



EQUIPPING FOR... **EVANGELISM & MISSION**

A Guidebook for Congregations Looking to Connect with Neighbours



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For this edition of *Equipping for... Evangelism & Mission*, we've invited The United & Presbyterian Campus Ministry team that serves three post-secondary institutions in Calgary to share what they've learned about creating pathways into Christian faith for non-believers.

Recognizing that many students are skeptical about faith and resentful about the harmful things the church has done in the past, the YYC campus ministry team has built programs that help to break down barriers and invite young adults to engage with faith in open and exploratory ways.

Using their very successfully “Drum, Dine, and Discuss” program as a model, they have identified best practices that can be applied by congregations wanting to connect more fully with people and communities outside of the church.

Reaching Out

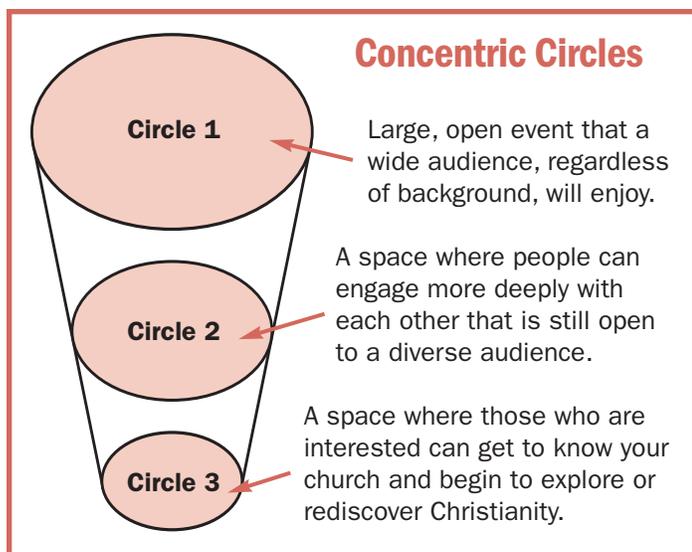
Engaging with communities outside of a traditional church setting can be challenging. Even before congregations reach out, doubt creeps in and questions arise: How will we gather people? Who will come? What are we going to do? What if our guests don't



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enjoy themselves? Despite these questions and fears, congregations know that reaching out is what Christ called us to do and is a key to thriving ministry.

This resource presents the concentric circle model that we, the YYC campus ministry team, use to shape all our programming. Concentric circles are sets of circles, one inside the other, that provide differing levels of experiences. Each circle represents an independent program that can be attended on its own but helps feed into the other programs around it. Together, the circles represent a pathway into exploring Christianity for non-church goers.



Circle 1 – Bridging

In our current cultural context, it is unlikely that someone who has never attended church would suddenly adopt a faith and commit to attending a congregation. A bridge needs to be made.

One way to create that bridge is by having fun and dynamic activities that allow people to connect, break down stereotypes, and enter into community. These activities should invite people to come as they are and require no prior knowledge or skills to take part. Ideally, each activity will create an atmosphere of welcome without expectation of anything beyond enjoying the time together.

When considering what activity your congregation could offer, look for something that fills a need in your community while also taking advantage of the gifts and talents already present in your congregation. Do you have lots of musicians? Host a jam session or open mic night. Have a drama teacher as a congregant? Host improv sessions. Do you have lots of people who love to cook? Host a cooking class. There are endless possibilities.

The key to success in these bridging activities is to choose something that is active, encourages interaction between participants, and allows for some creativity. As church folks, we are generally used to teaching and leading groups in controlled ways, however, with community building, the more you empower the group and hand over the reins, the more the group will feel invested.

5 best practices for bridging programs

No Expectations: Invite people, but make sure they know that there are no obligations or expectations for them to attend on a regular basis.

Be Considerate: These are people with busy lives, so don't inundate them with invitations to participate in other things or other events. You want to welcome people to your congregation without overwhelming them.

Make Each Event Individual: Make your programs one-off events. Designing programs that require an ongoing commitment turns your program into an obligation rather than a joy.

