

# 1 THE CONNECTING LINK

## **Introduction to the unit *From Here to Community***

- Spend five minutes at the beginning of today's session highlighting the Introduction in the Learner's Guide that will describe the 12-week unit. See the suggested visual aid below in the shaded box..
- Read the first three paragraphs under Welcome.
- Use the visual aid to point out the three sections overall: sessions 1 – 4 look at the challenges that the individual Christian faces, 5 – 9 concentrate on the Christian community, and 10 – 12 on responses to outside opportunities.
- Note the seven parts of the journey that make up each session.
- Encourage full participation and commitment to the group as highlighted under "Commitment".
- Session 1 is an introductory session to help participants begin to think in new ways about how the Christian community can help us progress towards living more closely to Jesus' vision for our lives. This will be explored more thoroughly in later sessions.

### ***From Here to Community***

Welcome

Sessions 1 – 4 Individual

Sessions 5 – 9 Christian Community

Sessions 10 – 12 Responses to Outside Opportunities

Journey: Destination

Postcard

Food for the Journey

Encounters along the Way (true stories, readings)

Notes for the Travelogue

Food for the Journey

Re-entry (Reflection, Action, Digging Deeper) to read for next session.

Travel Guides

### **Pathway to the Destination for this session**

- Use pictures and stories to show connectedness and disconnectedness between our daily life and the ideal that Jesus taught, that is, to "love one another as I have loved you."
- Envision an ideal Christian community.
- Brainstorm on how our Christian community presently facilitates connectedness and on ideas for improvement. Consider a new personal commitment to the Christian community.
- Consider some thoughts on Christian community from a modern theologian.

### **Teaching Tips**

- Before the session begins, prepare the flipchart or marker board (like the shaded boxes in this guide) for the Introduction as well as for the First and Second Encounters. Record the discussion as it progresses.
- Practice reading aloud the Destination as well as the two paragraphs under "What is community?" in the Second Encounter, underlining the important concepts so that the listeners will be able to easily pick out the essential phrases.
- Before the session begins, choose two women to read the roles of Jane and Pam in the modern story and two other participants to be narrator and a disciple in the Biblical story and show them where it is located in the materials. Begin each session by reading the Destination aloud.

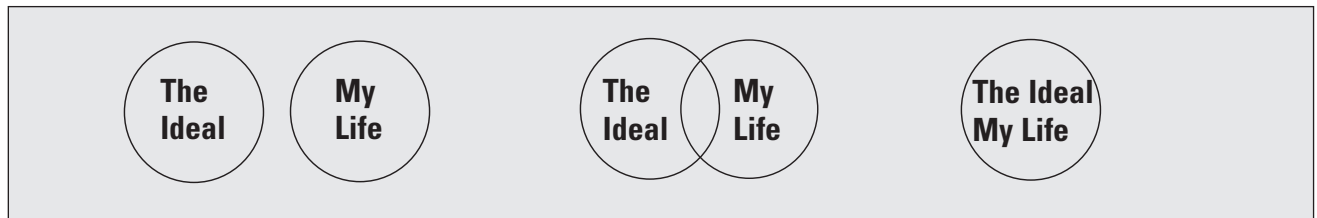
- Three Encounters
  1. My Faith and Life Journey
  2. Envisioning an Ideal Christian Community (a modern story, a Biblical story, and our story)
  3. My Journey from Here to Community
- Provide a pencil and a 3x5 card with a small envelope for each participant.
- Re-entry (Reflection, Action, and Digging Deeper) should be regarded as homework for the participants but if class time permits, any Re-entry section may be used to expand the discussion. These readings may also provide helpful background material for the leader.

## Encounters Along The Way

### First Encounter: *My Faith and Life Journey*

**IMPORTANT:** This section is intended to be a thought starter for future sessions. As such there is limited time for limited objectives. It is not necessary for every pair to report back to the larger group. The goal is to get each person to think about his/her own personal faith journey, sometimes even just a daily journey.

