

Introduction to the Inspire Movement

Rev Dr Brian Yeich, Lead Missioner in USA (inspiremovement.org)

The Inspire Movement is an international network of Christians who are committed to developing mission-shaped discipleship in the leadership and life of the church. Our vision is to help people become everyday missionaries, who abide deeply with God and live missionally in the world. In short, we seek a life of 'mission spirituality', this is filled, transformed and overflowing with the love of God and neighbour. Although Inspire is an ecumenical movement, it draws upon the wisdom of John Wesley who pioneered a world-changing movement of mission-shaped disciples, with the principles of longing for more of God, seeking him through spiritual disciplines, and helping one another through small group fellowship. Inspire currently has Missioner Teams serving in England, Ireland and the United States. Other individuals and groups are experimenting with Inspire Bands around the world.

Way of Life

Inspire calls individuals and groups to a way of life comprised of four parts:

- First, by **Seeking Growth** in God, participants are encouraged to cultivate their hunger and thirst for more of God in everyday life.
- Second, participants are encouraged to grow by **Using Disciplines** as means of grace; including, but not limited to, scripture reading/study, prayer, fasting, and Holy Communion.
- Third, participants aim to live out their discipleship by **Engaging Mission** through seizing opportunities to join Jesus Christ in His mission in everyday life.
- Fourth, participants are expected to make the journey of discipleship by **Sharing Fellowship** with three to five friends who meet together as a 'band' for mutual accountability and mutual spiritual direction.

Band Meeting

The fellowship band is a catalyst for the way of life that Inspire invites persons to live. Bands are groups of 3 to 5 persons (usually same gender) who meet together at least monthly to share deep spiritual conversations with one another. These conversations include both the ups and downs of life. Band meetings begin with centering prayer and/or worship and then allow time for each person to share what God has been doing in their lives since the previous meeting (challenging, encouraging, convicting, etc). As each person shares, the others are listening to the Spirit for a word of encouragement, exhortation, or challenge. Each one shares in turn, giving opportunity for the rest of the group to offer any words before moving on to the next person. After everyone has an opportunity to share, the group and each individual resolves to follow through on what they perceive God to be saying, and how he may be leading them. Finally, the group closes with prayer.

Rhythm of Discipleship

Inspire encourages participants to engage in a rhythm of discipleship characterized by Reflecting, Relating and Responding. This rhythm provides room for both the individual and community aspects of spiritual formation.

- As persons **Reflect** in their own walk with God, they prepare themselves in prayer for what they need to share with their fellowship band.
- As persons come together in band, they to **Relate** what God has been doing, allowing time for the process of mutual accountability and spiritual guidance.
- As persons **Respond** to the leading of the Spirit discerned in band meeting, they find themselves joining in the mission of God in the world.

Learning From the Inspire Movement So Far

Rev Dr Philip Meadows, Director of Inspire International (Founded in 2009, inspiremovement.org)

Assessing the effectiveness of Inspire, and our learning about this kind of disciple-making ministry.

Stories of Changed Lives

One way to judge the effectiveness of the Movement is by keeping statistics of how many people are involved as enquirers, explorers, wayfarers, and missionaries. But the real test is listening to testimonies about how people's lives have been really changed. We see the following range of outcomes:

- **Mutual support in discipleship and leadership**, as a 'charismatic' disciple-making community
- **Deeper fellowship and spiritual friendship**, mutual accountability and guidance
- **Abiding more deeply in God**, and practising the presence of God in daily life
- **Greater confidence in sharing the faith**, and living more missionally in the world
- **Renewal of spiritual discipline and church life** as deeper discipleship leads to more engaged worship
- **Pioneering new missional communities** as band meeting becomes a catalyst for mid-size groups, meeting in homes, for the purpose of mutual formation in mission.

