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Here is how HTB structures its small groups. They have developed a pastorate structure and the following gives an outline of how that works. The Pastorate Manual has been released in the UK and can be ordered through the HTB bookstore. It will be published in North America later this year.

AN OUTLINE OF HOLY TRINITY BROMPTON'S PASTORATE STRUCTURE:

HTB does not use the 'cell' model as such. Various parts of what they do is similar to cells, but that is not the structure that is followed.

What is a pastorate?

A pastorate is a congregation-sized gathering of between 25-35 people who meet fortnightly (every two weeks!) on a midweek evening or morning to worship, pray, learn, and share a meal together. Members of the congregation are also encouraged to establish their own small group with like-minded people and this meeting can take place on alternate weeks.

Pastorate groups are run by members of the congregation who are not in full-time ministry. Typically a pastorate is lead by a single person or a married couple, supported by a leadership team. They often meet in the home of one of the pastorate members. These pastorate groups are the church. The pastorates are not one program amongst many the church supports. They are the heart of the church.

The following is some history, which will give you an understanding of what HTB does, and why they do it:

Why does HTB run pastorates?

To be a member of a pastorate is, along with the celebration and small group, the most effective way of enabling any individual member of the church to grow in maturity and be actively involved in the church. A pastorate fulfils four roles:

1. An excellent way into the church

If a newcomer goes to a church service, and comes upon a large group of people caught up in worship, they may feel intimidated. They don't know anyone and they are perhaps not familiar with the style and/or content of the service. They won't easily feel at home and it is hard to make friends. Making friends is the key to someone wanting to remain at the church. Equally, if this same person goes along to a small group (of perhaps two to twelve people), looking for a way into the church, they may feel the absolute opposite: painfully visible and highly self-conscious. If, for whatever reason, they don't particularly like this small group, what should they do next? If they don't go back, they risk offending their hosts. And the group members will undoubtedly be at church on Sunday, so they may avoid going to church as well!

However, if this same person goes along to a medium-sized gathering, such as a pastorate, where there are 25-35 people, they will feel neither the center of attention nor a sense of exclusion. Although the group is small enough to be noticed, it is probably large enough to find someone they can relate to, and large enough to be absent the following week without offending anybody. They are free to return

some time or they can continue looking around for a pastorate that would suit them better. Once established in a pastorate, this person should naturally be drawn into a small group with like-minded people.

2. A great place to make friends

The life of a pastorate, and the social setting that it provides, make the forming of new friendships and relationships easier. Younger, unmarried and/or relatively new Christians especially enjoy the pastorate meetings. They welcome the opportunity to meet people, and like the fact that the pastorate is an open group with a fluid membership. As friendships deepen within the pastorate, small groups arise organically. Those who have been Christians for a long time, and/or who are married or slightly older, appreciate the intimacy, confidentiality and accountability they find in the small groups.

There was a time when HTB lost sight of the importance of the pastorates and concentrated only on small groups. They saw a corresponding increased request for centralized social events as the small groups did not provide the variety and breadth of friendship possibilities, that is, people wanted to meet more people! Pastorates provide that possibility. Without the provision of pastorates, people were clearly missing the opportunity to meet each other.

3. An ideal setting to develop gifts and ministries

It is very hard to give your first talk to 200 people: it's too overwhelming and too much of a risk. It is equally difficult to give your first talk to five people: it's embarrassingly quiet. Leading 200 strong singers in worship for the first time is very intimidating while worshipping with five enthusiastic but unmusical friends can also be daunting, but for different reasons! It is the same with the gifts of healing, prophecy, tongues, the interpretation of tongues and many other spiritual gifts. The ideal setting in which to develop gifts and ministries is a group of 25-35 people.

In a pastorate people can take it in turns to host the evening, to lead ministry, to give talks, and those with the gift of leading worship can start to exercise their ministry. Most of HTB's worship leaders started leading worship in a pastorate setting. Again, when for a short time, HTB lost sight of the importance of pastorates, they noticed a decline in the emergence of spiritual gifts and suddenly had no new worship leaders!

4. An effective means of church growth

HTB has found that the pastorate is the ideal group for any new person who wants to join the church. They have the opportunity to meet a group of people and to become involved in the church. Their spiritual life will develop as they start to exercise their gifts, and they will hopefully find friends with whom they start praying at a deeper level in a small group. All these factors should cause their own relationship with God to go on growing and deepening.

The pastorate sends teams of those with appropriate gifts to help or lead on Alpha. Sometimes, these people will step back from pastorate to commit themselves to Alpha for a term, but they may well still meet as a small group for support, prayer and social life/fun. Those who help and lead on Alpha can take the new Alpha graduates back to the pastorate where they, in turn, meet a variety of people, new small groups form, the pastorate grows, and eventually new pastorates are planted from it.

What happens at a pastorate meeting?

A pastorate evening would run as follows.

7pm	Meet for food and conversation (a key part to the evening, as with Alpha)
7.45	Notices and feedback (from what people have been doing since last meeting)
8	Worship
8.15	Talk
8.45	Small Groups
9	Ministry
9.15	Finish

HYB has found that this structure works really well and means in effect, that the evening is like a mini church service.

The other advantage of this, is that small groups from Alpha can get involved in the life of the church, while at the same time, staying together as a small group. The pastorate meets every second week, and on alternate weeks people are encouraged to attend small groups. Therefore the Alpha group gets the benefit of growing in the ways described above, while also keeping a small group format. The small group meetings would generally follow the same format as the pastorate, except there would be a bible study rather than a talk. It is important that this distinction is made, so that people can contribute to the bible study rather than being talked at. There would also probably be a longer period of prayer, as the small group is the perfect setting for accountability, whereas the pastorate is better for ministry, if you see the difference.

HTB sets up pastorates initially, and then from the pastorates, small groups form, either naturally through friends wanting to meet together, or through Alpha where the small groups are already set up. The Rector (Senior Pastor), Sandy Millar, appoints pastors, and this ensures that HTB is effectively able to pastor the whole congregation. Sandy focuses his energies on developing the pastors, (they have a weekend retreat together each term) and the pastors will in turn focus their attention on the people in their pastorate. He looks for strong leaders - people who others will follow, people who are spiritually mature, and people who are naturally fun!

When the pastorate system was first established, it was not imposed upon the whole church all at once. Instead, Sandy Millar invited a few key leaders to develop and so formed the first pastorate. When that group became too big, it split into two pastorates and so it went. One of the key ideas behind pastorates is that each pastorate leadership is training two others to eventually lead the other half of the group when it splits.

Is there more information I can receive on HTB's pastorate system?

Because of increased interest, HTB is developing manuals on how to train pastors, run pastorates and implement a pastorate system. The pastorate's manual is already available from the HTB bookstore (011 20 7581 8255) and will be published in North America within the next year.

Blessings,

Alpha Canada