



## Community Experiencing Life Together

*"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity ...  
For there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore."*

*Psalm 133 (New International Version)*

## Running Sheet for Programme

*Please note, these are approximate times and assume an 11:00 am start. To keep the programme flowing you will want the next person or group to be coming up as the previous group is finishing.*

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 10:50 | Prelude music   |
| 11:00 | 2 songs   |
| 11:06 | Welcome/Announcements   |
| 11:10 | Offering – collected by children  |
|       | Suggestion: during offering collection, which should be taken up by the children, data projector slides of pictures children have drawn depicting community |
| 11:15 | Song  |
| 11:18 | Prayer  |
| 11:21 | Song  |
| 11:24 | Sermonette 1  |
| 11:29 | Item – SS group (Beginner/Kindy) <i>Jesus Love the Little Children &amp; My God Loves Me</i>  |
| 11:32 | Reader's Theatre  |
| 11:36 | Sermonette 2  |
| 11:41 | Drama – Arty the Ant  |
| 11:45 | Sermonette 3  |
| 11:50 | Item – SS group (Primary/Junior) <i>We Are The Church</i>   |
| 11:53 | Sermonette 4  |
| 11:58 | Closing congregational song   |
| 12:01 | Children's Ministry person to explain the "Prayer Partners" and thank children for their work   |
| 12:04 | Closing prayer – Child  |
| 12:05 | Postlude, children who play instruments in your church  |

## Programme Outline

### Welcome

*The following is a script that you might like to use for the welcome. You will need to script announcements according to your local needs. Adapt the welcome to fit the culture of your church family.*

### Welcome Script

**Child 1** What picture first comes into your mind when I say the word 'church'? Some of you will think of a building, some a programme once a week, some will think of late night board meetings and others will think of getting dressed up. However, today we want to look at what picture the Bible writers had when they thought of the word church – they thought of church as a community where people grow closer to God and one another - together. Today we find out about what it means to be a church community.

**Child 2** As you will notice today is a little different – the children of our church will be leading the service. We have a really important message for you that will make our church more of what God wants it to be.

If you are our guest today we want to give you a big welcome and we are really glad you are here.

**Child 1** If you are a regular part of our church then we are also really glad you are here, as together we make up a church family and you're a really important part of that.

**Child 2** Take a moment now to turn to the people around you, find out who they are and let them know you're really glad they are here today.

### Child 1 & 2 alternating with announcements:

Lots of things happen in our church family and we want to let you know about a few of them (announcements).

For more information check out our church bulletin (*website if you have one*)

**Child 1** Today our offering is for \_\_\_\_\_.

**Child 2** Once again welcome and have a happy Sabbath.

*For an **alternative welcome** have a video made of attending a church service from a child's perspective. Have a video camera record at a child's eye level with commentary: 'This is my church...include commentary of what church is like from a child's perspective!'. Maybe include coming into the church foyer, getting around people's legs, getting into Sabbath School, trying to wash hands at an adult basin, getting a drink from an adult bubbler, sitting in church and seeing just heads in front – maybe bouncing up and down. Finish with 'This is my church, we have \_\_\_\_\_ grown ups and \_\_\_\_\_ kids – together we make a family and I'm really glad that I'm a part of it.'*

Then continue on with spoken aspects of welcome and announcements as needed.

### Offering

Organise the children to be the Deacons this week. Maybe you could collect the offering in something different rather than use the usual offering plates. Use children for music during offering. While offering is being collected show drawings on the data projector of ideas children in your church have for loving one another. You will need to get these drawings done in Sabbath School a few weeks earlier so that you have time to scan and put them into powerpoint. Alternatively, show data projector pictures of the children in your church.

### Prayer

It is really nice if a parent and a younger child do the prayer together. Alternatively use a group of various children. In church families where there is a wide cultural diversity maybe use children who can pray short prayers in their various languages – maybe the same prayer for all, finishing in English.

## Sermonette 1

### God's Plan For His Church

If you had to answer in a single word what God's dream for human beings is, what would you say that it is? I think that word would have to be community.

