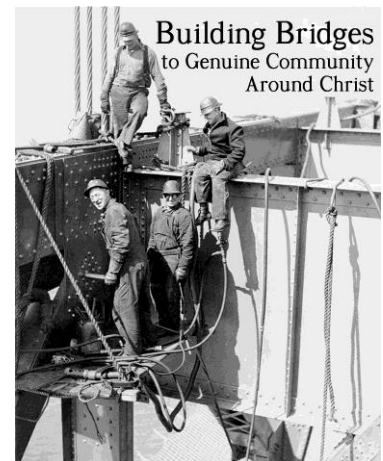




Building Bridges to Genuine Community around Christ

At Ashfield Presbyterian Church we want to be **growing followers of Jesus**. For some this will mean taking their first ever tentative steps in understanding who Jesus is and why he matters. For others, it will mean continuing on in the Christian life after many years. But wherever people are at, we want to be a church where everyone is helped to know Jesus better.

And this is where our home groups fit in. Our home groups meet to explore the Bible and learn together. But home groups are also about experiencing real community. It's within a small group of people that there is so much more opportunity for people to 'get real' with each other and look out for one another in practical ways. They are a tool that enables us to build bridges to genuine community around Christ.



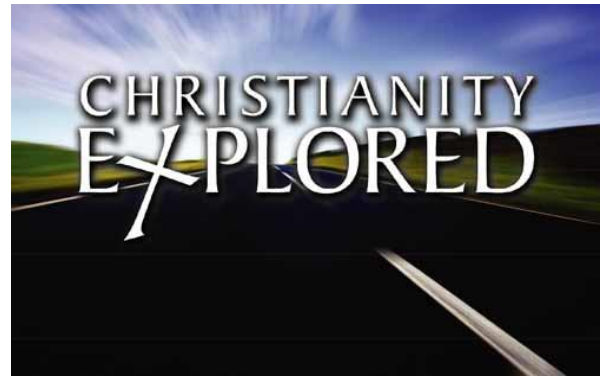
In the New Testament, Galatians 6:2-10 says “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ”. Home groups are the perfect way to build relationships so you can begin to care for each other in practical ways. Being in a home group means you can be there for others in the highs and lows of everyday life. They’re like a big family.

Home groups run at a variety of times during the week, and for men, women, or mixed participants. Most run weekly, others fortnightly. There’s a group to suit everyone.

First Steps

At Ashfield our home groups are for everyone! The Bible study material won’t make assumptions on what you know, and neither will the leaders. There will be no expectation placed on you to read the Bible or pray out loud. So if you are investigating the Christian faith or new to it, our home groups are a great place to be. If you want to know what it means to live the Christian life, then there’s no better thing than being able to see the Christian life in those who are in the group with you.

For people who are new to the Christian faith or perhaps reconnecting after many years away, it may be helpful to go through the basics. This is where our ‘**Christianity Explored**’ Course comes in. Think of it as our Ashfield ‘first steps’ home group.

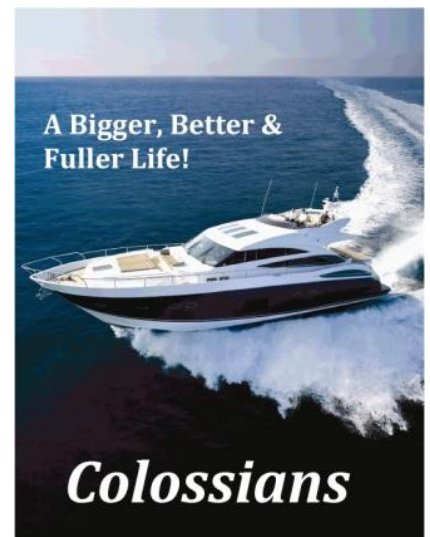


The **Christianity Explored** course goes for 7 weeks with much of the same elements as other home groups—time to get to know others and discuss together. But what makes ‘Christianity Explored’ special is that each week there’s an excellent DVD presentation that goes through what the Bible tells us about Jesus and the Christian faith. Afterwards you can ask any question and learn together.

