

THE BURICH FELLOWSHIP GROUP

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PREFACE

As a result of my sharing with Professor Lois A. Tupper early last fall my enthusiasm about our Burtch Fellowship, she suggested to me the use of our group as the basis for an examination of small groups as a medium through which individuals can grow spiritually within the Body of Christ. From this suggestion has come this study.

I am especially grateful to Mrs. June Holmes and to the Rev. John Amy for sharing their experiences with us. I am also grateful to the other members of the Burtch Fellowship for allowing me to share with others our common group experience.

My thanks to Professor Lois A. Tupper and to Professor Murray J. S. Ford for their suggestions, helpfulness, and patience.

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1. THE BURTCH FELLOWSHIP GROUP

1. Origins

I have asked the Rev. John Amy of Delhi to write the introduction to my paper. The following is his account of the origins of the Burtch Fellowship Group.

About March 1968 I was in prayer in relation to the spiritual needs of our denomination. I felt especially concerned that others of my brethren in the ministry might experience the Baptism in the Holy Spirit which I had received in April, 1964.

As I prayed the thought came to my mind that I should write to my brethren in the ministry to suggest a conference on the Holy Spirit. I considered this in my spirit and felt that God was in it. Accordingly I sent a letter in April 1968 to all of our ministers suggesting that such a conference be held, and inviting their comments on the proposal. A self addressed envelope was enclosed. The response to this letter was quite large and generally favorable. Accordingly I gave myself to consideration of what form such a conference should take and who might be our speaker. In the planning I took into account the various suggestions that had been made.

I felt that the Rev. Len Evans was God's man for the occasion. He seemed especially qualified on a number of counts. First he was a scholar. Second he knew and loved the Scriptures. Third he was a

lover of Jesus; and fourth, he had had a vital experience of the Holy Spirit and appeared to be gifted in sharing this with others. I contacted him to see if he would be available and interested and found he was both.

As I pondered the purpose of such a conference I came to feel that while the subject of the Holy Spirit was of great importance, yet it was also of great importance that we should be drawn into a closer fellowship with one another. I felt that it was important that adequate opportunity should be given for a mutual sharing of views and experiences. It appeared, too, to be desirable to place the Holy Spirit in adequate perspective in relation to the life in Christ and to the command of our Lord that we love one another.

The Rev. D. Filyer was kind enough to offer the facilities of First Baptist Church, Waterford for the Conference and the Norfolk Baptist Ministerial agreed to sponsor the Conference. It was agreed that Len Evans should be our speaker and that the Conference should be held Nov. 4th and 5th, 1968.

Approximately 50 attended the Conference, comprising about 40 ministers and 10 minister's wives. One laymen was also present throughout the conference.

Each person was invited to share with us his or her reason for coming and what he or she hoped to receive from it. Considerable time was given to the sharing of views in regard to the Holy Spirit, with a number of passages from the Scriptures on the Holy Spirit (printed in the program) being used as a basis of study. Time was given for all to contribute and the sharing was entirely cordial.

Len Evans' ministry was most acceptable and most effective. While telling of his experience with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit he stressed that we should love one another, developing this theme from various Scripture passages. One was conscious throughout the conference of the presence of the Holy Spirit bringing us to an increasing harmony and love in Christ.

Toward the close of the Conference, on the afternoon of the second day, a spirit of love seemed to descend upon the assembled brethren. We felt drawn to one another in an unusual way. Some requested prayer for specific needs. Some confessed to not having loved. We felt ourselves to be one fellowship.

Such a result to the conference was all the more remarkable when it is remembered that a variety of theological positions were represented, not only in regard to the Holy Spirit but on other issues that had been causing division among the brethren.

What had happened was most heart-warming and strengthening to those who had been a part of it. Some became open to the receiving of a personal experience of the Holy Spirit that they had not previously considered. I was glad for this result but was especially impressed with the importance of our loving one another.

A number of the conference participants were present at a series of studies held at BTI in Brantford in the late fall on the new Faith and Work Plan. The principal of BTI, who led the sessions had also been at the Waterford Conference.

The sessions at BTI were conducted in such a way as to allow considerable individual expression of views. They were so structured

that we came to know each other better and came to feel that we were engaged as a team in seeking what God had to say to us through the course. There was a real undefineable, 'plus' at these sessions. At one point the leader said: "there's something unusual going on here. The Holy Spirit is present." However, when later there was a marked increase of warmth for one another it seemed that the leader became uneasy about what was happening. At any rate in the following session he inhibited those procedures which had contributed to individual response and closeness to one another. While it had appeared that we were progressing toward some kind of "crossing point", the trend was halted and little progress took place after this point.

I felt that something good had been happening and should go on happening. I felt that a number at the BTI sessions had been touched by the Holy Spirit (not all of the participants had been at Waterford Conference), and might want to continue some kind of group meeting.

The parsonage at Burtch appeared to be centrally located and Allan Perks was interested and willing (with his wife Ruth) that we should meet there. Accordingly in the spring of 1969 weekly meetings began at Burtch. These were changed to twice monthly meetings in the fall.

It was decided that there would be a minimum of formal structure to the meetings. From the first there has been a decided interest in the subject of the Holy Spirit. However, as I see it, the ultimate aim of the group is that we should come to love one another, to realize our oneness in Christ, that in doing so we should come to personal wholeness and to power and fruitfulness in relation to the church and the world.

2. Growth and Development of the Group

At our first meeting (of six interested men) there was a "feeling out" of each other - why we came, and what we expected to gain by our coming together. This was necessary as there were several new persons involved from the Hamilton area who were not at BTI during the winter. A great deal of time was necessarily spent in getting to know each other and then to discover together what our chief concerns in becoming involved in a sharing group. These soon came out in the open. One pastor expressed the feeling that he would not want to be part of a sharing group in which some of his own members were present. He desired an intellectual study of a book or subject of particular interest to him and he thought this study should be restricted to pastors only. It was obvious that he would feel uncomfortable in a sharing group. We did not get to the point of discussing other concerns because this first topic led us to a discussion of world problems. A second meeting was set for the next Monday evening.

After the first meeting was over I wondered who would show up for the next meeting. One of the men from the Hamilton area returned with his wife and they have been one of the regular participating couples of our group, John and June Holmes. Mr. Holmes is a lawyer and they are members of the Ancaster Baptist Church. Another of our regular members is Gus, a service station operator from Galt who is a member of First Baptist Church. Gus Pelz comes because of a need for this kind of open fellowship. "You know my background," he says - and indeed he has shared with us his life as an alcoholic and the agony of almost losing everything because of his drinking. "However, thanks be to

God I have a new life in Christ!" Gus cannot understand why people, especially Christian people can be satisfied with "low octane" Christian living - which is his way of pointing out that there is the Spirit-filled way of living the Christian life. Both Ruth and I were hungry for a deeper spiritual life and experience. Ruth was particularly frustrated as a substitute Adult Bible Class teacher and as a mother because of the lack of desire in most class members to share their problems as parents in coping with life. John Amy's involvement and leadership of our group has already been revealed.

