



GC2 equipper

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"Come, follow me."

Dear participant in ministry with Jesus,

The gospel tells us that God, in Jesus, has reconciled to himself all people (Rom. 5:10), adopting them as his beloved children (Eph. 1:5). It also tells us that the ascended "man" Jesus, as the "one mediator between God and men" (1Tim. 2:5-6), is relating in the Spirit with each of God's children. Jesus sends the Spirit to call and gift the church to share in his relating with believers and non-believers—within the church and out in the community.

In this issue of *GC2 equipper*, we explore two biblically informed and culturally effective steps that congregations may take to share in Jesus' relating with unchurched people in the community near the congregation's place of meeting.

The first step is to identify and connect with a **focus group** of unchurched people (see page two). The second step is to join with the Spirit in the **assimilation** of people from the focus group into the loving fellowship of the church where they may grow as disciples of Jesus (see page three).

We pray that this information is helpful to your congregation as it grows deeper in experiencing and expressing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14).

In his service,
Ted Johnston

P.S. Please share with others the following announcement:

GCI-USA Church Administration and Development is pleased to announce the launch of **Trinitarian Worship**—a blog for discussing how trinitarian theology undergirds and shapes the worship ministries of the church. This blog will be of particular interest to worship directors and leaders, pastors, musicians, technicians—all who are involved in planning and facilitating the worship of the church. We invite you to join the discussion at <http://trinitarianworship.blogspot.com/>.

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Connecting with a focus group in your community

Is your congregation hearing the Holy Spirit's call to join with Jesus in making disciples within the community near where you meet? If so, how do you respond? An appropriate first step is to discern what Jesus is doing within the community, and then seek to join him there.

Of course, we cannot participate in *all* that Jesus is doing—thus the need to connect with a particular **focus group** within the community. This is a topic for prayer and time spent within the community.

One pastor sought to identify a focus group by gathering with a few mission-minded members every Saturday morning for a couple of months at a Starbucks near the church meeting hall. Their purpose was to observe and to listen: What is happening in the community? What are people talking about? Is there spiritual interest? What do we sense the Spirit saying concerning these people and their needs? The issue here is one of *spiritual discernment*.



Reaching out to a focus group through a food bank ministry

Let's say you sense God calling you to connect with under-advantaged families in the nearby community. The next step is to identify the needs of that group and the resources the community has available to help them. A good step in that direction is for a few members to survey the focus group and related community resources. The survey would typically include interviewing community leaders (mayor, police, social workers, school administrators and teachers, recreation leaders, etc.). The goal is not merely to *gather information* (though that is important) but to *build alliances*—connecting with people who already are devoted to helping your focus group. You may find that some of these alliances turn into fruitful discipling opportunities with people already involved in serving the focus group.

The next step is for church leaders to ask, what resources do we as a congregation have that we can offer to assist other community groups in serving our focus group? Maybe a school serving the focus group needs help with after-school mentoring of disadvantaged kids. Maybe we have some retired teachers who could help on behalf of the congregation. Note that we are not asking people in the focus group to come to us—**we are going to them**—joining with Jesus and with other people who are already ministering to the focus group.

We may then have opportunity to invite others in the community to join in serving the focus group with us. Perhaps it seems odd to invite people to become *ministers* before becoming *believers*. But isn't that what Jesus did? He invited his disciples to be with him; he then included them in his ministry; and over time, they came to know and trust him. The same thing is happening today, and it can happen in your congregation as you follow the Spirit forward into Jesus' mission and invite others to be with you.

As you build relationships within a focus group, it may be that the Spirit will lead you to relocate to be in closer proximity with that group—or to make other changes in how you “do church.” These changes are often challenging, but you can trust the Spirit to guide and to provide resources as you seek to join Jesus in his ongoing ministry—both within the church and within the nearby non-churched community.

Related resources:

- *From the Cornfields to the City*, a *Christian Odyssey* article describing the re-missioning of a GCI-USA congregation (pictured above). See <http://www.christianodyssey.com/church/cornfields.htm>.
- *Compassion by Design* offers helpful resources related to identifying and connecting with a focus group. See <http://compassionbydesign.com/>.
- An article by Ed Stetzer at <http://buildingchurchleaders.com/articles/2009/discerningcalltoministry.html>
- *Positioning for Mission with Jesus*, a GCI-ministry development team workshop that addresses the issues discussed here. See <http://www.wcg.org/MinDev/events.htm>.

Assimilating people from the focus group

As we join Jesus in his relating in the Holy Spirit with people within our focus group, we often will have opportunity to assist some who are responding to Jesus. We refer to this assistance as “assimilation.” It’s not about high-pressure sales, or predatory church-growth tactics—and it’s certainly not like the top picture below (no offense Star Trek fans, but God *never* uses coercion to entrap people in a mindless religious “Borg”). Rather, assimilation is about journeying with people who, in the exercise of their God-given freedom, are responding to the Spirit’s lead into a deeper experience of Jesus’ love and life.

Effective assimilation meets people where they are and provides helpful and accessible means to take “next steps” with Jesus. This journey has several steps: non-believer to believer, believer to worker, worker to leader, and leader to multiplier. While the steps are clear, a word of caution is in order: Not every person encounters them in the same order or at the same speed. Some begin as workers before becoming believers. Others become workers but not leaders. Therefore, we remain *flexible*—aware of the general nature of the journey, and always seeking to provide readily accessible support and equipping along the way.

The assimilation challenge leads congregations to ask several related questions:

- Do we have a means for connecting with *non-believers* in our focus group?
- Do we have a means to help answer their questions and their concerns?
- Do we have a means for nurturing *new believers* (such as having an “exploring the Christian faith” class or a one-on-one discipling program)?
- Do we have a means to help *growing believers* identify their call to ministry with Jesus (such as a class that examines Christian ministry and related topics like spiritual gifting, relationship style, personal interests and experiences)?
- Do we have a team-based ministry structure that readily incorporates *emerging workers and leaders* into ministry?
- Do we have programs that equip these people to live out their calling? Do we have strategies and flexible structures that make “room” for them by multiplying ministries and congregations?

These are challenging, yet vital questions for any congregation. They speak to how we position as communities of faith to participate with Jesus in the ministry that he is doing to invite non-believers into a journey of first becoming and then developing as his disciples. As we seek to participate, we are mindful that it is Jesus’ own ministry—he is *responsible*, and we trust in and rely on him. However, we also know that he invites us into active and focused participation that is responsive to his Spirit’s call to join with Jesus in what he is doing both within the congregation and nearby within the community.

Related resources:

- Various GCI articles concerning the church and its work: <http://www.wcg.org/lit/church/ministry/>
- A helpful article by David Durey on the topic of assimilation: <http://intentionaldiscipleship.com/images/4474/pdf/Assimilation%20Study%20Article.pdf>
- GCI, Ministry Development *assimilation workshop*: <http://www.wcg.org/MinDev/events.htm>
- GCI-GenMin *Servants Passage and Journey with the Master* programs that help of all ages discover their ministry calling: <http://genmin.wcg.org/leadershipministries.htm>
- GCI-CMM *Church Next Training* that addresses assimilating people from a focus group: <http://cmm.wcg.org/Events/TrainingWorkshops/ChurchNextTrainingIntensive/tabid/64/Default.aspx>

Not this:



“You have been assimilated into the Borg—resistance is futile!”

But this:



“Let’s follow Jesus together.”