

Research¹ on Discipleship and Community Mission: A Report about Conscientization

INTRODUCTION

I observe that in the literature on disciple training, there is rarely an output angle when evaluating the effects of discipleship (or disciple training); the emphasis is mostly on input, or the content of the input while neglecting the testing and examination of the output. This approach can easily become the mere revision of, or addition to, the discipleship input, promoting a myriad of amazing courses from time to time, resulting in the programming of disciples and the curricularization of faith and life. Disciples have then become people who just frequently take discipleship courses. Even if attention is paid to researching the quality of the disciples, there is a dearth of research focusing on the interaction between the disciples and history or society.

All along, Chinese churches have been concerned with disciple training. In recent years many churches have invested a lot of human and financial resources into the construction and operation of community centers, to implement social concern and integrate it with local mission. This current research emphasizes discipleship, to explore how 105 Gibson Centre, through social concern to achieve disciple training. From the onset the 105 Gibson Centre aims at shaping the future of the neighborhood, it cannot depart from viewing the calling and participation disciples (the church) in historical and contextual terms.

This research has chosen to adopt a qualitative indicator—a concept called Conscientization.²

¹ First of all, there is an inherent contradiction between researching church life and hoping to learn some principles from the study results. Scholarly research is incompatible with the church's development and growth in both basic methodology and worldview. Whatever happened to the Biblical characters basically were the results of God's unique work, rather than the results of scientific principles. Whatever is discovered from scientific methods in terms of the regularity of operations has nothing to do with interventions of God, which is above and beyond science and nature. All these happenings, including the act of creation, Exodus, captivity, nativity, resurrection, and the Pentecost are unique incidents. Even if any traces are discovered through scientific research, they are no more than ex post facto descriptions and conclusions. One may perhaps point out that there is an amazing God who calls His believing children, whose actions are in keeping with God's plans. Such research is possibly a descriptive study or attributive study. At least, whatever the research results show, to think that these results can be replicated without the work of God's spirit is nothing but ignorance or arrogance. Nevertheless, God also makes use of the trajectory left by events that happen in the world. The world, being created by God, functions with certain logic. Whether in the interpersonal realm, in religious matters, or in physical phenomena, things that happen all operate according to habitual patterns. These habitual patterns may not be one hundred percent free of errors, but to some extent and within a given time frame, some predictability is possible. This is an important assumption underlying research on social groups. Based on such understanding, we make three points about any research: (1) a research is to reiterate acts of God through reporting and organizing; (2) a research is to describe and explore cause/effect and habitual patterns behind an incident; and (3) a research is to point out deficiencies and difficulties that need to be corrected or overcome, with a prayer for God's grace and intervention.

Conscientization is a concept in adult education, referring to how a person moves, through a certain educational method (dialogue/praxis), from a lower and more primitive consciousness to a higher level. This process of raising awareness continuously is called humanization. This process represents human beings' search for freedom, which through conscientization will result in obtaining critical knowledge of the world. A conscientized person is able to find her or his own foothold and a way to participate. To grasp the societal and historical context, one primarily uses a dialectical process of dialogue and action-reflection; eventually one engages in improvement of self as well as of the entire society. In Christian lingo, we may say that one finds the calling that links oneself to the world, a calling that is made for the here and now – to practice missionary work, offering oneself to the command of loving others. All this was sparked by a wave in education starting during the 1970s and 1980s in Brazil that eventually swept through Latin America and many countries in Africa.

The reported study here adopted discourse analysis, a type of qualitative research methodology. Collecting data through interviews, understanding of word usage, and participant observation, we attempted to sketch a picture of happenings within the church and community service during the last few years. Perhaps in this way, observation of the changes in the lives of the disciples (participants) may lead to an extension of a specific disciple training model.

The subject of our study is a church with a multi-lingual, multi-cultural congregation – Chinese speaking (Cantonese and Mandarin) and English speaking.³ In response to a calling to do local missions, the church is situated in a multiethnic community. Looking back at the few years between the inception of the community centre and its current operation, we paid attention to how the church has participated in disciple training with a community service and local mission component. Interviews were being held with several participants to explore their faith experience, especially their "conscientization" while going

² "Conscientization" originates from the Portuguese word "conscientização", or sometimes translated into "enlightened consciousness" or "raised consciousness". Refer to Chan, Jonathan (2002), unpublished paper, "Conscientization is a way of education: an inspiration from Paulo Freire", an assignment for the course "Worldview Studies: Education" at The Institute for Christian Studies (Toronto). In that paper Chan points out that conscientization can be understood as, in summary, the following:

- A process of humanization
- That man comes to grasp critical knowledge of reality through praxis
- A continuous initiation to engage in progress of cultural action for freedom
- Can be done through critical education

Chan also critiques the concept of conscientization. While he believes that this educational approach is meaningful to some extent in raising awareness, he points out that a real and comprehensive awareness can come only from religious faith. At present, it is impossible to produce an ultimate united knowledge of the world; in other words, currently it is impossible to witness thorough and complete humanization.

³ The *Canadian Chinese Churches* once conducted an interview with multicultural, multilingual churches that also engage in community service. I responded to their question about how to integrate the different cultures within the church. While having two languages and three dialects may fragment the church, we can actually find two common languages. One is the language of our spiritual experience while the other is the language of the great commission. As long as we are interested in the spiritual experience of brothers and sisters who are different from us, we will be willing to listen to their sharing, which may enrich our own lives. Furthermore, we all have to take up the same mission, which is greater than our local church based on a particular dialect or language. Thus it is essential to learn to cooperate and to listen to each other. The first step to learning any language is to see the need, then to learn to listen.

through disciple training. The hope was to understand how they perceived the relationship between local missions and community service, and ultimately to bring to home of how the process of discipleship could be benefited in such understandings.

The present action research report will cover the following areas and themes:

- Reflections on discipleship
- A community engagement experiment of discipleship
- Observations of the experiment and report
- The experience of conscientization - learning and reflections while in action

I. REFLECTIONS ON DISCIPLESHIP

1) The word "disciple"

Actually, "men tu xun lian" 「門徒訓練」 (the Chinese word for training disciples) is a very Western term which comes from discipleship or disciple making. The term "men tu" 「門徒」 (disciple) is not a commonly used term in contemporary Chinese. A more contemporary term that is close to Jesus' relationship with his chosen followers of His days is "di ji" 「弟子」 or "tu di" 「徒弟」 or "men shang" 「門生」, all of which carry the connotation of being part of the teacher's inner circle or "ru shi" 「入室」 (literally meaning to enter the inner chamber). There is also the connotation of a vertical passing of the baton from "Up" to "Down" and from "Past" to "Present." Apparently, the act of Jesus calling the apostles already implied a demand of the latter to carry on the legacy by continuing to spread His teachings and to make disciples of others. The word "xue shang" 「學生」 (student or pupil) is a more casual term, lacking implication of intimacy between the master and the apostle. The use of the Chinese translated word "men tu" is a wise choice as it preserves our understanding of both the tradition in Jesus' era as well as the Chinese tradition of "inner circle." Of course, times have changed and this word "men tu" seems dated, but this does not mean we should discard it. It does mean when promoting disciple training in churches, we need to find a way to communicate the meaning of "men tu." When I interviewed younger Christian co-workers in our Community Service Centre, I sensed their feeling somewhat alienated from the word "men tu."

Barna Research Group (commissioned by the evangelical organization Navigators) published a research report in 2015. The group also concluded that within American churches the word "disciple" is neither a familiar or frequently used term when referring to spiritual growth.⁴ The researchers studied words frequently associated with Disciple training. Among those interviewed about their understanding of the journey of spiritual growth, only 18% responded 'discipleship'⁵ and other responses were, in this order: 'becoming more Christ-like' (43%), 'spiritual growth' (31%) and 'Spiritual journey' (28%). 'Discipleship'

⁴ <https://www.barna.org/research/leaders-pastors/research-release/new-research-state-of-discipleship#.Vs9SevkrK00>

⁵ Discipleship - here means to be a disciple

is ranked number 4, followed by 'spiritual maturation' (16%), 'sanctification' (9%), and 'spiritual formation' (5%). My understanding is that discipleship is not a commonly used term in American churches; at least, it is not an important term to describe spiritual improvement. Being a Christian is a very personal matter and spirituality oriented. What does all this signify? First, in terms of word usage, "discipleship" has been marginalized, not receiving sufficient attention. Second, people perhaps understand "Be more like Christ" as a goal for Christians, but this may not necessarily have any connection with discipleship. One can be a Christian but not a disciple. Third, the four top ranked terms have no reference at all to a master-learner relationship, an assertion that is supported by other findings of the Barna study.⁶

2) Making disciples

We may want to ask, is the term "discipleship" helpful in communicating ones' faith or one's belief in Christ? How should evangelical believers and leaders understand a better or more advanced faith? If they want to seek improvement, is this improvement in line with what the Bible demands? These questions serve as a lead-in to a discussion of the method/ mode, content, and evaluation of disciple training.

a) Modes of discipleship

It has been said that there are as many modes of disciple training as there are disciples. There is some truth in this statement; each social group, including that of the religious ones, has its own way of extending itself. Thus, every church has its own way of sustaining and reproducing itself, through disciple training.

Although there are many different models of disciple training, Heather Zempel, a researcher on the history and categorization of disciple training, discovers five major models:⁷

⁶ In terms of participating in activities related to "Be a disciple", the fourth most mentioned one is meeting with a spiritual director (17%). With the 13 basic elements for "Becoming a disciple," majority are personal and related to the soul.

⁷ Heather Zempel, *Models of Discipleship throughout Church History*, Feb 1, 2006.