A Journey of Participation

We have learned that personal commitment to the journey of serious discipleship can take time to develop, but once engaged, it runs deep. We have developed a language for describing this journey, which can also be applied to involvement in the local church:

- **Enquirers** are those who are curious about what Inspire is all about (±500 registered)
- **Explorers** are those who decide to try out the way of life and band meeting (±550 registered)
- **Wayfarers** are those who make a long term commitment to meeting in band (±400 registered)
- **Missioners** are those who experience the benefits of Inspire, and volunteer time to advance the movement in various ways (35 active, plus other advocates).

Bands cannot be rolled out as a congregational program, but are planted and multiply organically.

Discipleship Challenges

We find that the major issues facing discipleship and mission are not educational or methodological but spiritual. Here are some of the underlying challenges that we face in developing the movement at local church level:

- **Church membership** vs Everyday discipleship
- **Practical atheism** vs Practising the presence
- **Privatised spirituality** vs Shared journey
- **Consumer religion** vs Missional following

Leadership Shifts

We have discovered that effective disciple-making churches do not have discipleship as part of the program, but make it their orienting concern. Leaders become less concerned about running churches than they are about raising disciples. Over the years, we have distilled four leadership shifts (rooted in the Inspire way of life) that are key to creating a discipleship culture in the local church:

- **From attracting crowds to investing in a few** who walk with God (Sharing Fellowship)
- **From feeding the flock to creating a hunger** for more of God (Seeking Growth)
- **From doing ministry to equipping the saints** for intimacy with God (Using Disciplines)
- **From planning missions to raising missionaries** for the work of God (Engaging Mission)

Sample Band Meeting Testimonies, Inspire Movement 2015-16

Mutual Support in Discipleship and Leadership

"It is nice to be among people truly interested in living missionally and having conversations about our contexts/situations.... I now feel more confident in who I am as a Christian but also as a leader in Christian ministry. Also, I understand the ways of Jesus, his life style, his ways, and his stories better..." Dublin, 2016

"[Inspire] is giving me a better insight to what I want from a 'church' and how it needs to work and follow through..." Ireland, 2016

"I have found myself much more intentional in my awareness of the Holy Spirit's activity both as the church gathered and scattered... It has encouraged me to believe the Holy Spirit will come in our bands and church gatherings. I have been moved to try to recruit new members and encourage others to form bands, having approached 3 different people this past week." Enniskillen, 2016

"My work is children's and (hopefully next year) moving into youth. This is where my passion is and always has been... When you mentioned in Mitchelstown that Inspire could be used in children's work I honestly lit up inside." Mitchelstown, 2015

Deeper Fellowship and Spiritual Friendship

"My band was formed from 2 ladies I heard talking about inspire. One of these has since moved on and been replaced with a new member. We have met 3 times and are just feeling our way. I have recently gone through a very stressful difficult time. My band has been invaluable". Wiltshire, 2016

"One year ago I joined a new ministry our church was starting called Inspire Life Groups [i.e. bands]. The setting was unique because instead of the typical bible study of God's word, the focus was how God is at work in your life. I didn't know what to expect. I knew there would be some sharing of struggles, some praying, some scripture, but I didn't know how it could really be any different from the typical studies. Boy was I mistaken! I've discovered this is what real authentic Christian community is all about. Not to take anything away from our church, because what great fellowship is had with the family of believers. This was getting real with Christian brothers about the day to day experiences of Gods grace, sharing life struggles without the fear of being judged. It was a little awkward at first, which is to be expected... The awkwardness quickly dissipated by the power of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Coming together with this small group of only 5 men has lead to the most significant period of spiritual growth in my Christian life... I've learned how God uses each person's individual gifts to speak truth into each other's lives. Through my Inspire Life Group experience I've discovered how truly life giving real friendships are in Christ... As our struggles, doubts, fears, and anxieties are exposed to one another, Gods light blasts through the lies of satan with ease... With the group of believers coming together in humility, how much room is created for the Lord to work on our souls." Texas, 2016

Abiding More Deeply with God

"My band was formed [and] we also have 2 other bands in our church. Using this format, and the ideas from Inspire has been the most formative and indeed inspiring 'thing' for want of a better word, that I have been part of for years." Bristol, 2016

