

“Hearts and Minds”

We absolutely need a group of brothers and sisters to fellowship with. And we need that fellowship, regularly. We all know what happens when we don't have this time together:

- Our hearts and minds begin to drift away from the deep, rich, orthodox sources of our Faith.
- In more serious cases, we begin to think: “I, I alone am left, and they seek my life....”
- We miss the unique friendship of people who are “in the same business” – brothers and sisters who do ministry fifty-two weeks a year.

For the past three years, I have been part of a Mission Affinity Group in National Capital Presbytery. National Capital serves churches in Washington D.C., Southern Maryland, and Northern Virginia. Our group is made up of senior and associate pastors; it preceded me by at least three years; and, it was built on a solid foundation of friendship and shared ministry context. *I think that's essential:* A good group can only stand on the rock of friendship in Christ. If that friendship isn't there – the kind of friendship that's built informally, patiently, lovingly – then the theology we love, unfortunately, can't create it and probably won't sustain it.

We meet once a month (with a 2-3 month break during the Summer), and we are fortunate to be able to do so. We live and work in close proximity to one another, so we can drive to meet for an afternoon, and still have a productive morning at our churches. It's certainly true that nothing replaces face to face time together, but if you are “serving in a forward position” in the Kingdom – a small church, in a rural setting, or in a Presbytery where there aren't many who would choose to fellowship in our way – it is crucial that you use available technology like Facetime, Skype, or Google Hangouts, so that you *see* and *speak* to your friends in Christ, regularly.

When we meet, we work through a passage from Scripture, or an excerpt from a Catechism or Confession. Our discussion of these is made relentlessly practical through this question: ‘How do we apply this “grammar lesson” to the day to day “language” of our ministry-setting: Our preaching, pastoral care, administration, teaching?’ When this question is asked, again and again, the theology we find in Scripture and in our Confessions and Catechisms, comes alive in the way our forefathers and mothers in the Faith meant it to – their hearts and minds speak to ours, and encourage us to listen for the One who promises to guide and sustain us in every season of life and ministry.

If you enjoy this kind of fellowship, tell me about it. If you want to build this kind of fellowship, let's talk about it. Until then, may God's grace and peace sustain you as we serve our Lord in the place - and with the people - he has sent us to.

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