and seeing how we live is the only way that our Christian faith can appear plausible in today's world, and that will be the subject of our next session together.

Question

Which of these suggestions could be presented by the speaker in a learning community in your church, during the session on the "social dimension" (building relationships with other people)?