



## Piloting the Suffolk Fresh Expressions Community Session Three: Healthy meetings

### PSALM 46

1. God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.
2. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.
3. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!
4. A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High.
5. God himself lives in that city; it cannot be destroyed. God will protect it at the break of day.
6. The nations are in an uproar, and kingdoms crumble! God thunders, and the earth melts!
7. The LORD Almighty is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress. Interlude
8. Come, see the glorious works of the LORD: See how he brings destruction upon the world and causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear in two; he burns the shields with fire.
9. "Be silent, and know that I am God! I will be honoured by every nation. I will be honoured throughout the world." 11 The LORD Almighty is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.

### Aim

To equip leading members to reflect on what makes a healthy mission small group meeting.

### WELCOME

What is the best thing and the worst thing about a small group you are part of?

### WORSHIP

Read John 20.24-28: Play a meditative worship CD. Ask the group to sit quietly and imagine that Jesus has walked into the room. He has promised to be with us when we meet together in his name. Imagine that you can then see the nail marks in his hands. Ask the group to say what they want to thank Jesus for as they think of his suffering on the cross.

## **WORD**

Read Psalm 46

What phrases in this psalm give us positive things to hang on to in times of trouble? (e.g. to trust God) Make a list.

Has anybody experienced applying some of these principles when going through a difficult time? Ask for testimonies about God breaking through.

Is anyone going through a difficult time now and can we pray for them – Split into pairs and pray for each other.

## **WITNESS**

Many non-Christians seem to have stories of encounters with God or some sort of spiritual experience. Did anyone have these sorts of experiences before becoming a Christian?

**Challenge** - Do a bit of research:

Ask some non-Christians if they have ever had any spiritual experiences? (If this leads to them wanting to talk to you about spiritual things – be prepared to go with it!).

Continue to work on the mission vision for your group.

## **Evaluation**

1. What evidence was there that the Holy Spirit was with us in this meeting?
2. What happened to encourage this?
3. What was holding this back?

## **GROWING IN DEPTH: KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER**

**1. Growing in depth** is about being edified or built up in faith. It is Jesus who does this work in His people through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is his agenda and His timing that we are seeking in small group meetings. He will use the gifts of the Spirit when individuals are willing to be used as channels by Him to bring words to one another. A key moment is the end of the Word section when we break down into pairs or threes and pray for each other to apply the Bible study. The idea is to walk out different to how you arrived, having had an encounter with the living God.

**2. The key to leading a healthy meeting is reaching the 'point of edification'.**

This means:

- making sure that God is given space to move and change people's lives and
- encouraging all members of the group to have faith that he will do so.

**3. Word questions which lead to edification** are usually open questions which stimulate everyone to reflect on the biblical truth for their own lives. There are three questions which we should always have in the back of our minds when preparing, leading or evaluating the Word Section:

- What are the bible principles of the issue we are talking about?
- Has anybody experienced this working in the past? (testimony)
- Is there anyone going through this now so we can pray for them? – On many occasions people will feel more open to share their situation in a pair than with the whole group – so it is good to split into smaller groups to pray for each other most weeks.

**4. Creating community**

Perhaps the main factor that helps growing in depth to happen is when real community has been developed. The small group then becomes a place of encouragement and safety, where people can share openly about their struggles.

Without openness there can be no growth in depth. When group members are prepared to apply the word of God to real situations in their lives and use the gifts of the Spirit to minister to and pray for each other, then cell members will grow in maturity.

**5. What about people who are not comfortable with sharing their struggles with the cell?**

- A leader should model sharing by sharing their own real struggles with the small group. There may be occasions when you cannot do this because it would involve betraying a confidence – On these occasions, make sure you are in an accountable relationship with a mentor who can help you through the issue.
- If you are not able to model the sharing of your own difficulties and receive prayer from others for a season, step back from leadership for this time.

- If you notice, someone else in the small group is not receiving prayer or not feeling edified, seek to find the root of this.

## **6. Rubber bands and swimming pools**

People grow in discipleship when they are stretched/ challenged to the right degree both in seeking personal holiness and in offering service to others. Think of a rubber band under tension – neither floppy nor stretched to breaking point.

Think also of a swimming pool – some need a shallow end in which to learn to swim. Some need a deep end to challenge them. Some need something in between. Small groups are particularly good at offering the shallow end and deep end options – but you will need to work offering a full range of opportunities to stretch the different members - sometimes members will need other outlets in addition to small group meetings in which to be stretched and/ or mentored. Help them to find these. Leaders in the Suffolk Fresh Expressions Community can help too.

## Growing in God

This initiative is the result of the partnership of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich with Rural Ministries. It is open to Christians of any denomination or stream.