The Bible is full of stories that show God trying very hard to have a relationship with us and build a community. In the Old Testament God is trying to build a community that follows His plan and shows everybody what happens when people live by His principles. In the New Testament the church is set up to be a community that shows the world what happens when a group of people live together following God's plan. In the book of Revelation we read about a community that follows God whatever happens and then we read about us all being together with God, in community, just like He planned from the very start.

Today our society seems to be all about self. We seem to be about getting more things, more power, more money to look after ourselves – it seems we don't have time to look after people and build community. However, the Bible tells us that we are not on the planet for ourselves but for God's purpose and one of His purposes is for us to grow a deep relationship with Him and with other people. We think that getting things for ourselves will make us happy. However, Jesus says we are only truly happy when we are in community with God and other people.

Today we are exploring what a church community looks like and what it means for you to be part of that community.

Jesus says people should know us by our love and that people seeing how we look after each other would draw people to Him. If I was to walk down the street and ask people what they knew about our church do you think they would say 'I know those people really love other people and care about each other?' – I hope so.

God did not design us to be lonely – he made us to be part of a community. Community looks out for and cares for each other. It is about reflecting Christ to each other. Sometimes it's as simple as giving another person a cup of water. It's about everyone here knowing they are part of a group where people really look out for them. Sadly many churches are not in community - lonely lives don't get changed and we end up with churches full of people who turn up every week but do not serve with each other, grow closer to God with each other and really worship with each other – lots of times they don't even care about each other and sometimes don't even like each other. This is not God's plan - Church is not about turning up to a building once a week – it's about being a group of people who together are God's community all the time. The apostle Paul describes it as being a body- not just any body but Christ's body.

In Acts 2:42 we read about the early church and community. They were fellowshiping, eating and praying together.

In verse 44 it says that they cared for one another deeply. In verse 45 it says they cared about people more than things. In 46 it says they valued fellowship and hospitality and their lives were becoming more interdependent. That's just a big word to say they worked together. Community must be a big deal for our church too - it doesn't need to cost us money, it just means really caring about each other. That's something each of us needs to be part of.

God invented the Sabbath as a special day to celebrate this community and what it means

to be a part of His body. It is a day where we can forget about the things we have to do all week, like school, work and jobs. Instead, Sabbath is about spending special time growing community with Him and the people around us. The Sabbath is a special day to remind us about how important community with God and each other really is and to remind us we were created for a bigger purpose than just looking after ourselves.

Look at this brick (*have a brick in your hand*): by itself it is pretty useless – it might be a door stop. However, a brick by itself really does not do that much, however, in a wall and as part of the architect's plan it looks beautiful and is part of something very big. Church is not about being alone but together being part of God's great plan to build a community. That really is pretty special and is God's dream for our church.

#### **Points to include if you are writing your own sermonette**

1. *It is God's plan for us to live in Community with each other.*
2. *Today's society is all about 'Self'.*
3. *We are on this planet for God's purpose and that is to have a relationship with Him.*
4. *Jesus said that we should be known for our love so as to draw people to Him.*
5. *Community looks out for each other. It supports one another and cares for each other. It is about reflecting Christ to each other – and then the world will see that we are different by our love.*
6. *God invented the Sabbath as a special day to celebrate this community and being part of His body.*

#### **Item – Sabbath School Group**

## Readers Theatre

### 1 Corinthians 12:12-28

- Reader 1** Our bodies have many different parts which work together to make one body.
- Reader 2** It is the same with the body of Christ
- Reader 1** Which is His church.
- Reader 3** We come from different places,
- Reader 2** Racial groups
- Reader 1** And backgrounds.
- Reader 3** Some of us are rich
- Reader 2** And some of us are poor.
- Reader 1** We are all very different
- Reader 2** But the Holy Spirit has fitted us all together into one body
- ALL** And together we make up God's church.
- Reader 4** Our bodies have many parts and they must work together to help us move.
- Reader 2** What if our foot was to sulk and say
- Reader 3** "I am not part of the body because I can't do what the hand does";
- Reader 2** And what if your ear was to feel sad because it wasn't able to see like your eyes?
- Reader 4** Is the ear less important to us than the eye...
- Reader 1** Suppose the whole body was an eye,
- Reader 2** Then how would we hear?
- Reader 4** Or what if we were one big ear,
- Reader 3** How could we smell?
- Reader 1** Fortunately that isn't the way God made us.
- Reader 4** He has made many parts for our bodies and has put each part
- ALL** Just where He wants it.
- Reader 1** What a strange thing a body would be if it had only one part!