This fall Alf and Pat Brown from Ancaster have become regular members of our group. Alf is a real estate agent and owner of a motel near Ancaster; he is chapter president of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship. Another regular member of our group is Miss Jean Donaldson, an ordained minister of the United Church. We have other members who are usually able to attend once a month now. One of these is the Rev. J. Frank Ward of Paris and Frank never comes alone. He and his carloads have on occasion swelled our ranks to 17. Another frequent participant is the Rev. Paul Timpany of Hagersville.

By about our third meeting after we had become quite well acquainted with one another it became apparent that two members of the group had had a deep spiritual experience which they called the 'Baptism of the Holy Spirit'. About the same time John Amy had received information re - the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship Regional Convention which was being held in the Sheraton-Connaught Hotel Hamilton May 15-17, 1969. At the next meeting John told us about the Convention and filled us in briefly about the Full Gospel

Business Men's Fellowship. He told us that he had attended his first meetings in Montreal and through their witness he had become open to seek and receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. I cannot recall whether he spoke of his experience in this exact way or not. What did happen as a result is the important thing for our group. Sam Findlay was present that night as well as Frank Ward and Paul Timpany. We all stated that we would attend some of the sessions of the Convention.

On the Thursday of the Convention (May 15/69) after the Rev. Harold Bredesen had finished speaking a group of us went with Alex McCrae and David duPlessis to the rear of the auditorium: Paul Timpany, John Amy, Raymond Brown, Alex Gray, Gus Pelz and I. After we had been with David duPlessis for about an hour, Raymond Brown asked that David pray for us and for our Convention fellowship. The prayer was quiet and beautiful - he began to pray in English and then in tongues. He went round the table where we were seated and laid his hands on our heads. When he laid his hand on my head the inner dam burst - I cried - I laughed - I wept - I felt myself being surrounded by the love of God. I felt clean; I felt good. How long the experience lasted I don't know. Gus leaned over and put his arm around me and gave me a hug and said, "Let go boy. That 's good". Paul Timpany on the other side of me spoke to me encouraging me to find full release. Shortly afterwards, we went out to a restaurant and had supper. John Amy asked me if I knew what had happened. I said, "Not really".

Before our next group meeting Gus called in for a few minutes. On his way out he said, "you have received the Baptism of the Holy

Spirit". I replied, "what did you say"? Gus's answer was "See you Thursday":

On Thursday, I spoke to Gus after the Examining Council had disbanded (for Paul Timpany's Ordination). Gus said to me "You have received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit". I replied this time with understanding because after Gus had left me on Tuesday evening I had continued reading David du Plessis' book, The Spirit Bade Me Go and had found there in the book some one else's experience of receiving the Holy Spirit - my experience.

At our meeting the following Monday night there was real excitement when it was discovered that two of us had received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit on the Thursday at the Convention through the ministry of David du Plessis. Mrs. Peggy Smith of Paris was the other person who had received the Baptism during the Thursday evening session. It was obvious from the comments of some of the members of the group that we should spend the next few meetings discussing what the Bible teaches concerning this experience. Copies of John Sherrill's book, They Speak With Other Tongues were given to those who were interested in reading it.

During the weeks that followed we could hardly wait to be together to share, to study God's Word and to enjoy the presence of the Lord and sense His directing presence in our discussions. We knew so little about what the Bible teaches concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit. My wife questioned the lack of teaching and emphasis upon the work of the Holy Spirit in our churches. Is it because we lost so many people at one time to the Pentecostals? Is this why we

have this blind spot? We had to admit that this may be one of the reasons. Someone said, "I thought of the Holy Spirit in terms of the Comforter". Another person said, "I always thought that 'tongues' was for the Apostles' day but not now".

With the number of questions being raised and the desire to know and experience the deeper life in the Spirit we eagerly looked forward to our meetings on Monday nights. We enjoyed one another's fellowship and when someone missed a meeting we were concerned about him. All too soon came the summer vacation period and we disbanded until September.

Our first meeting was much like a glad reunion. It was decided at our first meeting that we would meet twice a month (the first and third Mondays of each month). During this meeting we shared together the events which took place during the summer months. One of our number especially was encouraged to give vent to his frustrations. He was encouraged to stick with the local church and not to withdraw his support from his pastor. So far, he has followed our advice and we have prayed with him and for him and his church. Early in our fall meetings it became quite evident that June was hungry for a deeper experience of the Lord. The very first meeting that Alf and Pat Brown were present it became evident to Alf, John and myself that all she needed was encouragement on our part to enter into the experience of receiving the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. However, that night we hesitated. The very next meeting (Nov. 17, 1969) just after I had rejoined the group John suggested that we go to the Lord in prayer. I remember talking to Paul Timpany and our sharing together that we were

not ready ourselves for prayer so soon. However, we soon discovered that June was and through the ministry of Paul - and later Alf and Pat - June found full release and while seated on our living room rug she sang and praised the Lord in a new and different way. June has shared with me that it was because of our caring and loving her and through our encouragement she was able to find release and be filled with the Spirit.

I recall about this time that I made two side trips in between these two meetings. First, to see Gus and secondly to see John. Gus greeted me: "The Lord must have sent you to me, Al. Do I ever need to have some Christian fellowship". I did not know why I should go to see Gus when I was driving up to Salt. However, I recognized upon our exchange of greetings that it was the Lord who had prompted me to go and see him. We shared over the lunch hour, had a good time of fellowship together and then parted. A week later, I was prompted to drive to Delhi and visit John. After he had left the meeting two members of the group expressed their concern about John - saying he looked very tired and "uptight". John had been unusually quiet and withdrawn. I stayed and had lunch with John and his son Peter and we shared with one another. I told John that a few of us were concerned about him. At our next meeting he shared his burden with us and stated that he was moved by our concern for his health. As a prayer fellowship group we have been asked to pray not only for ourselves and our families and our churches but for people we do not even know personally. I was personally moved when we received a long distance telephone call from one of our friends and she shared

her concern with us, and asked us to pray for a young girl who had been seriously injured in a train wreck near Toronto. The very next day I contacted members of our group and she was daily held before the Lord in prayer. When we learned of her death it touched our hearts very deeply.

Just a few weeks ago (Jan. 26/70) we rejoiced that Claire came with her mother and father and had a real encounter with her Lord. One of the young people in our church could hardly believe his eyes and ears: "She's so different, her face is so radiant, I never heard her talk about Christ in such a personal way before". I said to him, "Paul, I know! Isn't it wonderful to see her so enthusiastic for Christ? She has had an encounter with Christ".

I have invited June Holmes to share her experience with you and the following is what she has written for me in answer to a couple of basic questions - why she came and why she is still very much a part of the fellowship?

