THE DISCIPLE MAKING RURAL CHURCH

Session One: A Parable of our Mission
Why does our rural church exist?

Session Two: Growing Leaves or Bearing Fruit?
What does God want to accomplish through our Church ministries?

Session Three: Leading Church Members to Maturity
How do we design activities that encourage people
to become fully mature and trained disciples?

Session Four: Becoming a Disciple Making Church
How to lead my people in becoming a disciple making church?
Welcome!!

We are delighted you have taken time to make an investment in your life and leadership by joining us at today’s event. Twice a year the Rural Church Pastors Network creates events for rural pastors that focus on both relevant church ministry matters and pastoral personal health and wellbeing. All events are designed by a team of seasoned and committed rural pastors who ensure each RCPN gathering offers a meaningful experience that is not only encouraging but can be applied to your life and your rural church setting.

Today’s theme focuses on The Disciple Making Rural Church and is designed to engage participants in discussions and exercises that help up discern where are church is at in its transformational journey.

Our Goals for the Day

• To provide pastors with a ‘day away experience’ from normal ministry routines & practices.
• To offer encouragement and support to pastors as they consider their current rural church setting and ministry demands
• To gain a fresh appreciation for the uniqueness of rural based ministry.
• Laughter and fellowship will permeate our gathering as we learn, eat and pray together.
• To harvest the great deal we can learn from each other… there is wisdom in the room – both lessons we have learned and mistakes made along the way!
• To encourage networking between rural pastors for continued contact and accountability.

Why Did You Come?

Take time to consider: As we gather today – what are your goals – why did you come – what are your personal and ministry needs?

__________________________________________________________

Website and Facebook

Visit our Website www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com where you will find...

• Free audio files to download offering insight and support related to the uniqueness of being a rural pastor.
• Download past RCPN event training resources to use with your church or local ministerial... How to Meaningfully Engage with your Community... How to Keep Balance Between Life and Ministry in a rural church setting.
• Find information on the next event planned for your area in May 2020
• Resources, Book Reviews and more!
• Let Us Know How We Can Pray for You!
• Friend us on Facebook at RuralChurchPastorsNetwork
Famous Last Words

Match the names with their ‘famous last word’ statements by putting names in spaces provided…. (answers appear on next page)

Henry Ford - Bob Hope - Billie Holiday - Bob Marley - Frank Sinatra - Steve Jobs
Thomas Edison - Leonardo da Vinci - Winston Churchill - Barry White

1. "I'm going to the bathroom to read." - Elvis Presley
2. “I’m losing it.”
3. “I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”
5. “I’ll sleep well tonight.”
6. "I should never have switched from Scotch to martinis." - Humphrey Bogart
7. “Leave me alone. I’m fine.”
8. “It’s very beautiful over there.”
9. “I’ll finally get to see Marilyn.” - Joe DiMaggio
10. “Don’t be in such a hurry.”
11. “I’m bored with it all.”
12. “Money can’t buy life.”
13. “Surprise me.”
14. “One last drink, please.” - Jack Daniels

While some of these so called ‘last words’ above might not have been the ones these famous people would have chosen to be associated with…. For the most part, the ‘last words’ someone speaks, knowing their specific chapter in life is concluding, are very significant. Whether entrusting property to family members, or exhorting siblings to love each other… in the heart of the one uttering their ‘last words’ there is deep emotion and desire for their words to be followed.

One of the greatest mysteries of all times is how the church and individual followers of Jesus have never worked out the last words of Jesus into their daily lives and church activities. Jesus said ‘All authority has been given me, therefore GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’

The command embedded in these words is to MAKE DISCIPLES. Yet our track record of leading others to spiritual maturity and on to spiritual multiplication would suggest we have forgotten the heart and words of Jesus, as he returned to his Father in heaven. To get more personal, the challenge we need to focus on is whether we have grown to full maturity and are now making disciples who make disciples.
In John 14 & 15 Jesus challenged his disciples and said:
… if you LOVE me you will obey my COMMANDS
… the one who follows my teaching is the one who LOVES me.
… you didn’t choose me, but I chose (and appointed) you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last
… this is to my Father’s glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This booklet walks leaders through an open discussion and reflection upon the local church’s commitment to, and fruitfulness in, obeying Jesus’ Great Commission to make disciples of all nations. Four sessions are provided for conversation, reflection and follow up in the local church.

Session One: A Parable of our Mission –
Why does our rural church exist?
Session Two: Growing Leaves or Bearing Fruit?
What does God want to accomplish through our Church ministries?
Session Three: Leading Church Members to Maturity
How does the rural church meet the needs of people through various stages of spiritual growth?
Session Four: Becoming a Disciple Making Church
How to lead my people in becoming a disciple making church?