- Reader 4** It is the same with His body the church –
- ALL** Many parts, one body.
- Reader 2** The eye would never say to the hand
- Reader 3** "I don't need you"
- Reader 2** Neither would the head say to the feet
- Reader 4** "I don't need you"
- Reader 2** As they are all important.
- Reader 1** Sometimes the parts that seems to be the weakest and least important are really the most necessary.
- Reader 2** If one part suffers,
- Reader 1, 3, 4** All the other parts suffer with it
- Reader 2** And if one part is honoured
- Reader 1, 3, 4** All the other parts are glad.
- Reader 1** So I tell you now today, all of you together make up the body of Christ.
- Reader 2** Even though you are all very different people God loves each of you infinitely,
- Reader 3** You are all important
- Reader 4** And necessary parts of His church.
- ALL** Which is His body.

## Sermonette 2

### United In Christ

Have a look at the people around you. There are some old and some young, there are ladies and gentleman, there are people with black hair, blonde hair, white hair and no hair, people with glasses, people with real teeth and false teeth, people with big noses and little noses (*Include particular facts about your church*). The idea is that God created each of us different. Even if you're a twin you are still unique and different. God likes variety and He created us all to be special and show a part of His character.

While we are all different, our scripture reading tells us we have the same purpose. We are to work together. We are to serve together, learn about God together, tell other people about God together, worship together and care for each other together. Doing it all together is a really big deal for God. Paul says, working together is very, very important.

Jesus thinks working together is so important that just before He went back to heaven He prayed for the church and for His children, that's you and I, to work together. In John 17:20-25 He prayed that just like He and God the father are together - but different, we also would work together, even though we are very different.

Unity does not mean we all have to be the same, it doesn't mean we have the same opinion on everything - God made us all different for a reason. However, it does mean we will have the same purpose - (*Walk to piano if near by and play a chord - if you do not know piano get shown which notes before hand*). If I play these three notes together they sound great - they are all different but together they make a lovely sound. However, I only have to add one more note that doesn't work together with the other three and it no longer sounds right (*play another note that doesn't fit with the chord*). When we are loving God and loving each other as a community we will work together to glorify God.

This doesn't mean we all have to look and act the same. It means we remember we are different but when our differences are put together we make something that is very special.

Working together is much better and far more fun than trying to get the job done by yourself. There are things like maths tests that you have to get done by yourself. However, church is not a Maths test - in church we all need to co-operate, put our skills together and work as one body. If you've got a whole pile of dishes to get done does it feel better doing them by yourself or having a few people working together? God made us different - but he made us to work together.

What stops us working together?

Maybe we can't be bothered.

Maybe we are too busy thinking about ourselves.

Maybe we don't care about other people and don't take the time to get to know them and see the special things they can do.

Maybe we are selfish and want all the glory for ourselves.

Paul says that if there is anywhere people should be working together, it should be in our church. In fact Paul calls the church a body where we should all be working together.

God created us to be good at different things, and no one is good at everything. This is how God wanted it to be so that we would all need to work together if things are to work best. Even more than this, Paul reminds us that God gives us spiritual gifts. Paul says that

understanding spiritual gifts is very important for the church body.

What is a spiritual gift you might ask? A spiritual gift is a special ability given to you by God, through the Holy Spirit, that is to make the church a better church and bring Glory to God. This means God has designed each of us to do something special in the body of Christ 'the church'.

Here's the thing - we all have a spiritual gift and God has designed you in a special way to use your gift. If you don't know your gift, or if you're not using it, then the church misses out, you miss out, and God misses out by not having the part happen that he made you for.

