

The GlobalChurch Project

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Ruth Padilla DeBorst

Local Church Small Group Resource

This resource is designed to facilitate your small group discussion. It's shaped to inspire you to consider new ways for understanding the mission of the church. Questions are organized in themes: consider choosing the themes appropriate to your small group context. You don't need to cover all the questions. The study closes in a time of response and prayer. Allow time for your small group to reflect on these themes.

Small Group Preparation:

- Video: Ruth Padilla DeBorst, 28 minutes.
- Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9-10
- Participants are encouraged to bring their own journals or writing materials.

Themes explored in the video:

- Joining in God's mission
- Hospitality
- Theology for everyday life

Beginning the conversation

Consider the questions suggested below to start the conversation for your small group. They'll consolidate the content of the video, after you've viewed it.

1. What were the major themes in Ruth's responses? How would you describe Ruth's understanding of the mission of the church?
2. Discuss the difficulties of content. What was difficult to understand? Was there anything you would like to clarify with the group?
3. What is Ruth passionate about - relating to the mission of God?
4. What does Ruth mean by referring to the "justice call of the gospel"? How is this evident in Ruth's responses about the mission of the church?

Going deeper

Explore the major themes raised in the video. Critically engage with Miroslav's theology of the church. Consider the questions that respond to the issues raised in your preliminary discussion.

1. **Joining in God's mission:** How does the "justice call of the gospel" characterize the Latin American church, according to Ruth? Is the "justice call of the gospel" relevant to all church communities?
2. **Joining in God's mission:** How does the truth that people are gifted in different ways, and called to different dimensions of God's mission by God's Spirit, encourage the mission of the church?
3. **Joining in God's mission:** Ruth defines integral mission this way. It's "mission that involves all dimensions of life, including families, churches, communities and the structures of society." According to Ruth, why should churches engage in integral mission? What are some of the challenges of integral mission?
4. **Hospitality:** Discuss Ruth's understanding of biblical hospitality. What scriptures, including 1 Peter 2:9-10, inform your understanding of Christian responsibility, hospitality, and the calling to "be" the people of God?
5. **Hospitality:** How does Ruth learn from Jeremiah 29? How does she explain the mission of God's people using the image of God calling this exiled community, held by enemy forces and uprooted from their land to "strike roots", to "really belong and engage and pray for their city"? Does being intertwined with those we consider enemies cause you discomfort?
6. **Hospitality:** Discuss the following quotes: 1. "The world cannot sustain the lifestyle of the West," 2. "Our lifestyles are built on unjust systems," 3. "We cannot expect to live sustainably as humanity if we stay as we are." What do you make of these quotes? How does the "unexpected guest" threaten our sense of comfort?
7. **Hospitality:** What does Ruth mean by welcoming people who are "different"? What does it mean for communities to be centered on Jesus but not bounded by church affiliations? What does it mean for them to reflect the love of God in the world and contribute to God's purposes?
8. **Third-culture lifestyles:** Explain Ruth's concept of third-culture lifestyles. How is this evident (or not evident) in various ministry contexts?
9. **Third-culture lifestyles:** What do Majority World and indigenous Christians teach Western Christians today, according to Ruth? How might they encourage community, different perspectives and mutual learning?
10. **Theology for everyday life:** What are the challenges of engaging with theology which "doesn't fit into our schemes"? How does Ruth's theology respond to the issues of her context?

Informing theology

Ensure the discussion specifically draws on your local setting and is relevant to the lives of faith for your small group. Encourage relevant and thoughtful examples from each participant.

1. **Joining in God's mission:** What issues is the church currently engaged in? What issues should the church be engaged in? How do local church communities respond to the "justice call of the gospel"? In what areas should there be change?
2. **Joining in God's mission:** Each of us is gifted differently by God's Spirit to specific and unique dimensions of God's mission. We work together as a body as God's agents in God's world. How do these insights enliven mission? Is this your experience of mission? What are some of the challenges of this?
3. **Joining in God's mission:** How can you envision integral mission in your own ministry contexts?
4. **Hospitality:** What are ways in which your communities can open their churches, homes and borders to welcome and include? What issues should they be involved in? How will they be received?
5. **Hospitality:** How can we welcome "unexpected guests" at God's multicultural, multifaceted banquet table? How do we do this in the challenge of many people on the move (displaced persons etc.)?
6. **Hospitality:** How does the example of Christ who is so willing to give, differ from your own "welcome"? In what areas would you like to see God change communities in their responsiveness and engagement?

7. **Hospitality - refugee crisis:** How does our allegiance to Christ affect our response to the refugee crisis? Ruth says, “If these are the ground for our core identity, we need to start questioning policies, actions, attitudes and values that are excluding people”. What are some of the challenges of this notion?
8. **Hospitality - refugee crisis:** Ruth says, “Christians should be at the forefront of questioning anything that is depriving all people of the abundant life that God is intending for all people.” She also observes that the church is at the forefront of unwelcome, where religion can be a lacquer that covers over human greed and unwillingness to sacrifice and change. How are you responding to the refugee crisis?
9. **Third-culture lifestyles:** Ruth discusses the enriching experience of learning from one another. “We all experience God in ways that are related to our culture, context and personal experience.” How does our understanding of God “grow”, in diverse expressions of God? Can we have a “richer” understanding of God by third-culture church members? What might communities celebrating multiplicity and diversity look like for your local contexts?
10. **Third-culture lifestyles:** In what ways does our language affect the way we relate with other cultures? How important is it to have a posture of leaning in, of openness, and of a willingness to be taught by one another in the context of multi-ethnic contexts? What does this entail?
11. **Theology for everyday life:** Ruth says that in listening, we realize our commonality and learn from one another: “This rich exchange gives us a fuller picture of God”. How might you practice theology with more openness and hospitality? How can you do theology with a posture that says: “Before I classify and discard, I will listen”?
12. **Theology for everyday life:** How does a practical, cross-disciplinarian theological method respond to the needs of a community? How can interdisciplinary “grappling with the questions” and working with one another be incorporated into your theological method?

Informing community

Facilitate the space for your group to respond to the discussion. You might consider this section as a personal time of written journal responses to the following questions.

1. What is God encouraging our class and me, to do? What has challenged me about Ruth’s words?
2. In response to the issues raised in the video, what are areas I want to ask for God’s forgiveness in? What areas of compassion do I want God to stir up my heart and our hearts for?
3. What do we need of God to have our mission more integral? How does he have lordship over every dimension of our lives? In what areas do we need to trust God in for our lives and our communities?
4. How do I need God to minister to me and this small group, for us to better engage with these issues.

Prayer

Spend time in prayer over what you’ve learnt.

Invite the ministry of the Holy Spirit to clarify, heal and inspire change for your participants and communities.

Links

Website: www.theglobalchurchproject.com

Book: Graham Hill, *GlobalChurch: Reshaping Our Conversations, Renewing Our Mission, Revitalizing Our Churches* (IVP Academic, 2015)