<http://discipleshipgroups.blogspot.ca/2006/02/models-of-discipleship-throughout.htm>

The chart shows the typology:

5 Discipleship Models/ Approaches			
Model	Characteristics	Biblical emphasis	Examples
1. Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small groups Natural growth of Christian lives by relational interaction of Christians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 2, where we read that they met together in homes and they devoted themselves to the fellowship of the other believers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Master Plan of Evangelism Discipleship by Design
2. Experiential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discipleship induced through 5 senses (Exodus/ 10 commandments) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acts 2, the Pentecostal experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postmodern experiments like: Ancient-Future Faith, The Emerging Church, and Reimagining Spiritual Formation

- Relational
- Experiential
- Academic
- Personal
- Incarnational

These categories are not mutually exclusive; sometimes one model will adopt characteristics of another model. For example, incarnational disciple training may combine some elements from the relational and experiential models. Real examples discovered in history have confirmed and supported this insightful classification. The Reformed tradition and the Sunday school movement are obviously examples of the academic model, whereas the systematic cell groups prevalent in North America today emphasize relationships and everyday living. Incarnational discipleship, of which World Vision and Samaritan Shoebox Movement are examples, emphasizes service to vulnerable populations as a mobilization force for disciple training. Different models of disciple training reflect the need to make choices among the many biblical teachings and experiences. Taken as a whole, Biblical teachings have different descriptions of how disciple training manifested, which is the say, the early church's manifestation to the world is multi-dimensional. It was only later in church history that churches chose an emphasis (or a blind spot). Furthermore, the emergence of a certain model of disciple training is, to certain extent, related to the social, cultural, and technological development at the time. For instance, the academic model of disciple training could be attributed to the climate generated by the Reformation and the prevalence of the printing press.

b) Evaluation of discipleship

Another direction for looking at the process of discipleship is evaluation. The question is, how do we know when the disciple training has reached its goal? What are the criteria for determining success?

3. Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History: Age of Enlightenment, Protestant Reformation, and Industrial Revolution sparked a new form of discipleship • Rooted in an Academic or educational model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." • Acts 2, the early church was devoted to the apostle's teaching and continued to meet in the temple courts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reformed tradition • Sunday school movement
4. Personal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • combined with the Relational model (small groups) or the Academic model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Timothy 2:15, where Paul exhorts Timothy, • Personal approach is also seen in Acts 2, where we read that people devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach to spiritual formation used by the Desert Fathers • Experiencing God • Purpose Driven God
5. Incarnational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • closely tied to the Relational and Experiential approaches • People grew in their knowledge and relationship with Christ by seeking to become like him through service out outreach to others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matt 25: The Goat and Sheep parable • Acts 2: selling everything and stay together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Vision • Samaritan's Purse

My only criticism of this type of chart is the author (Zempel) makes no distinction between disciple training methods and the Bible's emphasis and content. For example, she mentions that the incarnational approach comes from the parable of sheep and goats in Chapter 25 of Matthew. Yet, in this passage the Bible emphasizes the relationship between faith and the life of the poor. Actually, the behavioral manifestations of the disciple may not have any direct linkage to the method of disciple training. Of course, disciples' behaviors are directed by the method of disciple training.

Evaluation involves the vision or ideals behind the disciple training, which means that the vision or ideals drive the design of content, leading to a certain method for evaluation, even. Thus, in our discussion sometimes we would place the evaluation and the ideals side by side. The following are a few ways to evaluate a discipleship process.

i) Holisticism (of the content and aspects of disciple training)

People nowadays like to use the word "holistic", perhaps as a reaction and correction to Christians' tendency to compartmentalize. Since the issuing in the late 1980s of the Lausanne Declaration affirming Christians' social responsibility,⁸ the concept of a holistic gospel has not only emerged, but has also given attention to culture and justice.⁹ This development has led later to a concept of a holistic discipleship. One manifestation of a holistic understanding of discipleship is a requirement of simultaneous appearance of Word, Relationship, and Ministry.¹⁰

Another creative way to look at the idea of 'holistic' is to use three verbs representing growth in relationships with God, church, and world: **celebrate** (God's salvation and work in the church), **connect** (the lives among believers) and **contribute** (preaching Christ's Gospel to the world.)¹¹

Of course, Christian groups that care about creation have advocated for the inclusion of environmental concern as required content in any disciple training.¹² The inadequacy in the area of creation care in the current or past disciple training has become all too clear. The evangelical Lausanne Movement's newest declaration –Cape Town Commitment— asserts believers' responsibility for taking care of the earth and all that God has created.¹³

ii) Aspects of life

Some have said that discipleship is essentially a journey of transformation from secular lifestyle and thinking to a life based on Christ's Gospel, embracing Christ's life and ethic.¹⁴ One may use the concept

⁸ <https://www.lausanne.org/zh-hant/covenant-zh-tw/lausanne-covenant>, *Lausanne Covenant*, 1989, the Chinese Edition.

⁹ *Lausanne Covenant*, 1989, point 10 and point 13.

¹⁰ Original quotation 'Word, Relationship, Ministry', <http://www.discipleshipdefined.com/resources/biblical-basis-discipleship>

¹¹ Original quotation 'Celebrate, Connect, Contribute', <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/5732-measuring-disciplemaking.html/3>

¹² Discipleship should include 'much of our relationship with nature, the land and our fellow creatures.' Dave Bookless, *Planet Wise*, IVP, 2008, p.88, 95.

¹³ <https://www.lausanne.org/zh-hans/content-library-zh/ctc-zh/ctcommitment-zh#p1-7>, In English: *Cape Town Commitment*.

¹⁴ Discipleship is the process of transformation embracing the life and ethic of Jesus Christ because of the hope laid out in the Gospel. ("Discipleship" is a term used to refer to a disciple's transformation from some other worldview and practice of life into that of Jesus Christ, and so, by way of Trinitarian theology, of God himself. Note the Apostle Paul's description of this process, that the disciple "not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and acceptable and perfect." Therefore a disciple is not simply an accumulator of information or one who merely changes moral behavior in regards to the teachings of Jesus Christ, but in response to God's work in him or her

‘transformation’ to attempt to assess a disciple's life—even though there is no specific content. The eight attributes or indicators of transformation are: Biblical engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and unashamed transparency.¹⁵ Another way to assess discipleship is to use the following six measures¹⁶ : connection through prayer, engagement in Scripture, being present, acts of service, investment in others (especially the body of believers), and worship through generosity.

iii) Quantitative measurement of discipleship

Using church growth as a way of evaluating disciple training can be highly quantitative. One researcher came up with a formula to develop an index and the formula is this: (New members + Average Small Group attendance + Average Worship Attendance)/Church membership in the beginning of the measurement period.¹⁷ This formula has two characteristics: one is to combine the factors of Sunday

seeks a fundamental shift toward the ethics of Jesus Christ in every way. Loving one another is the exemplification.)

<http://www.theopedia.com/discipleship>

¹⁵ 21 Transformational Discipleship Assessment identifies eight Biblical factors that consistently show up in the life of a maturing believer. Those "attributes of discipleship" are:

- Bible engagement
- Obeying God and denying self
- Serving God and others
- Sharing Christ
- Exercising faith
- Seeking God
- Building relationships
- Unashamed transparency

<http://tda.lifeway.com/what-is-it/>

¹⁶ There are many ways people can live out their faith, but here are six common signs of discipleship:

- **Connection through Prayer:** 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 – Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.
- **Engagement in Scripture:** Joshua 1:8 – Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
- **Being Present:** Hebrews 10:25 – Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
- **Acts of Service:** Isaiah 58:6-8 – Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness the LORD will be your rear guard.
- **Investment in Others:** Ephesians 4:11-13 – So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- **Worship through Generosity:** Deuteronomy 16:17 – Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you.

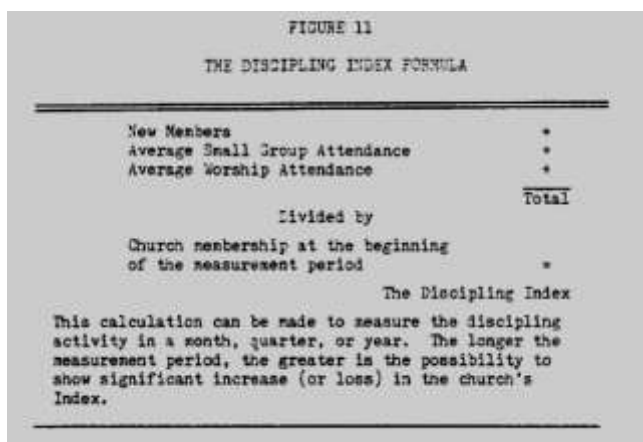
<http://churchrelevance.com/measuring-the-intangible-with-6-symptoms-of-discipleship/>

¹⁷ The discipleship index formula: New members + Average Small group attendance + Average Worship Attendance/ Church membership in the beginning of the measurement period

worship attendance and small group attendance with church membership to form a base number for discipleship. The second characteristic is to provide a quantitative indicator for discipleship, that is, within a period of time, any change in one of the factors would show progress or regression in the overall quality of disciple training. Following this mathematical reasoning, theoretically we can develop an index composed of quantifiable factors related to discipleship.

iv) Praxis

Having considered the various content and evaluation of disciple training, we must mention the concept of Covenant Discipleship of the Methodist Church, which is a legacy of John Wesley.¹⁸ This approach divides the disciples' life into four action categories in a person's life, labeling them using scriptural concepts of worship, devotion, mercy, and justice.¹⁹



Daniel E. Bonner Jr., *The Renewal of the City Church*, Chapter 6, Boston University of Theology, 1982.

