



MC Member Movement

Missional Community Leader Guidance

Introduction

How can we better shepherd our people when they pursue moving to a different MC? How can we be loving and understanding while also being faithful to lead people into situations where they can grow - even if that might mean asking them to stay in an MC that they have expressed a desire to move out of? What factors should we consider as appropriate for moving to another MC? Is there a more faithful process for evaluating this?

These questions frequent our minds as we lead people within the context of our Missional Communities. The problem that we face is that often these situations are nuanced, existing within various circumstances and emotions on the part of the individual or family that is trying to switch MCs.

So, how can we proceed together with love and Biblical intent for the benefit of our people? Answering this question is the expressed purpose of this document.

The Challenge

The specific situation that we are addressing in this guide is the somewhat regular practice of members of our spiritual family desiring to move from one Missional Community to another for a variety of reasons. One of the challenges with this issue is that, frequently, the reasons for this change are unclear, confusing, or not in the best interest of the discipleship growth of the individual.

Biblical Convictions

In order to create a better framework for shepherding our people through these challenges, it is important that we be unified around ¹ the proper biblical principles that should inform us and also ² some practical steps that we can follow to better align ourselves collectively around the Biblical principles.

Missional Communities Are The Practical Context For Discipleship

Of first importance in addressing this issue is to remind ourselves of the purpose of our missional communities. It is our belief and conviction that we have been ultimately charged with equipping a group of people (local church) to increasingly grow in relationship and work with God. We believe that this is what is meant by the word "discipleship." It is our desire that our missional communities be practical contexts where every believer has a deepening opportunity to grow in relationship with God and other believers, and to serve His mission in the spheres of influence that they have.

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ 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.

Due to this core conviction, we want to strive to make decisions and lead MCs to not become Christian social clubs, activity groups, or peer groups. Being social, having friends, and enjoying life with peers are not bad things and should be pursued within the broader context of our entire spiritual family, but these are not the expressed purpose of an MC.

Missional Communities Are Family Contexts

It is crucial to believe and maintain a commitment to see MCs as the most basic real-life, everyday context for spiritual family life. Being in the family of God is not an ideal only, it is meant to be a living reality that includes, at times, opportunities to work through relational challenges.

Discipleship Is Both A Leading And A Following Institution

If we believe and desire for MCs to be primary contexts of Biblical discipleship for our people, it is important that they are led in such a way that is consistent with the Biblical principles concerning discipleship.

The most basic orientation of any believer in discipleship is that of teacher-student. We suggest, from the standpoint of both biblical example and explicit teaching, there is no discipleship without the presence of this teacher-student orientation.

Matthew 4:19

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."

1 Corinthians 11:1

Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

This being the case, the Biblical mandate for the teacher-student orientation informs us of what should be the basic culture of Missional Communities. We desire to be fully in step with God's discipleship design: establishing and maintaining MC cultures that provide the best opportunity for members to embrace their necessary posture of being "students" of Jesus by being students of more mature believers.

Simply stated, we believe that MC Leaders must embrace a role of "teacher" and provide the best context for their members to be "students" of Jesus.

Discipleship Is Primarily Informed By The Equipping Gifts

A key Biblical conviction that we also hold is that believers must be *equipped*. Being a "student" of Jesus has a clear end game - being collectively formed into the likeness of Jesus in order to collectively work eternally *for* and *with* Jesus. This is equipping.

Within our previously discussed *student-teacher orientation*, we believe that God desires the equipping gifts to be exercised as the primary means of maturing younger believers. These are the gifts that are to primarily animate the ministry of an MC Leader.

Ephesians 4:11-16

¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry...

Students in the discipleship design of God need teachers who are functioning in the way of these gifts in order to grow, mature, and be equipped to be sent out and do the same for others.

- *Apostle* - students need to observe and learn of God's mission, and then be sent to go to the unreached places of the world, whether near or far.
- *Prophet* - students need to observe and learn from those who exhort them to listen and obey the word of God.
- *Evangelist* - students need to observe and learn from those who clearly communicate the non-negotiable gospel of grace.
- *Shepherd* - students need to observe and learn from those who carefully and intentionally guide them to the truth that they need to know and follow at key points in their lives.