- Is there a connection between My Life and The Ideal Life? This is visualized in the circle diagrams:



1. My Life and The Ideal Christian Life as two entirely separate circles:  
My Life has no relationship to the Ideal to “love one another as I have loved you.” In the midst of some activity at our workplace, for example, we do not always stop and analyze what the Christian response should be to a given situation. This may be how many of us act on some days of our lives, but it is not something most of us would like to admit, especially in a discussion at church.
2. Two overlapping circles:  
Some of the time I live following Jesus’ command (that’s the overlap) but My Life has some experiences and behaviors that are outside the Ideal Life and there are some Ideal Christian attitudes and actions that I don’t think about or I typically ignore.
3. Two identical circles:  
I always follow Christ’s command.

The Holy Spirit mediates our connection to God and provides the motivation for moving towards the Ideal Christian Life that Jesus taught about (*i.e.*, more overlap in the circles, fewer attitudes and actions outside the Ideal). The rest of this session will consider how the Christian community affects the amount of connection pictured in the circle diagrams.

**Second Encounter: *Envisioning an Ideal Christian Community***

■ Do these churches (Mayfair Church, the Early Church, and Our Church) fit Bellah’s definition of community? After each story is read, have the participants point out those characteristics of each church that are in Bellah’s definition. List obvious behaviors, attitudes and actions seen in the story. The story of Margaret and Mayfair Church is true, though disguised, and represents situations in many Christian communities. In both stories the leader should begin the drama by reading the “setting.”

■ Compare the Biblical story with the story of “Margaret and Mayfair Church.” Here the expected responses for each question are positive for the Biblical story and not so positive for Mayfair Church. It may be necessary to point out that the dialog does not reveal all the factors that may be influencing the behavior of the members of Mayfair Church and that we all fall short of the ideal in situations like this.

Below is a suggested layout of a marker board or flip chart for the Second Encounter to record ideas generated during the discussion. If a flipchart is used, two pages may be needed. Write the headings in the bold print on your flipchart as indicated. Fill in the chart as the discussion proceeds. The phrases in the chart are some of the responses from field-testing of this material and are included here as hints of discussion starters for the leader.

<b>Attitudes/Beliefs/Practices of a Community</b>			
<b><i>Mayfair Church Community</i></b> Ignores needs of a member Is not motivated Concentrates on internal issues Seems too busy to visit others Lacks a personal connection	<b><i>Early Christian Community</i></b> Knows daily needs and tries to meet them Has the leadership to organize themselves Involves the entire community Develops consensus Is concerned with justice Trusts its leaders and each other	<b><i>Ideal Christian Community</i></b> (Circle those listed in Early Church that apply) Intentionally includes new folks Respects privacy Cares for and comforts others Discusses in a safe atmosphere Offers fellowship and friendship	<b><i>How can Our Community increase the connection?</i></b> (Some from the other lists) Youth mentor program Sport teams Parish visitation team Care groups Newsletter Reach out to others Welcome others

■ List the characteristics of an Ideal Christian Community. What are some characteristics of a Christian community that intentionally follows Jesus’ command to love one another? Use the two stories and the definition of community in thinking about this. Circle items from the lists for Mayfair and/or the Early Church that apply to the Ideal Christian Community. Then add more characteristics to the Ideal list. Is one important characteristic that this Ideal Christian Community helps the individual live out the Ideal Christian Life as well?

■ What about OUR Story? This is an essential question for each of the twelve sessions so this discussion need not be an exhaustive one. In this section it would be helpful for the leader to think ahead of time about the questions and some answers that may come forth. The goal here is an honest appraisal of your own Christian community but do not let it become a “bashing session”. Be ready to ask, “How do you wish that had been handled?” The leader should decide whether “our” refers to this study group or our church.

**Third Encounter: *My Journey from Here to Community***

Allow time for each person to write their commitment on the card and seal it in the envelope before handing it to you. Tell them that they will open their envelope in Session 12.

**Re-Entry**

Before having the closing prayer, point out the three parts to this section: Reflection, Action and Digging Deeper. Encourage each individual to rank him/her self, to read the reflection, and to make the personal commitment to action. You might ask them to write their proposed action in their booklet for voluntary sharing in the next session.