<http://cucr.us/images/Chapter%206.pdf>

¹⁸ http://gra.methodist.org.hk/covenant_discipleship.html, <http://www.methodist.org.hk/h/7/>, <http://home.methodist.org.hk/Booklet.pdf>, The English material can be found in

<https://www.gnjumc.org/content/uploads/2015/06/Covenant-DG-Brochure-2.pdf>

¹⁹ In this diagram (using Micah 6: 8)



Disciple	Personal	Social/ communal
Religious (loving God)	Devotion	Worship
Public (loving people)	Mercy (Compassion)	Justice

This four-way categorization divides the life of a disciple into religious life and public life, as well as personal and communal. Each category may be combined with another category to form a coordinate. For example, worship is communal religious life, and a public communal life is driven by the implementation of the principle of justice. The whole purpose is to be Christ's witness in the world. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the believers obey His teaching through acts of compassion, justice, devotion, and worship.²⁰ The Covenant Discipleship approach adopts the small group format to evaluate the member's status in the four areas of their daily living, emphasizing accountability to the group. Each week all members develop their own goals for the four areas of life, each with their personal goals to be achieved in the coming week. And they would come back to check it next week when they come back. The biggest difference between this approach and other evaluation approaches of disciple training lies in its reliance on self-determination of goal attainment, rather than on any course content. We can say that this type of disciple training has no specified preset content, only specified format, self-determination, and mutual accountability.²¹

Disciple training courses and approaches keep emerging endlessly, but we need to make an important critique on the motive of the local churches, to learn or strengthen their own functions through searching for a disciple training course, yet ignoring the importance of the context. Actually, whether the course content is "holistic" or something else, it always requires an understanding of the here and now. It is a common belief that "be like Jesus" and "follow Jesus" are the essence of discipleship. Of course, this is not wrong, but in different parts of the world, "following Jesus" would require different behaviors corresponding to the societal context. For instance, a disciple living and trying to follow Jesus in a totalitarian country should be prepared to be persecuted. A disciple living in an unjust society should perhaps speak out on behalf of the unfortunate. In a community with many new immigrants, a disciple should extend a helping hand. Therefore, in evaluating the content and theory of discipleship, content is but only one of the criteria; the ultimate important factor should be context. Context

²⁰ 'To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings, through the acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.' This is a clearly listed purpose in their regulations: <https://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/guide/discipleship/resources/covenant>

²¹ David Lowes Watson, the theoretician in charge of the Covenant Discipleship project in the Methodist Church of the U.S., has described in detail, in his book *Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability*, the functions of mutual accountability in disciple training. In his other book he discussed and explained in detail how the small group helps people change behavior. Refer to David L. Watson, Ronald G. Tharp, (Brooks/ Cole: 1993), *Self-Directed Behavior (6th Edition)*.

eventually would dictate content. Relevance is the key. If by following Jesus, one fails to produce any effects upon society or the people around them, then this church cannot and should not be called a church of Christ.

It is precisely for this reason that we initiated our community involvement experiment. Its advantage lies in placing the content teaching of faith elsewhere other than in the disciple group setting, requiring the disciples not only to listen to God's Word but to carry them out, putting emphasis on 'doing' and 'practicing'.²² In fact, we have simplified the practice of faith to a structure that is easy to understand yet encompasses a lot. By doing this, we avoid the need to regularly update the content. Goals are self-determined, making it easy to respond to and getting oneself involved in different contexts. This is a very different notion of disciple training. The disciples commit their lives also to other disciples, who as a group assume the role as a watchman or a keeper. At the same time, the covenant small group pays attention to the daily guidance from the Holy Spirit. The approach incorporates, into "disciple training" the sensitive touch of the soul and consciousness of God's daily operation in leading people to Christ. Therefore, the dynamic world with a latent spirituality becomes the disciple's location for evangelism—a place the Holy Spirit has called the disciple to participate in.

II. A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXPERIMENT OF DISCIPLESHIP

After gaining an understanding of the model and evaluation of disciple training, we decided to incorporate the experience of community involvement into it. The ultimate outcome is using a qualitative research methodology to examine the effectiveness of this type of disciple training.

The important parts of community involvement are:

- Site visit to gain an understanding of the community
- Volunteer work at the community centre (105 Gibson Centre)
- Taking the disciples training class (this was offered in the Sunday school hour in the Cantonese congregation, in which a 15-week course incorporating elements of the Covenant Discipleship small group was offered)

The experiment was evaluated by the qualitative method of 'subjective narrative.' Through recording the subjective narrative, we gained an understanding of the participants' 'conscientization' and a measure of life transformation.

The assumptions behind the experiment are:

1. Engaging in action is an important element in discipleship
2. On site observation and understanding shall open up a disciple's life

²² In the last section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pointed out the importance of living out one's faith. The last part of the Gospel of Matthew also emphasizes "obey," which is actually practicing one's faith.

3. A small group course based on self-determination of goals and content, run along with mutual accountability helps the internalization of one's faith

Now we will turn to the historical development of the community centre, its strategic place in the church, and its relationship to disciple training.

1) History and Goals of the 105 Gibson Centre

Driven by a strong conviction about disciple training and inspired by God, Rev. Dr. Harding Ng, the Senior Pastor of the Toronto Christian Community Church, led the church in the planning and establishment of a community centre, the birth of which became a preparation for the evangelization of the neighborhood.

Such a concern for the community and for evangelization were in line with the five core missions identified by the late Rev. Dr. John Kao, the founding pastor of Toronto Christian Community Church: (1) Unity and Love; (2) Disciple Training; (3) Church Planting; (4) World Mission; (5) Social Concern.

In 2001 the church purchased a warehouse with land totaling 47,000 square feet to use as a community centre. The purpose is to let the centre become a place for the church to live out its faith, bringing God's Kingdom to the community, and bringing people to the Kingdom. At the same time, the centre will provide an opportunity for the English-speaking second generation to outreach and contact people in need. Chinese churches have existed in Toronto for over 40 years. In the climate of increased secularism and marginalization of religion, in order to exert future influence in society, participation in community building and expanding social services are good ways to present non-religious face to mainstream society. These are also an attempt by immigrant churches to find a way out and establish a foothold into the mainstream society. Bearing Christian witness to society is an important purpose of disciple training, the church believes. People once asked us how the operation of the community centre has been doing. Our response was that we are actually building a church in the community—introducing the church to the community and bearing witnesses of Jesus Christ in the neighborhood.

On 5th October, 2013 the community centre officially opened. For the last approximately two years, our operation has been guided by the following principles:

1. **Movement**—though located in a physical building, the centre's purpose is a movement to promote spiritual awakening and social concern. The building should not be a limitation to the mission it was destined to be.
2. **Community based**—the content of our services is driven by community compositions and needs, with felt needs being the point of initial contact. Our service and programs have to be sensitive to the community needs. Since the community is an ethnically and cultural diverse community, our programs and activities must reflect that diversity and needs. We established the goal that 70% of the users of our services will be from our immediate neighborhood.
3. **Platform**—the centre is a diverse and open platform, thus we need all kinds of people who embrace our mission to provide services. Different community groups can interact with us and are encouraged in dialogue of further cross-breeding to create new programs. We maintain an open attitude as we explore with community people new services for the future.

4. **Shalom future**—a church operated community centre is a long-term enterprise of 30 to 50 years, thus we hope to grow with the community. We distill inspirations from the Biblical Christian faith tradition, to inform the development of a future holistic social community. And this future shall guide our operations.
5. **Mentoring**—we hope to share life with every person who comes to our centre, walking alongside them. The biblical concept of mentoring refers to shepherding and sharing joy and sorrow, as well as caring for all aspects of the person's life.

In the beginning of 2015, 105 Gibson Centre issued this missions statement: ‘To serve **the locals** and **those in need**, and to share with them the **compassion** and **hope** of Jesus.’ Note how two action verbs and four key words capture the five principles for our ministry to the community.

This kind of work belongs to the local missional and practical theology.

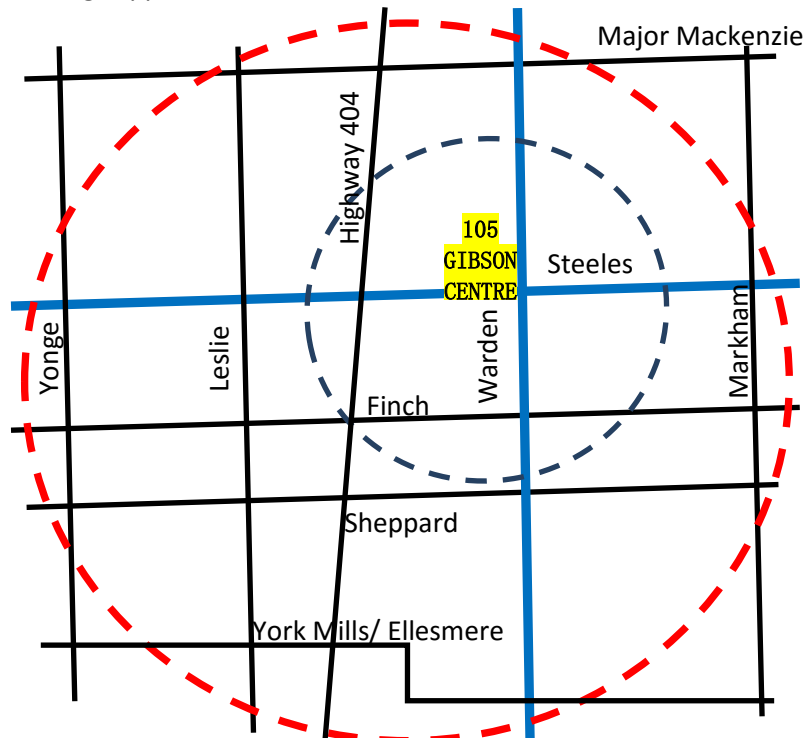
2) Overview of the Neighborhood

105 Gibson Centre is located in a densely populated immigrant district, the 8th district at the south end of Markham. To the south of the main road (Steeles Ave) is the Scarborough district, and continuing westward for 3 kilometers is the North York sub-district of Toronto, with a superhighway as the dividing line. We have designated an area with a radius of 5 kilometers as the catchment area as in **Diagram 1**. This small community has roughly 190,000 people. The basic demographics are shown in **Diagram 2**.