A companion booklet, The Adventure of Disciple Making is also available from the RCPN Website for personal and group use. This resource looks at Jesus call to us personally, as disciples, to lives such lives that we leave a legacy of disciple makers who are committed to spiritual multiplication. Visit us a www.ruralchurchpastorsnetwork.com
Session One: A Parable of our Mission
Why does our rural church exist?

Someone once asked… if your church were to close today would any one miss it other than those who met for worship on the weekends, and programs in the week? If not, we have a problem! Consider the following parable and then consider questions related to the purpose of your church.

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur there was a once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves, they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost.

Many lives were saved by this wonderful little station, so that it became famous. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding areas, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews were trained. The little life-saving station grew.

Some of the new members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and so poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from the sea.

So they replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in an enlarged building. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they re-decorated it beautifully and furnished it as a sort of club.

Less of the members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions, so they hired life boat crews to do this work. The mission of life-saving was still given lip-service but most were too busy or lacked the necessary commitment to take part in the life-saving activities personally. About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boat loads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people.

They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin, and some spoke a strange language, and the beautiful new club was considerably messed up. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside. At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's life-saving activities because they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal life pattern of the club.

But some members insisted that life-saving was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a life-saving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. They did.
As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. They evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was founded. If you visit the seacoast today you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, only now most of the people drown.  

Author Unknown

This story illustrates the reality of human nature: when you ignore PURPOSE and MISSION, the greatest enterprise or endeavour ends up looking and feeling like more than a CLUB. Over the years this ‘parable’ has been used to consider the purpose and mission of our local church…

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Based on the story above, what unique parallels are evident when compared with the history and development of rural churches in general? To what extent do they possess a club mentality?

2. When looking at your own rural church – what similarities are evident based on the history of your church. Recall the initial reason your church commenced and the journey throughout the years to its current condition.

3. If a newcomer to your town or city were to attend and observe your church for a month, what would they conclude your primary purpose or mission is?

4. The purpose of Jesus’ coming was plain and simple. He was sent to redeem and reclaim those lost from God. Also, it was to train his followers (disciples) to be disciple makers. When Jesus said to his followers in John 20:21, Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you... How are these words (and those of the Great Commission) understood within the context of your church?

5. When was the last time you preached on Making Disciples/The Great Commission from your pulpit? When was the last time your leadership (elders) reviewed the purpose of your church in light of Jesus command to make disciples? What would be their response?
Session Two: Growing Leaves or Bearing Fruit

What does God want to accomplish through our Church ministries?

Jesus often used things around him, such as soil, seeds and trees as teaching points for expressing the values of the Kingdom of God to his disciples. Consider this story and reflect upon its truths in light of your own church ministry and the fruit it bears in making disciples.

Mark 11:11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. 12 The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. 13 Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. 14 Then he said to the tree, “May no one ever eat fruit from you again.” And his disciples heard him say it. 15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, 16 and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. 17 And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” 18 The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. 19 When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city. 20 In the morning, as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots.

Some info it’s good to know…

1. It is important to realize when it came to fig trees in the day of Jesus’ they grew leaves and bore fruit AT THE SAME TIME… therefore, if you found a tree in full leaf it should have also have fruit present at that time. If not, it was a ‘sick tree’ in giving a display of health while actually being ‘barren.’ It was on this basis that Jesus cursed it.
2. Understand that LEAVES are not bad, they are a vital and necessary part of the health of the tree, but no one ever confuses leaves with FRUIT!
3. When Jesus cursed the tree, the texts says ‘And His Disciples heard him say It.’ meaning this was a point of teaching they were to be aware of.
4. Excuse the sick humour but Jesus was speaking ‘Figuratively’ to the tree with his mind actually on the ‘leafy’ temple of Jerusalem he was about to go and set straight that morning … it was in this sense that Jesus entered the day spiritually HUNGRY.
Let’s Consider Your Church
What does God want to accomplish through the ministries of the local Church?

We are all busy people, and church calendars are crammed with all sorts of activities. But at the end of the day, or the close of another season of ministry, what evidence of disciple making fruit is evident as a result of all of our efforts and investment of funds? Consider the following questions and discuss them in light of this passage when it comes to the fruitfulness of your church in making disciples (leading people to spiritual maturity).

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. If church programs are likened to the ‘leaves’ on a tree, and evidence of disciple making growth is the ‘fruit’ produced by the tree, what is the condition and health of your tree (church) in these days?

2. What is the balance (connection) between leaves and fruit in your church? Is there an intentionality as to the purpose of your programs in producing the desired fruit of spiritual maturity? If so how?

3. To what extent have you (elders) developed an understanding of what a mature follower of Jesus looks like in your setting?

4. On the next page is a case study for you to work on related to how your church would embrace a new family into your fellowship, leading them on to spiritual maturity in the coming years. Complete this exercise and compare your strategy with others.