3. One Member's Experience

A testimony - by June E. Holmes

My old set of directions for living are obsolete, as are my old ways of thinking, so that if anything that I say in this testimony confuses you, it is not your lack of understanding but my "newness". I love that expression that Jesus gave - born again! Now I can appreciate how the Prodigal felt after the big party his Dad gave for him.... humility and obedience are a strange way for me too, but I have made one discovery that the pain in killing my various prides is severe only at the beginning, until my Father comes to meet and alleviate.

In our Burtch Fellowship, though, we have no elder brothers. You and John have been exactly the opposite about me since I first met you both at BTL. Possibly the fact that we were comparing experiences and not theology there put us on a sharing level from the beginning, or else it could be that there was a sense of common concern for the other even then. It was John to whom I was drawn to ask "How do I get the Holy Spirit?" This is not a question I have ever asked before, or ever heard asked in a Christian group. I may have heard a sermon on the subject of the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit in the normal Christian life, but I cannot recall it. John's calm reply to my question was very simply made, "You just ask." The hunger in my voice was nothing compared to that with which I had been dealing within for some time. As I have since been free to tell you, my personal and spiritual life was in that 'horrible pit of miry clay' from which there appeared no way out. I won't pretend or intimate that getting down in it was not

of my own doing, because I am still having difficulty moving the centre of my life over from June to Jesus Christ. At one time (I confess: the recent past) "not feeling wicked" was about the only guide I had to living a Christian life. I sometimes longed to have a recipe for that happiness so often extolled in the hymns and choruses I now treasure and in the sermon; publishing the Glad Tidings of the "Kingdom of God". Secretly, too, I sometimes doubted the ultimate triumph of God, for its power eluded me. All the while, my Sunday face never changed, of course. I taught my poor little Sunday school students from books, worked avidly in myriads of church activities, sought help from the wrong sources, and inevitably eventually I cracked - up. It shattered my home life; threatened, but strangely, did not, perceptibly alter my church-going existence. In fact it was in my minister's study haven that I cried to God, and He gave me Jesus.

Nobody needed to tell me to repent! One moment in His Presence - the Divine, the Holy One - and it is as if there is never going to be another night. The desire to remain moment after moment in this perfect purity freed me from all other desires which before had been so important. His forgiveness, so precious, is my spur; the reward is to live at peace with my family and my friends, and finding the will of our Father in heaven.

Here is my new neighborhood - it is truly a new dimension of life on earth. That born-again joy caused me some distractions in assimilating one dimension with the other. I didn't know what to do with it! My transparent self", so aptly described in Sidney M. Jourard's insight book, suddenly became nakedly exposed and vulnerable. When succour was

sought from the one or two known places and persons the good-will was present but the power I needed to help me was lacking. My abysmal lack of knowledge of the Scriptures was never so deplored as during that time, because I was unable even to help myself think. The best I could do was to memorize certain passages I read which imparted strength wisdom, or inspiration to my weak struggles. Books of prayers gave me insight through the words of others into the nature of God as revealed to the different writers. I wanted with all my highest desire to pray - but I could not. My groanings to God must have been intelligible to Him because at a very crucial point, our Fellowship meetings were arranged and I was included among those persons invited to meet in your home at Burtch. As our Fellowship increases in depth, I am strengthened in my belief that God has ordained us to be yokefellows, and that those who are added to our number, either just briefly, or as sharing believers, have been given to us in His Providence as well. This hope has been my sustaining encouragement to travel those miles weekly or twice monthly. The incredible revolution of Joy was transpiring in my soul found an acceptable outlet not possible in any of my other Christian associations. Your concern for me in those struggling days was my first experience in Upper Room Christianity. Our Lord's Divine Presence was first made known to me when, after I had revealed an experience of deep significance to me, to you and Ruth and John, that you said two words I had not previously associated with myself "The Comforter." The Scripture you gave me to read gave me great assistance. You and John, and now Paul, always seem to know exactly where what I need to know is found in the Scriptures, for those Words speak

always to my deepest needs - I can never thank you enough for knowing and then caring enough to share this with me.

As I read and re-read the passages where Jesus describes His heavenly gift of sustaining Love, my throat would close and my eyes fill with tears. Never would I forget the moment when I first knew Love. Remembrance of the holiness brings me now into His very Presence. My wretchedness becomes my strength because He has touched me. Where else could I say all this except to one another in our little group, Allan? (How I long for my loved ones to have friends like this too - ones who give us the encouragement found in loving family relationships.)

Our gatherings have undergone miraculous changes. My own feeble expression of Thanksgiving is received by God and granted deep, often unspoken communion with Christ and those gathered. His love encompasses all our needs, present and world-wide, as we seek His blessed favour in intercession.

Fervency has increased in our prayers since we first gathered; I was never so happy as the night those visitors with the Pentecostal personalities visited us. That was a real prayer-meeting at least for me, and from then on I was never to be satisfied until I could participate in like manner. Oh, how they loved the Lord in word and song the whole evening; they never stopped thanking Him and praising Him and just talking to Him naturally, or saying "thank you Lord", in the middle of silent prayer. There was discussion about speaking in tongues between some who did, and some who did not, and I remember now being partially amused with the expression, and partly

curious as to what possible connection it could have with Christ, Who by now, was becoming my Guide. He has found my vulnerability, and whenever He wishes me to listen, brings a vision of Himself to my mind. I have had "visions" as long as I can remember from time to time, but it was only in recall that one spoke to me of God; there was never urgency connected with them in the past, and to my peril, I see now how often I ignored His blessed Guidance.

Soon after the Full Gospel Business Men's Convention in May last year, when your life was changed, our group discussions centred noticeably on the activities of the Holy Spirit amongst our members and in the lives of some of our visitors. The discussions of "Tongues" as being a gift of Christ to those whom He baptizes into His Spirit captured my interest. I sought in the Scriptures and read as many books on the subject as I could find or were given to me by you "boys", during the summer months. Here, once again, was that great hunger to know Christ and if this was from Him, I wanted it too - the Baptism I mean - for as yet, the Lord's Holy Spirit was not known to me as a Person of the Trinity. My fecund imagination could not conjure even a mere hint as to the meaning, but my thirst would not be denied.