- *Teacher* - students need to observe and learn from those who teach them the meaning of the Bible, how they can study the Bible, and how they can teach others.

Satan Works Against Discipleship

The Biblical Story informs us, from the Garden of Eden to the dawn of the Eternal State, that God's mission exists within a powerful spiritual battle against Satan and his demons. The narrative compels us to take this adversary seriously, understanding his methods and his end game. He seeks the destruction of God's people in every way, beginning with spiritual destruction and ending with physical destruction.

We soberly acknowledge the challenge of this battle that we all face as we pursue God's discipleship design in our MCs. We do not minister in freedom from opposition. What we often do not account for is the work of Satan against those we are discipling. This is a very real challenge that we face as leaders and we must be vigilant to keep shepherding our people with the honest understanding of Satan's relentless efforts to confuse and destroy them.

The Flesh Does Not Desire Discipleship

In honestly considering the challenges that we face in leading MCs with a discipleship culture, we must not only look at the challenges from without (Satan and the World System), but also the challenges from within (Flesh).

The narrative of Genesis 1-3 informs us of the fundamental sin that separated human kind from God, and also the new natural bent of humanity in their state of sin. Although the story of the Fall does seem to present simple obedience as the sin, the results of the Fall indicate that the disobedience was the result of the actual, fundamental sin - independence. Instead of choosing God and His influence in their circumstance, Adam and Eve chose to go independent of Him and prefer the voice of Satan. It was this choice of independence that became the fundamental disposition of the "flesh" of humans.

We understand this fleshly disposition of independence from God to be a powerful component in the life of the believer and in their discipleship. The battle with the flesh is very real and believers often struggle with its inclinations toward independence and self rule, especially as the dynamics of MC life begin to press in.

Spiritual Maturity Is Gained Through Difficulty

It is clear to us, from a Biblical perspective, that running from difficulty is not the path of growth for the believer. Although our culture often permits and even encourages this, we know that God teaches and matures us as we persist with Him through our challenging circumstances.

Romans 8:26

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

James 1:2-4

² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

This principle clearly applies to MC life as well. In the particular area of people desiring to switch MCs for reasons that are not most spiritually beneficial for them, we should not want to disengage and allow them to pursue a change that might be removing them from a challenging situation through which God actually desires to grow them.

Leadership In Discipleship Requires Decisions That Are Loving, Not Convenient

In summary, it is our conviction that God desires to fulfill His mission for people through the means of discipleship. This discipleship is for the redeeming and restoring of lost people, ultimately empowering them to walk with Him and serve His mission in their own right. This is accomplished through a teacher-student culture where students can see and hear the truth of God's Word in a way that equips them to live fruitfully for and with Him as well. This is a challenging proposition in a world where Satan is aimed at their destruction and their own fleshly disposition seeks independence from God.

Due to this real-life relational context that we are called to lead in (within our MCs), it is our responsibility and privilege to walk through life and to help properly shepherd our people in ways that are best for them. This will undoubtedly require us to provide loving and helpful direction if they seek to move to another MC for reasons that are not most beneficial to them.

Application

Understanding The Challenge

We offer this guide due to the often experienced reality of MC members desiring to move to a different MC for various reasons. Apart from some obvious exceptions (listed below), a majority of the time an individual believer seeks to move to another MC for unbiblical or at least unhelpful reasons. Some of these reasons are:

- "I don't really connect with anyone."
- "There is no one here that is in my same place in life."
- "I don't feel like I have been given enough opportunities here."

- "It is hard for us to consistently attend the meetings."
- "My family just needs a change of scenery."
- "I've been gone for awhile, but now that I've come back I would like a new beginning."

It is our view that most of these reasons, albeit understandably hard, do not merit biblical reasons for leaving and joining another MC. Each of these situations has common reasoning. They all articulate challenging circumstances, informed by negative feelings, that lead to a *seemingly* "good" outcome - moving on to new circumstances in a new MC. The difficulty here is that root issues are often never realized or dealt with, thereby stunting the opportunity for genuine spiritual growth in hard circumstances. This is where leadership in God's discipleship design comes into play.