Paul says of Jesus…
He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.
Colossians 1:28
It’s one thing to have a church mission and list of programs ‘on paper.’ It is another thing to see it working functionally in ‘moving people’ along a relational church pathway to maturity in Christ and connectivity to the church family. The following scenario is presented with follow up questions to allow you to develop a ‘working knowledge and application of your church’s vision and mission’ related to Jesus’ commission to make disciples.

SCENARIO

Last weekend a family (parents in their late 30’s, 16 year old son, 12 year old daughter) arrived at your church worship service uninvited and unannounced. In casual conversation following worship they shared they had just moved into your community from another city where they attended a church at Christmas and Easter.

This weekend they will return to your church and, after worship, will share with the pastor they would like to come to your church regularly. They shared they feel something ‘is missing in life’ and want their kids to grow up with good morals.

QUESTIONS

As a leadership team, and based on the information shared about this new family who wants to come to your church:

1. Where would you like to see each member of this family in one year’s time related to church involvement/connectivity and spiritual formation? How about in two years time?
2. What processes/pathways are in place in your church so your desires for them actually occur and aren’t left to ‘good intentions?’ (The issue: ‘intentionality’ in bringing vision/mission to life)
3. How are your church ministries designed/configured to help you achieve your desires for this family?

Use the following page to answer your questions and sketch out your church programs in sequence of how they lead new people to eventual spiritual maturity
Session Three: Leading Church Members to Maturity
How do we design activities that encourage people to become fully mature and trained disciples?

One of the key principles of disciple making in the local church finds the experience feeling ‘relational’ rather than being ‘assimilated’ to become like everyone else, thereby losing their uniqueness in Jesus! The term ‘life on life’ discipleship refers to the experience of growing together in Christ, with mature believers helping raise the next generation of Christ followers.

Relational pathways that lead newcomers into relationship with others in the church and growing in their faith, is foundational for the local church to make disciples that make disciple

On a relational basis there are various aspects we can consider in understanding how God is drawing people to himself through relationships in the local church… Remember Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32)

I believe Jesus’ preferred method of drawing people to himself is through meaningful relational connections through His body, the local church.

To understand the progression of the manner in which Jesus draws people to himself, let’s consider five elements of relational connection…ATTRACTION - ASSOCIATION – ADOPTION – APPRENTICESHIP – APPROVAL. For each one, take time to consider what you personally, and your church (through intentional programming) is doing to help Jesus draw all people to himself…. Eventually seeing them become disciple makers themselves.

NOTE … you can refer back to the earlier exercise (Bringing church ministry to life) to assist complete the following:

**ATTRACTION**

Attraction involves all activities used to connect with people yet to be part of the body of Christ… this can include outreach events, personal invitations, websites and maintaining an attractive church property… On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (great) how would you rate your church? _____.

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ASSOCIATION

Association involves all activities used to develop more than a surface relationship with people, once an initial connection has been made with your faith community… this can include fellowship events, invitation for connection, coffee, meals, sharing each other’s stories in an intentional manner… etc. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (great) rate your church? _____.

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ADOPTION

Adoption is the ‘line that is crossed’ when people move from seeing themselves as ‘attending’ your church, to ‘belonging’ to your faith community. Adoption involves two decisions – one on the part of the church to ‘adopt’ the new person or family into their church relationally. The other involves the person or family who decide to adopt the church as their own church family. While most churches are good as association through their programs – very few have worked through an ‘Adoption Strategy’ that finds people ‘bonding to the body.’ Usually some sort of a face to face discussion needs to take place between church member/leader and newcomer. Understand at this point the newcomer may not have crossed the line of faith. Sometimes people have to ‘belong’ before they ‘believe.’ On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (great) rate your church on adoption? _____.

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APPRENTICE

Apprenticeship involves helping a new believer, or adopted believer, into a life of discipleship and involvement in the ministry of the local church. This could involve growth in knowledge of Scripture, prayer, spiritual gifts etc. It will also see the person ‘becoming active’ in their faith based on their gifts and the needs of the church and surrounding community. Apprenticeship has no time line set to it… but will result in the person becoming more mature in their faith to the point, one day they can lead another person to faith, maturity in Jesus. People need to ‘belong’ before they can ‘believe.’ They usually need to ‘belong’ and ‘believe’ before they can ‘become’… finding their full potential in Jesus. On a scale of 1 to 10 rate your church on apprenticeship? _____.

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APPROVAL

Approval occurs when an apprentice now shoulders the responsibility of being released in the church to disciple others and lead activities designed to repeat the cycle of attraction – association – adoption – apprenticeship – approval. Approval is displayed through ongoing training, encouragement and affirmation. Such approved people may be voted into leadership by the church body as they are viewed as mature and capable. On a scale of 1 to 10 rate your church on approval? _____.

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Session Four: Becoming a Disciple Making Church
How to lead my people in becoming a disciple making church?