When our Fellowship met in the Fall, once again, I could not express enough of the love in my heart for you and John so in between our meetings I began more regularly and with greater insight to pray for you, and your families, and your church's witness. There was a great surge of divine energy generated within me, that significant change in my ability to accomplish tasks done in Christ's Name and willingness to give my testimony whenever I was given opportunity was

more and more evident. No one commented to me about it until the morning service in which I sang my first solo in ten years. The miracle was not in the solo, but that "Christ had put a new song in my mouth, even praises unto our God", by restoring to me the ability to sing for Him. Having shared this great joy with our fellowship circle, I was pleased to be asked to sing in your church, Allan, since it was because of our good relationship that I received courage to sing out during the sing-songs we had around the piano in your home. My self-confidence was restored. Our fellowship maintains meaning for me whether we are together in your home or separated, and has contributed to my support when I have been otherwise spiritually alone, such support as I imagine you might feel when delivering a sermon knowing that someone is upholding you in prayer. Anyway, I should not try to analyze - I only know that without our fellowship group I would have no one to whom to turn for spiritual support and encouragement; so when my voice returned, there was no happier place for me to begin solo singing than at Burtch, and to give "our" testimony in song at the anniversary service in Immanuel with all our group sitting encouragingly in the front pews. Hearing Mr. Evans speak too, greatly strengthened my desire to know more of Christ's riches. It was at this service that I saw Paul again, after many years, and if you can accept my word about anything here, you will know my meaning when I say that God filled me with the same loving concern for him as I have for you and John. Paul talked to me about his experience with Christ, and how he had received the Baptism into the Holy Spirit. I expressed my distress and longing for some release from the joy mixed with pain

building within me. There was someday coming a bursting-point, literally! Once again, that indefinable sense of fellowship strengthened me as Paul's Christian concern was related into prayerful action. Christ's outreach to me that night through Paul, and later through Alf. and Pat has been all the release I have needed to receive the gift of speaking in tongues. If they could care about me that much, and help, how much more did Christ, my Lord, and my God. Their beautiful chant-like prayer in the Spirit on my behalf inspired the faith and trust required in receiving this great gift from our Lord. Jesus stood before me and His Spirit quietly flowed over and through. I was whispering thoughts of love to Him in a language not previously known to me. It was not at all like other occasions when I had struggled to speak words that could not come - on Nov. 17th, 1969, the ease and delight with which now the sounds poured from me was, in comparison the difference spoken of in Scriptures as with Flesh and Spirit, and the kingdom of earth and the Kingdom of God. I am now enjoying a peace within never even hoped for before. All my lack and my newness is being constantly compensated through Him each time I enter the chamber of prayer through our Lord's Spirit. He is building me up to be useful in His Kingdom. When I am faithful and obedient to the urging of the Spirit I quickly respond by praying in His Spirit through the new language He gives. I do not know what I am saying. I just keep my request, or my loved one, or the stranger, or you "boys", before Him in my mind, and His words pray what I should be praying, but cannot. He knows and provides for all for whom I pray, and with the patience He gives when I am yielded, I know that one day, too, I will be enabled to pray in English through

His power for the benefit of others, even as His power reached and lifted me through intercession.

The testimony to follow is the most difficult to include and yet it is part of my witness and must be included. I am certain that you will not interpret my conviction of Missions as a "religious spree."; but also thankful that Christianity cannot be explained but imparted. This gives me confidence to say that my spiritual diet was milk for so long, and with the change to meat I can only partially digest oftentimes. The process of assimilation and understanding is progressing, but slowly. When we first met at Burtch, I often felt guilty that I should be receiving so much Christian Fellowship other than in my own local church. I wondered if I should be enjoying myself so much, and from a false sense of loyalty, cogitated discontinuing our relationship through regular gatherings. In a voice as clear and vivid, as if speaking beside my ear instead of inside my ear, God said, "Don't let the church hold you back". I was puzzled at first, but came to know the full implication of those words as circumstances and occasion to serve elsewhere would bring them to my mind. Always they guide me to the Truth; as a witness I submit our Monday evening gatherings and what happened so marvellously in my life because of them.

I want to share with you too, how my lesson in the meaning of humility was given to me by our Lord Jesus when He washed my feet in the Spirit. Allan, I cannot tell you about this sacred time. There are no English words or any other ones which would do anything but profane that which was granted my spirit's sight. There is this I must tell

you, though, that in searching for the account which I knew was in the Gospels, I was spoken to again through the text "You do not know what I am doing, but you will later." You see, I had been standing at my kitchen sink, peeling potatoes when His Spirit overcame me and reduced me to helplessness.

A week later in your home the touch of His Hand through our Fellowship gave to me the gift of heavenly language, and during the experience my Lord appeared to me as He did in the garden to Mary Magdalene. The vision, the Love, Joy, and Peace of the moments with Him there has never left me nor the message that I am "to tell the disciples," I have seen the Lord.

Can you understand how then when I was shopping after that, His urgings prompted me to "go immediately to the Divinity School" and I went down the hill and into the school? There was a Baval record I should return sometime, so I took it along, but the urgings had to do with Miss Tupper for some reason unknown to me at the time. Upon arrival I found Miss Tupper's office door almost closed, she was engaged in conversation, and the school office door was closed as well. The Spirit was still quickening me when I gave my record to someone else and then left. "What do you want me to do, Lord", I asked. I did not find out that day, or until you asked me to participate in your thesis in this personal way, mentioning that Miss Tupper is your Professor and of course, would be reading your thesis including this testimony. My experience and visit to the Divinity School was not to see Miss Tupper but to assure me to-day as I write this for you that I am within His Will. Otherwise, I would have been very uneasy. I

have learned that my own understanding of anything is of no value. God's approval has an unmistakeable mark of power and authority completely beyond all imaginary signs.

In our Fellowship let us continue to watch, and pray that we will remain faithful to His Holy Will.

"Praise the Lord!"

A STUDY OF SMALL GROUPS

1. The Place of the Small Group in Renewal of the Church

After our group had been formed I soon became aware of other groups that had suddenly sprung up in other homes. It seems that people everywhere have a deep longing for some depth in human relations that is lacking in most human contacts to-day. Even within the institutional church small cell groups have sprung into existence for one reason or another in every denomination - some for prayer and Bible study or study of particular books, etc. Other groups are simply sharing groups where people are enabled to come alive as it were and become whole persons through the loving atmosphere that surrounds them and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Some groups like our own are rather ill-defined and have a shared leadership. Mr. Ted Byfield in his book Just Think, Mr. Berton describes a group of laymen of the Anglican Church (in Winnipeg) who meet on Thursday evenings to share experiences, to seek one another's advice and to pray together for one another. The structure was very informal. They met in order to build each other up and to propagate the Gospel. To bring individuals to Christ. Mr. Byfield describes the group as pretty poorly defined. "There is no definite form or constitution to it. You should think of it only as a group of Christians trying to practise their faith the best way they can and sharing the common objective of bringing new people into the faith. This way the group

grows, of course. Eventually it divides and propogates. People move away, or other groups are formed from it".¹

2. Interaction of Persons in the Group

A great deal has been written in recent years on 'church renewal' and the ministry of small groups within the larger body of the institutional church. It is the hope of these writers that as the individuals within these groups come alive the church too will find new life.

Clyde Reid's book Groups Alive - Church Alive can be used as a basic handbook in one's understanding of small group dynamics. Mr. Reid believed very strongly that small groups can provide one of the ways for church renewal. Mr. Reid is on the staff of the Institute for Advanced Pastoral Studies in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, working with the Director Dr. Reuel Howe. For the past eight years he has worked with small groups there and at Union Theological Seminary in New York. I intend at this time to draw heavily upon Clyde Reid's insight and experience in order to examine the principles of group process and dynamics.

