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## MINISTRIES OF THE CHURCH:

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### *Fellowship*

#### **Importance of fellowship:**

Fellowship within the local church is fundamental to its design and functionality (cf. 1 Cor. 12:24-26). Fellowship, which conveys the idea of things shared in common between individuals, expresses the bond believers have as the result of their faith (cf. Eph. 4:1-6). It is this bond which is a crucial characteristic of the local church and which affects its stability, strength (cf. Eccl. 4:9-12) and ability to impact its members (cf. Pro. 27:17) and the world (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6; Php. 2:15) in which it exists. Without fellowship, the local church would be impotent and ineffective.



#### **Essence and basis of fellowship:**

The essence and basis of fellowship between Christians is Jesus Christ, not simply God. This is true because if a Christian's basis for fellowship is strictly God, then he can have fellowship with Muslims, Hindus, Mormons, Jehovah Witnesses, etc., for they all state that they have faith in God. But for the true believer who holds a biblically-based view of Jesus, Jesus is the center and focus of his fellowship. The Apostle John clearly demonstrated this truth when he spoke to his readers in 1 John about the basis of fellowship between them and the apostles. It is their relationship with Jesus that he gave as the basis for their mutual fellowship (1 John 1:1-2). It is this relationship which established the apostle's fellowship, not only with Jesus and with his readers, but with God the Father as well (1 John 1:3). Therefore, since fellowship is a relationship which is based upon Christ and Him alone, it is therefore a relationship which can only exist between Christians. It is not a relationship that can be shared among unbelievers (John 8:44) or between believers and unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). This is why ecumenicalism -- the unity among all religions and faiths -- is unscriptural.

### **Inherent aspect of fellowship:**

Fellowship should be a natural and intrinsic part of a believer's life. So, if a person claims to be a Christian and does not love the brethren and/or does not desire to fellowship with them, then it is appropriate to question whether this person truly knows the Father (1 John 4:7-21). If this person truly is a believer, then one can rightfully assume that he is struggling in his faith. This is true because fellowship is common to all believers (cf. 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 13:14; Php. 2:1; 1 John 1:7). It cannot be separated from who they are and is therefore something they should not forsake (Heb 10:24-25).

Because of the intricacy of fellowship in the Christian faith, the cultivation of fellowship is important within the local church. Although fellowship exists at the core of a person's faith as soon as he becomes a Christian, the relational aspect of fellowship needs to be cultivated. If left to chance, the deeper levels of fellowship may not develop for many reasons. This is why church leaders need to work at encouraging and developing fellowship within the body. The deeper the Christ-centered relationships grow, the stronger the church will grow. Even though this should be the case, it is to be expected that unhealthy relationships can develop and grow in a church as well. Therefore the leaders need to be circumspect, working at keeping this from occurring.

### **Cultivation of fellowship:**

Fellowship within the local church can be cultivated in many ways. For example, an act as simple as having people shake hands with other people sitting around them during a worship service can encourage fellowship. Although this is a little thing, it can help believers begin to feel more comfortable with others they do not know in the church. It can be a catalyst to conversation, which later could lead to friendship, and ultimately to the deeper goal of fellowship. Also, planning events inside and outside the church can also stimulate fellowship. Inside the church such things as Bible studies, on books of the Bible or on specific issues, can cultivate fellowship. Developing discipleship groups and men's and women's groups are also helpful. Events outside the church that people enjoy such as attending concerts, operas, bike rides, walks, picnics, or other excursions can also help draw people together and be a catalyst to deeper fellowship. The church leaders need to think through these issues and work at making fellowship an intricate and important part of their church.

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## APPLICATION QUESTIONS:



1. What are your church's guidelines for what other types of churches it will fellowship with? Are they written or unwritten guidelines?
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2. Are all of the guidelines listed above biblical? Go back to question number 1 and list Scripture passages next to each guideline that clearly shows that it is actually biblical. If any of the guidelines are not biblical, please justify why your church should follow them.
3. Do you have specific standards on whom you will personally fellowship with? Are your standards the same as your church's or different? Are they more or less restrictive? Are they biblical?
4. Within your church what types of things are being done on a regular basis to encourage fellowship (weekly, monthly, quarterly, yearly)?
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5. What could your church do to promote more fellowship?
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6. What could be done in your church to stimulate deeper levels of fellowship?

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7. Does your church have events that are planned according to age groups for the purpose of stimulating fellowship (i.e., children, teenagers, college students, young married couples, middle-aged people, seniors)? If not, what are some events that your church could organize?

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8. Does your church organize events to stimulate fellowship according to other characteristics such as events for singles, for men, for women, for families, for people who share areas of interest (e.g., sewing, child rearing, gardening, fishing, sports, computers, etc.)? If not, please list some ideas of events that your church could organize to promote fellowship among such people groups.

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9. If your church is too small to organize some of these things mentioned above, are there other churches that you could involve in these events? Involving other churches would not only stimulate fellowship within your church, but also between the churches. List some potential churches below.

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10. Though age and/or interest-oriented fellowship events are important, it is also important to stimulate fellowship between all ages of people in your church. Doing this will help keep the church unified and not cause division, especially between its youth and the elderly. What are some things which your church can do to encourage fellowship between its various age groups?

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**SPECIFIC QUESTIONS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL MISSIONARIES AND CHURCH PLANTERS:**

1. What can you do to integrate fellowship into the lives and practice of new believers and into the routine of your new church from the beginning?

New believers:

Church:

2. How can you model fellowship in a way to encourage others to follow your example?
  
3. Have you written a policy with guidelines on which kinds of churches your church will fellowship with and which ones it will not? List some scripture passages below which will help you in this process.