When a church decides that it needs to check its progress, what are the criteria it must use to do so? For the small business or the large corporation there is an easy way to measure success by checking out the “bottom line”. They can determine whether or not they are making progress by seeing what their labor is producing relative to their goal, profitability.

But how does the local church measure its progress? We have a difficult time determining what the “bottom line” is since we are dealing with many intangible issues and with the hearts and lives of unique individuals whose progress cannot always be measured by objective standards. Yet we cannot ignore the need to evaluate and determine whether we are indeed making any progress simply because the task is somewhat subjective.

Since our goal is to grow to maturity in Jesus Christ personally and to introduce others to Him, it only makes sense that we should be able to ask ourselves some probing questions about the presence or absence of several marks of spiritual maturity.

The bottom line, when it comes to being a leader who considers themselves to be obediently following Jesus’ command to make disciples, is that there must be evidence of that obedience. Practically, if you aren’t living it personally, you can’t lead it in the church.

This is the sobering reality in today’s church. Leaders are not modelling a disciple making lifestyle and therefore the church reflects a similar disposition. We, ourselves, have fallen into the same ‘club’ mentality we are trying to keep our faith community out of. Our weekly schedule is full of keeping parishioners at peace with each other, leading worship and trying to balance the budget all at the same time.

Here are eight categories in which to ask ourselves how well we are measuring up to the standard to which we seek to attain as disciples of the Lord Jesus. Rate yourself in these areas in a season of personal reflection and honest admission.

**Satisfaction with Our Portion.** Have you learned to be content with the knowledge that the Lord Himself has promised to be your portion? It is extremely difficult to resist the constant barrage of influences around us telling to be more ambitious, to settle for nothing less than the best. Regarding our children, our homes, our jobs and in every other imaginable situation, we are flooded with the thought that what we have and who we are is not enough. When we have been given life in Jesus Christ, we can learn to be satisfied and rest in Him.

**Sensitivity to Sin.** Am I more aware of aspects of my character that are unworthy of Christ now than I was before? One of the most obvious evidences that we are growing to maturity in Christ is the extent to which we are aware of the presence of sin in our lives. The closer we get to Christ, the more His light exposes the areas darkened by sin. Therefore, we should be recognizing more areas of our lives which need to be changed to be more like Christ and become more sensitive to our sin.
**Servant’s Heart.** Do I have a heart to serve others and to love them as Christ does? Whenever we walk with Christ, the immediate impact upon our hearts is the presence of a servant’s heart in our Master. We cannot escape the fact that He came to serve and that to follow Him we must also develop the spirit and attitude of a servant. Maturity in the church will always be characterized by a servant’s heart.

**Scriptural Soundness.** Is what I believe based upon the teaching of the Word of God? The marriage of belief and practice is such an alien concept in our society that an editorial in a local paper some years ago expressed dismay that evangelical Christians were dangerous because they allowed their “religious beliefs” to influence their social and political thinking. Do we dare plead guilty? We better! Our beliefs must be biblically based and practically expressed.

**Submissive Spirit.** Am I willing to yield what I want for the sake of others? Until we find an attitude in our lives which willingly submits to others, we will not be able to function in the unity of the Spirit nor enjoy the bond of peace which maturity in Christ promises.

**Strategy for Non-believers.** Are we concerned enough about those who do not know Christ to invest ourselves in developing a strategy that introduce them to Him? We should always be looking for ways to share the good news of salvation in Christ with an ever-increasing circle of non-believers. Most of us tend to divest ourselves of most of our relationships with those who do not know Christ. We need to build up more regular contact with those who need to meet Him.

**Stewardship.** Am I growing in my understanding of the biblical truth that I am just a manager of the resources that God has entrusted to my care? Am I giving faithfully to the work of the body of Christ so that I can share in the blessing of knowing the joy of obedience? When a church is mature, its people are generous and faithful, often sacrificial, and seldom need to be reminded of their responsibility in the area of personal stewardship.

**Stable Prayer Life.** Is my personal prayer life growing and the content of my conversations with the Lord giving evidence of a deeper walk with Him? The depth and breadth of the prayer life of the body of Christ serves us well in determining something of the spiritual vitality and health of the congregation. Prayer must be an integral part of our personal spiritual lives which adds to the richness and depth of our corporate experience of prayer.

What’s the “bottom line?” If we want to be the kind of church that “measures up”, that is growing in maturity, why not ask ourselves these questions? As you can see, we are not what we once were, but we are not yet what we are going to be! Let’s press on toward the goal together!

If you are working through this resource with others, enter into a time of sharing and prayer based on these areas, and anything else that has caused you to ponder the reality of the local church you call home when it comes to obeying Jesus commission to make disciples.

**In conclusion:** What are three practical things you will do in the next month based on working through this resource?