It is our firm conviction that truly loving our fellow brothers and sisters through hard times requires us to engage and lead them in ways that best serve their growth with God. This is precisely the kind of growth for which MCs are designed to provide a context. If we are to lead them well, then we must be convinced of the above stated Biblical principles and committed to leading our friends in ways that align them with those principles. Our aim in all of this is not unnecessary conflict, but authentic discipleship growth for every believer.

Obvious Exceptions

Before we discuss some shared steps that we can take to lead folks in these situations, we want to acknowledge a number of situations that would be reasonable factors for considering a change from one MC to another.

- *Work/School Schedule Conflict.* Oftentimes, uncontrollable changes take place in work schedules that fundamentally forbid all or the majority of a person's involvement in MC. If the MC and work schedules do indeed conflict, then this would be a reasonable scenario for a person to consider changing MCs. Simple inconvenience or lack of desire to sacrifice one's time to adjust for MC involvement is not what we are talking about here; we are addressing legitimate and complete schedule conflict.
- *Engagement/Marriage.* Oftentimes two MC members will begin a romantic relationship, and that relationship will move to the point of becoming engaged for marriage. Once a couple is engaged, a movement of the couple to one MC where they will begin to grow and invest together is not only appropriate, it is preferred. If two people are in a dating relationship, and are already members of separate MCs, it is both wise and advisable that they remain in their separate MCs so as to position each other for the prioritization of each person's spiritual relationship with God and not encourage spiritual codependency.
- *Strategic Discipleship.* There may be a few instances where a couple within one MC begins a counseling relationship with a couple from a different MC. As time goes on, it becomes apparent that long-term discipleship is needed for the benefit of the couple being counseled. Due to the reality of time constraints and the need for common rhythms, it may

be beneficial for the couple being counseled to move to the MC of the couple that is providing the counseling for them.

Practical Steps

As we consider all of these Biblical principles that are in step with God's design for discipleship, we want to outline a few practical steps that can be taken when we have members of our MCs that are desiring to switch to a different MC.

- *Be Aware.* MC Leaders need to be aware of the people in their MC and in other MCs. When we notice our own MC member beginning to habitually skip our MC functions, we must first take note and discuss this as an MC Leader Team. If we see members of another MC abruptly begin to attend our own MCs, we must first take note and discuss this as an MC Leader Team. It is on us, as leaders, to notice these patterns and to discuss them as a team. It is not helpful to overreact when it might be a unique circumstance that led someone to visit your MC gathering. These irregular types of attendance are no issue of concern at all. If the issue becomes regular, there is likely a reason for this and it needs addressed.
- *Step In.* As we recognize these growing patterns and advances toward a different MC, whether it is our own MC member or someone from another MC abruptly beginning to attend our own MC, we must discuss this with the individual. Because their reasons are often not Biblically informed, these individuals are most likely being led by emotion than truth. It is for this precise reason that God would have us step in and encourage them to think through their reasoning for their actions. This will take time to hear their story, discern the root causes, and begin to challenge them to think through Biblical principles about their situation. Although this will prove challenging and possibly even uncomfortable, this is exactly what is needed.
- *Be Unified.* As we walk through these situations with our members, we must strive to be unified in two important ways: 1) With the members themselves. We must be loving as we challenge them to live principally and not emotionally, but we must also understand their situation, relating to them in knowledge. Our aim is to help guide them to fruitful living in difficulty, not be domineering. 2) With the other MC Leaders. These situations often play out as people move from their current MC to another MC. This puts both teams of MC Leaders in a tough position. The most important thing to do is to work together as MC Leader teams to see the situation with clarity and collectively guide the individual through the situation. In practice, when we see someone from another MC begin to attend our own MC, we instigate a helpful conversation to ask questions and then direct them back to their current MC Leader Team to begin to discuss their situation, address their concerns, and guide them in a better direction.
- *Be Principled.* As we begin to discuss the situation and challenges of the individual who would like to switch MCs, we must be committed to see their situation in the truth of God's discipleship design. They will likely be emotional, but they still need guided to the

truth. We must listen well, affirm their concerns (not necessarily *agree* with their perspective, but at least affirm that we understand them), and then offer Biblical principles that they can understand and use to consider a more fruitful way forward for their growth. We must lovingly uncover their emotional responses and present God's better design to grow them through difficulty as they walk by faith with Him.