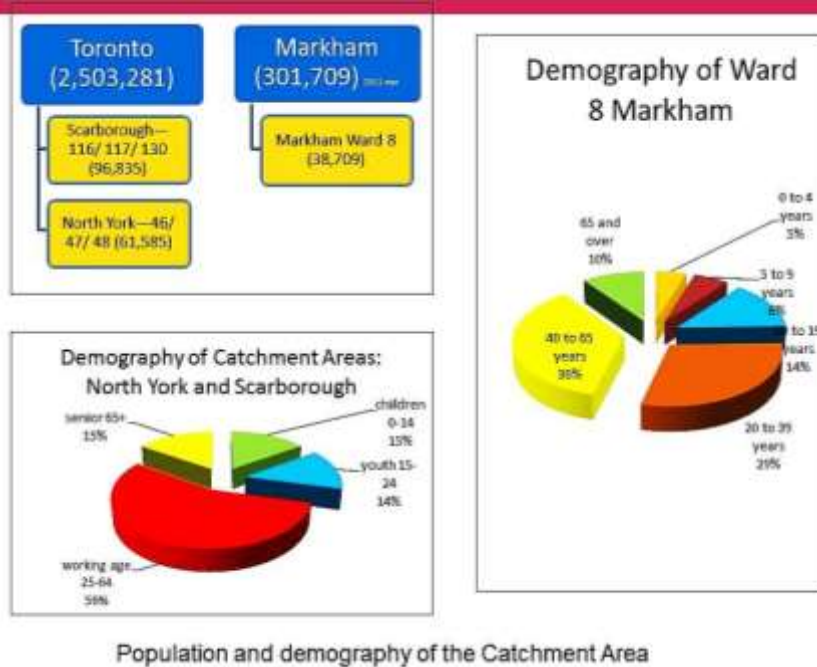
Catchment Area (Diagram 1)

Area of service — — — — —

Getting support from - - - - -



(Diagram 2)



A comparison of the demographics of Markham (population of 300,000) and Scarborough (population of 600,000) is shown in **Chart 1**.²³ Chinese was the largest minority group.²⁴ It constitutes 38% of the total population of Markham, with half of it speaking Cantonese and other half speaking Mandarin or other Chinese dialects, mostly from Mainland China. The next largest visible minor group is South Asians (19%).

²³ Chart 1

Our target audience - Demographics				
2011 National Household Survey	Markham		Scarborough	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population (in private households)	300,135		625,930	
Not a Visible Minority	83,090	28	191,429	29.7
Visible Minority	217,095	72	434,510	70.3
Chinese	114,950	38	117,890	19.1
South Asian	57,575	19	150,020	24.3
Black	9,718	3	60,490	9.8
Language (Mother tongue)				
English	115,780	40	260,600	43.5
Cantonese	47,460	16	40,000	6.4
Chinese (not otherwise specified)	31,165	11	37,190	6.0
Mandarin	14,390	5	23,715	3.8
Tamil (India and Sri Lanka)	14,710	5	45,860	7.4
Age of population				
0-9 years	18,955	11	66,000	11.0
10-19 years	40,095	13	78,915	12.7
20-29 years	59,825	13	86,350	13.7
30-39 years	58,920	13	77,165	12.5
40-49 years	112,140	21	221,745	25.5
50 years or more	37,015	12	90,660	14.7
Labour force by industry				
Total labour force population aged 15+	155,575		275,325	
Professional, scientific and technical services	16,600	12	22,330	7.6
Finance and insurance	20,170	13	24,695	8.4
Retail trade	16,515	11	33,600	11.4
Manufacturing	15,345	10	33,400	11.3
Health care and social assistance	12,875	8	30,655	10.4
	83,505	54	144,670	49
Household income				
Under \$20,000	7,340	8	20,070	13.8
\$20,000 - \$39,999	11,305	10	42,495	29.1
\$40,000 - \$59,999	11,940	13	40,090	18.9
\$60,000 - \$79,999	11,560	13	24,335	13.9
\$80,000 - \$99,999	10,890	12	22,475	10.6
\$100,000 - \$124,999	10,510	12	18,130	8.6
\$125,000 - \$149,999	8,305	9	11,635	5.5
\$150,000 and over	18,975	21	16,520	8.7
Average Household Income	\$108,530		\$72,344	
Median Household Income	\$65,022		\$58,098	
Education				
Total population aged 15+	247,615	100	512,830	100.0
University certificate, diploma or degree at or above the Bachelor level	82,095	33	118,115	22.6
University certificate or diploma below Bachelor level	16,520	7	31,015	6.0
College diploma, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	38,775	15	85,100	16.7
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	10,365	4	30,530	6.0
High School diploma	61,235	25	146,895	28.6
No certificate, diploma or degree	40,615	16	102,445	20.0
Religion				
Christian	132,250	44	N/A	
Hindu	26,540	10		
Muslim	22,415	9		
Buddhist	13,260	4		
Jewish	7,330	3		
Sikh	4,335	1		
Other	1,310	<1		
No religious affiliation	88,095	30		

²⁴ In Canada, the term commonly used is “visible minority”, which is translated into “minority of color” in Chinese.

In terms of income, Scarborough has a larger poverty population than Markham does. 19% of Markham families versus 34% of Scarborough families have an annual income of below \$40,000.

The rough demographic details are shown in **Diagram 2**. Within the catchment area are two small sub-districts, south of the Centre, in Scarborough, designated by the government several years ago after some research as 'high priority neighborhood'.²⁵ What it means is, within one kilometer the residents had trouble finding needed community facilities and services, such as senior citizens' centres, employment services, youth centres, community centres, etc. The number of residents who pointed out the difficulty of locating services would determine the ranking of the priority, of which, the neighborhood ranked almost top of all Toronto neighborhoods. Such situations were more likely to be found in new immigrant neighborhoods, with new immigrants referring to those who came to Canada in 15 years or less.²⁶ Some factors that accounted for 'high priority neighborhoods' were: the government was not catching up with the needs, the lack of space for construction of facilities, and new immigrants' lacking the knowhow to organize effectively to demand government responses toward their needs. It was only two years after the church purchased the 105 Gibson Centre, that we found that our Centre is actually located to the north of one of 15 'high priority neighborhoods.'

When I converted the catchment area into a 'village of 100 people' and did a study back in 2008, I found out the followings (**Diagram 3**)²⁷: Out of 100 people, 71 were immigrants, 57 Chinese, 18 South Asians, 4 Filipinos, 4 Blacks, 10 whites, 12 retirees, 63 working people, 16 holding sales or service positions, 12 doing manufacturing, 7 employed in finance and real estate, 53 without a university degree, 31 age 50 or above, 23 under age 20.

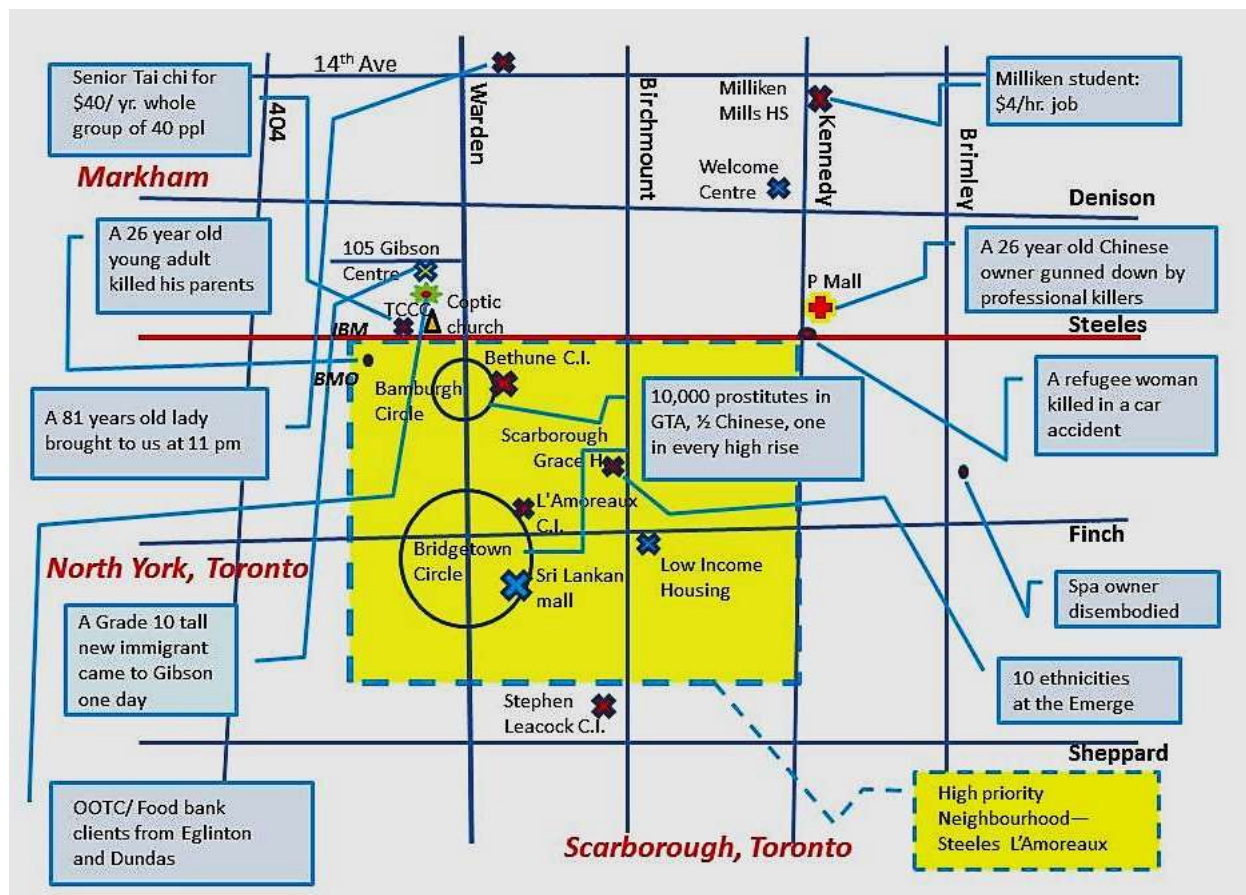
A record of observations and events in our catchment area in the last two or three years offer an overview of the issues that the neighborhood is facing with, as shown in **Diagram 4**.

