

# Small Boats

A guide to starting and sustaining  
small Christian communities

Second edition



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# Vision

Our heart is to see people grow as disciples of Jesus.

At the moment we see small Christian communities as the best way of enabling this. These groups provide a way of doing life which deepens relationships with God, each other, and those around us.

**We see each community as a small boat - unique, agile, and built for fishing.**

It is important that small boats follow the leading of the Holy Spirit and remain connected to each other for support, resourcing, and light touch accountability.

**We see this connectedness as a harbour - places for refreshing and equipping the boats.**

*So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. Acts 26:19*



'Small Boat'. Sarah Grant

# Church reimagined

The rural church in the UK is in decline. We need new ways of being church which work alongside traditional models.

We seek to begin new contextual communities that are primarily relational not institutional, based on scripture and responsive to the Spirit; agile, flexible and focussed on making disciples.

The imagery of small boats and harbours helps us to picture this new future.

*Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? **Isaiah 43:19***



'Being prepared'. The harbour at Sagres in Portugal.  
Cliff Baxendale

# Small boats at a glance

## A small boat is...

- The primary place of belonging, discipleship, care, and mission.
- A community, not just a meeting.
- Uniquely shaped by place as well as by people's gifting and calling.

## The community:

- Grows together through mutual discipleship.
- Regularly eats and prays together.
- Connects with other small boats.
- Connects to the wider church through 'harbour' (e.g. gatherings, prayer initiatives, coaching).



*The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets in their house. **1 Corinthians 16:19***

# First steps

Each community will be shaped differently but will begin with:

- A sense of call to a particular location or people, and exploring the call in prayer with others.
- Continual watching and listening in that place for signs of God's activity.
- Researching the community to better understand its history and present shape.
- Establishing a prayer guard of others who will pray for you as you begin.
- Finding those who will welcome you ('people of peace').

*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.*

**Colossians 4:2**





# Ask

- What is the cry of this community?
- What would it look like for the Kingdom of God to come here?
- What shape should the Christian community take to see this happen?

*Your Kingdom come, your will be done...*

**Matthew 6:10**

# Values

Our values are:

**Candle** – the presence of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit in all of life, in every community and in every heart.

**Table** – community lived in and lived out around a table: a place of generosity, hospitality and study.

**Door** - compelled by love to go outside in mission and to welcome in through the door the pilgrim, the friend and the stranger.

*How lovely is your dwelling place, LORD almighty. My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out for the living God. **Psalm 84:1-2***



# Practices

In time, a small boat will be characterised by five practices inspired by the church described in Acts 2: 42-47:

- Doing life together (*koinonia* - Greek for 'fellowship'), not just weekly meetings.
- All participating.
- Gathering regularly around the Word and communion.
- Devotion to prayer and worship.
- Sharing generously what we have with others.
- A focus beyond ourselves in making disciples and seeing the wider community transformed.
- Multiple leaders.

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47*



# Principles

We see 'small boats' as a way of being church that is sustainable and replicable. In starting and sustaining a small boat, remember that:

- **Only God can do what is needed.** Prayer and fasting, watching, listening and waiting are key.
- **The development of small boats is a long-term process.** It can take time to form relationships and settle into new rhythms.
- **A variety of fishing boats are needed.** No two Christian communities are the same, nor are the places or people they are called to.
- **The call to each of us is to fish.** Jesus sends us together to see others grow as disciples.
- **The size of the boat is as determined by God.** A community can vary from two or three people to house size or people's capacity.
- **This will not come without cost.** Starting and sustaining healthy Christian community involves commitment and sacrifice.

*Whoever wants to be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **Matthew 16:24***





## Children and young people

Your small community might consist of different ages. If so, the life of the community should be crafted so that children and young people are an integral part of it. This involves creating spaces and opportunities for them to participate, contribute, and learn alongside adults.

Children and young people might also have their own regular space such as a youth group that connects young people from across several small communities.

# Harbours

Harbours can provide:

- Space and opportunity for worship.
- Space to hear God together through Word and Spirit.
- A place safe from storm or enemy.
- Home, hospitality, friends and family.
- Rest, relaxation, recovery, storytelling.
- Repair, equipping and boat building.
- Clear signage for access.
- Organisation, permissions, safeguards and communication.



# Harbours

Harbour can be anything we do to help boats fish. Harbours arise through connected small boats with a sense of call to an area. Harbours can include:

- Connection to leaders and others.
- Sharing of resources and hospitality.
- Relationship with others in a community of similar vision and values, commitment to prayer, co-discernment of direction of travel and mutual learning.
- Access to community gatherings for – relationship, worship/teaching/prayer, youth activities, leadership support/coaching/equipping, storytelling.
- Availability of public space to enable relationships with others from our local context – meeting space, events, online access, retreat, café's.
- Help or cover with organisational aspects: insurance, safeguarding, charity law, employment, GDP, health and safety and other aspects of public service where needed.

*And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. **Acts 5:42***



# A way of life

The essence of small boats is the way we do life, not in a reproduceable model.

- Seeking the presence of God - rhythms of prayer and worship.
- Relationship - doing life together.
- Informal - freedom and spontaneity.
- Flexible - organisationally light.
- Missional - built for fishing.
- Attentive - listening/waiting on God.
- Part of something bigger - not isolated.

## The limitations of metaphors

We are aware that metaphors have their limits. Boats and harbours is just one that is useful at present...



'Boats out fishing'. Cliff Baxendale.

# Support

You are welcome to be part of the network we are developing. We aim to support and connect but not strain existing network or denominational loyalties.

You may also wish to access support or resources such as co-coaching, prayer support, storytelling evenings, mentoring, or learning communities.

To find out more, visit  
[www.thresholdnetwork.org](http://www.thresholdnetwork.org)



# Further information

For further information and resources visit

[www.thresholdnetwork.org](http://www.thresholdnetwork.org)

[www.thresholdchurch.co.uk](http://www.thresholdchurch.co.uk)

[www.harbourchurchdorset.org](http://www.harbourchurchdorset.org)

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