

Press release

Re-emerging Evangelism. Crown Jesus are launch small groups.

Crown Jesus Ministries has been serving the local church for 21 years not only in evangelism but also in equipping others to evangelise. Significantly in 2016 we started the School of Evangelism. This is now available as a 21 week course, a 'lite' 4 week course in local churches and more recently as a 10 week online course. Feedback has been very positive and we are now launching small groups in August with the same intention: to equip others in sharing their faith. We understand that communication with church leaders etc, is key hence this press release.

Some of the back story to this journey is important and significant. We want you to see the value of these groups and how they can benefit the church and increase the capacity to reach others. In May last year we celebrated our 20th birthday at the Titanic Belfast. It was a wonderful evening that showcased and celebrated our work, supporters and staff. It was also a poignant moment when we spoke into the future. On the Titanic steps, David Beck interviewed me and asked this question:

'What does the future hold for Crown Jesus?'

Here was my response:

Firstly, I think it's going to look different but the same. What we need to do is stay in the flywheel of creativity and be movemental. When Jesus established his church he didn't establish an institution but established a missional movement.

We are not a church but we are a missional community that needs to stay sharp and pioneer new ways and fresh expressions of mission.

Someone asked me recently, "How have you coped with the transition?", I replied "What transition?"

You only notice or struggle with transition when you are heading in the wrong direction, are rigid in form, have slowed down or have become stuck.

Movements are always in transition.

Secondly, going forward we need to see what is going on around us. Leadership guru Max De Pree, noted that the first responsibility of a leader is to 'define reality'.

To ask, what is going on? To observe the ebb and flow of culture, listen to the questions our young people are asking, navigate the storms, speak the word of God and display the Kingdom of God.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that whatever is before us is going to be different from what was behind us.

Tod Bolsinger put it like this:

'You let go, you learn as you go and you keep going, no matter what.' We must gather every bit of what we have learned and adapt it for whatever comes before us.

Thirdly, we must smash the paradigm and rewrite the story. Who we reach and how we reach them will demand internal changes. If we launch a new strategy but don't change the paradigm and structure nothing will change.

Alan Hirsch tells the story of Zenith Drill company to illustrate paradigm blindness. The company prided themselves on being the 'best drill-bit- producing company in the world' and used tungsten-tipped drill bits. But competition had caught up with them.

They were trying and struggling to keep up with the demands and challenges of 'making the best drill-bits in the world'. Everything changed when a new CEO broke the paradigm with these words:

'NO! Our job is not to make the best drill bits in the world, rather to make the best holes in the world!'

They went on to innovate laser drilling and become the best hole-making company in the world.

My point is this... What are the best ways to reach today's generation without compromising on the word of God? We need to become a digital / laser drilling ministry.

Fourthly, we must embrace the adventure!

The problem for many Christians and indeed churches is their oppositional thinking blocks the capacity to discern a way forward. Part of the problem, to use business consultant Jim Collins' term, is that they fail to embrace the genius of the 'and'. We can become trapped in either/or thinking. From the perspective of either/or thinking, imaginations begin to fade away. Collins rightly says that a truly visionary organisation 'embraces continuity and change, conservatism and progressiveness, stability and revolution, predictability and chaos, heritage and renewal, fundamentals and craziness. And, and, and.

Social Media and small groups.

Our missional centre Hope in Monaghan will play a massive part in defining our new laser, taking the on-line remote communication and blending it with small group intimacy.

Our 'and' must embrace innovation and tradition. James K.A. Smith said, 'I will argue that the postmodern church can do nothing better than be ancient, that the most powerful way to reach a postmodern world is by recovering tradition.'

If we are to take on serious engagement in the Republic of Ireland and also engage better with Catholic communities, we have to change the narrative of who we are and what we do.

Finally, I am struck by the words Paul used when he defends his faith before Agrippa:

'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.' Acts 26:19

So obedience is top of the agenda.

This is a defining moment on our island, we are going to need you to trust us.

Twelve months later as I reread the script, I'm thankful that God was preparing us for such a time as this. Of course no one could have imagined the changes that we find ourselves in today; the effects of Covid-19, the recent racist issues and the monster of global warming staring down on us like a 500 foot wave, but in this moment we must give thanks. God is at work in our churches and he is also shaping us, preparing us for the new.

Last summer my reading and podcasting led me to the Apollo 11 mission and the Lunar Module Eagle landing on July 20, 1969. What an incredible moment in history! 50 years on as I read around the story there is so much that mirrors our adventure and ambitions. Of course the moon is not our goal, but Ireland is.

From John.F. Kennedy's moon speech in 1962 to the lessons of every Apollo mission, including the disasters, each one inspires us to chase what others believe to be impossible.

Six months after our Titanic speech, came our moon speech, our missional mandate for the next decade.

Our mandate for the next decade

We choose to go...

By the end of the decade we choose to go into all 32 counties of Ireland and ensure everyone has the opportunity to receive and respond to the transforming message of Jesus Christ and the hope He brings.

We choose to go, not because it is easy but because it is hard. The goal will serve to organise and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to achieve.

We choose to go and we want you to partner with us on this adventure because together we are stronger. Join us as we launch into this new season; there are communities to reach, people to rescue and together we will make a difference for the glory of God's kingdom.

We choose to go because Jesus has given us the power, authority and commission to go. Everyone in Ireland needs a chance to respond to the gospel. This will be the most challenging, dangerous and greatest adventure on which we have ever embarked. It must be done and with your help it will be done before the end of this decade.

