

Workers' Group

Working Paper

Workers' Group Strategic Plan 2009

April 2009¹

Abstract

This document sets out strategic plan for Workers' Group as at 2009.

The strategic plan revolves around Workers' Group's strategic goals. These goals, in place since 2009, are:

- reflect the heavenly reality more and more by listening and responding to God's word;
- grow in godliness in the household of God; and
- proclaim the gospel, thereby serving others and edifying the body of Christ.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Theological Framework

Small group as an *assembly*

Small group as a *household*

Small group as an *association*

Challenges of Ministering to Adult Workers

Lots of changes as young workers progress through different life stages.

"Baggage" crowds out gospel work.

Entrenched views mean it's harder to "unlearn" things.

Do we have non-Christian friends?

Group meetings become routine.

Changes we see in the Medium Term

Crossfire matures and migrates to Workers' Group

EDJ matures and advisers scale back their activities

People start families

Our Plan

Overview

Our "loose-tight" approach to our groups

Have I missed anything?

¹ See Revision History for further details.

Introduction

1. This document sets out the strategic plan for Workers' Group as at 2009. The thinking behind this strategic plan has been developed over a number of years, and presented in a number of different ways, but this is the first time that it has been put together as a single document.
2. The structure of this document is as follows. Firstly, we will examine the theological framework for Christian gatherings, of which the concept of small groups is a manifestation. Second, we will look at the unique challenges facing ministry to adult workers. Thirdly, we discuss the known developments for ministry in Workers' Group over the medium term. Finally, we will discuss our goals, and how we are going to achieve them.
3. This plan assumes that Workers' Group will remain primarily a collection of small groups. These plans may need to change if the structure of Workers' Group changes.

Theological Framework

4. This section sets out the theological framework for Christian gatherings. It examines three perspectives provided by the Scriptures on these gatherings.
5. It was first presented in 2006 as part of the preparation for the 2007 small groups.

Small group as an *assembly*

6. The Scriptures view Christian meetings as a manifestation of the heavenly assembly (*ecclesia*). The writer to the Hebrews expresses this as such.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the **assembly** of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." This phrase, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Therefore **let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken**, and thus **let us offer to God acceptable worship**, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.—Hebrews 12:18–29 (emphasis added)

7. This passage occurs in the second half of Hebrews 12. In Hebrews 11 the writer provided numerous examples of faithful people in the Old Testament. These, we are told, are witnesses to encourage us to run with endurance, looking to Jesus as the founder and perfecter of our faith. Thus we are to lay aside our sin, which hinders us from the race, and to endure hardship as discipline.
8. The reason for this exhortation is that we are now “assembled” at a better “mountain”. The assembly of the Israelites at Mt Sinai, where they met God, turned out to be only a shadow. The heavenly reality is that we as God’s people, have come to and assembled at the heavenly mountain, where now we meet God.
9. And so we are encouraged not be like the Israelites, who did not listen to God’s Word and were punished accordingly. Rather, we are not to refuse him who is speaking, and we are to be thankful for God’s gathering us on his mountain, and to offer acceptable worship to God.
10. At this stage, this assembly, of all God’s people in heaven, is a spiritual one and is unseen. However, a day will come when this assembly will occur physically in heaven, when God’s purposes are fulfilled. Nevertheless, we reflect this heavenly reality on earth as we meet as God’s people, including in a small group.
11. And so, in our small groups we should aim to **reflect the heavenly reality more and more by listening and responding to God’s word.**

Small group as a household

12. The Scriptures sometimes describes Christian meetings, particularly those which occur on a regular basis, as a household. An example of this comes from 1 Timothy 3:14–16 (emphasis added):

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the **household** of God, [*behaviour within*] which is the **church [assembly] of the living God**, a pillar and buttress of the truth. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

13. In 1 Timothy, Paul is giving instructions to Timothy, a leader of Christians in Ephesus. The instructions relate to how Timothy should lead the gathering of Christians in that city, and what he should teach to the Christians there.