²⁵http://www1.toronto.ca/city_of_toronto/social_development_finance__administration/files/pdf/priority_areas_with_wards.pdf

²⁶<http://www1.toronto.ca/wps/portal/contentonly?vgnextoid=e0bc186e20ee0410VgnVCM10000071d60f89RCRD>

²⁷ Diagram 3





(Diagram 4)

- Serious crime (a 26-year-old owner gunned down by professional killers in an Asian mall in the evening; an owner of a massage parlor was murdered and mutilated by a former boyfriend.)
- Family problems (a 26-year-old man, believed to have mental illness, killed his parents. He might have attended one of the high schools we visit on a regular basis.)
- Refugees (a refugee woman from China was run over by two cars one snowy night as she crossed the street. She had an abortion in Malaysia, traveled to Canada via Australia.)
- Elderly needs (After dropping the cell phone as she left the shelter, an elderly woman got lost in the streets until being rescued by some kind-hearted person, who gave her a ride to seek help at our Centre.)
- Employment of youth (Those new immigrant youths not proficient in English after leaving high school could find only jobs that pay \$4 per hour in cash and the earnings were unreported for tax purposes. The minimum wage in the country was \$11.25.)
- Sex trade workers (Due to strict restrictions imposed by the government on white sex trade workers from Europe, Chinese sex trade workers have flooded to fill the gap in the market. According to an organization seeking to bring the gospel to sex trade workers, roughly half of the 10,000 sex workers were Chinese. There was at least one sex trade worker in each high-rise apartment building nearby.)
- Ethnic diversity (I once waited at the emergency room for 9 hours, encountered patients and medical personnel of ten different ethnicities.)

- Main buildings or facilities (There is a shopping mall with about 500 little shops of 100-300 square feet, located about 2 km from 105 Gibson Centre. This mall is visited by 140,000 people per week. There was another mall nearby that was visited by 80,000 people per week. In addition, there were landmark churches. Four of the six Chinese megachurches (congregation of at least 1,000) were located in the catchment area. A low cost housing was also located here.)

3) Views on Disciples and Discipleship

To gain an understanding of how the Toronto Christian Community Church engages in disciple training, we interviewed the following people who also participated in the Community Centre. They are of different ages and were involved in various capacity of the Centre: Senior Pastor (**N**), a program manager (**C**), an experienced deacon (**A**), two young volunteer (**T** and **F**).

The Senior Pastor was also the founder and mastermind of the Community Centre, having led the church for almost 20 years. Prior to assuming the Senior Pastor position, he had served as a deacon. His view on disciples, discipleship, relationship between discipleship and community involvement plays a key role in, and has significantly impacted, the development of the Centre and the shaping of the church (disciples).

N: Jesus Christ did three things: proclaiming the gospel, teaching, and healing. As disciples, we should do the same. The three actions added together constituted holistic mission. Disciples must also be historical and contextual, starting with an awareness of sin to repentance to being born again, and are then sent back to the context. An ideal disciple should have contextual concern, meeting the needs of the local community; this is part of the disciple making process, same as getting exposed to the poor and needy. Disciples must be oriented to the local community and be involved in society...Reflecting on its significance, 105 Gibson Centre is a training ground and platform, which cultivates a crop of contextual disciples willing to be short-term missionaries overseas. 105 Gibson Centre is a laboratory that fosters global as well as local awareness. To incorporate missions into regular disciple training is what we call Missional discipleship... Through tangible practice and participation, disciples learn to cooperate with believers from other churches...working with members from congregations of three cultures.

Senior Pastor N points out that the current church's context is the presence of three cultures: the Hong Kong culture based on Cantonese, the Mainland Chinese culture based on Mandarin, and the local American-born Chinese culture based on English, even though all are Chinese. This is our training ground and we must not ignore it. N proposed the idea of harmony and cooperation, which is in effect an interpretation of missions based on loving one another. The Christian Community Church's current challenge of carrying the burden of missions is how to build on the combined strengths of the three congregations in order to love a multi-ethnic community. N also points out that disciples (as well as disciple training) should be historically and contextually relevant. The Community Centre situates directly to the north of a High Priority Neighborhood, and for a decade or so many immigrants arrived from China. This is a character of the era. More recently, we have seen refugees from the war in Syria, posing a shock to disciples and disciple training. In summary, N has the following beliefs about disciples and discipleship:

1. A holistic and multi-dimensional disciple and discipleship
2. Disciples must directly face the current context (Being a disciple has always meant a journey of opening up oneself to the world.)
3. Disciples and discipleship must be historical and contextual. (No disciple can be trained in a vacuum, detached from reality. The degree a disciple has relevant concerns for history and context will be a criterion or standard for measuring his quality.)
4. 'Concern', 'care', and to 'learn the way of Jesus' are words used to describe the way disciples encounter the world. (These words are the tangible manifestations of mission.)
5. One of the goals of disciple making is to nurture 'glocal' (global and local) disciples. (This is a concept responding to the characteristic of our time because well-developed transportation and communication has made it possible to do cross-national missions.)
6. The Community Centre (with tangible programs and environment) is the training ground for such disciples.

A program director C shared the views of disciple training, are represented by the following interview report:

C: The word 'disciple' is neither an essential nor only word for naming a believer. One can just say 'Christian'. Getting along is an important understanding of the disciple relationship. Discipleship involves relationships, the mutual transmission of love, understanding and loving and accepting others. The wavelength between the master and the disciple may be different, but with time they will become closer. God is Being (capital B in being or existence); 'B' would take initiation to do things. A relational approach to discipleship is a matter of the heart thing of a discipleship between two beings. Following Jesus is not a 'should' approach but I am in a repellent state now, and resist the idea of discipline. Being a disciple is being a human being. To be a disciple is to become a person again, to be reconciled in a fallen world. The purpose of disciple training is to help others discover their own 'hearts', find a joyful life, experience God answered our prayers. Thus we are carrying out a project of life re-ordering. Give others a desire to read God's Word, and then they will read God's word. Disciple training requires honesty and integrity, openness on a journey to experience God. A genuine fellowship life is not about systems; rather, it is raw human. We hope the brothers and sisters around us really love God from their hearts and then use God-given love to fulfill the love requirement demanded of us.

The axis for this kind of disciple training is Human—God relationship, one that emphasizes the disciple's self-actualization. We may categorize this type of disciple training as 'Personal'²⁸, which evolves into an Existential-Relational disciple training. Its characteristics include:

- An emphasis on the interactive relationship between the master and the disciple.
- A belief that God initiates; humans just open their hearts to receive and follow.
- A focus on the nurturing of the soul, with opening the heart as the starting point.
- The redemption/restoration of one's self as the process of discipleship.

²⁸ Heather Zempel, Models of Discipleship throughout Church History, Feb 1, 2006.
<http://discipleshipgroups.blogspot.ca/2006/02/models-of-discipleship-throughout.html>

The two above-mentioned views of disciple training complement each other. The former emphasizes an outward manifestation that extends itself to the public life of society and community. It may be called 'incarnational disciple training', which uses the external/missions discipleship model.²⁹ The latter emphasizes the internal completion of the disciple's life, establishing an intimate relationship and cultivating the soul must occur before ministry and implementation. It belongs to the tradition of internal devotion and cultivation.

Lay leader **A** has always had a high degree of involvement with the Centre. He has been attending the church for a long time. His views on discipleship and disciple training are as follows:

A: To be a disciple is to be a follower, with Jesus as the master. Being 'like Christ' is a matter of opinion, but disciples should draw close to the Heavenly Father; be compassionate toward others, including sinners; be ready to sacrifice; taking God's Word seriously; develop the habit of fasting in solitude. Disciple training is an apprenticeship system. Because Jesus is no longer on earth, having ascended to Heaven, we have to provide disciple training on a one-on-one basis and make sure not to fall into mere formality. In the process, there must be changes and improvement. The focus is on the training, not on concrete results... Most important is disciples loving one another.

Disciples training based on a master-apprentice relationship is primarily and it should not be driven by content or classroom experience. **A** proposed that content should be related to an internal process of intimate relationships, attitudes toward people, the will or aspiration, and several religious discipline exercises.

T and **F**, young, relatively new believers, have been involved as volunteers in a certain program for two years. Their views on discipleship and disciple training can be summarized as follows:

T: Disciple training involves a person leading a group of people; Jesus demonstrated the life of a person of faith, always thinking of, and communicating with, God. Disciples who want to follow Jesus must have a leader and must have great power to do what God want us to do. The leader must have a stronger faith, has experience and stories to tell.

F: Discipleship is a support group. I realize through ministry that disciples are companions along a journey, walking alongside young people. The mode of 'teaching' could create resentment. In contrast, disciples share common experiences and are fellow travelers on the same journey.

While **T** points out that disciples follow the master, who must be more experienced, **F** emphasizes the equality among the disciples, who are peers living together in a small group. The emphasis is thus on a sense of community.

On the matter of interactions with the target population, they share their perceptions:

T: Sometimes I see participating in programs as stress reduction for me... One time I was working with the young people to pack gift shoeboxes to be shipped to Third World countries, I was touched by how

²⁹ Ibid

conscientious the young people were. Some even wanted to pack more shoeboxes. I felt what I was doing suddenly took on some meaning.

F: I enjoyed the time spent with the target group, playing together, living together, sharing, and relationship building.

Both T and F view their target population as peers, as friends. They also have an open mind to accept whatever behavior the target group is engaged in at the time. The initiation comes from the target group. T and F have manifested an open mind and open heart. In interviewing them, I did not have a sense that they consciously tried to engage in disciple training or convey their faith to the target group. Perhaps they were engaged in a service that has Christian elements while they are walking and growing with others. However, this type of service for the 'other', performed under the influence of the volunteer who study the Bible together with them, appear to have awakened them. We will discuss this later.