No one of us has all the gifts and this is also how God made it. God made it that we need to rely on each other, as a community, so all the gifts can work together. Take this bulletin (*hold up a bulletin*) - it shows lots of bits working together.

Someone needed to design it, lots of people were needed to send in information about their areas to put in it, someone needed to print it, someone needed to hand it out and this is only a small part. If parts decide to stop working, then the other parts suffer. God designed this community so it would be at its best when we are all working together.

When we serve together as a community- everyone wins. You and I are part of a community that is doing what God planned for it to do - that's lots of fun and it glorifies God. God made you and I to be part of a bigger plan - His community. As you look at this play think about your part in this community and how you can encourage other people.

#### Points to include if you are writing your own sermonette

1. *God likes variety and he created us all to be special and show a part of His character.*
2. *Jesus says we are to work together - John 17:20-25.*
3. *Unity means we must have the same purpose.*
4. *Working together is much better and far more fun than trying to get the job done by yourself. It is especially important in church.*
5. *God gives us spiritual gifts. Paul says that understanding spiritual gifts is very important for the church body.*
6. *No one of us has all the gifts and this is also how God made it. God made it that we need to rely on each other, as a community, so that all the gifts can work together.*
7. *When we serve together as a community- everyone wins.*

## Play - Arty the Ant

*Setting: Arty's bedroom, bare necessities like army barracks. Very tidy. He rises and makes his bed carefully smoothing it out perfectly during the narration. Narrator stands stage left.*

**Narrator** There was once an ant called Arty. Everyday he woke up early in the morning and spent the whole day finding and collecting food for the nest. Everyday was the same, up at dawn, work all day and go to bed exhausted at night. Then one morning Arty thought:

**Arty** I am tired of working all day. I think today I'll stay home and watch the grass grow and eat that chip crumb I found under (insert Pastor's name) bed.

*During narration Arty retrieves the crumb from under his bed, lies down and begins eating looking very pleased with himself.*

**Narrator** So Arty collected his crumb and settled back for a quiet day, wondering to himself why he hadn't thought to have a day off earlier. Well, as all of you know, Ants are very organised insects and it wasn't long before someone realised that Arty was missing. And Alex Ant, Arty's older brother – who was a soldier Ant, was sent to look for him.

*Light fades down off Narrator and onto the Ants.*

*The sound of knocking is heard. Then Alex ant enters stage right.*

**Alex** *(frustrated/concerned)* Arty, what are you doing lying there in bed...are you sick?

**Arty** *No. (picks off more chip)* It's my day off.

**Alex** *(Angry)* Day off!! We don't get day's off in Summer. We have a strict schedule to follow. Now get up. We need to hurry and catch up to the others.

*Arty moans and puts a pillow over his head.*

**Arty** *(moves pillow to hugging position)* All I do is hurry... *(in fake voice). It's quick Arty, there's a piece of Taco over there or Hurry Arty, there's a sun flower seed over there...get it before that pigeon does – As if I can take on a pigeon.*

**Alex** *(lecturing)* Now Arty, the nest needs you...

**Arty** *(annoyed)* No they don't. They won't notice if I stay home. There has to be at least 10,000 others doing the same job as me. I am sure they can manage with 9,999 today. Besides, who are you to tell me to hurry. All you do is stand around all day...

**Alex** *(defensively/annoyed)* I might look to you like I stand around all day. But just last week our nest was stepped on by *(insert Pr wife's name)* while she was hanging out the washing. If I hadn't given her a good nip we'd all have been turned into ant paté. You workers all run away while we soldier ants run towards the danger.

**Arty** *(sadly)* You are right. I'm just a worker and not important like you are. So who will care if I stay home today.

**Alex** We are all important. If you and all the other workers stopped gathering food, all us soldiers would starve. We need you, all of you to look for food. What if today was the day you were going to find ½ a snicker's bar and you chose to stay home instead.

