

EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP IN DISCIPLESHIP: EXPERIENCES FROM AN INTERDENOMINATIONAL PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

In the Evangelical-Lutheran Theological University (Budapest), the idea of participatory action research and the concept of intentional discipleship and small discipleship groups have converged, suggesting a new type of leadership behavior within the Church. The combination of theological reflection and empirical research can be effectively translated into practice through participatory action research conducted in an interdenominational context, thereby assisting Christian congregations in striving for relevant and vibrant Christ-like leadership and discipleship in a changing world. The concept of empowering leadership is a key term in both modern social sciences and the field of discipleship. This paper aims to examine the practical aspects of empowering leadership within the realm of discipleship, based on experiences from the participatory action research group “Banding Together”, with a particular focus on leadership behavior.

Keywords: empowerment, discipleship, small groups, participation, action research

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INTRODUCTION – WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

The practical foundational question of Christian discipleship – “How does one become a disciple of Christ today?” – explores the nature of the disciple’s life and its practical realization in a modern context. It thus falls under practical theology, specifically missiology and congregational pedagogy. Based on research addressing the future of Christianity from the perspectives of congregational pedagogy and missiology, it can be determined that two opposing processes are occurring within Christianity. In the Western world, one can observe that the Church is struggling significantly to engage the younger generation and contemporary communities, showing signs of decline.¹ In contrast, in Africa, South America, and Asia, Christianity exhibits a picture of dynamic development, typically characterized by a Pentecostal and charismatic emphasis.² Predictions suggest that Christianity will remain dominant in these areas over the coming decades and will even experience substantial growth that is not due merely to demographic characteristics.³ This implies that there is still potential within Christianity to reach new people; however, essential characteristics that would unlock this potential are missing from current European and Western practices.

Leaders belonging to various denominations have recently started seeking ways to change church practices in light of these processes. Feeling the necessity for a cultural shift, new community forms are emerging, and a reimagining of older forms has begun to foster a sense of community among those entrusted to our churches.⁴ This development points toward the concept of intentional discipleship. In addition to the existing thinking present in historical Christian churches, which labels every program and activity of the Church under the concept of discipleship,⁵ one can discover pathways that consciously focus on the practical realization of discipleship, reaching and teaching new individuals entering the community.⁶ Upon examining the biblical and

¹ Research on the situation of Christianity in Western Europe and Central Europe. Conrad Hackett – Alan Cooperman: *The Changing Global Religious Landscape*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape/> (accessed 2 September 2024).

² Research on the religious habits of young people. Stephen Bullivant: *Europe’s Young Adults and Religion 2018*, <https://www.stmarys.ac.uk/research/centres/benedict-xvi/docs/2018-mar-europe-young-people-report-eng.pdf> (accessed 3 September 2024).

³ Key findings from the Global Religious Futures Project. Pew Research Center 2022. December 21, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/12/21/key-findings-from-the-global-religious-futures-project/> (accessed 5. September 2024).

⁴ Pángyánszky, Ágnes: Kontextuális kérdésfelvetések a gyülekezetpedagógiában. *Lelkipásztor*, 2020/5. sz. 173.

⁵ Debra Dean Murphy: Discipleship, in: G.T. Kurian – M.A. Lamport: *Encyclopedia of Christian Education*. 2015. Rowman & Littlefield, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/11054927> (accessed 15 May 2024).

⁶ The work of Christian Schwarz, Rick Warren, and Timothy Keller, among others, and the movements that have developed around them, are of particular significance.

church-historical roots of intentional discipleship and modern practices, an interesting conclusion can be drawn: something is fundamentally missing from today's congregational practice.

REALMS OF DISCIPLESHIP: JESUS, JOHN WESLEY, AND MODERN PRACTICE

The master's footsteps: the realms of discipleship of Jesus the Nazarene

Jesus and his disciples turned the ancient world upside down. In examining communal and relational functioning in the Gospels, it may be noted that, alongside personal relationships (e.g., Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman) and public preaching (feeding the five thousand), the uniqueness of Jesus' ministry lay in his wandering together with his disciples in a larger group of friends, consistently investing time in them for three years. An assessment of communal forms shows that the broader circle of disciples included 72, while the narrower circle contained 12 disciples, in addition to an internal group of four including Peter, James, John and Jesus himself. One study notes, based on the lists in the Gospels, that the 12 disciples can also be categorized into smaller groups of four.⁷ The New Testament provides other examples of various sizes of small communities functioning and cooperating together.⁸

John Wesley's overlapping system of groups

If one examines the operations of the 18th-century Methodist movement and revival in England, one finds a fairly similar structure there as well. John Wesley's Methodist revival movement was built upon the dynamic cooperation of different types of communities.⁹ 18th-century Methodists practiced four kinds of community beyond intensive personal relationships (see detailed correspondence): they revolutionarily reinstituted public outdoor worship, and organized societies, class meetings, and bands. This fourfold community operated in an overlapping system, from addressing interests to organizing groups, extending to deep personal character development.¹⁰ The smallest was the discipleship

⁷ Carl W. Wilson: *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building: The Ministry Methods of Jesus*. Oviedo FL, Andragathia Books, 2012, 144–145.