Let Go: Yes, you do need to plan these events, market them, connect with members of the community, and make sure everything is in place for them. But, once that has happened, let the event itself unfold organically and enjoy.

Get to Know your Community: Go out into your community. Talk to people in local coffee shops, store owners, and people on the street. See what other events are happening and where your congregation or group could contribute.

Circle 1 – How We Do It

Our bridging program is an Open Drum Circle. Here students of every skill level come to create music together with a variety of percussion instruments. At our gatherings, we play together and our Program Director leads games and gets people laughing. This entry-level experience focuses on building a drumming community where all people feel welcome.



We let people know that we are a Christian organization. Sometimes this leads to questions that we are happy to answer. By being open with people who are interested but not pushy, we bridge barriers between Christian faith, people of other faiths, people of skepticism, and people who are questioning. From the drum circle, we invite people to come and have a free meal with us, which takes us into Circle 2!

Circle 2 – Feeding

Food is a means of connection. Breaking bread is found in every culture throughout time and is used worldwide to gather people together. From a meet-your-neighbours' potluck, to a cooking course, to a shared meal post-worship, food bonds people together.

For many congregations, food ministry is already a strength on which they can build. One way that congregations can build on an already established ministry is to focus on innovative forms of food ministry. What would it look like for your congregation to start a community garden, a communal cooking night, supper church, or a dinner club ministry?

Food can be its own program, or pairs very easily with any other activity. It can be a great way to add

unstructured fellowship time or after other community gatherings.

This is where you again want to consider the strengths and needs of your community. Do you have any bakers or chefs? Does anyone grow their own vegetables they'd like to contribute? Are you in a busy area where you could host a weekly lunch?

Things to Consider

- **Keep it Simple:** Feeding lots of people can be a challenge, especially when you don't know the numbers in advance, so make a simple meal. Vegan soups with legumes are a cheap, easy, and versatile option. Put out toppings on the side that people can add themselves.
- **Involve the Community:** If you can, try and involve the community in the preparation of the meal. By sharing their gifts in this way, participants are more likely to feel a part of the group.
- **Make it Homemade:** We have found that homemade food is better received by participants than purchased food. Given busy schedules, it isn't always easy to provide homemade food, but, whenever possible, try to make the meal from scratch.
- **Dietary accommodations:** As best as possible, have alternative options suit those with dietary restrictions.



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Circle 2 – How We Do It

From the Drum Circle, we invite students to come for supper and a talking circle where we focus on creating community. Everyone is welcome at the meal; there are no requirements to be a part of any religion or spiritual tradition. Each week we make a new vegan, gluten-free soup that satisfies many dietary restrictions. The fact it is homemade is very important to our students; they appreciate the hard work that it takes and connect well with the care that goes into making food by hand.

After dinner, we transition into a talking circle. Typically, we offer up one word for discussion and ask everyone to speak to what that word brings up for them. We tell them that we want to hear about their experiences, thoughts, and dreams. Students find this opportunity to speak deeply meaningful since they often aren't given a space to express themselves.

Circle 2 – Listening

In addition to fun activities and food, a key part of our core programming is sharing circles. All humans long for belonging, and, by sitting in a circle and taking turns sharing something about themselves, participants are given the opportunity to be heard, accepted, and valued by others. Whether sharing about a certain topic or just sharing about their day, participants are invited to speak from their hearts and listen without judgement. The circles create a unique space where individuals can come as they are and speak with honesty and vulnerability. The community is solidified through this practice as participants come to know and support each other in the circle.

Sharing Circle Set Up & Structure

Sitting in a circle is very important since it positions everyone as an equal participant. Start by creating group guidelines to ensure that everyone feels comfortable sharing in an open and honest way. Remind participants that the sharing circle is not a debate, but a chance to listen and learn. We recommend using a “speaking object” to pass around, which will help remind everyone to respect the person who is speaking by not interrupting.



