

Gospel Community Overview

Definition _ What It Is

A family of believers, serving Christ by serving others, learning as humble truth-seekers, and sent as witnesses of the Gospel to all people.

Definition _ What it is not

The following list is intended to clarify what Gospel Communities are and what they are not intended to be. While each Gospel Community may share some similarities with the list below they are not encapsulated by this list.

1. A Bible Study _ Study of the Bible is massively necessary for the life of a believer and our groups give attention and focus to the Bible as they gather but are not intended to become a Bible study. Rather, these groups are intended to be a place where the Bible is a living authority in every area of a group member's life as the individuals who make up a given community teach, admonish, rebuke, exhort, etc. one another in many different ways. Some of these ways may be formal and others informal.
2. An Accountability Group _ Accountability is an important aspect of a believer's life and Gospel Communities serve this purpose. However, this is not the only reason for the group. Great care needs to be taken that these groups do not become just a time for confession and absolution.
3. A Social Club _ These groups are intended to meet some of the social needs that God designed His people to have. But if the groups are not upwardly focused on God and outwardly focused in mission to their world then they are not Gospel Communities.
4. A Small Group _ Gospel Communities are a small collection of people that do meet regularly as a group. However, they are not intended to be closed or static but growing, maturing, and reproducing.

5. A Weekly Meeting _ Gospel Communities do gather regularly but the community is the family of people not the event or gathering. Gathering is an integral part of a healthy community, as is a Sunday service, but it is not intended to be the only element or interaction of a community. These families of people are intended to “do life together” with mission to the world for the glory of God. There is no way that can happen in a few hours one night a week. Simply stated, a Gospel Community is not an event but a family.

What We Hope For Every Group

1. Missional
 - a. Clearly Defined Mission
 - b. Developing Missional Lifestyles Of Every Member
2. Developing Leadership
 - a. The clear identification of potential leader’s, planters, elders, etc. and the appropriate training and timeline for multiplication
 - b. This will often work out into a shared leadership within a group setting where the leader will invite developing leader’s to share in the responsibilities of the Gospel Community
3. Connected to The Larger Church
 - a. Each group must be connected to an elder or a specific leader within the larger church body.
 - b. Contact would be regular and focused on accountability, encouragement, and training.
4. Gospel Formation
 - a. Each community would continually be shaped and reshaped by the Gospel. Gospel Communities are formed by the Gospel, centered around the Gospel, and refined by the Gospel, seeking to live in step with the Gospel.
5. Redemption of The City

- a. Each group, and every individual in a group, sees themselves as an oak of righteousness (cf. Isa 61) empowered and commissioned with the task of seeing redemption, rebuilding and restoration happen within the city
 - b. These groups see themselves as servants of King Jesus to His creation
6. Multiplication Of Groups And Churches
- a. Every group has target dates of multiplication and will be actively moving towards reproduction. This will take the shape of both more Gospel Communities and then through the multiplication of these communities will result in the formation of new campuses/expression/churches in Bellingham.
7. Glorify God
- a. The chief end of every group is to worship and glorify God through the tangible and visible display of what happens when the Gospel of Jesus Christ comes to bear upon a bunch of sinners.

What Is The Vision? (The Strategy)

The church is one of the most seen and practical displays of the Gospel. This can be good and bad, depending on how well a particular community lives out its faith in Lord Jesus and where that particular community displays their faith. The vision and hope for our communities is that they would be a radical display of the Gospel and how it continues to shape a community that is on mission to its city. While these communities are not perfect, the desire is to see them grow in all the ways in which the body of Christ is created and empowered to function.

The Formation (“Structure”)

This section outlines how our groups are formulated in terms of leadership. Also, how these groups structure themselves both as they gather and scatter throughout the week.

