



A short series of four studies designed to facilitate discussion about the nature of the Church.

Study 1. 'The Welcoming Church' (Part 1.)

The first two studies in this short series will taking time to think through the material in the document '*Meet, Greet & Integrate.*' by *Sarie King*.

1. Can you think of a time when you visited a church (not your own) and you didn't feel welcomed & thought I'll never come back here. List 2 or 3 things that led to you feeling that way. Discuss.

Now think of a church you visited where you felt welcomed and cared for. What happened to make you feel this way?

Summarise: What did you learn from these two experiences that could be applied to St Alban's so we give visitors a positive first experience?

2. Read the following passages. What do they teach us about the character and nature of the God of the bible?
 - Exodus 19.1-6
 - John 3.16
 - Matthew 11.28

3. What do the following verses teach us about how we are to live especially in regard to the 'stranger' or new person who may visit our church?
 - John 13.34-35
 - Matthew 25.31-46
 - Romans 12.9-13
 - Hebrews 13.1-3

4. Discuss the definitions concerning hospitality at the top of page 6 of, 'Meet, Greet & Integrate'.

What strikes you or challenges your thinking?

Do you think we appreciate the opportunity God gives us each Sunday as suggested by Searcy & Henson? Discuss.

5. The remaining questions will concern the (A) Identifying the Problem section on pages 6– 13.

Lack of warmth, friendliness belonging: p7

What do you think about the suggestion that the most important time to greet and be friendly to people is the 10 minutes AFTER the service not at the beginning?

Are there things that get in the way of us being more effective in this crucial time slot after the service? What are they?

6. Lack of Church wide Ownership/Culture of Hospitality p8

Of the 5 common factors listed on p8 which do you think represents the biggest barrier for us at St Alban's and the service you attend? Why? Explain.

7. Lack of clear processing & intentionality: p9

Are you willing to invite people/friends to church? If not why not?

How would you answer the following if talking to a non-church contact:

'I'd love you to come to my church because it's.....?'

8. What do you think of the suggestion that 16% of infrequent visitors or non-attenders would be willing to accept an invitation to church? Does that surprise you? What is your experience?

9. Lack of intentional discipleship (3.3 p10) leads to people leaving out the 'back door'.

How do you think St Alban's fares in terms of our Growth group structure and helping people grow to maturity as disciples of Christ?

What do we do well? What needs to improve? What steps need to be taken for that to happen?

10. In recent years we have talked about being a church of *'disciples who make disciples'* We have had a stronger focus on personal spiritual growth. This is hard, slow work. It takes time and commitment.

However, what do you think is the biggest barrier to that discipleship model becoming a reality in YOUR life and thus the life of our church.

- Is it: i.) Lack of time?
 ii.) Lack of commitment?
 iii.) Lack of priority?
 iv.) Lack of training?
 v.) Lack of non-Christian contacts?
 vi.) Something else?

11. Unrecognised 'exclusion barriers': p11

Consider the two questions on the top of p12:

- Who are the people who may not feel welcome, comfortable or at ease in this particular congregation?
- Who are the people who may be called upon to work harder to enter/assimilate/fit in, where much more may be demanded in order to accommodate to this congregations particular profile/focus/emphasis?

12. Under-utilized lay engagement:

Are you surprised at the impact of lay-person contact in follow up compared to a staff member? Discuss.

Study 2. 'The Welcoming Church' (Part 2)

The questions in this study will also be based on the brochure '*Meet, Greet & Integrate.*' by Sarie King. We will be considering the second half which addresses finding a solution. (p13f.)

If we are to be a church where 'disciples make disciples' then a number of things need to be done effectively:

1. **Building a DNA culture of hospitality and inclusion**
p14

Do you think there operates a healthy ministry of hospitality at the service you attend? How is that evident?

What could be done to strengthen this ministry?