14. The letter mainly deals with sound doctrine and the orderliness in all aspects of human behaviour. The verses above appear in the middle of the letter.
15. Here, Christians assembling regularly are described as forming the "household of God". The household is to be characterised by godly behaviour, which again is one of the major themes of the letter.
16. Thus our small groups should also aim to **grow in godliness in the household of God.**

Small group as an *association*

17. The third perspective relates to the way Christians are to use the gifts apportioned to them by Christ. Ephesians 4:1–16 is an important passage on the issue of gifts (emphasis added):

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But **grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.** Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

18. Paul has just explained in chapter 2 the work of salvation.² We were saved by grace in order to do good works which God has prepared in advance for us to do.
19. We are thus encouraged to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we have received. Part of this involves maintaining unity in the Spirit. This is based on unity in the Godhead, but nevertheless grace is apportioned to different people for the edification of the body as a whole. That is, Jesus gave different people different gifts which are to be exercised for the common good.³
20. These gifts are “Word gifts”, including apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. The common good is the edification of the body, so that everyone may attain to maturity, and thus would stand firm in the hazardous spiritual environment.
21. Because of the different gifts that different people have, from time to time it is better to do some of these things together rather than individually. While using them in this way are not instances of “Christian meetings”, small groups, as a group of like-minded people, provide an opportunity for members to exercise these gifts for the common good.
22. And so our small groups should aim to **proclaim the gospel, thereby serving others and edifying the body of Christ.**

Challenges of Ministering to Adult Workers

23. This section sets out some of the unique challenges when ministering to adult workers. This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Lots of changes as young workers progress through different life stages.

24. On graduating from higher education (such as university or vocational education), young workers go through many different changes very rapidly. These changes include:
 - (a) starting in a first job;
 - (b) dealing with a significantly increased income, relative to the past;
 - (c) making substantially larger purchases (car, house, mortgage);
 - (d) managing more complex relationships with both Christians and non-Christians in many more contexts (e.g. at work);
 - (e) getting married;
 - (f) moving out of home, potentially to a faraway location; and
 - (g) starting a family.
25. Young workers face a much different and complex environment compared with what they have experienced in the past. The protection provided by family

² Chapter 3, Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, is a (worthy) digression from the main argument.

³ Notice nowhere in the passage does the word “gift” imply it is something a person is good at. A gift is simply something apportioned by Jesus to an individual.

members, close friends and other Christians declines as workers head out to work, usually a mainly non-Christian environment, and as they are seen to mature.

26. Young workers may be confused or overwhelmed by all the changes, as they struggle to learn how to deal with them.
27. The risk is that given all these changes young workers may be “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Ephesians 4:14). The danger is that some will not stand in the faith and fall.
28. Our small groups must **encourage everyone to stand firm and run the race to the very end, despite all the changes and confusion.**

“Baggage” crowds out gospel work.

29. Along with the changes in life stage come the “baggage” which diminishes the opportunities for young workers to serve and be served in gospel work.
30. Young workers have much less time to engage in gospel work. A typical working week of 15–20 hours for students suddenly increases to 35–45 as they head out into the workforce (and more in certain industries). Working hours are increasing due to management or work demands and an economic environment not conducive to hiring extra staff. People come home from work tired and struggle to find the energy to minister. Weekends and holidays become precious and are used for rest or for other commitments.
31. Young workers have more things to worry about, which crowds out gospel work. Workers now have to worry about their work, their house, their mortgage and looking after family and other relationships. Prioritisation becomes important, and too often developing one’s relationship with God and serving others are placed lower down the list.
32. The risk is the Word is choked by “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22). The danger is that, having been deprived of nourishment, some will go backwards rather than forwards in their walk with God.
33. We need to so lead our small groups that **we prioritise our time and effort in a godly fashion.** This needs to start from our leaders.

Entrenched views mean it’s harder to “unlearn” things.

34. God uses his Word to challenge our:
 - (a) thoughts (is my understanding of God correct?); and
 - (b) actions (do my actions reflect the correct understanding of God?).
35. As we age, our views on things become more entrenched. We become more stubborn. The incorrect elements of our theology become more difficult to change. We struggle more to recognise our sinful habits and behaviours and to change them.
36. The risk is that growth in godliness and spiritual maturity will stall. Our Bible studies become academic exercises or social excursions and do not lead to real change.

37. As a result, we need to **model godly behaviour to each other and pray that God would change us**, for we certainly cannot do it ourselves.

Do we have non-Christian friends?

38. Many people in Workers' Group have been Christians since their teenage or university years. Long-term Christians' social network tends to naturally narrow to other Christians. This creates difficulties when trying to develop relationships with non-Christians to bring them to Christ.
39. The main source of non-Christians for many in Workers' Group would be through the workplace. However, friends in the workplace may not necessarily:
- (a) live in the same area; or
 - (b) be comfortable in attending a mainly Chinese church.
40. This is challenging, and there are no easy solutions.