**Arty** But I don't like snickers...I have a nut allergy.

**Alex** Well, dairy milk then...The point is you are an important part of the nest. The Queen depends on you to help search for food. Because when Winter comes it will be too late. We all have to work together so we can keep the nest

going. What if tomorrow the other 9,999 worker ants decided to stay home while you work? Where would that leave you?

*A pause while Arty thinks to himself.*

**Alex** Come on Arty, I'll help you find your spot in the line. It isn't too late to catch up.

**Arty** Am I really that important to the Queen?

**Alex** Of course you are!!

**Arty** *(getting out of bed, both head for door)* OK then, but will you teach me how to nip? I'd like to have a turn at...

*Talking fades out as they leave the stage.*

### **Voice Over**

We are all parts of God's body. It takes every one of us to make it complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other, and each needs all the others, Romans 12:5.

This voice over could also be displayed on the data projector screen while being read.

## Sermonette 3

### We Are All Given Unique Gifts Together We Make Something Special.

What jobs do you have around your house. In my family my jobs are to \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Explain your jobs)

Imagine what would happen if I didn't care anymore \_\_\_\_\_ I need to do my jobs so my family works right.

It's a little bit the same with the church family - you need to know and do your part in the body so that church works right.

However it's not just about church working right, it is about your life working right. You were made to serve God and Paul says in our second part of the scripture reading that we will only find the true plan for our lives when we find our place in the body.

You were created with special things you can do that are different from the person sitting next to you. When you know what you are best at, you can serve in that area and make a big difference. It doesn't mean you won't do things you don't like – sometimes there are jobs that just have to be done. However, when you know what makes you special you can use your gifts in being a more useful part of the body.

Think about what has God made you good at? What can you do that helps this church body work better?

Paul says we are like a body and when all the bits work together it is amazing. It takes all of us to make church work right. You are a very important part. If you decide your part is not important and stop, then that makes our church body sick.

It's only when we do what we are good at together that we end up being what God really wants us to be.

By ourselves we can serve God and that's very important – however together we can combine what we do well with what God has designed other people to do well and that will be much more effective.

By ourselves we can worship – but together we can worship in a really special way that glorifies God and encourages each other.

By ourselves we can grow closer to God – but together we can encourage each other and help each other grow.

Church is all about growing, serving, worshipping and sharing together. I want to be part of a church body like that where together we add to each other and together we are something bigger than what we could be by ourselves.

#### **Points to include if you are writing your own sermonette**

1. *You need to know and do your part in the body so that church works right.*
2. *It's not just about church working right, its about your life working right.*
3. *You were created with special things that you can do that are different to other people.*

4. *If you decide your part is not important and stop then that makes our church body sick.*
5. *By ourselves we can serve God and that's very important – however together we can combine what we do well with what God has designed other people to do well and that will be much more effective.*
6. *Church is all about growing, serving, worshipping and sharing together.*

**Item – We Are The Church** (From maxiPraise – Spirit Alive 2001 – Available from the Adventist Book Centre).

## Sermonette 4

### Being The Body

In our last part of our scripture reading we learn that it's not just about doing the job God designed us for – the way we do it is very important. Paul talks about our attitude being more important than the job itself. When we have the right attitude of being servants then being a part of the body just happens.

Imagine that you drove past some people who had been made to do community service and had to clean up the rubbish beside the road. Most of them would work slowly and not be very excited about what they were doing. They are just there to clock up their hours.

Now imagine if you drove past a group of school kids who had adopted a section of the highway to keep clean. They would be having fun getting the same job done. They are not doing the job because they have to, but because they see the purpose in what they are doing. It's the same with your part in the church body. It's not about doing it because you have to, but that you understand Jesus wants to reach lost people and change lives.

It is a privilege for you to play your part in Christ's body. When we work together toward bringing people to Jesus we can have a lot of fun along the way. We encourage each other, support each other and help each other. When one of us is down we are to look after that person. When one of us has something good happen we are to celebrate it together.

Paul says, If one part hurts we all hurt. (*Maybe put in example about when you have hurt a part of your body and your whole body feels in pain*). If something exciting happens to one part we can all feel excited. Paul says that this experience of being together is what God created us for.