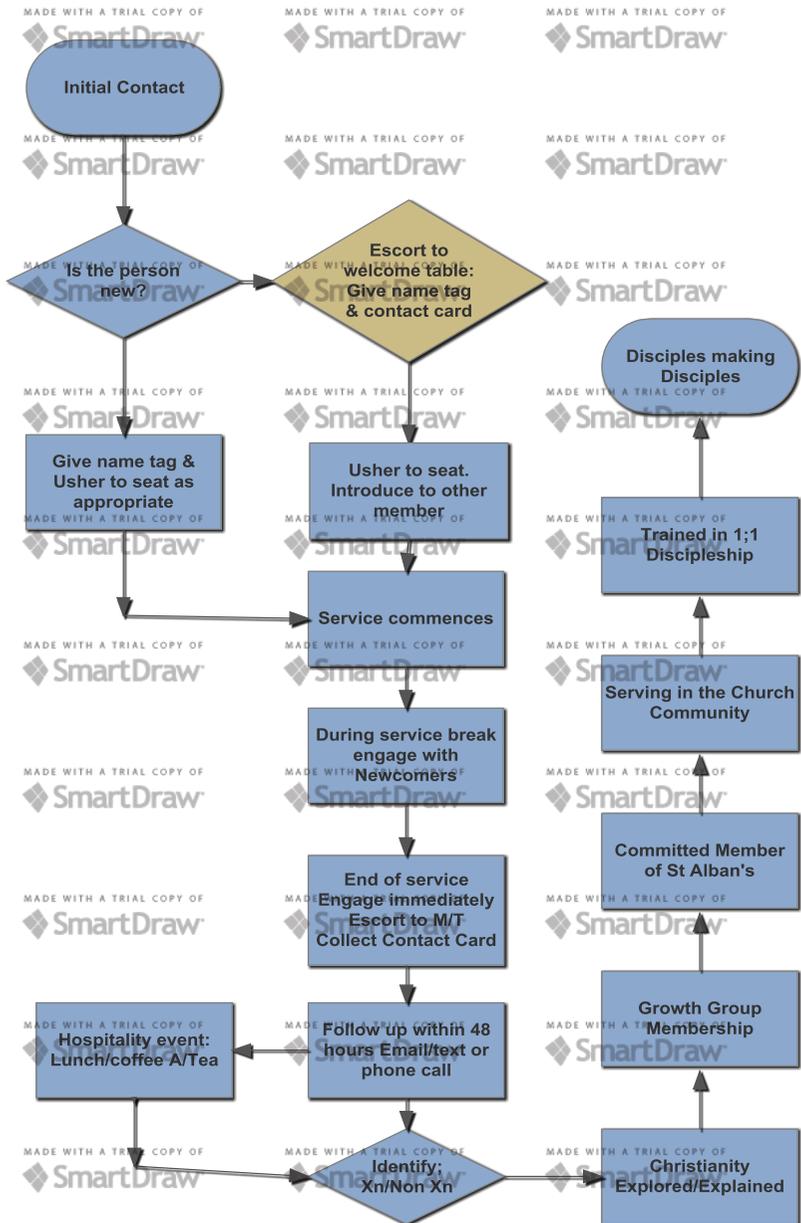
2. Consider the '*one another*' verses of p14 &15

Do any stand out for you as either strengths or weaknesses of your church experience? Explain.

3. **Creating clear and intentional pathways of 'entry, connection and engagement':** p15-17

Consider the following pathways diagram. It is this sort of pathway that needs to be in place in each of our services as we move to become a 'disciples making disciples' church community.

Welcoming Pathway @ St Alban's Lindfield (From Initial contact to full membership)



To implement this will take a committed team. What part do you think you could play?

4. In considering this pathway—where do you think we are operating at our weakest? ie. Where do you think this chain of events breaks down?

What needs to be done to ensure the pathway is unbroken?

5. Is there anything we can do to further strengthen our mission to be part of an MP3 or have more members reading the bible 1 to 1 with someone else?

6. It is suggested that we do a basic newcomer survey p19, in order to get constructive feedback.

Given peoples reluctance to fill out a contact card (often) do you think this is a realistic activity in the light of our Aussie culture?

7. Reducing Friction points: p20

‘A friction point is an unmatched expectation of the visitor, a potential source of embarrassment, or an untrained or nervous volunteer.’

Can you identify any friction points that need to be addressed at St Alban’s? Discuss.

8. Four types of church visitors are suggested on p23.

In what ways could such identification be helpful or unhelpful? What are they?

9. The entry point to a church community might not be the front door ie. at church on a Sunday. It may in fact be a side door. p23

What 'side door' ministries do we have at St Alban's? Is there anything we could do to make better use of our side door ministries?

10. Newcomers need to not only 'feel' involved but 'be involved' in order to truly engage in the life of the church. p24

At St Alban's our vision also encapsulates our strategy to engage people in many ways: p24 engagement

Gathering—Growing—Giving - Going for the Glory of God.

Gathering = Sunday worship = foundational to community

Growing = Growth Group ie. Group Discipleship & Pastoral Care

Giving = serving/contributing in a ministry
= contributing financially

Going = sharing your faith/ 1:1; inviting friends etc

Are there ways/activities currently not happening—that could strength members of our church so that they have a greater sense of ownership & belonging to the St Alan's Church family? What are they? What needs to happen for this to be implemented?

Study 3 'The Relational Church'

The Christian Church of Jesus Christ is a living organism made up of the believers from a variety of backgrounds.