From the above interviews, we have observed that within the church, disciple training is described and practiced differently by different people. However, all these descriptions can be amalgamated to reflect different levels of discipleship and disciple training. Different participants in the community centre use their own methods, either consciously or unconsciously, to do what they regard as the right 'disciple training' or service. For now there is no uniform understanding or practice of discipleship within the church. 105 Gibson Centre has adopted an outward and missions oriented model of disciple training. With such an understanding, let us turn to the design of this experimental study.

III. OBSERVATIONS OF THE EXPERIMENT AND REPORT

As stated earlier, the experimental disciple training with a community involvement component has several parts: understanding the community based on site visits, participation in the work of the 105 community centre, and taking a disciple training course. The goal behind all this is to strengthen the church.

1) Contacting the community and mobilization

An important element of disciple training is total church involvement. Only one third of the church's congregations actually live in the catchment area, therefore the attendees of church worship and other meetings are commuters, not residents of the catchment area. Some of them have lived in the catchment area when they first immigrated but have since moved away due to demographic shifts. One of the goals of our disciple training is to have believers contribute to the environment they are located in. A faith community that identifies itself as a community church should be concerned about the neighborhood around it.

In the last two years we have mobilized the entire church in visits to the neighborhood:

- Community survey at the stage of developing a ministry plan:

We mobilized 250 members to conduct a survey. The returned questionnaires provided data to the ministry plan, outlining the needs of the predominant age group in the community and gave us a preliminary understanding of the residents' felt needs. Another benefit was to open the eyes of the congregations to information about ethnic groups, street planning, residents' background, and their daily life.

- Getting to know Islam and Hinduism:

Islam is one of the major religions in the catchment area. For many in our congregation, visiting a mosque, listening to an Imam presenting Islam, stepping into a Hindu temple, were totally fresh but significant experiences. The pictures one obtained from such visits are more accurate and realistic than those presented by Christians. When visiting a Hindu temple, one female believer experienced emotional reactions and physical discomfort. Additionally, there were opportunities to hear testimonies of Muslims and Hindus converted to Christianity. The experience has really deepened and broadened our understanding of non-Christian neighbors.

- Distribution of program pamphlets once every 4 months:

The Centre published program pamphlets once every 4 months, so we decided to distribute them, roughly 5,000 updated activity leaflets to residents in the catchment area. This approach of knocking on doors worked well in Markham and Scarborough because of the prevalence of low buildings rather than high rises. Through such direct contacts, church members had a chance to understand the community better, sometimes even to chat with residents.

- Large scale community events, such as a neighborhood fair called The Open Market³⁰

In 2014 we mobilized close to 600 people to host a neighborhood fair called The Open Market, which drew 5,000 people. The purpose was to introduce the Centre to the residents in the neighborhood. The mobilization of human resources was not just for planning and carrying out activities and program, but also for contacting residents. When the whole church was involved in doing one event and witnessing the effects, one cannot underestimate the power it unleashed in producing cohesion. When we encountered difficulties selling the booths, we had no choice but to mobilize the whole church to go into the community and contact businesses, including Muslim business owners and other people who were not Christians. The overall strategy for this activity was to combine the church's activities, interests, advantages, and networks to produce a community event that lasted for 20 hours. Those who love to dance would invite fellow dancers to attend; those who love sports would organize ballgames; those who love performing arts would invite people to perform and we even organize singing contests in the neighboring shopping malls.

- Community cultural tour:

³⁰ Refer to a footage made of the neighborhood fair "The Open Market":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=An_SWsCQQCk&list=PLfQGAvegZvH8dy5mz2nKY8HcDO4xJVsqY

To enhance the congregation's understanding of the characteristics of the community, a 2-hour tour introducing the community's historical buildings, culture, and businesses was offered to church members. Included also were visits to small ethnic shopping malls and low-income housing projects.

In the past two years, the aggregated number of people who have joined such close-up contacts with local residents amounted to 1,600. The enthusiasm before the tour and excitement after the tour were palpable.

2) Participation in ministry

Up to the end of 2015, there were five ministries—Youth, Sports, Cultural Cafe, Community Classroom, and Community Needs. The ministry for the elders was emerging then. It subsequently became a priority item for development in 2016. The idea behind the ministry was ‘Senior University’.

The implementation of five ministries required a large number of volunteers to fill very different kinds of positions. The following chart captures but only some of the positions and jobs:

Planning	Approval of projects	Ticketing	Design
Committee members	Food categorization	Bidding	Program production
Receptionist	Editing	Accounting	Finance
General affairs	Marketing	Translator	Press conference
Tutors	Fundraising	Masters of ceremony	AV arrangements
Interest group teachers	Food transport	Storage worker	Filer of tax returns
Cook	Grant application writers	Waiter/waitress	Business development
Performer	Negotiating contracts	Sales	Secretary
Audio control	Photo/ videographer	Registration	

When discussing our work with government officials and members of the parliament, I once told them that what was unique about a church-run community centre was the heavy supply of volunteers. We started the centre with close to 1,000 volunteers. This implied that we had to train disciples to carry out the various ministries of the Centre. In 2015 alone, we had a record of 709 volunteer visits accumulating a total of 6,064 volunteer hours. Although not all the volunteer positions involved direct contacts with residents, such an experience of participation was crucial in realizing the relationship between the Centre's mission and its actual operation. Furthermore, abstract faith became concretized when the participation found its way to one's schedule.

Looking back at the last two years, we have discovered that church members found it easier to volunteer for one-shot events or time-limited tasks. Long term participation was more challenging.

3) The Discipleship Course

In the process of promoting participation in the community, we attempted to offer a Discipleship course, scheduling it during Sunday school time. The hope is to offer a curriculum that combines theory with

practice, one that deepens the disciples through community participation and experience. There are 15 lessons in the course, titled 'Following Jesus in the Here and Now.' The outline is as follows:

1. Where am I? (current position in faith/ discipleship as a journey/encountering God/disciples in relationships)
2. Being a person
3. Faith journey (discipleship)
4. Relationship with the Holy Father
5. Relationship with the Holy Son
6. Relationship with the Holy Spirit
7. Our neighbors
8. The church
9. Community
10. Field visit I
11. Field visit II
12. Local mission (model and format)
13. Covenant discipleship small group I
14. Covenant discipleship small group II
15. Covenant discipleship small group III

The course was co-designed and co-taught by three co-workers of the Community Centre. We went through a lot of interactions, revisions, and coordination, making adjustments in response to the audience's feedback and situation. The result was a course that departed substantially from the original design and thinking.

a) Participants

The average attendance was 10; it ranged from a low of 6 to a high of 14. All the participants were Cantonese speaking believers, ranging in age from 20 to 60. They had been Christians from 3 years to several decades, evenly split between male and female. Not all were baptized in Toronto Christian Community Church; in fact, there were quite a few from other churches who came with the hope to learn more about the community and to gain a spiritual experience that would 'hit home.' However, not all participants were punctual. Tardiness was more common among younger participants.

b) Instruction

Each session lasted 60 minutes; the entire course was 15 hours in length. The main mode of instruction was lectures supplemented by Q & A and small group discussions. The instructors had different teaching styles, ranging from narrative to theory to logical discourse.

c) Deep discoveries

1. Learners' discoveries:
 - 'From this course I have learned that one can find joy when sharing the Gospel to others, not because of the audience's response but because I am already working for God in the process. If someone receives the Gospel that is God's grace.'

- 'I have found the presentations of three instructors to be more human than other Sunday school teachers. The instructors' sharing of their personal experiences in preaching, missions, and spiritual growth really hits home. Good!'
 - 'I have learned to step into the neighborhood.'
 - 'I feel the cohesion of the course that leads to a reflection and renewal of the Christian life. Through the open sharing of brothers and sisters, I have felt the Holy Spirit at work among us.'
 - 'I believe that I myself must shift my focus to the people, thing, and events around me. Being self-centered can only lead to loss of peace and joy as well as the power from being a Christian.'
 - 'The course is quite comprehensive. I especially appreciate the format of the last session.'
 - 'Members shared a lot and instructors' teachings were clear, but it was a pity that the course did not adhere to one clearly defined theme. It felt like we barely touched upon a topic before moving onto something else. My faith is still strong...Given the fact this was a Sunday school course, one expected that the theme and purpose were made clear from the very beginning. This would have made class members' adjustment easier or met members' needs.'
2. The lack of consensus among the co-workers around goal, purpose, and approach to disciple training created confusion for the learners. For example, must all disciples exercise discipline and live according to certain norms? What are the standards for determining who is a good disciple? Or are there standards? If no consensus is reached beforehand, there could be contradictions in the classroom.
 3. The degree of mutual trust among the participants determined the depth of the conversations, which in turn affected the depth and sincerity of attending the course together and offering support and encouragement.
 4. There was some discrepancy in reaching a grasp of technicalities and estimated effects one can expect from adult education.
 5. The differences among learners' faith journey and age-related ways of expressing one's faith have produced different dynamics, resulting in some difficulties in conveying the same content. Of course, this is an important element in the process of disciple training.
 6. Due to the need to reorganize and re-distribute the content of the course, time spent on some topics such as 'Holy Spirit' was extended, at the expense of 'Site Visits.'
 7. 'Covenant Discipleship Small Groups' encountered resistance from some of the participants, possibly because of an unfamiliarity with systematic discipline and accountability. Some had reservations about simplifying religious behavior.

IV. THE CONSCIENTIZATION EXPERIMENT—REFLECTION AND LEARNING IN PRAIXS

One volunteer who participated in the charity used clothing sale said, "In my several decades of being in this church, I often felt my Christian life lacked excitement and I found it hard to live out Biblical teachings in my life. All this changed when the Community Centre appeared, giving me a chance to participate. When I saw neighbors coming to our booths, I felt it was so down to earth. Finally, as a believer in Jesus, I can contribute and feel being useful!"

This kind of practicing one's faith in life is very important. From this volunteer's enthusiastic and genuine sharing of her experience, we see a breakthrough of faith, a primary measure of disciple training.