Mr. Reid emphasizes the tremendous potential small groups have for releasing the real ministry of the church. He states that

the creative uses of small groups in the life of the church are many. They can be structured to help youth encounter each other and their faith more profoundly. They can provide the context for a meeting between youth

¹

Ted Byfield, Just Think, Mr. Berton, (Winnipeg: The Company of the Cross, 1965, p. 104.

and adults that can help bridge the generation gap. Groups can bring persons into deep communication across the racial and class barriers which seem so impenetrable at times. They can help persons discover themselves and their identity.

Mr. Reid envisions churches alive to the present needs of the congregation within which people are known and are loved and where they share each other's burdens. He states:

I see churches in which there is a deeper inner life through a variety of small groups; and because of that vital inner life, a genuine reaching out to the world,³ a 'journey inward, journey outward.'

(a) Group Contract

Mr. Reid points out that the basic task of any new group is to make some important decisions about the life of the group which can be thought of as the "group contract." Every group needs to work out an agreement as to the purposes for which its members are gathered together. A group, of course, may have several purposes. It may meet for intellectual stimulation as well as for personal sharing. The size of the group should be considered. The ideal size seems to be from 8 to 12 members. When a group becomes too large or is constantly changing, it becomes very difficult for persons to know each other in any depth. Another important factor is the composition of the group

2

Clyde Reid, Groups Alive - Church Alive, (New York; Harper & Row, Publishers, 1969), p.29.

3

Ibid, P.30. Clyde Reid supports Elizabeth O'Connor's position expressed in her book Journey Inward, Journey Outward.

as to age, sex and educational level. In our particular group we have found it extremely valuable from the beginning to have people of diverse backgrounds. It should be decided how often the group meets, what night and for how long, etc. Mr. Reid also points out that it is important for a group to establish the level of interaction for its meetings. For instance, some groups are able to combine intellectual discussion of their faith with personal sharing of their difficulties in living the faith. The important thing is for the group to have a clear agreement as to their contract so that expectations are not constantly frustrated. Another necessary element of the small group is leadership. A leader may be appointed by the group. If Bible study is the purpose of the group, for instance, it would be appropriate that a biblical scholar be chosen. (i.e. the pastor) The group may have a shared leadership depending on who is the host for the evening. Another important element of the group contract is agreement on the group disciplines which the members are prepared to accept - e.g.

- (a) to attend all meetings, if possible
- (b) to read the material agreed upon by the group prior to the discussion
- (c) to pray regularly for each member of the group
- (d) to begin and close each meeting with five minutes of silence, and
- (e) to have coffee available but to serve no food at meetings.⁴

It is important that the members have discussed and agreed upon and drawn up the guidelines for their group. Ideally, each

*
Ibid, p.41.

member ought to have a copy of the group contract for his own guidance. In doing this there will be greater loyalty to the group on the part of each member.

(b) Process

It is soon evident upon joining a small cell group, that each group has its own personality. In some groups that I have visited there is a more frank and open atmosphere which was refreshing and healthy. Another group which meets in Paris was much more spontaneous in its worship and praise; the group was openly Pentecostal. Much to my surprise this group's boistrousness did not disturb me as I sensed the presence and love of God in the room. What I am saying is that each and every group has its own dynamics. As Mr. Reid states:

you can't have a group without dynamics being present.... The dynamics are the forces that operate to hold the group together and determine the quality of its life. Those dynamics may be positive, negative or neutral. When they are positive and people in a group seem to be getting along happily and productively, there is little need to be concerned about the dynamics of the situation. However, when the interaction between group members is negative and unproductive, or even neutral and lukewarm, we need to know what processes are blocking communication.⁵

Reid further suggests that the best way to become sensitive to the dynamics of a small group is to attend a human relations laboratory or to take a special course in group relations. However, most of us have not had the opportunity. He recognizes this difficulty and

⁵

Ibid, p.46-47.

outlines ways in which we may become more sensitive to what is happening within the group.

1. Group climate. Perhaps the first thing we would notice is the emotional tone or climate of the group - whether it is warm and friendly, or cold and formal, joyful, or neutral; whether members experience rejection or whether there is any hostility shown and if so how the situation is being handled. Often you will see individuals become very argumentative and then they will retreat and become completely silent. It is helpful if we can be aware of the changes of the emotional tone of a session and why. The climate can help or hinder the group in achieving its goal.

2. Patterns of participation. It is important to be aware of who does the talking and who does not. An observant person can soon pick up the patterns of participation in the group.

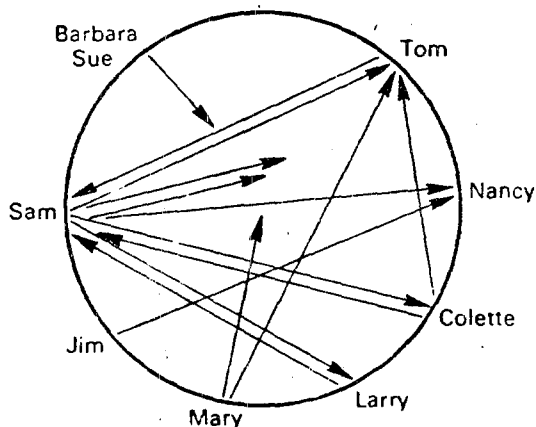
One very simple tool which the average person may find useful in observing patterns of participation is known as the flow chart.

This is made by drawing a line from the person who speaks toward the person to whom he directs his comment. If he makes a comment directed to the whole group, the line may simply end in the middle of the circle. The flow chart should be used for a short period of time, to describe interaction, from 8.15 to 8.30 or 8.30 to 9.00.⁶

For a particular meeting the leader could ask an individual to keep such a chart - quietly and unobtrusively.

EVERY GROUP HAS DYNAMICS

FLOW CHART



This can be a very simple way of revealing to the group who has been dominating the discussion to everyone else's irritation - a fact they were probably all aware of but did not know how to handle.

3. Flight and engagement or fight and flight. This means the sudden change from one topic, say a discussion of the problem of premarital sexual relations, when one of the group confesses his difficulties with the subject, and the group moves quickly to a safer topic. We must recognize that there are many reasons why the group takes flight and it is not necessarily bad that it does. It may be necessary and good. However, when it seems to be an unnecessary avoidance of 'hot' or 'live' issues, a question may be raised about it. "It is possible for a group member to say, 'I wonder if we didn't drop that subject too quickly: it may be uncomfortable, but it seems to me we need to take another look at it.'"⁷

7.

Ibid, p.52.

or established, one of the obvious results is leadership competition. It may be one individual displays more aggressiveness than any other person in the group. The ability to call attention to this problem as it arises within the group without condemning the individual will allow the members to accept leadership qualities in other individuals in the group.

5. Hidden agenda anxiety. One hidden agenda may be an individual's concern to hurry and get the meeting over so he can go home and watch his favorite T.V. programme. Therefore, he may desire that there be no discussion of the business and in fact he may be very agreeable to everything suggested in order to get the meeting finished in time. Another example of hidden anxiety may be the emotion of anger or resentment we bring into a meeting because of an earlier broken human relationship. It is helpful in order to bring it out into the open and to clear the air for someone to ask, "I have the feeling to-night that something is bothering us, and I wonder if anyone else feels the same way?" Or someone may say "We seem to be fighting about everything; what seems to be the trouble?" Hidden agendas can take many forms: from the behaviour of an individual upset over an unresolved crisis in the home, to group behaviour from a sense of loss because someone has dropped out of the group. It must be recognized that at times the real issue is not proper for group discussion at that time, and that the group will simply have to endure a difficult session.

