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Bible based, Christ-centered,  
Spirit empowered

## Asian Indian Christian Church of Pittsburgh

*A newsletter of the AICCP community*



# Gospel Street

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### Upcoming Events

- A Nepali Thanksgiving Celebration, (to be decided)
- Aradhana Music Outreach, Friday, Nov 21st
- Thanksgiving and Dinner, Sunday, Nov 23rd
- Christmas Choir Presentation, Dec 7
- Children's Christmas Presentation, Dec 14
- Congregation Christmas Celebration in native languages, Dec 21
- Christmas Day Worship, Dec 25, 10:30 AM
- New Year's Eve Worship Service, Dec 31, 10:30 PM

## A Time to Grow

As a church just coming off a successful Renewal Festival we have a lot to reflect on. Rev Dudley Thangiah challenged us to grow in numbers, in prayer and in creative outreach to the community. While each of these points deserves serious deliberation, this article and this issue as a whole will focus on the first point, growth in numbers. Now growth if not carefully and prayerfully planned can never succeed. So in this article I would like to talk about the 3M's of church growth. Motivation, Method and Mission Field.

We begin with the question of Motivation. Jesus has made this point on numerous occasions that our intensions are almost more important than our actual actions. When Jesus is commenting about the woman who put a few coins in the offertory or responding to the criticisms of His healing on the Sabbath, He is never impressed with only outward show but always looking at inward sincerity. So when we as a church plan work towards an agenda of growth, we have to begin with an examination of our hearts and ask the question, why do we need to grow. Is it because it is more prestigious to be a part of or a pastor of a bigger church or because if we are bigger we can have our own building or perhaps because it is not possible to do effective ministry below a certain size? How about this for a reason.

We want to grow simply because we are filled with a zeal to reach more people for God. If Scripture is our guide, then the last reason is the only one that has any validity.



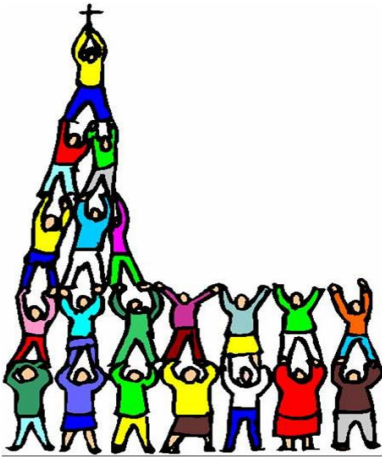
*Rev. Dudley Thangiah, speaker at the AICCP Renewal Festival 08*

Next we turn to the issue of Methods. If our motive is to reach people for Christ then our method has to be driven by that mandate. Reaching people for Christ is not about simply inviting people to church. That would be like Christ sitting on His throne in heaven and issuing an invitation to all of us to join Him, skipping all the hard steps in between. The invitation only works if we as a church are willing to understand what it means to "go" as commanded in Acts 1:8. Following the leadership of the church, each member has to grapple with how the call to "go" applies to each one individually. Broadly, this means training ourselves to better understand the folks who inhabit our mission field, including understanding their world view, their convictions, their motivations, their fears

their prejudices and their anxieties. This level of understanding happens when we immerse ourselves in their lives or walk in their shoes. This is what Jesus achieved through His incarnation. Then, having understood, we need to make ourselves vulnerable through our testimonies that address the people where they are. This testimony becomes the undeniably powerful Gospel Message. The toughest part of this work is that it calls for a massive investment in a relationship without expecting anything in return. Think of how much time Jesus invested in people including Judas and many who either ignored him or benefitted from Him and then continued on their way. But as a pure and costly expression of love modeled on what Christ has done for us, this approach of "going" is not an option, but in fact the essence of Church growth.

That brings us then to our Mission Field. Pastor Thinagar often reminds us of this William Temple quote, "the Church is the only institution that exists for the sake of its non-members. Every local church is uniquely geared to "go to" a special set of non-members. If every member is mindful at all times of who their non-members are, then that would make a big difference to the Mission of the church. At AICCP our Cont..pg 3

## Pastor's Word



### Church Growth

Church growth immediately brings to mind the number of people in the pews on Sundays. As I read or hear “Church Growth Pundits,” however, I come away with different aspects of church growth. Number in the pews is the byproduct of Church growth. So, what is church growth?