Paul Freire, an eminent Catholic educator known for his contributions to adult education, proposes a special kind of conscientization.³¹ He asserts that it is through continuous conscientization that humanization can be achieved. By 'conscientization,' he is referring to a successful search for a positive link between self and social progress. Instead of being controlled by the world and being objectified, one can participate in changing the world. Out of such a belief, a person can mobilize all the resources within oneself to participate in changing the world, letting conscientization occur in the moment.³² And it is through the dialectical praxis cycle of Action-Reflection that one achieves conscientization.

The volunteer mentioned earlier has actually experienced conscientization in a small but important way, having taken the first step toward 'humanization.' After all, 'humanization' implies self-maturation. The direction forward societal participation is an important piece. One of the goals of disciple training is to

³¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_consciousness, <http://www.freire.org/component/easytagcloud/118-module/conscientization/>. Conscientization can be translated as the activation of consciousness. The term was coined by educator Paulo Freire and appeared in his writings in the 1970s. In the education process, the primary goal is to activate and develop consciousness, elevating a person's awareness of self and the world, Triggering the will and ability to change the world or reality. The basic method of achieving this is through the interactive cycle and integration of action/reflection. This method has a very strong tradition in Latin America, culminating in the concept of praxis. What this means is that education must use the dialectic praxis interaction between action and reflection to trigger consciousness, elevating a lower level of awareness to a higher one on the road to humanization. The activation of consciousness is both an avenue to, and a part of humanization. This notion of activating consciousness is an important part in education, according to Freire. This approach is akin in content to the Christian narrative of Jesus on earth—how he led people to God and lived a life of justice and love. It is also quite possible that Freire used Jesus as a reference. 'Conscientization, which is identified with cultural action for freedom, is a process by which in the subject-object relationship the subject finds the ability to grasp, in critical terms, the dialectical unity between self and object. That is why we reaffirm that there is no conscientization outside of praxis, outside of the theory-practice, reflection-action unity.' Freire, P. (1985), *The Politics of Education—Culture, Power, and Liberation*. (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey), p. 160.

³² All of us are involved in a permanent process of conscientization, as thinking beings in a dialectical relation with an objective reality upon which we act. What varies in time and space are the contents, methods, and objectives of conscientization. Its original source is that point far off in time that Teilhard de Chardin calls 'Humanization,' when human beings made themselves capable of revealing their active reality, knowing it and understanding what they know.' [Freire 1985, 172] '...I am thinking that through the problematisation of the relationships between human beings and the world, it is possible for them (the students of his 'Culture Circle' in particular and the people or the oppressed in general) to recreate, to re-make, the natural process through which consciousness appeared in the process of his evolution...precisely in the moment called 'hominisation'...evolution of humanity.' [Freire 1981, 58]

help disciples understand that through faith they can change the world. Sometimes, the content in faith itself can provide the power for conscientization. Other times, the process of conscientization helps to deepen one's faith.³³ From my observation, participants often derived more joy, passion, and power through pre-arranged out of the comfort zone activities than through indoor quiet devotional activities. This is not to devalue quiet devotional activities but to emphasize that only by entering the learning cycle of 'Action-Reflection' can one reach true and sustained conscientization. This is consistent with what Jesus said toward the end of his Sermon on the Mount, "Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man, who built his house on a rock. The rain came down, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house; and it didn't fall, for it was founded on the rock." Jesus himself often reflected on the Old Testament teachings and developed a new understanding. He was a person who has been conscientized.

As the Holy One sent by God, Jesus completely manifested the qualities we believe wise men, philosophers, and sage should possess. Such people usually appear infrequently in human history, perhaps only once every several hundred years. Of course, Jesus as the Holy Son of God, already existed before the creation of the world, is 'the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being' (Hebrews 1:3). He is the Word who became flesh. As such, Jesus is superior to all wise men, philosophers, and sages. His teachings show a clean break from the mire of secular values and life. In an extremely treacherous environment He took action to draw people to God. Of course these actions offended those in authority and put his life in danger. The opinions expressed in his speech were the results of his reflection on the religious legacy that had been twisted by the religious establishment at that time. "The Sabbath was made for men, not men for the Sabbath", "Man lives not by bread alone but by every word that comes out of God's mouth", "Fear not those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul", "Woe unto the hypocrites—the scribes and Pharisees..." "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The above are examples to illustrate that Jesus had experienced conscientization.

Jesus' conscientization has the following special features:

1. He was very certain of the purpose of his being in this world.
2. He had a clear reading and critique of the ideology that impacted the society.
3. He used clear, tangible methods to carry out his purpose—calling the disciples, sending them out to work, teaching them about the Kingdom of God, and started an ever growing church.
4. He was able to see through the spiritual problem in society.
5. His life radiated noble and humane values, such as universal love, forgiveness, and caring for the insignificant persons.
6. Although he was not a social activist and his agenda was not politically revolutionary in its intention, by holding onto his convictions he was engaged in politically sensitive and radical behaviors, such as riding on a donkey to enter the city, cleansing the temple, not observing the Sabbath fully.

³³ In another interview, a leader who participated in the construction phase of the Community Centre as well as in other committee expressed his deep appreciation of the importance of prayer. Another change was in learning to be patient on a day to day basis with people who have different opinions and personalities. These Christian values increased in value and understanding as a result of the participation process.

7. He received his power from the Holy Spirit and drank from the true God who should be worshiped, from whom he obtained inspiration for living and wisdom for handling situations. He frequently grasped 'the moment.'
8. From His intimate relationship with the Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit, he obtained true knowledge of the world, thus able to participate in the world and to promote the Kingdom of God.

The above description is the 'faith version' of conscientization.

In terms of faith, to be a disciple is to respond to the call and to 'follow Jesus', or 'be like Jesus.' Strictly speaking, there is some difference between 'be like Jesus' and 'follow Jesus,' with the former emphasizing internal renewal while the latter, a change in outward behavior. There is no need for us to choose one over the other as they are two sides of the same coin. 'Be like Jesus' should include how Jesus responds to society, politics, and culture of his time, as well as learning the heart and soul of Jesus. Finally, it includes obeying his commands, as presented as a framework in his Sermon on the Mount.

Being a disciple cannot rest at the stage of duplication; nor can it stop at the completion of a course. Even crossing over to the stage of conscientization is considered just a beginning. In terms of goals, one important content element of any disciple training is conscientization. This 'awakening' not only carries sociological and psychological connotations, but religious/faith meanings as well. What the present study attempts to do is to follow up on awareness and consciousness in the soul beyond outward behaviors. Through narratives, we hope to identify the existence and nature of such consciousness. But to further an understanding of the effectiveness of 'conscientization' in initiating another round of consciousness raising, would be a matter to be taken up in the future.

To illustrate the process of religious awakening after participating in the ministry of the Community Centre, I am going to report on the narratives of several people: Two of them were frontline volunteers (**T** and **F**) who had contacts with the target population on almost a weekly basis for two years. The other two were **L** and **H**, deacons and leaders of the English congregation. In addition, a leader of the Cantonese congregation, **A**, would be interviewed.

F and **T** have participated in youth ministry as volunteers for a period of time. They were originally from Mainland China and Hong Kong, respectively. Here are some quotations from their sharing about their thoughts and lessons learned.

T: To experience God's love together with the participants (those who came to the Community Centre), to carry out the biblical teaching of Love Thy Neighbor, show concerns to the young people, encourage them, to share their lives, to be 'hands-on' and be available, demonstrating positive values for them to refer to. One lesson I have learned is, putting your heart into what you do must stem from love, not doing it for the sake of doing it. I have learned to set aside preconceived notions and prejudice, viewing people and events positively. Such a changed attitude has also gradually affected the way I respond to my family.

F: A year ago my faith focused on roles and responsibilities, and now there is a natural feeling. I have now turned to people, getting to know the youth, live, eat, chat, enjoy each other's company, divide up

responsibilities, become friends, and do things together. Ministry is a platform to know myself, to apply what I have learned to myself. I have dropped a few service opportunities in church because sharing is now the focus of my ministry. I have learned to say 'No' in my attempt to locate myself in what God has created me for, be thankful as I share, not because I have to finish an assignment. I used to carry out ministry responsibilities quickly but I also got tired quickly. To me, to love others as you love yourself involves two parts—loving yourself and loving others.

'Conscientization' in these two volunteers has these commonalities:

1. A reflection on and a comparison of their faith before and after
2. Provision of personal thoughts
3. Discovery of new anchors and footholds that deepen their faith
4. Transfer of religious lessons learned to other areas of their lives (new actions after reflection)

The two deacons from the English congregation were born in Canada or came to Canada at a very young age. Culturally, they belong to the English-speaking world and native Canada.

L: I used to dislike people from Mainland China, considering them to be backward... After participating in the work of the Community Centre, having had closer contacts with them, I began to change and would greet them...

In the Anniversary Commemorative booklet, **L** wrote, "...During the summer vacation, we received a referred case involving a family of four in dire financial circumstances. One day, my son and I went to the Gibson Food Bank to fetch some food, toys, and candies before visiting this family...This provided an opportunity to teach my son about following Jesus' example in caring for and loving our friends. Shortly after arriving in the home, my son was already playing with the two kids in that family, while the adults also got immersed in conversation. Unexpectedly, our little gesture of warmth and concern has earned the great trust of this family. Without reservation they shared with us their financial, health, emotional, and mental difficulties... Before leaving the home we held hands and prayed for this family. I prayed that God would bless them... After praying, I deeply understood this is how we can humbly follow in Christ's step, bring His love to the community, spread the gospel of incarnation, and let the Kingdom of God enter the community."³⁴

The experience of **L** reveals that conscientization includes:

1. Getting rid of prejudice that stems from society or personal experience ("feeling they were backward"...began to change)
2. A cycle of "Action—Reflection" ("would greet them" as the result of reflection)
3. Deepening of the faith ("I deeply understood...")
4. Acquiring a new or reinforced conviction ("Bring His love to the community, spread the Gospel of incarnation, and let the Kingdom of God enter the community")

H participated in the Gibson project for 5 years, starting from involving in the buying the property to eventually being the chairperson of the ministry committee, he has involved himself in almost all aspect

³⁴ *Dwell Among Our Neighbors, 2004 Gibson Anniversary*, p. 17 (Toronto, 105 Gibson Centre, 2014)

of the 105 Gibson Centre. He is one of the lay leaders from the English congregation and has been in leadership positions.