Paul goes on in Corinthians chapter 13 to talk about the importance of love in the body. We are to be a body that loves God and shows that love to each other. Serving out of love is very different to serving out of guilt and being scared. When I do something for my mum out of love it is much more fun than doing it just because I have to.

God designed this church to be a body – where all of us use our spiritual gifts together, where we care about what happens to each other and where we remember that we Christ's body together.

This week let's see what each one of us can do to make this church family more of a community. Maybe it's phoning up someone to encourage them, maybe its inviting someone home for a meal. Maybe you will help someone with a job or look after someone who has had a bad week. Think of what you will do this week to build relationships. Maybe it's time for you to stop just watching and get involved in the part God designed you for.

Paul says, You are Christ's body – that's what you are – you must never forget this!

#### **Points to include if you are writing your own sermonette**

1. *Paul says our attitude is more important than the job itself. We need to adopt a servant heart.*
2. *We play our part in the body so that lost people will come to Jesus. It is a privilege to be part of the body.*
3. *Paul says, If one part hurts we all hurt. If something exciting happens to one part we can all feel excited. This experience of being together is what God created us for.*

4. *Corinthians chapter 13 talks about the importance of love in the body. Serving out of love is very different to serving out of guilt and being scared.*
5. *You are Christ's body – that's what you are – you must never forget this!*
6. *Challenge the congregation to go out and be a community this week.*

#### **Congregational Song**

*Children's leader to explain the 'Prayer Partners' and thank children for their work.*

#### **Closing prayer - Child**

**Postlude** - children who play instruments in your church.

#### **End of Programme Give Away** (see appendix 2)

##### **Prayer Partners**

The focus of this programme is on Community and the importance of building close relationships with members of your congregation. This will take a bit of advance preparation but it will be extremely worth while.

Have you ever played Secret Friends at school? I am sure that most of you have. Prayer Partners is a little like Secret Friends. At the conclusion of the service, each family in the congregation should be given a Prayer Partner picture (eg below). It should be laminated and a magnet placed on the back so that it can be put on the fridge. This family will be your special family to pray for daily and do nice things for (maybe a birthday present or card). Ideally it should be a family that you don't know well, or don't usually socialize with (that way they are getting to know a family in the church community better). You should keep the same Prayer Partner for the year. It would be best if new Prayer Partners could be given out each year, that way you get to know more people and new members can be added.

When you give out the Prayer Partners, make sure you give them out with a covering letter explaining the process - see the one below (just in case they didn't hear the explanation in the service time). That way everyone will have a clear understanding of the process and why they are doing it.

##### **Materials**

Photos of each family in your church  
Laminator or contact paper  
Hot glue gun  
Magnetic strip

You will need to get recent photos of all your church attendees and families. The photos should be set up with the name and birthdays of each family member (eg below). It would be best to laminate them if you have access to one or you could use contact paper. Then, using a hot glue gun, glue a piece of magnet to the back of the picture so it can be displayed on the fridge.

##### **Prayer Partner's Letter – EXAMPLE**

By now you are looking at a picture of a family, couple or person from your church. If you don't know them very well, then that is a really good thing. By the end of the year you will

hopefully know them very well and have some new friends at church.

Have you ever played Secret Friends at school? I am sure that most of you have. Prayer Partners is a little like Secret Friends. This family will be your special family to pray for daily and do nice things for (maybe a birthday present or card, a phone call to see how they are doing). This family, couple or person will be your Prayer Partner for the year. You can choose to tell them that they are your prayer partner...or you could keep it a secret and keep them guessing.

We hope that by participating in this activity you and your family will come to know the importance of Community better and that you will get to know another part of the body of Christ.

Remember, as you pray for your prayer partner's each morning, there will be someone praying for you.

God bless.