I hope the narrative around this step into small groups informs and inspires you. These ideas and plans have not developed in only a few months or for that matter over a year, as you will find out.

To keep theme and to keep clarity on progress I want to present our small groups to you as what we call in-house as 'Apollo 1'. Each Apollo mission on its own will not take us to the moon but they are designed to take us the right direction in reaching Ireland for Jesus.

Apollo 1

2016 was a milestone for me personally as I graduated with an MA in Applied Theology.

My dissertation was entitled 'Evangelising the Baptised using Wesleyan small groups'. It took me on a wonderful journey of studying the early Methodist movement, its class meetings and German origins. Additionally it was a study in practical theology and how it might work in Ireland. My studies didn't set out to prove that small groups were the way forward, indeed what drew me initially to methodism was Dr Dave Smith's PHD on the thunderous preaching of George Whitfield.

My conclusion is condensing 18,000 words into 2 words which answer the questions; how will we reach Ireland for Jesus? How can we engage better with various communities? **Small Groups**. Beyond my M.A the practice of establishing small groups has been one we have left with the church. We encouraged a Wesleyan model sharing it with many pastors and leaders over coffee but abdicated responsibility for delivering them... until now.

Why are we launching small groups?

Since 2016 our School of Evangelism has been running successfully with hundreds of students attending the Monday night course at Crown Jesus HQ and 4 week 'lite' course delivered in churches. Feedback has always been positive and partnerships with Moorlands College, RZIM, BGEA Emerging Evangelists Institute, and TeenChallenge Global have added to the delivery quality of the course. In March, just two weeks into lockdown we made the decision to offer the course online for free. The response was overwhelming with 150-180 students attending each Monday night on a Zoom Call as people of all ages and cultures embrace the new digital technology. Not only are the numbers attending higher than ever before but the small groups (break out room sessions) have been longer and more productive. People enjoy the teaching and the focus on evangelism in a small group community.

Feedback over the years from previous students has highlighted that beyond the course the students miss the community, find it a struggle to put what they have learnt into practice, miss the 'sharpening' through the teaching and connection with other mission-minded Christians.

Lockdown as a result of Covid-19 has allowed us time to process this feedback, to pause, reflect and pray into how we respond. Alan Hirsch once said: *'if you really want to see innovation, find a crisis'*. Covid-19 has certainly pushed us to be innovative!

We believe now is the time to address these needs and begin our own small groups. These groups will have a very clear focus on being missional and supporting mission. They are not intended to duplicate church home groups but rather to add value to the mission of the local church. We intend to call them **Go Groups**.

What will they look like?

Having studied many forms of home groups including the German Pietism movement, Moravian bands, SPEC societies, the Wesleyan class meetings, the early Presbyterian heritage as well as the more modern systems of cell group and free market, I believe we have a good foundation to begin what we will call GO Groups.

Below are some key features of the GO Groups:

- The key phrase for our GO groups is this, ‘Does your neighbour know you love them?’.
- Every GO member must belong to a local church.
- No more than 12 members in a group and no less than 6.
- Our small groups will be missional focused.
- GO Groups will have the option of meeting both digitally (Zoom) and physically but only digitally over the next 9 months.
- One leader will be appointed to each group.
- Groups will meet every other week preferably on a Monday night.
- Groups will have the options to meet in preferential ways such as geographical location, all male groups, all female groups, youth groups and even by profession (such as school teachers).
- Groups will complete **modules**. A module can last from 4 to 10 sessions. This allows people to join for only one module (for example: apologetics and then leave.)
- Members can swap groups at the end of each module should they want to stay on.
- Online/digital meetings will be no longer than 1 hour. Physical meetings no longer than 1 hour 30 mins.
- Each meeting will consist of three sections; 20 mins teaching, 20 mins discussions, 20 mins praying/worship.
- The groups intend to provoke action, celebrate stories, provide accountability and support one another practically.
- Leaders will connect in once a month to a leaders group meeting.
- Crown Jesus will identify leaders who are envisioned and able to mentor and to model an evangelistic lifestyle.
- GO team members will help multiply the mission of the local church and our missional strategy for Ireland and beyond.
- GO groups will broaden outreach into the Republic of Ireland.
- GO groups based in Monaghan can connect with Hope and will therefore have an additional layer of community and support.
- GO groups are intended to complement the work of the local church as we seek to activate church members into mission. To use a latin term used by John Wesley: “little churches within the church”.

- Cost - there is no cost for membership of GO groups but at every meeting members will have an option of making donations via Paypal

What next?

I have already discussed the idea quietly with 8 pastors/leaders. All approved and thought it was a great idea. None felt that a church pastor should feel threatened by the groups provided we are clear in our statement of intent. Hence this document. Lockdown has created a greater confidence in the digital platform and as a ministry we see this as an opportune time to fully embrace both the digital and physical in our evangelism and training. (We use the term Phygital). The first two modules will be digital only.

We plan to advertise our Apollo 1: 'GO Groups' at the end of June with the first module beginning in August. The first module will focus on 'sharing your story.'

Go Groups has been soaked in much prayer, learning, discussions and reflection. We hope you will embrace this concept and use it to your advantage as we seek to equip more labourers in the harvest.

In Luke 10 : ² Jesus told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³ Go!

Thank you for your ongoing support,

God Bless,

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Rom 1:16