6. The Plop. Sometimes several good ideas of one person are left in the middle of the table, untouched. He may feel as if he

is being rejected by the group. It may be because his suggestions were poorly-timed for the group's acceptance. The group was not ready for the ideas. Also if the ideas were accepted it might involve a great deal of time and effort which the group may be unwilling to expend. For example, the person may have suggested a coffee house ministry to meet a specific need in the community. The idea was rejected because of a lack of group commitment to meet the need.

7. Trust Level. Sometimes the trust level changes dramatically when one member leaves or a new person joins the group. A crisis shared by the group will deepen the trust level. Like group atmosphere, the trust level is a dimension of the group process which an untrained person can detect by simply listening to his feelings. You either feel the group is being trustworthy or you do not.

The following is one method to help groups deepen their level of trust. This method could be used fruitfully by church groups. It is called "the process of sharing."

First, each group member is told that he will have a specific amount of time (usually five or six minutes each) in which he is to share one or two incidents from his childhood, one or two from his teen years, and one or two from his adulthood. These should be incidents which he feels have helped to make him the person he (or she) now is. A few minutes are allowed each person to think about what he might share and jot down a few notes. At the conclusion of the five minutes (and the time limits should be scrupulously observed), each person is asked to share what he considers the happiest moment of his life. It is simply amazing how much closer people feel to each other after having gone through this process It has the limitations of being an entirely verbal exercise, and we now know

that when we move past the strictly verbal to include physical contact, trust can deepen even more.

An interesting illustration of the use of physical contact is the trust-circle exercise commonly used now in human relations training. The group stands in a circle with one member in the middle. Keeping his knees stiff and his feet on the floor, the member in the middle falls back so that someone in the group must catch him and pass him to another in the circle. As he is passed around the circle, trusting that the group will not drop him, he feels physically the support he may have suspected the group could provide. This exercise illustrates the fact that there is a close relation between the physical and the emotional, a relation we have really only begun to discover. Other learnings can emerge from this experience as well. Some people do not want others to get close, and tend to shove them away when they fall in their direction. This helps to raise for them the problem of how they deal with intimacy. By calling attention to how it felt when you were shoved away, you may also help a person to allow more closeness next time. Often he wants people closer to him but is afraid to allow it or doesn't know how.

(c) Risk of being honest. When a person takes the risk of being honest and frank with another, the moment of truth may be painful for us. However, the important thing is that he has taken the risk of opening a learning situation, and even of being rejected by the rest of the group. If they feel his comment is unjustified and is criticizing another unfairly then the situation is reversed and the group attacks him. It becomes a learning situation for him. Reid points out that many

Christians have the unfortunate idea that to hurt someone is always un-Christian or unloving. On the contrary, it may be most loving and Christlike to be honest with a friend by sharing with him something he needs desperately to know about himself.⁹

This type of experience will enable an individual to see himself as others see him. They are enabling him to change and grow.

Time for evaluation and a willingness to risk honesty can make the big difference between a dead group and a group of alive and growing persons who are willing to share life experiences with one another for mutual upbuilding. Where is God in all of this? Surely God works through such interaction among persons.

We have followed Reid rather closely. Other authors that are helpful: Philip Anderson's Church Meetings that Matter; John L. Casteel's Spiritual Renewal through Personal Groups; Sara Little's Learning Together in the Christian Fellowship; and Robert Raines' New Life in the Church.

9.

Ibid, p.57.

A LOOK AT OTHER GROUPS

In this chapter we shall look at other groups and compare them with our fellowship. I shall note their similarities and the differences that are apparent to me when I compare them with our fellowship at Burtch.

1. The Potter's House, Washington, D.C.

One such group that has had a world-wide influence in the area of church renewal is the Church of the Saviour in Washington, D.C. In the foreward of Elizabeth O'Connor's book Call to Commitment Elton Trueblood states that it is the most encouraging Christian fellowship known to him because it has taken seriously the concept that the church is meant to be a redemptive fellowship. He states that

The experience of the Church of the Saviour is shocking to many sincere Christians. They are shocked, in the first place, because it is still small in numbers. To remain small when growth is possible is mystifying and faintly un-American. The very conception of making membership genuine rather than nominal, and therefore difficult, is bitterly resented by some, who rightly see this conception as an implicit criticism of their own superficial standards of membership.

When so many Christians have an 'edifice complex', it is shocking for a now famous congregation to have no proper church building. The modest structure at 2025 Massachusetts Avenue is not even called a 'church'. It is simply the 'Headquarters' of the Church of the Saviour. In it are library, guest rooms, kitchen, office etc. but no ecclesiastical

atmosphere whatever. The 'church' is not confined to a spot on Massachusetts Avenue, but is in the homes and offices and coffee shop and arts and crafts center and retreat farm. The church is where the members are carrying on their ministry....

The feature of the Church of the Saviour which surprises people most is the practice of encouraging strong members either to work primarily outside the fellowship in mission groups to the unchurched or even to leave and thus be free to join some other fellowship which needs them.¹

As Trueblood states one of the unique ideas is:

that people can be called to leave a fellowship just as they are called to enter it, and that they should not leave unless they are thus called. This means that a committed member will not leave because of wanderlust, or even because of better opportunities for employment in another city, but only because the opportunity to serve Christ's cause seems greater. The dedicated Christian will not make this momentous decision alone, but will seek the prayerful judgment of the group before he acts.²

This last point alone and other aspects of the church's life and ministry reveal to us what the church can be and become. It makes us feel ashamed of ourselves for our lack of commitment.

I should like to examine only one aspect of this unique church's ministry and outreach into the community. I shall look at the church's vision of opening a coffee house, and the disciplines

1. Elizabeth O'Connor, Call to Commitment, (New York, Harper and Row Publishers, 1963), p. ix & x.

2. Ibid, p.x.

involved in its successful ministry to a secular world. The Potter's House is the church in the Market Place.

After sharing the idea of holding the classes of their School of Christian Living in a rented room of a restaurant, one small group suddenly had the vision of allowing the irreligious to ask aloud his religious questions e.g. "What is the meaning of life?" in the atmosphere of a coffee house of their own. That first evening in 1958 this idea was explored enthusiastically. However, this was not the group that was to make the dream become a reality.

It was the policy of the church that any new mission group must have its mission confirmed by the Church Council. The Tavern Church gained the Church's official recognition and received a \$1,000. allotment out of the church's budget to help the group, now twelve in number, establish its coffee house ministry. Of this amount \$150. was given to Esther, who had been asked at an informal session to become manager of the coffee house, and she enrolled in a correspondence course given by a hotel training school. However, most of the training material was applicable only to hotels and large restaurants.