## Song List

### **KIDSOURCE**

*Compiled by Cpt. Alan Price, CA in 1999, Published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd Buxhall, Suffolk.*

For I'm Building a People of Power	61
Lord I Want To Be In Your Family	235
We Are One, We Are Family	351
Welcome To the Family	357

### **THE SOURCE**

*Compiled by Graham Kendrick in 1989, Published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd Rattlesden, Suffolk.*

An Army of Ordinary People	20
As We Are Gathered	29
One Heart, One Voice, One Mind	405
The Church Has One Foundation	477
You Have Called Us	598
We Are the Army of God	540

### **THE SOURCE 2**

*Compiled by Graham Kendrick in 2001, Published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd Buxhall, Suffolk.*

Here Is the Risen Son	729
One Lord, One Faith	919
You Have Been Given	1088

### **SPIRIT ALIVE - CD**

*Composed by Janine Max in 2001, Published by maxiPraise, Cooranbong NSW.*

Build Up the Body of Christ	15
We Are the Church	16

### **SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH HYMNAL**

*Published by Review and Herald 1985.*

Blessed Be the Tie	350
Built On the Rock	347
Father Help Your People	353
God Is Love	349

### **REACH FOR JESUS - CD**

*Composed by Kimberly Houliston, Published by Houlico .*

Cooperate

## Background Reading For Leaders

This section provides a short study on the purpose of community. It is provided here with a view to having you become immersed in the value and why this is such an important concept to share. As you think through the concept you might generate other ideas that allow you to present this purpose even more clearly in your context.

### Community – God’s Dream For Humanity

If you had to say, in one word, what God’s dream is for humanity, what would you say? For the Bible writers the single word would be community. The apostle Paul often writes about the church working together as a body and being a community of believers. In the Old Testament God’s plan for the Children of Israel was to be a healthy, truth revealing community. In fact the whole Bible is the story of God’s ongoing attempts to create perfect community; how sin destroys it and how God does whatever it takes to make a way for that community to be experienced again.

God created us for community and until we understand how this works we will keep chasing the wrong things.

We look for happiness in places where God did not design for us to find it. We think that achieving the next goal will take us closer to happiness. The truth is that happiness comes from experiencing community with God and others. Isn’t it ironic that these are the very things we sacrifice in our quest to ‘get ahead’?

God’s dream for you is that you begin to realize the beautiful words of the Psalmist when he wrote: *“How very good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.”* Psalms 133:1.

### To Say Community Matters Is Like Saying Oxygen Matters

We were designed by a God already in community (Trinity) to live in a relationship. Without a community where we know, explore and discover one another we experience isolation and despair that drives us in wrong directions and corrupts our efforts to live meaningfully and love well.

The entire Bible is the story about God who is in the process of building a family who will love Him, honour Him, and reign with Him forever. It says, *“His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave Him great pleasure.”* Ephesians 1:5 (New Living Translation).

Only community is forever. Sin is a brutal attack on community. It leaves us short of experiencing the complete fulfilment of relationship.

One of the primary reasons Jesus set up the church was for it to be an example of the community that is experienced when truth is lived out in loving relationships. It was not only to be an example, but it was also to be a place where people could experience a sense of belonging. For this to occur we must continue in our efforts to develop loving relationships in our church.

The future of our church depends on how well we develop true community. We can only get by for a while on size, skilled communication and programmes to meet needs. Unless we sense that we belong to each other we will become stale, irrelevant and a place where people suffer alone.

In Hebrews 10:25, Paul writes: *“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”* The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be the church.

Loving relationships are the heart of a healthy, growing church. Jesus said people will know we are His disciples by our love, John 13:35. The church is a practical demonstration of how love builds authentic Christian community and brings others into God’s kingdom. Loving relationships are the mark of the Church that will tell the world of a loving God. While preaching and programmes may draw people to Church, it will be the supportive relationships that are developed which will provide the glue that will enable attendees to stay and engage in greater spiritual growth.

Community grows in our church every time someone chooses to pick up the phone and check how another church member is doing rather than race to the next chore. Community grows every time someone sends a note of encouragement, gives away baking, invites a group of people for a meal or social get together or finds some other way of putting people above things or those jobs that always need to be done.

*“You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoys its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour.”* James 3:18 (The Message).