Peter Wagner sums up church Growth into four aspects following the New Testament model. Church Growth meant to grow up, grow together, grow out, and grow in numbers. The New Testament Church grew up into Christ, they grew together breaking bread and worshipping, they grew out reaching out to all who were in need, and they grew in numbers. Numbers matter. Numbers mattered to the early church.

In order to understand Church Growth, we must first define and understand evangelism. A church gets involved with ministry among alcoholics under the banner “evangelism.” It is good work and an important work. It is Christian work. Maybe it is evangelism. Maybe it is not. Then there were top denominational leaders gather to tackle some crisis in their community, whether racial tension or the scourge of war. These are important part of “evangel,” sure. But, we might be missing the heart of the term “evangel” as used in the Scriptures. Evangelism could take many roads but must go all the way to the foot of the cross every time. Evangelism and Church growth are inseparable. Evangelism is “growth” because that is what we are talking about – the extension of God’s reign of love. It is also “Church” because it is the people folded into a living and moving organism that does the

work. Apart from them it cannot function effectively.

In order for the church to function effectively, we also need to develop cell groups. In a sprawling city, we need the witness for Christ in as many parts of the city as possible. Development of leaders within the church to lead the cell groups that function as the arms of the church is necessary. Pastors alone could not do it. The cell group leader becomes the Church Growth person. C. Wayne Zunkel, author of the book “Church Growth Under Fire,” writes that the moods of a Church Growth person are:

1. Obedience 2. Optimism 3. Pragmatism

He or she is called to be faithful; optimistic about the future God can give; and open and flexible, which means ready to discard methods which do not accomplish what they are attempting to do. Our goals do not change. Our methods and tools could and should.

During the recent convention meetings we also heard three important things that become visible in a growing church:

A growing Church is called the “House of Prayer.” In order to grow, a church must insist on praying.

In a growing church, God is seen in action. People sense the presence of God in tangible ways. We must believe in the miraculous.

In a growing church, new leaders are becoming visible. God has been preparing leaders for a long time. We must identify them so that they could step up and provide leadership that will help build the church.

AICCP, I am sure, is poised for Church Growth. Our prayers, our support, and our involvement will make it happen, with God’s leading and guiding. It is exciting time for our Church.

Pastor Thinagar

## What are Home Cell groups?

If you attended any of Rev Dudley Thangiah's meetings at the AICCP Renewal festival as well as listened to Pastor Thingar on the topic of church growth you will hear repeatedly the term "cell groups". In this article we will explore the term looking specifically at the cell group model followed by Rev Dudley Thangiah and developed by Dr David Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the world's largest local church with present membership of 750,000. The key aspects of cell groups are:-

Cell groups are small groups that meet at the home of one of the members during the week for worship and fellowship.

Each cell group has a cell leader and this leader is completely responsible for organizing of the group, and the spiritual and pastoral care of the group.

Each cell group caters to individuals within a particular geographic area.

Each cell group has both the mandate to conduct evangelism in its area and also specific goals for reaching a particular number of people in a given time frame.

The cell group has a mandated maximum number and when the group crosses that limit, the cell is expected to split.

All materials used for study by the cell groups are centrally created and distributed so individual cell leaders have the needed resources and provide sound spiritual teaching.

The cell groups are not a substitute for Sunday worship and all cells come together for the Sunday services.

Why should one have cell groups? There are a number of reasons. The first reason is that it enables individual church members to have all the benefits of a small house church environment. These benefits include a high degree of pastoral care, fellowship and accountability and powerful prayer sessions within the group. It also affords significant leadership opportunities in the small group setting that would otherwise not be available in the context of the larger church setting. Another key benefit is that it creates an excellent forum for neighborhood evangelism. This is because the proximity to the neighborhood allows for contact and caring opportunities for the cell group to the people in the neighborhood. The cell group is also a great forum to invite the non-church goers in the neighborhood to.