H wrote in an essay, "...in the past four years I believe many members of church, like myself, have not stopped thinking about the value of the existence of 105 Gibson Centre...I believe that 105 Gibson Centre is a main avenue for our church to display our faith to the community. Through this Centre, in accordance with Christ's commands, we go to the world to make disciples of all people. Of course, our church has other ministries, too, through which the members can show our faith, for instance, short-term mission, distribution of winter clothing, and so forth. However, I firmly believe that the sustained and regular services provided by the Centre throughout the year, is better able to fulfill the outreach responsibility of a local church, that is, to bring the Gospel into the community. I have found true joy within the church family through worshipping together with brothers and sisters and through serving others..."³⁵

From this essay we can see another perspective of conscientization, as summarized by **H**, based on his four years of volunteer service:

1. The Centre is an approach that seeks to obey Christ's command to make disciples of people (linking a concrete program to faith)
2. The source of joy for the church group comes from worship (an internal and devotional matter) and serving neighbors (an external evangelization activity)
3. A 'model' of the life of disciples that includes a practical combination of church life and local evangelization

Among all the volunteers, **T** and **F** were two who have not only participated in tangible Centre programs but also taken the disciple training course.

A, a leader from the Cantonese congregation described 'conscientization' this way:

A: When I first participated in the work of the Community Centre, I was not thinking from the perspective of disciple training. But as time went on, I began to understand discipleship more. The unity and mutual love among the disciples in the church is very important. Sometimes we have different opinions, trying to find a way out through deferring to one another and compromise. This is real fellowship. I also noticed that out of the realization of the importance of prayer, our pastor has added 15 minutes of prayer before every meeting. To have everyone lift up their eyes to God is commendable. In the past five years, I have learned persistence, realizing that 'do not give up' is an important Christian value. Regular practice is important; so is the technique of dealing with practical matters. In the process, I have discovered that God has refined and disciplined us through disappointments. I have gained a deeper understanding of human nature. Once, I received a letter that challenged me. How to love others? How to be more tolerant? How to think from other people's perspectives? What is a sacrificial spirit? I asked myself. I now know more about Jesus. On the other hand, my intimate contact with God has decreased because I have spent less time on His Word and I have no time to teach Sunday school. However, practicing my faith has become more frequent, my knowledge has increased, and my faith in

³⁵ Ibid, p. 6

God has also increased. For example, after a meeting in which the motion to purchase the Centre was passed, God sent 'angels' to help our fundraising effort by giving us timely donations. In summary, loving one another among disciples is very important. Among the shortcomings and needs for improvement that have emerged in the process are: more communication among the leaders, slowing down the pace, doing more second level pastoring, and not letting discipleship fellowship become a mere formality. These will necessarily change and improve as we place our focus on disciple 'training' and not tangible measurable outcomes.

What the above interview has revealed are:

1. Action leads to reflection
2. Understanding of discipleship and disciple training
3. A deep realization of specific content of faith
4. The interconnectedness between the content of faith and action ("My faith in God has also increased...")

To recap the experience of conscientization:

1. Action and participation stimulate reflection
2. Participants all experience some realization, achieved through self-reflection or the questioning and guidance of a third party. Such an element is very important and it involved the direction of guidance and techniques. Nevertheless, we can assume that all participants are capable of self-reflection because this is an innate ability. Still, the guidance and questioning by a third party certainly can produce a positive and subliming effect on the participant's life.
3. Religious conscientization is different from an ordinary conscientization in the way words were used and actions ignited. However, the examples cited here could not exemplify this difference in terms of its nature and strength.
4. Because of the broad scope of content in our interviews with participants, it is very difficult to categorize it. In a way, this is normal and heartening because every person's life journey is different, with very individualized manifestations. This characteristic is important for disciple training; at the same it also poses a challenge.
5. How to move the experience of being awakened up one level at a given time is an issue of further research interest.

CONCLUSION

Disciple training is a mission given by Christ to the church. How a local church carried out this mission through establishing a community centre became an area for research on the Toronto Christian Community Church experiment. This mission has two directions, an outward one of evangelizing locally, hoping that the Kingdom of God manifest itself in the community and making disciples among the community residents; an inward direction of helping church members become better disciples, i.e., disciple training.

The focus of our research was placed on the how the process of disciple training produced qualitative change in the disciples. The research target was a tri-cultural Chinese church, which adopted a disciple training approach that showed social concern to a multi-ethnic community through a community centre.

We first reflected on discipleship and disciple training, and then proceeded to look into how the church understood these two concepts, and how a three-part training course was designed to help church members become better disciples.

The focus for evaluation was the educational concept of 'conscientization.' After examining Jesus' life on earth for reference and comparison, we discovered:

1. The community centre's social concern is a good entry point for opening up the life journey of the participating disciples, giving them new substance and experience.
2. This experience brought a sense of grounded-ness to disciples, providing nutrients as well as challenges to their faith, deepening their faith, and revealing blind spots.
3. The three-component disciple training design (site visits in the community/direct participation through volunteering/ the disciple training course) addressed each person's mind, action, thinking, and awareness, thus becoming a holistic training that corresponds to the holistic nature of the mission.
4. The 'conscientization' experience is a very personal one that really shakes up any stagnant disciple training course. This is a very important part yet often being neglected or set aside by the usual disciple training courses.
5. The 'point' of conscientization is important to discipleship, and to being human as well. It is intrinsically linked to a here-and-now social experience. Even though our research is not absolutely conclusive in proving that the social experience indeed triggers conscientization in disciple making, the idea that conscientization is triggered by social engagement is widely accepted in the field of adult education. It would be worthwhile to study the mastery of these 'points.'
6. The experience of 'conscientization' is linked to community factors. The community centre and related learnings, through 'conscientization,' has enriched content areas in the disciple's life, which are often neglected, such as overcoming difficulties in adhering to core values, preserving the church's unity and cooperation.
7. Interviews served to help participants' 'conscientization' experience become an awareness entity that can be put into writing, in other words, become text-based. This really helped in raising awareness.

8. The problem is how to turn and extend the little steps of 'conscientization' into meaningful actions, thus becoming the soil for growing the next 'conscientization' with the goal of triggering and sustaining the 'humanization' process.
9. This study adopted theories from adult education. Perhaps we need to do more work in borrowing expert knowledge from other fields to understand the feasibility and utility of this approach of disciple training.

APPENDIX

1) Blockages and challenges

What the church is doing in establishing the community centre is something to last for 30 or 50 years. And making disciples is her ultimate mandate. These two added up together is the future widest positioning of church, and as a visible minority witnessing the coming Kingdom, here are some blockages and challenges for this gospel community:

a) Internal cultural differences

For an immigrant church, there is a disruption in passing on the first generation faith onto the next because there might be a clash between the native expression of the same faith and the immigrant faith. To make the situation a bit more complex, you add to it a third imported expression of faith, you have a diverse expression of faith under the same roof, and each has its emphasis and method of operations. The 3 cultures are the Cantonese Hong Kong as the mother base, the local born English natively generated and connected with the wider circle of the English Canadian churches, and then the Mandarin house church tradition. The situation exerts a challenge to disciples training, especially when we are doing this research with emphasises on results and output of disciples making.

b) The need to make adjustment to the original church culture

When we stress on the output of disciples training, we would come head on with the cultural dynamics and the thinking pattern of the original culture(s), and we should not take it lightly about the resistance.

c) The execution of community concern

The Northward migration of the church members started a decade ago. Now that the church reiterates local community concern and makes it its missional focus, the challenge now is to bring the attention of the members to its locality. This shall be the major positioning of the discussion of the strategy of the church.

d) The factor of newcomers

Can the church put newcomers as their congregation composition target? There is a big difference between making the newcomer as a mission target and as a congregation composition target. If the church positions itself as a newcomer church, it would greatly affect its strategy in pastoring its members and do disciple training. But as a church situated in a newcomer neighbourhood, the position of newcomers is unavoidable.

e) Theology of immigration

How does the Bible view immigration? What is the relation between the gospel and immigration? These are questions that an immigrant church should not avoid and neglect. And it is urgent for a church to investigate the Bible from the angle of immigration in order to do mission.

2) Solution(s)

Urban/ city mission is a responsibility of contemporary disciples and this is part of a response to the call of Jesus Christ. Choosing community service is considered a historical arrangement and should be considered a specificity rather than a given. Through the practice of community service, it naturally leads to the consideration of disciple training, and the ideal is to train a group of disciples with mission mindset. In the historical situation of two languages three dialects, multicultural and multiethnic neighborhood, I would suggest the following solutions to the problems facing the church's mission:

a) To develop a theology of immigration

Mission shall start with the church's proclamations and theology. A church having a mission towards a neighbourhood populated with newcomers should develop a theology of immigrants with the following themes: family, pilgrimage, being marginal, between generations, gospel and the context of immigration, etc.

b) To add the element of local context into the discipleship

The community is a big topic, and the church should spend a great deal of time to understand it. This would be of great benefits for mission and for be-friending the neighbourhood. Learning to understand the neighbourhood should be included in the discipleship curriculum. This would help putting the neighbourhood as the church's mission focus.

c) Be mindful of the output of discipleship

A general operating definition and common understanding of what to expect as output for the disciples training would benefit the church as a whole.

d) Alignment of the three congregations

There is still a degree of difference in terms of making the local neighbourhood their mission focus in the three congregations. There are also differences between the congregations in terms of discipleship. There is a need of a thorough dialogue between the different congregations to gain consensus and to unite the church.

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