

Using Emmaus in small churches

What is the key to using Emmaus for evangelism in small churches?

Meeting in small groups, such as for Emmaus or Alpha courses, is one of the most effective ways of evangelising and a small church with its contacts is a ready-made small group! Small churches are more likely to grow than larger ones - Bob Jackson's *Hope for the church* (Bob Jackson, Hope for the church, London: CHP, 2002, especially Chapter 11: see <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk>) explains why. Mike Booker writes "the secret is beginning to get out: smaller churches have much to offer which large ones do not" (Mike Booker and Mark Ireland, *Evangelism - which way now?*, London: CHP, 2003, p.139, see <http://www.chpublishing.co.uk>). But he also notes that some small groups "struggle with evangelism" (p.149), therefore an evangelism resource such as Emmaus can be immensely helpful.

Small churches have a headstart. They are already known and trusted locally and more respected than they realise - this is true even of small urban churches if they are outward-looking and engaged with their community. So to assemble an extended small group for an Emmaus Nurture course is less daunting than in a large church. It is not dependant on large-scale advertising and brand recognition but on bringing along people who are already friends. The Emmaus Contact booklet provides down-to-earth tips on doing this.

It is 'do-able'. Running an Emmaus course costs very little financially. And given that clergy are increasingly thinly spread in small church situations, it is eminently do-able by, say, house group leaders, Lay Readers, lay preachers, and others who are thereby released into evangelism: "members of small churches may also develop the attitude that it is down to them to find new members" (*Hope for the church*, p.110).

Finally, **it re-shapes the church.** Emmaus sits between the church's social life and its worshipping life, between coffee morning and Sunday morning as it were, making a natural bridge between the belonging that local people commonly feel towards 'their church' and believing in Christ as Saviour.

Hope for the church recommends four elements that should be included in diocesan policy towards small churches. One of these is "to help them do ... process evangelism courses" (p.124) such as Emmaus. I can see why.

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