For many months the coffee house group held breakfast meetings before Sunday worship. This was a time of praying, and planning and dreaming aloud. During this time they searched for a name which would have religious meaning to the group and yet would not alienate the unchurched. They found it in Jeremiah 18:1. "The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Arise and go down to the potter's house and there will I let you hear my words." Elizabeth O'Connor speaks

of the discovery thus:

Jeremiah heard no sermon at the potter's house. He simply watched a potter at his work and saw how he fashioned spoiled clay into a vessel which was good. In this he found the message of God who can do the same with our damaged lives if we can come to know that we are creatures made of clay and place ourselves wholly in the hands of the Potter. It was the message we wanted the coffee house to hold for the city in which it would be set.³

The method of evangelism was to be their common life in seeking to live out the gospel: in being a reconciling community, a community which knows how to accept and to love. They knew that they were fully dependent upon the Holy Spirit working in and through their lives.

From the beginning it was hoped that the Potter's House would attract artists, writers, musicians, and craftsmen, who might be able to discover that their creativity could be identified with the creative power of God.

There were great days of dreaming how to make the coffee house an evangelistic arm of the church. They studied evangelism. But the problem was what would they say when they entered into dialogue. They soon discovered that they could not be experts on every subject and they also discovered this was not the real need. They discovered that their role was to be a listening people, a people who could be loving and accepting.

Through the church's monthly publication outside interest

3.
Ibid, p.112.

and financial support were gained. Following the advice of one outsider they were led to spend \$2,300. on lighting - although this amount seemed exorbitant. They realize now that more than anything else, it has been the lighting of the coffee house that has helped create the desired atmosphere. The artists who have contributed their art to hang on the walls are delighted; they comment that their works have never been displayed under more favourable conditions.

Finally after months of looking the group located and leased a building in December, 1959, and long before the coffee house was opened to the public, the Potter's House was interpreting the church to the hundreds who were dropping in out of curiosity. Artists, when discovering that the walls would be a gallery asked about arrangements for exhibiting. Elizabeth O'Connor states that writers and poets and actors who had learned that there would be readings shared their dreams and offered helpful suggestions.

After hours of labour the renovations were finally completed and accepted by the Board of Health. The Potter's House opened to the public in April, 1960. In one of the windows they placed a potter's wheel, the coffee house symbol, and in the other window, wooden shelves were built to display the work of local craftsmen. The coffee house was an immediate success. People from all walks of life dropped in. For example university students came and could stay all night and spend only twenty-five cents. They felt "it was the one place in Washington they could feel a peace."⁴ The Potter's House

4.

Ibid, p.118.

was carried as a featured story in several different publications. Consequently, it was not long before every night the place was jammed. The very success created problems for the group ministry. And yet behind the noise, and bustle, there was felt a peace not often found in our world to-day. The question has often been asked "Why is this place different?" The difference is God is to be found in this place through the ministry of persons.

Ministers often brought boards and members with them to visit the Potter's House. One minister said that he discovered there what it meant to be a servant people, and he recognized that this concept of the church had nearly been lost by him and his people.

For the members of the group ministry the Potter's House became a unique classroom in the School of Christian Living. The original group of twenty had to be enlarged considerably because of the success of the coffee house. People from all walks of life were teamed together to serve and wait on tables. They had to master unfamiliar equipment and perform tasks that were equally unfamiliar. People were often teamed together whose personalities clashed under the pressures of trying to keep up with the orders. Often neat and orderly persons were teamed with careless and disorganized ones. Tempers clashed! There was a need within their own ranks to learn about acceptance and forgiveness. Elizabeth O'Connor marvels that they survived the pressures of these early months. She states that they did so because of the prayers that brought the vision of a coffee house into being. The espresso coffee machine was replaced by one that was three times the size of the original. The group has learned to take

directions from one who oversees the operation for the evening.

Out of the trials and tribulations of the early months, an order or covenant of discipline was drawn up. This is in addition to the church's discipline which, as noted earlier, is part of the life of all members of the Church of the Saviour. The Rule for the members of the Potter's House reads as follows:

Friend, you declare by your membership in the Congregation of the Potter's House that The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has called you to belong to him, has called you also to be on mission to His world through this venture of His church. As the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, 'Go down to the potter's house and there I will cause you to hear My word,' so from on high must you have heard this voice, watched the potter at his work, seen how the clay was spoiled in his hand and how he took it and made another vessel as seemed good to him to do, and then heard deep within, God saying, 'Friend, can I not do with you as the potter has done? Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand.' Your life is to be yielded to the hand of the Potter that you shall be to those who gather in the Potter's House the bearer of this message, a witness to God's redeeming love in Jesus Christ.⁵

The Associate membership is for those persons who are not yet members of the Church of the Saviour but have taken two or more courses in its School of Christian Living and who share in the church's life and desire to serve in the mission of the Potter's House.

The Rule of the Potter's House for its Associate members reads as follows:

5.

Ibid, p.122.

You declare by your associate membership in the Congregation of the Potter's House your hunger for God in Christ and your belief that you can best come to know Him as you share in the common life of His people. You no longer belong to the number of those who have never heard the words of Christ nor touched the church of Christ. The Congregation of the Potter's House is part of His Body. Christ is the Head of this people. He is in the midst of them, but He is also out yonder in His world. To share in the common life of this community is to share in a life of worship, prayer and study - a life of loving and of giving.

There are also others who serve as emergency standby personnel; these people usually are involved in another mission group. Before the coffee house opens each night, the group on duty meets for worship, study and time of sharing of insights gained have enabled those who are serving tables to be able to share with those with whom they come into contact.

2. Firehouse Drop-In Centre, Sioux Falls

Other groups have patterned similiar coffee house ministries after the ministry of the Potter's House. They have a special reading course and group study on Christian Living before they begin to wait on tables and they have evolved similiar rules of discipline and covenants for the group's ministry. One such dynamic group ministry is the Firehouse Drop-In Centre in Sioux Falls, South Dakota where the Rev. Roger Frederickson and his laymen work side by side in a ministry of outreach.

3. The Stepping Stones Restaurant, Toronto

In Toronto, the Rev. George LeRoy left a suburban pastorate because he had a vision. In a complete step of faith with very little financial backing he has opened the Stepping Stones Restaurant in the Yorkville area. He left the pastorate "to seek the lost" serving them coffee and food without charge. It is his desire to share with them the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Some of those whom he has won to Christ are now working with him to win others to Christ. This ministry is less than a year old. During the summer 1969 over one thousand young people came in and out of the Stepping Stones Restaurant. Painted on the walls in psychedelic colours are many unidentified scripture verses on love. Often these messages on the walls act as a springboard for discussion about God's love. George and his co-workers are able to demonstrate and tell young people that they love them and that God loves them. Many a teenager has been helped and has been reunited with his family because of the ministry of reconciliation that is taking place. George Le Roy is planning to have the Stepping Stone Restaurant incorporated; the board of directors of the mission will have a strong interdenominational evangelical base. He sees the need of extending the ministry to include a half-way house. The group around him are exercising a charismatic ministry, a faith ministry seeking to live out together the Christian life led by the Holy Spirit.