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Circle 3 – Christian

After reaching out into the community, building bridges, and cultivating new friendships, your congregation will likely have connected with people who are interested in finding out more about Christianity. These new friends will need a safe place to explore Christianity without pressure. With the right kind of programming, your congregation can be that place.



Any program you run to introduce people to Christianity or help them rediscover their lost faith must be rooted in exploration, with plenty of time of participants to ask questions, be critical, and dig in deep. These programs can take many forms: an informal Bible study built off questions people ask, a Christianity 101 learning group, a topical discussion series. Whatever you do, it is important to ask your new friends from the community what they would like to learn about faith and base your programming on their interests.

Things to Consider

- Be honest about the fact that you'll be discussing Christianity, but stress that it will be an open and explorative discussion with no commitment required. This circle isn't about converting people to Christ. It's about providing them with a space to explore faith.
- Be ready for tough questions. People exploring, or people reconnecting, with Christianity will typically have a lot of tough questions. Be ready to address their questions with openness and honesty, but also be ready to admit that none of us have all the answers. You do not need to be an expert; this can be a time of shared learning for all involved.

Circle 3 – How We Do It

For the Campus Ministry, our Christian Circle is comprised of three different programs:

- **Dirty Theology:** an exploration of the parts of the Bible that make young adults feel awkward, confused, and maybe even angry. This open and honest conversation is led by a clergy person, who helps guide the young adults in their theological exploration.
- **Contemplative Worship Service:** a monthly gathering of young adults from across Calgary who share a meal and participate in a candle-lit contemplative service of Taizé music and Lectio Divina.
- **Peer Partnership Program:** The participants in the program take part in almost monthly bible studies and learning circles where they can explore big questions around theology, vocation, and identity.

The different programs in the Christian Circle offer differing levels of commitment and they feed into each other. Students with a general curiosity or questions about faith usually start attending Dirty Theology, and, once they decide they want to go deeper, they start going to the contemplative worship services. And, those who decide they want to commit to journeying as a faith community throughout the year join the Peer Partnership Program.

Does It Work?

Let's Ask a Student!

“The Campus Ministry changed my life. I entered university viewing religions through a lens tainted by atrocities committed in their names. Integration of progressive religion into a healthy lifestyle was foreign to me. That was before I began attending the weekly drum circles. Drumming was unintimidating to approach due to its secular nature. However, drumming is

a deeply spiritual experience which led me on my journey into reconciliation with Christianity. Through my further involvement with the Campus Ministry I found a church community and became a peer partner, all the while participating in a wide variety of events focused on personal and spiritual development. The welcoming community with a focus on religious development has been invaluable in helping me find my path on my life journey. I look forward to seeing the future direction and outreach of the Ministry.”



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Now, go out and build bridges!

We orient our programming around living out the values we see as core to Presbyterian theology: compassion, grace, social justice, hospitality, fellowship and critical thinking. And, in doing so, we demonstrate a radically different version of community than most of our students experience in the rest of their lives.

With God's help, congregations can also offer a radically different version of community to what is offered in the rest of society. Jesus met people where they were at and then shared the gospel message. As churches, we also need to follow Jesus' example in this way by being present in people's lives, offering others hospitality in a way that is comfortable for them, and forming relationships outside of our faith communities.

Our students are often surprised by the Christian faith they experience in our programs because it welcomes questions, critical thinking, dialogue and

curiosity. Like the students we serve, people in our communities are searching for deeper meaning and a place to belong. Congregations need to build bridges between the lives of those we are called to serve and the life of faith offered through the church. By creating bridging programs, your congregation will be creating a pathway for seekers in your community to step into faith and church life.

Canadian Ministries wants to hear from you!

What parts of this resource are most useful? Share your story of mission and evangelism! Recommend a resource! Make a suggestion or ask a question!

Contact us at canadianministries@presbyterian.ca or call 416-441-1111 or 1-800-619-7301 ext. 271. Find more great ministry ideas through our weekly Facebook post *Take it Up Tuesday*. Follow us on Facebook at facebook.com/pccconnect.