- *Be Loving And Clear.* We must remind ourselves as leaders that our charge is to love our members. Loving is always rooted in truth, and we must be clear about the truth as it pertains to their situation and their response. When people want to change MCs simply due to circumstances that are inconvenient or are rooted in their own inconsistency, we must love them enough to bring that to light for them. We must be clear in helping them see the truth of where they are and also the truth concerning how they can walk onward in maturity.
- *Be Gracious.* In all of these discussions and situations, we are committed to being faithful, loving, and **gracious**. We must remember that, as leaders, we also are weak people that are in need of loving input that is seasoned with grace. Let us commit to being careful and helpful, truthful and concerned. Let us move forward together in shared commitment to guide our people into the truth with grace being the unquestioned core of our motivation.

Appendix: High School Student Integration

Vision

One of the most challenging transitions in life is into adulthood. This is hard enough for an unbeliever, but a child of God faces even more challenges as they begin to think and walk on their own spiritual feet in this fallen world. Due to these challenges, we desire to provide a context for young adults to begin this process while still living at home and under the primary discipleship of their parents. We want to provide a safe place for them to step out on their own and grow in their own pursuit of discipleship within the family of God.

With this vision in mind, we desire to provide the opportunity for high school seniors to join their own MC apart from their parents. This is not meant to replace the discipleship influence of parents at this crucial time in their lives, but to work in unity with their parents to urge them in taking spiritual steps for their own growth and life moving forward. We view this as the first of many steps that young adults will surely need to take if they are to live eternally fruitful lives.

Process

In order to provide this opportunity to our high school seniors, we will outline a general process that we ask Deacons, MC Leaders, Parents, and the students to follow in order to go through this transition with clarity and care.

1. Parents and the high school students should be discussing and considering this opportunity during the junior year of their student.

- This is important to be challenging parents to consider this early in the life of their high school student.
 - They might be intimidated by this and need to see the principles behind it from a Biblical perspective if they are to desire to pursue.
 - Remember that the most important thing that we are looking for is the student themselves to be aware of their need and desire to pursue this as an “adult” decision for themselves.
2. Parents and their student should discuss this opportunity with their MC Leaders.
 - Parents might need encouraged to consider these discussions with their student.
 - MC Leaders should have conversations with parents to discuss the Biblical principles behind this potential change for their student.
 - MC Leaders should be careful not to discuss this with high school students unless the parents have been asked ahead of time.
 3. MC Leaders should prayerfully consider input and guidance that might help the student transition.
 - MC Leaders should ask the student if they know of other MC Leaders already, or at least those who they are interested in getting to know. This might be a helpful starting point.
 - MC Leaders should be aware that oftentimes a student’s motivation toward a specific MC might be more for “fun” or for relational opportunities that they think would be easier or “cool”. This is to be expected and is in fact an affirmation of the need to guide them into meaningful discipleship relationships and not entrust those decision solely to them. We must work together to guide them into the most beneficial opportunity for their spiritual growth.
 - MC Leaders should seek the input of the Deacon of MC Integration for further insight into possible MCs to be considered.
 4. MC Leaders and parents should help their student be introduced to the leaders of their new potential MC to discuss the new potential MC culture, rhythms, and expectations for joining.
 5. The student should make the transition to their new MC as soon as is appropriate (any time after the completion of their junior year of high school).

Integration

It is important that the MC Leaders of the new MC that the student is joining be prepared for their integration. Here are a few potential ideas and principles that might help MC Leaders integrate a new high school senior.

6. Cast a vision for your MC for the integrating of these new high school seniors.
7. Plan a fun hangout for your MC with the new student (don’t put them on the spot, but plan for fun activities that everyone can participate in)
8. Meet personally with the new student before they come to a gathering of the entire MC

9. Prepare to be welcoming and aware of the new student at their first MC gathering.