Yet because each of these cells are not stand alone entities but connect to the larger whole, therefore when it comes to ministries at the larger church level the economies of scale allow the church to sponsor ministries like youth camps, mission trips, special events and community support projects at a scale not possible for a small house church. Thus the concept of a cell group is both highly suitable for the spiritual nurture and leadership development of individual church members and infinitely scalable allowing for vibrant growth. To learn more about cell groups, see *Successful Home Cell Groups* by Dr David Yonggi Cho or go to <http://joyfulministry.com/cell.htm>

-Ed

## New Arrivals

We rejoice with Jey and Sumi and Shelley and Evangeline for the new additions to their family and ours. Anya Jasmine Baskar was dedicated at AICCP on October 19, 2008 at which time her parents, maternal grandmother Mrs Julie Helman, representing the grandparents and the congregation committed to nurture and train the child in Christian life. Little baby boy Egan Jeruel Shelley is our newest addition to the AICCP family. At the time of writing, he is just two days old but already very alert and ready to take on the world.

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## A time to grow

mission field is clearly the folks in Pittsburgh with connections to the Indian sub-continent. As members our ordinary lives affords us many connections with non-members. If we were constantly aware that we exist to serve these non-members at every opportunity we get, it would radically revitalize our church. Members would be constantly asking for training and outreach ideas. We would be constantly praying for non-members. We would be putting together programs that we could invite non-members to. As a church we will be bubbling with vitality.

In summary, we as a church must grow not because church growth is an end in itself, but because church growth becomes the visible sign of our zeal to reach people for Christ. Our method then must be incarnational and finally our Mission Field should at all times be in the foreground of our vision and imagination. May God bless this time of growth.  
-Ed



Anya Jasmine Baskar, born Sept 30th 2008, to proud parents Jey and Sumi Baskar and doting brother Nathan



Egan Jeruel Shelley, born Oct 23rd, 2008, to joyous parents Evangeline and Shelley Rajamony

## Discussion Starter- Halloween, an opportunity?

Halloween is a challenge for many Christians. The quandary is usually whether to just go with the flow and do what the neighbors are doing or to hide behind closed doors. Before we probe for solutions let us unpack some of the issues involved. Firstly, what is going on at Halloween. There are many different myths and stories that explain this festival but at the very basic level, the kids coming knocking on doors are supposed to represent evil spirits coming around and the candy doled out is supposed to represent the appeasement of those evil spirits. This being the case, it is easy to see why many Christians believe they have no business being involved at all. On the other hand, looking at the way our lives are structured in this country, we seldom get an opportunity to have meaningful interactions with our neighbors. And you cannot be salt and light to others if there is no meaningful contact. Further, there is a perception among non-church goers that church goers have a holier-than-thou attitude and look down on everyone else. Given these realities, it seems to me that engaging rather than running away seems to be the appropriate way to engage this opportunity. But even if we do want to do something, what then should we do? When thinking of this the strong leading I get from the Spirit is that we have to engage in this with a clear understanding of who we are. For example, we know and understand the fact

## On the lighter side...



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"Well Pastor you're experiencing some remarkable church growth!"

Source <http://www.toonfever.com/>

that we are children of God surrounded by his love, care and protection. Because of this we are not afraid of evil spirits and feel absolutely no need to appease them. Of course we should never proactively engage in behaviors that possibly attract evil spirits. However, in our situation, when we interact with the kids we can see them like how God sees them i.e. as individuals representing the high point of His beautiful creation, who He loves so much that He gave His only Son to die for. Now we don't really have to stand at the door and give them a sermon on this however. We can just interact with them in a way that this love that God has for them really shows through. Many web sites suggest distributing tracts along with the candy. That might be something useful in your situation. The real opportunity here I believe is to make the kids feel that they have come to a special house and met special people. Maybe they would like to come again and find out why these people are so special. If we can treat the kids with love, care and concern we would have succeeded. Then if we have the means to do so and have some decorations up that are completely unexpected and can trigger a curious child to ask some questions about our faith that would be a great bonus. The other question is, should our own kids go around with the other kids collecting candy? Here again I believe this might be an opportunity to explain to our kids their identity as children of God (and children of God I think should not be parading around in the form of evil creatures). However this article is not meant to be a list of prescriptions but meant to provide some direction as we dialogue with each other, engage the Holy Spirit and discern our response to the situation. Anybody with any good ideas, may please feel free to share it with us. At any rate I do hope and pray that we all make the most of this opportunity.

-/Ed



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