

Session 1: Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry

Quick recap

This was the first session of "Equipping the Saints," a five-class ministry training program developed at St. Columba's church. Hillary led the class on biblical foundations for small group ministries, covering key scripture passages including Exodus 18 about Moses and Jethro's advice on shared leadership, and Jesus's concentric circles of ministry (5,000, 500, 70, 12, and 2-3 closest disciples). The class practiced the African Bible Study method, a simple four-step approach for small groups to study scripture together through reading, sharing insights, personal reflection, and prayer. Participants broke into groups of three to try the Bible study technique using Matthew 18:20 ("For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them"). The session emphasized how shared leadership prevents burnout and how small group Bible study can transform ministry work from "busy work for Jesus" to true kingdom work.

Next steps

Hillary

- [Upload the African Bible Study Method, the small group scripture selection guide, and the videos of the classes to the website being built for the Equipping the Saints class, and also make them available electronically in Realm.](#)

Collaboration

- [All participants: Attend the next class on Prayer, Discernment, and the Holy Spirit.](#)
- [Small group leaders: Bring the African Bible Study Method and the scripture selection guide to their small groups to incorporate scripture study into their meetings.](#)
- [Small groups: Consider designating a timekeeper to keep the Bible study sessions on track.](#)
- [Ministry leaders: Aim to structure their ministries with shared leadership, ideally having at least three people \(a leader, a helper, and a mentee\) to prevent burnout.](#)

Summary

Equipping the Saints Class Preparation

Hillary led a meeting to prepare for an Equipping the Saints class, directing participants to move to designated tables and ensuring they had handouts including an African or Lambeth Bible Study and

a list of scripture studies. She acknowledged Jamal's technical setup and requested applause for his work. The meeting focused on logistics for the upcoming class, with additional materials available at the tables for future attendees.

Ministry Training Program Introduction

Hillary introduced a five-class ministry training program called "Equipping the Saints" developed during the spring staff retreat. The program aims to help ministry leaders and potential new ministry developers by providing biblical foundations for small groups, leadership skills, and practical guidance on running parish programs at St. Columba's. The first class focused on biblical foundations for Jesus' small group ministry approach, with subsequent classes covering prayer and discernment, leadership skills, administration systems, and a physical walkthrough of the church facilities.

Small Group Leadership Foundations

Hillary discussed biblical foundations for small group leadership, focusing on shared leadership principles from Exodus 18 where Moses received advice from his father-in-law Jethro to delegate responsibilities rather than carrying the ministry alone. She explained that effective ministry groups should have at least three people: a leader, an administrative person, and someone being mentored to eventually take over leadership. Hillary also outlined Jesus's concentric circle approach to ministry, beginning with the broader 5,000 people who are fed by the church and moving to the 500 regular church attendees, before focusing on specific leadership circles including the 70 followers Jesus commissioned.

Jesus' Ministry Instructions to Disciples

Hillary discussed Luke chapter 10 verses 1-9, focusing on Jesus' instructions to 70 disciples sent out in pairs to minister in various towns. Jesus instructed them to travel light, carry no extra supplies, and focus on healing the sick, casting out demons, and proclaiming the kingdom of God. The discussion highlighted how the disciples' ministry would not only benefit those they served but also transform them, with Jesus warning them about the challenges they would face, comparing them to lambs among wolves.

Challenges in Kingdom Ministry Work

Hillary discussed the challenges and risks involved in kingdom work, emphasizing that following Jesus often requires effort and can lead to conflict or frustration. She highlighted the importance of discernment in ministry, noting that sometimes ministries need to be adjusted or moved to different times and spaces when they no longer bring peace. Hillary also connected this concept to biblical

stories like the Exodus, emphasizing that kingdom work should be seen as immediate and ongoing rather than just a historical concept.

Concentric Circles Engagement Framework

Hillary explained a framework of concentric circles describing different levels of engagement with Jesus, ranging from the 5,000 (general parish) to the 2-3 closest friends. She detailed how the 70 represent commissioned disciples equipped for ministry, the 12 represent deep mentorship for spiritual leadership, and the inner circle of 2-3 are Jesus' closest friends and highest leaders. Hillary noted that individuals can overlap across multiple levels of engagement, and she referenced T.D. Jakes' concept of three groups of people (constituents, confidants, and comrades) as related to this framework.

Small Group Ministry Planning

Hillary discussed the importance of small group ministry and scripture study, emphasizing how Jesus used concentric circles to build relationships with his followers. She explained that understanding scripture requires community interpretation rather than individual study, using the example of the lectionary cycle in Episcopal tradition. Hillary announced plans to teach a simple Bible study method for small groups that focuses on listening to the Holy Spirit.

African Bible Study Method Overview

Hillary explained the African Bible Study method, which originated from the African provinces in the Anglican Church and was adopted during a Lambeth gathering. She outlined the step-by-step process, including opening prayer, reading the passage, identifying meaningful words or phrases, sharing personal connections, reflecting on actions or changes God might be inviting, and concluding with prayer for others and the Lord's Prayer. Hillary instructed the group to break into small groups of three to practice the method.

Scripture Study Workshop Practice

Hillary led a workshop session where participants were divided into small groups of three to practice scripture study techniques using the passage "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them" from Matthew 18:20. The exercise involved reading the scripture multiple times, identifying meaningful words or phrases, reflecting on how the passage relates to personal life, and considering what God might be inviting participants to change or do. The session concluded with group prayer and ended with the Lord's Prayer.

Bible Study Implementation Planning

Hillary led a discussion on implementing Bible study modules in small groups, introducing an African Bible study model and providing scripture passages for group use. She explained the importance of dividing leadership responsibilities to prevent burnout and emphasized how adding 5-7 minutes of Bible study can transform group meetings into meaningful kingdom work. The group discussed practical aspects including using timers for discussions, selecting challenging scripture passages, and utilizing different Bible translations like "The Message" for better understanding. Hillary confirmed that the materials would be made available electronically through their website and Rome platform.