"I just want you to know that I am 76 years old and coming to the Inspire sessions has changed my life. I have been going to church all my life but now I have a real relationship with Jesus." Mitchelstown, 2016

"To day in our home group [i.e. band meeting] I had to explain about speaking in tongues and prophecy. People are begging to learn about the Sprit." Enniskillen, 2015

"I was inspired at my first band meeting. It felt like real prayer should! Not cup of tea in sight, just water lest we be distracted and put off course. Please pray of us too, for strength and with faces to be set like flint to this time... no giving up." Enniskillen, 2015

"God is amazing, today I am experiencing more. The way he has brought so many different people together that we could never have imagined." Ireland, 2015

"Being part of an Inspire band has challenged me to carve out specific times of retreat during the year." Dublin 2015

"Three of us have set up a band meeting and meet every Thurs in one of our houses. It is a great help and we all are growing." Cork, Rol, 2016

Greater Confidence in Sharing the Faith

"My prayer list has doubled. The minute I made myself available to the Lord and expected Him to bless people through me. It was amazing the people I met who had needs and I ended up chatting to them, a complete stranger in one case." Cork, Rol, 2016

"The very next morning I had the opportunity to witness to a man (a complete stranger) who I met whilst out walking. Isn't God wonderful!!! Without having heard the testimonies on Wednesday night I may well have missed this opportunity." Lurgan, 2016

"When I was leaving [church] on Saturday... 2 men approached us. The first man with lots of tattoos including words IRA on his left hand and who smelled of alcohol asked me for money and gave a sob story about being just out of the T and F local mental hospital after taking an overdose. The second man hung back keeping his eyes closed seemed a bit "out if it "...We prayed for them... Their story did not add up but they needed to know the love of God and we are called to demonstrate it." Enniskillen, 2016

"A work colleague of mine had a health scare recently and was really anxious so I asked some Inspire friends to pray for her. When I told her we had been praying she was incredibly thankful and on return to work having been given the all clear the first thing she said to me was to thank everyone who had been praying. I was able to pray with her later in the week before her return to the Drs but I was also nudged by God to pray and ask for a word for her. Which I did and was able to share that with her too. Thankful to God for giving me the boldness and courage to do what he prompted me to do and for the openness in our friendship for whatever God wants to do next! The more we see God at work the more our faith grows to see even more than we can think or imagine." Ireland, 2016

"I met a woman at Inspire who came from a Roman Catholic background. She said that people like me annoyed her because we know about Jesus and we know that we can have a relationship with him, and yet we are "too nice" to share this knowledge. She is right. I don't share for fear of imposing....and people miss out. I think we have been misled into thinking that all we have to do is lead Christian lives and people will follow our example. Rubbish, folk need to be told about Jesus." Mitchelstown, 2016

Renewal of Spiritual Discipline and Church Life

"I have only done it twice but I have fasted since that evening of Inspire teaching, using the Thursday pm to Fri pm way. I was sceptical that I could do it as I am very small and slight... However God is gracious and I have been able to fast without feeling it being a risk to my health. Oddly both times I have fasted I have allowed time in my lunch break (at work)to pray, only to be interrupted by Christian friends who have chatted and shared prayer concerns with me!" Derby, 2016

Inspire "has been so encouraging to both my friend and myself in our weekly Bible Study. We discuss what the sessions were about and find that we want to delve deeper and both of us are very new to bible study." Derry, 2016

"[Inspire gets] to the heart of our faith and guides us to want to delve deeper, to a greater commitment... like 'shepherds', teaching, guiding,encouraging. I feel that God is setting the agenda for me now. Since the first meeting last Dec I have been able to read the bible and pray regularly, not haphazardly!" Derby, 2016

"Best thing about Inspire... was sharing with each other. It has encouraged me to 'dig deeper' into my faith. Some might find the teaching 'too deep' for where they are at the moment, although I realise we all need to be challenged and 'moved on' in our faith" Derby, 2016