The Church (ie. God's people) comes into existence first of all when people give their lives to Jesus Christ. From the very beginning Christianity is, at its core, relational. It begins with relationship with Jesus but it doesn't stop there, we are called into a family of believers called the church.

1. If Jesus gave his life for the church, his bride, how should that impact our view of the church and Christians in general?

Read 1 John 4.7-21

Love is the theme of this passage & the key to life!

2. This passage speaks of the source of love, the greatest example of love, the empowerment to love and the command to love. Take some time to discuss this passage. Consider:
 - Can you be a Christian and NOT love the Church?
 - What is the connection between fear & love as expressed in v17-18?
 - This passage doesn't spell it out, however, what do you think it involves to love our brothers and sisters in the faith?

Read Romans 12.3-21

3. These are very precious verses but they are also very challenging!

How can we be sure to think of yourself/ourselves with sober judgment and not more highly than we ought?
Why is this such a difficult thing to do? Discuss.

4. In Christ we have been called into interdependent relationships with each other. i.e. Each part of the body has a unique function and part to play v 4-8

In our culture we strive to be independent and NOT dependent on anyone. Being dependent on others means being vulnerable to others.

Is this a challenge for us in the life of the church?
What can we do to develop a deeper trust and willingness for greater interdependence as we share our lives together?

5. v9-21 are some of the most profound and beautiful in all scripture but not easy to live out for God's people.

Why is love without hatred of evil not enough? Can you have one without the other?

6. Discuss Romans 12.9-21

Are there any verses that particularly jump out for you?

Are there any instructions here that you think we are noticeably lacking in at St Alban's? Any solutions?

In the previous passage in Romans 12 two key themes of love and service came through, both of which highlight the relational nature of the church.

In the following passages we are reminded that forgiveness must be freely given amongst God's people if relationships within the church community are to thrive.

Read Matthew 18.21-35

7. Do you think it is easy for us to be like the unmerciful servant when it comes to forgiving? Why/Why Not?

8. Can you think of a time—when you found it hard to forgive a brother or sister in the church? You don't need to share the details—but why was it difficult to forgive them?

What enabled you to get to the point of forgiveness and reconciliation?

9. In order to extend forgiveness does someone need to repent or are we required to forgive irrespective?

Read Ephesians 4.25-5.2

10. Do you think it is difficult to speak the truth to one another in the life of the church? What would this look like in practice?

11. What are some of the possible consequences of not speaking the truth in love and not forgiving one another?

Read Colossians 3.12-14

12. How do we 'clothe' ourselves with these virtues?

Study 4. 'The Faithful Church'

1. Off the top of your head can you give a simple definition of 'faith.' What does it mean to have faith when used in reference to God?
To have faith in God means to

Read Hebrews 11.1-2, 22-12.1-3

2. What stands out for you in this heroes of the faith snapshot?
3. What was the key to these great saints 'faith'?
4. Is there a connection between living a life of faith and the promises of God? If so what is it?

If you don't know the promises of God (in his word) can you live by faith? Explain.

5. How do you explain the willingness of these saints and many others down through history, being willing to endure such suffering? See v35-40

6. Are there things that keep us from living by faith and trusting the promises of God? What are they?

7. Why is delayed gratification a key to living by faith?

8. Consider Hebrews 12.1-3

How can we be sure to persevere in the Christian faith?

What do these verses encourage us to do?

Read Colossians 1.1-8

9. The Apostle Paul commends the Colossians in this opening prayer of thanksgiving.

What is the evidence for their faith that he highlights?

10. Explain the connection between Christian faith, love, hope & grace? (See also 1 Thessalonians 1.2-3)

Discuss the ways you think we, as a church community at St Alban's are being faithful & ways in which we are not? ie. See Revelation 3.14-21

Read James 2.14-26

11. Why is a faith or intellectual belief insufficient? v19

Do you think many in our culture have that sort of faith?
ie. Say they believe in God etc but there is little evidence

If so, where does that leave them according to James?

12. Why is there always a cost to faith? There is always a price to pay.

It has been suggested that the Christian Church is weak in the West because we are not willing to count the cost of openly and publicly declaring our faith. Where as in India & Africa the church is strong because people have no choice but to live by faith and count the cost. Do you agree? Discuss.

13. Take time to reflect on your own life and your journey of faith. Try and identify an area of your life where you have been resisting Christs call for you to live by faith, an area that you need to surrender afresh to him?

Consider the following:

Work situation - Your children - Your use of money

Marriage - Relationships at church - Speaking of Jesus

Health Issues Priorities Other.....?

Faith is a gift from God—but we are called to exercise it!

Take some time to pray.

