

Report on the Opportunities to Connect issue (November 2009)

The continuing regulars from 6pm church met twice September 2009 to discuss the future of 6pm church. During the first forum, whilst many things were discussed, two particular issues were raised as areas of concern. These were music and the song play list, and the lack of opportunities to connect outside of Sunday nights. At the second forum, it was resolved to set up a survey to address the song likes/dislikes of the congregation to address the music issue. People were asked to volunteer to meet outside the forum to discuss the second issue. The rest of the time at the second forum was spent thinking and discussing the questions of "Why are we not growing?" and "Who are we trying to reach?"

There are many different perspectives on this issue. The goal of this paper is to generate discussion, not provide the definitive solution.

Craig has asked me to report back on a group discussion that took place in October 2009 after the two 6pm forums, and draw together the different ideas coming from 6 o'clockers about the Opportunities to connect issue.

Coming away from the group discussion and forums, it was clear to me that the basic goals of our activities and meeting together must be defined and specific, otherwise we will be working at cross-purposes. Two related, but different goals are: are we trying to have regulars connect with one another outside of church, or are we trying to reach out deliberately to friends who are not Christians? To attempt to address either goal, as we think about connecting more at 6pm church, there are two things that we can do:

- change our culture and mentality, or
- make structural changes.

Before suggesting and making any changes, it is important that we all value and maintain the things which are working at connecting people at 6pm church. It would seem appropriate to affirm and thank the people that help organise, lead, and participate in these events:

- informal dinners after church (the Vietnamese noodle crew)
- Home groups
- Hub dinners
- No fuss dinners
- Casual dinners outside of church.

These things were all identified, in the group discussion, that in many ways are working well.

Next year, in 2010, with the move of Home Groups back into homes an important question to ask would be: how can we maximise Home groups as a place for connecting? Perhaps one aspect of this happening would be Home group weekends away.

As has been happening from time to time since night church began, the group would like to approach half a dozen home owners to think about opening up their houses for supper on a Sunday night, in effect continuing church in a different location. There would be something good about this being informal and not

rostered, but like No Fuss dinners there would be advantages to letting people know that the suppers are on in advance.

There were many other suggestions about church sports teams, trivia teams, picnics, and church outings etc. We need to keep asking are these events focussed on reinforcing relationships within the church or connecting with outsiders. Whilst there is an important place for encouraging one another and strengthening relationships within the church, we need to keep in focus that a major identified weakness is that 6pm church is not growing by attracting non-Christians or outsiders.

Whilst structural changes are easier to implement, these will have minimal effect without cultural change. Changing our culture, attitude and mentality about connecting and growing is a much more daunting task, yet this is the change that Christ calls us to and in which God helps us. We need to continue to think about who is 6pm church for? What do we need to do in order to grow? (indeed, if we want it to grow?)

Discussion: