

Midrash Summary

April 2008

The following is a summary of our April 2008 community Midrash meeting. Our Midrash meetings happen once a quarter. In these meetings we gather together to talk about issues that are of importance to our community life and mission together. If you have any questions about the topic of discussion, please feel free to contact one of our pastors or someone on the Ministry Leadership Team.

Conversation Summary:

At this Midrash we spent the evening discussing three main topics:

1. General Updates
2. Mission Giving
3. Discipleship

1. General Updates

God has been doing some awesome things through our community. Here are some quick thoughts..

Growth is good...

We have seen quite a number of new families and individuals taking part in our life together. This is awesome as we simply get to send more and more people out into neighborhoods, workplaces, homes and Starbucks' to be the hands, feet and voice of Jesus. This fits right into our goal to always be a sending church...

We still have a very, very generous community...

We shared that we are out-giving ourselves again! So far we are ahead of where we were at this time last year. This is awesome! This year we increased our budget in a few areas. The main area is that we are paying Gary a more fitting salary. We also made the choice to cover the health insurance of any of staff over 20 hours since our part-time model demands that they have abnormal second careers.

We are right on mission...

You have heard our mission over and over again. To be a community that acts as the hands and feet of Jesus and proclaims the message of Jesus in Feasterville, Bucks county, Philadelphia and the world. We believe that in order to do that we must be "training, connecting and empowering disciples of Jesus for participation in God's work in the world." The basic point is this, if want to be witnesses to the risen Messiah, we must intimately know Jesus and the story of Hope.

2. Mission Giving

As a church we are committed to giving away at least 10% of the gifts we receive toward causes outside our community. Over the last few months Kate Livingstone and a team of people

worked on developing a philosophy as to how we decide on where these gifts are given. Below are two philosophies that we developed as part of this team.

The Well's Philosophy of Generosity

We believe in living lifestyles of generosity. Our belief stems from our core value that we are loved by God and are called to love Him and love others. We believe God has supplied all our needs, entrusting us with the care of His creation. We believe in charitably and joyfully giving of ourselves, our talents, our weaknesses, our finances, and our time. We believe in a God whose vision is greater than our ability to ask or imagine — our desire is to join Him wherever He leads.

The Well's Philosophy of Giving

We believe God has ordained generous lifestyles. Throughout the Old Testament, ten percent of an individual or community's income was set aside and given to God, the Giver of all good things. As New Testament believers, we are called to give cheerfully and generously. At The Well, our desire is to continue the traditional practice of tithing by giving ten percent of our yearly budget to organizations, individuals, places, and other external endeavors which reflect our mission and vision to further take part in being the hands and feet of Jesus to Feasterville, Bucks County, Philadelphia, and the World.

3. Discipleship

We sent out the church report card last week and it was clear that we have the most room to grow in the area of discipleship. Of course, we will always have room to grow in our four values of Justice, Locality, Unity and Discipleship but we decided to take the evening and focus specifically on discipleship.

We broke this discussion down into five basic discipleship areas:

- Spiritual Friendships
- Small Groups
- Personal Disciplines
- Biblical Education
- Other

We split into five different groups and in the following section you will find summaries of each of the discussions. We encourage you to read through these and try and see where you need to grow and where you would have fun helping our community grow. If you have further thoughts or ideas please contact one of the pastors.

Spiritual Friendships

We discussed several aspects. One person shared a bit about what this has looked like in his life. Another was beautifully transparent. She shared how she has been here for 2 years and has yet to build any relationships let alone soul level friends. She made of point of telling us that she wanted to come to this midrash for the express purpose of

telling us this! That took some serious strength. One person also shared that it has not been easy to build deep relationships of this nature.

To a person, we agreed that this is a vital piece of community. We also came to the conclusion that *programmed* Spiritual Friendships do not sound attractive and that past experience in this has been negative. We concluded that in order to foster a culture of discipleship in this area, we need to be hearing it from the leadership and we need to be seeking and perpetuating it on a personal level. And hearing it from leadership in the form of experience and teaching is important. Every person anxious to see this grow.

What Next: 1) We need to talk about this from the front more often. 2) We need to all develop and understanding that spiritual friendships are a vital part of a life of discipleship. 3) We all need to simply start doing it and sharing with life with each other.

Small Groups

This was the smallest of the groups and appropriately so! This group talked a bit about the nature of small groups and what works and what doesn't in a small group setting. The main thing that came out was that small groups are good but are only as a part of the spiritual formation of a person and community. The way we have approached small groups has worked well for us as a community. This has been that when there is a need for a certain type of small group should we worry about starting them. These might be location based, study based, life stage based, need based, etc. Often these small groups have a life span and that is okay also. Right now we have a few small groups that are functioning and we are always on the lookout for others that might need to or be able to start. We agreed that its best to put the responsibility on both the leadership and the community start these groups.

What Next: We need to constantly encourage and look for types of groups (short term or longer term) that would be helpful for the community)

Education

The education group discussed the need for a holistic view of education, where the new believer could receive basic instruction, the mature believer could receive substantive teaching, and education could be used as outreach, offering opportunities for discussion with non-believers. There was a desire within the group to be creative, so as not to let education be a compartmentalized part of our "church life." To this end, education does not need to happen on Sunday mornings or in traditional education formats, but can happen in different times, places, and formats. The overall goal of education at the Well should be education, not indoctrination. Our primary goal is not to bring people to uniform beliefs about doctrine, but to empower people to live their lives more fully for God. We invite everyone to pursue and produce ideas as to how this might happen more effectively in our community.

What's Next: This is being worked out by those passionate about this. If you are, help us work out some first steps.

Personal Disciplines

This group met and discussed a lot of different ways that the personal disciplines are important and addressed some different approaches such as: book studies on personal disciplines, sharing Sundays (sharing personal stories), other accountability groups, community prayer book, disciplines give us the glasses through which to see/interpret the world and the rest of the Christian life - they help us know truth, more personal sharing in service, personal experiences not complete until they are shared.

The big question they asked is this: how do we make personal disciplines more relational?

What's next: Do you have a passion for seeing our community engage in personal disciplines more? If you do, please contact someone on the Ministry Leadership Team

The Other Group

The Other Group got together and discussed the nebulous parts of Discipleship. In typical otherness fashion, this led to shared stories about life experiences, contemporary expectations of Discipleship, creative outlets of worship, and various other things. We talked about how "Other" aspects of Discipleship (or whatever it was that we actually began discussing) included things like creative outlets in music, art, fashion, etc.; Alternative Worship Services (i.e. 24-Hour Prayer, Good Friday Services, prayer labyrinths, etc.); movie groups; sports outings; and a myriad of other things (we didn't want to limit ourselves). We also concluded that a beautiful aspect of following God (Discipleship -- as we viewed it) is through stories. We shared how we have experienced God through works of fiction and through writing. We also said that reading and writing in the context of community, greatly enriches these experiences. Therefore, we decided we would like to form our own Algonquin Round Table of sorts. We are introducing a group that will get together on Sundays after church. For a period of time we will read a book together and discuss it, for a different period of time we will write memoirs and compile a compendium of our work, and then for each subsequent period of time we will designate an Other-type endeavor of our collective choosing. All "Other-minded" types are welcome!

What's next? There will be a small group started around the topic of fiction and writing.