4. Distinctive Features of the Burtch Group

Basically our group is something of a hybrid between the Keith Miller (The Taste of New Wine) type of group and some of the

dynamic house groups. As in many groups, there is an emphasis upon sharing and loving one another plus a recognition of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps to date the balance has been more toward the emphasis on the Holy Spirit than on honest sharing, although there has definitely been some of the latter. On the charismatic side I am including "worship in the Spirit" an important part of most meetings. It is often during our worship and praise that different persons assume leadership at various times. The worship is completely free and spontaneous - nothing is planned. The psalms, choruses and songs, a passage of scripture - maybe only a verse - are important elements; praise and thanksgiving are the essence of our worship. Very often we have a separate time of prayer as we pray for special needs amongst our group, our families, our churches in ministering one to-another as members of the Body of Jesus Christ.

Our group is not organized for a special mission as the following groups are: The Potter's House, Firehouse Drop-In Centre, and the Stepping Stones Restaurant. Our mission or goal is to build each other up in the Spirit so that we may be more effective servants of the Lord where He has placed us. For instance, we do not have a covenant as most other groups. If there is a meeting in any one of our own churches then it comes first. Our concern is that our group will not compete with or interfere with our participation in the ministry of our respective local churches. You will recall the diversity of our members - Baptist, Fellowship Baptist

and United - and from several different congregations. A couple of our number, partly because of their tremendous spiritual growth, are exercising a positive influence in their own churches. Another big difference is that from the beginning we refused to be bound to a set of study books. We are not a study group. However, books are freely circulated among the group members and ideas are shared. Our group in one sense has unconsciously been missionary minded. Our discoveries about God and ourselves are so strong and fresh that we must share our experiences with others. As a result of our sharing beyond the group we have had many different persons out to some of our meetings during the past year. A few of them have become regular members of the group; at least one has initiated a new group in his community.

IV

CONCLUSION

The following are guidelines we have used and guidelines I would use in the future. We have sought to discover the mind of the Spirit and to move with Him. In a recent conversation with John Amy we agreed that we would not change this approach another time. Specifically, we feel that God calls us to love one another and that whatever happens this is basic. The structure of the group is quite free; there is room for the individual to participate and contribute as he may feel led.

From the insights gained from our group and as a result of studying Clyde Reid's discussion of group dynamics I would feel quite free to step in and draw it to the attention of the whole group that a certain person is monopolizing the discussion and that certain other persons are becoming squelched. This situation has made some members reluctant to become involved in our discussions. Somehow, these individuals will have to be lovingly encouraged to participate. We have discovered that we can learn from each other's experiences and struggles. That is, we can minister to one another.

Each time we meet, especially when new persons are brought into the fellowship, we are aware that the situation is a new one. We each have our own needs and we have brought these needs, anxieties, and hopes into the situation to be met by Christ.

From the beginning the word to us has been that we love one another. We have learned too the value of spontaneous worship led by the Spirit. We have learned the importance of giving opportunity for those who need and desire such spiritual ministry to receive this type of ministry. We recognize that we are in many different stages of spiritual development with a variety of needs. Our ultimate goal is perfect union of love in Christ with a consequent outflow of loving service to a needy world. However, we must wait for one another for God sees many needs to meet in each of us personally before we reach fullness of love together. The Holy Spirit knows of the particular needs of the members of the group and directs so that in one way or another these needs are being met along the way. This does not mean that the group is, even temporarily, turned in on itself and isolated, for its members are associated also with other situations and opportunities for practising love outside the group. Through the group meeting (and by a consciousness of a continuing fellowship even when apart) we receive encouragement and help to live for Christ wherever God has placed us. One of our members is exercising an intercessory ministry. Because of her prayers for us as pastors and as laymen and for our families our lives are being blessed by the Lord. Her life, her family-life, her witness and ministry in her church in turn is being used of the Lord. Thanks be to God, He can use everyone of us, and remold us for we are like clay and He is the Potter.

In secular education to-day, learning in small groups is prevalent from the early elementary grades right on into secondary school.

The social purpose of grouping is to provide opportunity for each child to develop self discipline to contribute to the discussions and to achieve respect for what others contribute. The educational objective is to provide opportunity for a child to follow a particular interest, to discover new facts by experimentation, to organize information and make use of all types of material such as books and periodicals, hobbies and projects.¹

Constant evaluation takes place within the group.

It is the belief of the educators who advocate small groups within the classroom that it is more important to equip children to get along with people in later life than to put in thousands of facts many of which they soon forget. The principles of group dynamics are certainly evident within the classroom situation. Sara Little in her book Learning Together in the Christian Fellowship emphasizes that the individual's original motivation becomes strengthened as his needs and values are being met through his participation in the fellowship of a small group. As he gives more of himself, his motivation to learn and to belong to the fellowship becomes stronger. It is possible within the fellowship of a Christian group that a person may have a confrontation with his Lord.²

1.

A classroom project evolved around a boy's interest in building model cars. The class was divided into interest groups. For example, one group chose engine parts. They used a working model of a V8 engine and they explained how the various parts worked. Their presentation taught the whole class what they had learned.

2.

Sara Little, Learning Together in the Christian Fellowship, (Richmond, Va., John Knox Press, 1960), p.63.

The group process as a method to be used in learning was pioneered within the church. Let us examine the objective for Christian Education as stated in the curriculum plan devised by Co-operative Curriculum Project of the following denominations: Advent Christian Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, American Baptist Convention, Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ), Church of the Brethern, Church of God, Church of the Nazarene, Cumberland Presbyterian Church, The Evangelical United Brethern Church, Mennonite Church, The Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church in Canada, The Presbyterian Church in U.S., The Protestant Episcopal Church, Southern Baptist Convention, United Church of Canada.

STATEMENT OF THE OBJECTIVE

The objective for Christian education is that all persons be aware of God through his self-disclosure, especially his redeeming love as revealed in Jesus Christ, and that they respond in faith and love - to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, grow as sons of God rooted in the Christian community, live in the Spirit of God in every relationship, fulfill their common discipleship in the world, and abide in the Christian hope.³

Within the small group, each person can minister to the others in loving, in accepting and in encouraging them to grow spiritually. Within the fellowship of the group (community) we discover the reality of God's presence as we struggle together in searching out answers to life's questions. To me the experience of

3.

The Church's Educational Ministry: A Curriculum Plan,
(St. Louis, Missouri, The Bethany Press, 1965). p.8.

being part of a sharing group has been one of the most stimulating and spiritually enriching experiences of my life. I believe for adult and young adult groups and teens such a group experience of sharing and of discovery together could be one of the most exciting ways of communicating the Gospel. Perhaps it can be seen as the most meaningful way of communicating the Gospel in our society to-day which has become so impersonal.

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