1. Leader(s): Shared Leadership
 - a. The specific job of the leader(s) is to steward the people of the group, the mission of the group, and the purpose of the group. The leader(s) adopts the position of a church planter, seeing the Gospel Community as a family on mission to the city.
2. Leader's In Sending:
 - a. The role of the leader in sending is to both grow in shared leadership and also preparation of planting a new Gospel Community
3. Host Home:
 - a. The host home is the steward of hospitality and responsible for making each member feel welcomed and loved as well as any visitors
4. Elder Or Coach Oversight And Nurture:
 - a. Every group needs to be connected to an elder or a leader within the church for accountability, encouragement and training. This connection may take a variety of shapes but will need to be regular and will often take place between the group leader and the elder.
 - b. The coach/elder is charged with the task of helping each group align to the intentions for Gospel Communities. This happens through relational interaction between the coach and the Gospel Community leader(s)
5. Missionaries And Servants
 - a. What specific area or people group is this community pursuing?
 - i. How is this group "on mission" in their mission field?
 - b. In what way(s) is this group engaged in service to their community?

The Strategy (How Are We Going to Saturate This City With The Gospel?)

It is one thing to define what groups are and another thing to see them form and grow and function according to their design. The vision of Redeemer Church is the redemption of our city for the glory of God. We see Gospel Communities as vital to this vision. By leveraging the unique structure and culture of Bellingham we believe that a

targeted focus around five major hubs within the 24 defined neighborhoods will serve the city well.

1. 24 Neighborhoods & 72 Groups

- a. We envision a minimum of 3 missional communities in each of the 24 neighborhoods that compose Bellingham. As more neighborhoods are added we will adjust our strategy to absorb and pursue those areas as well
 - i. Also, areas such as Geneva, Sudden Valley, and areas of the county, need to be examined prayerfully and developed missionally through the planting of groups in those regions as well
- b. How Do We Evaluate A Neighborhood?
 - i. If there are no groups meeting and targeting a specific neighborhood it is a red zone. Meaning, that there is almost no dedicated Gospel presence in that community. Red Zones will require the direct investment of resources (people, time, money, etc.) to develop a Gospel presence.
 - ii. 1 to 2 Groups in a specific neighborhood will denote a yellow zone. These areas have some Gospel presence and are hopefully making some impact into the community through evangelism and service. Because of the presence of groups in these areas and the emphasis on multiplication, leadership development, and mission, yellow zones are able to reproduce into more groups targeting their specific area
 - iii. 3 or more groups in an area are green zones. With a critical mass of at least 3 groups these neighborhoods should have a visible Gospel presence through service, prayer and evangelism. The goal is that every neighborhood in Bellingham would be a green zone within 5 years.

iv. There is also the need to see neighborhoods not just geographically but relational. We recognize that for many people affinity is stronger outside of their immediate area than it is within their block. We encourage and welcome people to pursue their neighbor, whether that be physical, relational, or even vocational, as long as they are pursuing with the Gospel and for God's glory. With this said however, we do believe that geographic proximity helps to foster shared lives and we do hope that as Gospel Communities grow they will become more and more localized.

c. How Are We Planting Churches?

i. There are at least five specific areas where Redeemer Church is looking to plant churches. Redeemer Church can be thought of as a multi-site multi-campus church seeking to saturate the city with the Gospel through "micro" churches and Gospel communities

ii. The Five Areas

1. Fairhaven
2. CBD (With special focus on WWU)
3. Barkley
4. Fountain
5. Cordata (With special focus on WCC)

iii. As Gospel Communities develop in each of the five larger spheres, or focus areas, they will result in the formation of new churches. By sharing eldership, resources, logistics, etc. across these five areas we are able to multiply faster but also to reach the specific cultural dynamics of the entire city. We are able to engage many people by being small and quickly reproducible.

iv. Eventually there may be need to expand to more and more sister churches within Bellingham and perhaps even more expressions

than five. By God's grace we will continually be humble and prayerful before Him as He directs His Church for His Glory.

- v. Currently we designate 10% of all tithes collected towards local church planting and this money is intended to be used to fund, train, recruit, and source church planting locally.

2. Beyond Bellingham

a. Going North And South

- i. Skagit serves as another strategic area to plant and in addition to planting more and more communities in Bellingham we will be looking for opportunities to plant south.
- ii. Canada, and specifically Vancouver, is an extremely strategic area to focus a great deal of planting efforts. We will give money, people, prayer, and time towards developing a church planting movement within the Vancouver area

b. And To The End of The World

- i. In addition to more localized planting we desire to partner with church planting movements across this globe and currently designate 10% of all tithes to international church planting
- ii. In additional to financial partnership it is our desire to train and send missionaries from Bellingham to places that desperately need a Gospel presence