We offer the **Christianity Explored** course in the first term of the year (don’t miss out!) but it’s on at other times as well. In fact, we don’t want anyone to have to wait around, so as soon as we have some people who are interested, we’ll run the course. Given it goes for a discreet 7 weeks, ‘Christianity Explored’ can be the perfect introduction to the way home groups work at Ashfield.

Home Group Bible Studies

Our pattern for Bible study in home groups is to link with the sermons given on Sundays. We believe this is a good pattern because there’s incredible depth to any passage in the bible. We don’t want to treat the Bible like yesterday’s newspaper as if we move on once it’s read. We want to think seriously about how it applies to us, so having time to ask questions and clarify our thinking is very helpful.



Home Groups & Living Life Together

The core of our home groups is the weekly activity of studying the Bible together. But that doesn't mean they are simply Bible study groups. Our home groups are about Christian community. Many groups will enjoy a regular meal together or various social activities – excellent opportunities to introduce non-Christian friends to the community.

There are also opportunities to serve the larger church family in organising our bi-monthly church lunches. There's no better way to forge community than over time spent with each other in service to others. We encourage all our groups to think of ways they can look out for others and serve together as a group.

Committing to a Group

We want to make it easy for people to join a group, and believe it or not, make it easier to leave as well! Rather than a full-year commitment, we're asking people to be committed to a group for the length of a school term, approximately 9 weeks.

This means you can think of growth group and your year in terms of 'bite size chunks'! We want you to be fully committed to the group for the 9 week session, and then you can reassess things. If you don't think the group is for you, one option we'd like you to consider for the following term is to join another group.

If you join a group for a term, it's important to remain committed to it. This is because the most important ingredient for the health of that group is not the quality of the bible study material, or the type of home group leader you have. The most important ingredient is you! If the only reason you're not there on any given week during the term is because you're sick or away, that provides a powerful positive message. It shows to everyone that the group matters to you and it makes the group all the more encouraging for everyone.

Each term, after coming along for a couple of weeks and then deciding if the group is for you, the leader will go through what commitment to the group means:

- Commitment to the other members expressed in regular attendance
- Keeping spiritual growth as the top priority.
- Studying the bible.
- Preparation.
- Contribution to discussion.
- Confidentiality.
- How we treat one another in the group.
- Group operation issues such as start and finish times.
- Identifying appropriate social events.
- Opportunities to serve together

We want people to think of home groups not as an activity during the week, where your attendance has little impact on whether it keeps going or not. We want you to think of home group as a team, where your involvement is key to making it a success.

Home Groups & You

Read I Peter 1:22-2:3

1. How can home groups fit into the picture of what we're told in this passage?
2. What do you think are the strengths of learning from God's word in a home group?
3. If the Christian life is about constantly putting away such sin as mentioned in 2v1, what are the implications for appropriate sharing in home group?
4. What needs to happen so that home groups can be a great starting point for 'loving one another deeply'? (1v22)
5. What stands out for you in this document—that you think might particularly help with growing in the knowledge of God's word and growing together?
6. What other thoughts/ideas do you have about Home Groups at Ashfield?

I Peter 1:22-2:3

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord stands forever."

And this is the word that was preached to you.

2:1 Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. 2 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, 3 now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Where To From Here?

Let's not be a church where people simply attend. Let's be a church where people are **part of a community**. Our goal is that home group participation increases from 65% to 80%. Here are 4 things we'd like you to do:

- Consider joining the **Christianity Explored** Course at the start of the year. As well as giving a great introduction to the Christian faith, it's a helpful 'first steps' for ongoing home group involvement.
- **Be involved** in a Home Group. We're confident there's something to suit you. As you take the step of being committed to a group you'll reap great benefits for yourself as well as bring encouragement to others
- **Pray** for our home groups and pray about your involvement.
- Any questions? Or you want to get involved? **See David.**