Group meetings become routine.

41. In 2009, Workers' Group would have been around for about 5 years. Many of us would have been attending small groups for a substantial portion of these 5 years. Groups in 2009 are largely unchanged from 2008.
42. There is a risk that we would become complacent, placing small group attendance as just another routine. Our commitment and our relationships may become shallow. We may merely turn up to our small group meetings and answer Bible study questions. The danger is that our groups become ritualistic rather than reflecting the great heavenly assembly of which we are a part.
43. We need to **encourage everyone in our groups to take part in each other's lives**. Our group leaders act as facilitators to encourage everyone to participate in running our groups. Sometimes our leaders will provide "gentle pushes" to allow everyone to discover their gifts and use them to edify everyone.

Changes we see in the Medium Term

Crossfire matures and migrates to Workers' Group

44. Over the next few years the bulk of those in Crossfire (the university group) will graduate and join the workforce. There will be a steady stream of members moving from Crossfire into Workers' Group.
45. Over time, Workers' Group will expand to include the current members of Crossfire. As with the English Ministry's plans for youth ministry groups, Crossfire will then be closed.
46. This will entail added around 3–4 additional groups to the Workers' Group system. The challenge are:
- (a) finding and training appropriate leaders for these additional groups;
 - (b) finding the resources to coordinate the additional groups.

EDJ matures and advisers scale back their activities

- 47. In the same way, EDJ (the senior high school group) members will slowly graduate from high school and enter university. Through God's work over a long period of time, the bulk of EDJ members will grow to such a point that they are self-sufficient in running the group.
- 48. This means that the current EDJ advisers are likely to scale back their involvement in EDJ so that the group's own leaders may take on more responsibilities.
- 49. This presents opportunities for these resources to be "redeployed" into Workers' Group.

People start families

- 50. In 2009 there will be a handful of married couples in Workers' Groups. In the medium term some of these couples will start families, and thus begin their next stage in life.
- 51. Having children will be consequential effects on Workers' Groups. For example, couples with children are likely to find it difficult to meet on weeknights. As a result, alternative meeting times may need to be found.
- 52. We will need to be mindful when composing small groups over the medium term that it may be useful for those with families to be together in one group.⁴

Our Plan

Overview

- 53. Our plan can be summarised in the following diagram:

Perspective	ASSEMBLY	HOUSEHOLD	ASSOCIATION
Goal	Reflect the heavenly reality more and more by listening and responding to God's word	Grow in godliness in the household of God	Proclaim the gospel, thereby serving others and edifying the body of Christ
Priorities for our groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proclaim the whole counsel of God • Challenge the secular worldview • Pray in response to God's word 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model godly behaviour in our groups, starting with our leaders • Develop relationships in our groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage "ministry of the pew", corporately as well as individually • Encourage and "gently push" ourselves to discover our gifts and use them for the benefit of others
Priorities for our coordinators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build up our leaders in maturity in Christ • Seek and train a new generation of leaders • Be strategic in the way we divide groups • Work with Crossfire leaders to plan for the transition into Workers' Group 		

⁴ Interestingly, this hails back to the establishment of the Church in the late 1980s. One of the first "fellowship groups" of the Church is the Families Group.

54. Under each of our goals there is a small list of priorities for our groups. I would guess that none of these are surprising, but nevertheless helpful to spell out.
55. Underneath that are some priorities for our coordinates, i.e. the part which coordinates between the groups and holds them together. These are things which groups cannot do by themselves.
56. The plan is intentionally ambitious. In the past I have made the mistake of having too low expectations. We should trust that God will change his people to become more like Jesus.

Our “loose-tight” approach to our groups

57. We adopt a “loose-tight” approach to our groups.⁵ We set boundaries—a set of overarching goals and expectations—for our groups, which are set out in this plan. Group leaders and the groups themselves have the discretion to operate within those boundaries.
58. As a result, our groups may come up with different ways of working towards these aims.

Have I missed anything?

59. This plan is an initial draft. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please feel free to contact me.

⁵ The terminology is courtesy of Macquarie Group Limited.

Status of this Document

This document is a working paper. Suggestions for improvements are welcome.
Distribution of this document is unlimited.

Author's Contact

Kelvin Mo is responsible for the comments on this paper. He can be contacted by the usual means.

Revision History

Version	Date	By	Comments
1.0	30/01/2009	Kelvin Mo	Initial revision
2.0	02/04/2009	Kelvin Mo	Version after initial feedback