⁸ As an example in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the home churches, the Antioch circle, and the circles of the disciple of Paul: Acts 13:1–3, 20:4–5.

⁹ D. Michael Henderson: *John Wesley's Class meeting: A model for making disciples*. Wilmore, Rafiki Books, 1997, 81–122.

¹⁰ Robby Gallaty: *Rediscovering Discipleship*. Zondervan. 2015. <https://www.perlego.com/book/558341> (accessed: 22 March 2024).

group containing 3-5 members, the band, which sometimes functioned as a confessional community, acting as a catalyst for personal faith experience and formation. The class consisted of 12-15 members and was organized locally as a place to learn about Christian living. The societies were larger worship communities where classes organized in one area held joint meetings, listened to preaching, and sang together. Two other types of groups were also established by the Methodists, the selected society, which served as a leaders' training group, and the penitential band for individuals struggling with addictions and behavioral issues. Continuously practiced public preaching represented the form that most effectively reached the uneducated masses. The bands were those small groups where the proclaimed "message transitioned from printed text to living speech, from personal to communal, and from cognitive to emotional levels, transforming private matters into communal issues."¹¹ These groups focused on attuning each participant to the heart of Christ, meaning the group members experienced how much Christ loves them through the recognition of their own brokenness, thus becoming capable of change. The requirements of the groups were quite strict by today's standards, but participation was voluntary. These were always gender-segregated groups, and they met at least once a week, although many gathered multiple times a week for personal accountability and encouragement. In these small discipleship groups, honesty, loyalty, and reliability were emphasized as core values.¹²

Contemporary practice

Today's congregational practice is characterized by personal relationships; in general, there is a type of group functioning, and there is the worship community and some kind of public service or social presence. What is typically lacking in organized congregational practice is conscious, structured small discipleship groups of 3-5 people. In addition to one-on-one connections or connections on large community platforms, there is an opportunity to consciously promote small group connections for the purpose of building faith. This is what is missing in today's congregational practice. A discipleship small group in congregational life is a small group that has a conscious goal of personal faith growth and spiritual formation.¹³ In these groups, the level of commitment and the boundary of inclusivity are determined by the personal decisions of the group members. Discipleship groups connect individuals into

¹¹ David Hempton: *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005, 79.

¹² Gallaty: *Rediscovering Discipleship*. n.p.n.

¹³ Roger L. Walton: *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups*. SCM Press, London, England, 123.

a transformative community along the lines of self-directed learning and transformative learning concepts, which include some form of transparency and accountability.¹⁴

MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment in the Discipleship Small Groups Model

Mike Breen's model signifies the discipleship model represented by Jesus and Christianity as a culture of empowerment, which presumes high levels of involvement and challenge. A community or group cannot call its members to change if it only focuses on serving their needs and ensuring their comfort. For a culture of discipleship to be established, the community must learn to be inclusive while continuously inspiring people to learn and grow.¹⁵ In this model, the congregation or group is not a service or therapy but a form of community in which individuals are active participants in their own personal growth and engage personally in shaping others. The culture of discipleship is a dynamic community-building tool created by congregations through their practices and habits. One can speak of an empowering atmosphere in a congregation when this culture is characterized by a high level of inclusivity yet also invites individuals to change. Starting from Breen's model of a culture of empowerment, a developmental path is outlined that invites people in the Christian community to become active participants in this development across personal growth, deep and balanced relationships, rhythm of life, multiplication, personal calling, prayer, community life, and service to others.¹⁶ Therefore, from the perspective of discipleship, empowerment means inviting individuals to a change that is brought about by their own decisions in the context of an inclusive environment and the acquisition of the appropriate knowledge.

Empowerment in a broader perspective of leadership

Empowering leadership constitutes a global paradigm shift in organizational management, moving away from traditional hierarchical control structures towards fostering autonomy, responsibility, and shared decision-making among

¹⁴ Gyurkó, Donát Sámuel: A közösség ereje – egy felekezeti közti részvételi akciókutatás tapasztalatai, in Bácskai et al. (eds.): *Teológia és hűség*. Budapest, Luther kiadó. 2023. 44.

¹⁵ Mike Breen: *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did*. 3DM Publishing. 71.

¹⁶ Breen: *Building a Discipling Culture*. 71–73.

fellow employees.¹⁷ This approach is predicated on the understanding that employees, when given the appropriate latitude and support, are capable of contributing significantly to organizational goals and objectives.¹⁸ Empowerment, in this context, transcends mere delegation; it encompasses the creation of an environment where individuals feel valued, trusted, and equipped to make decisions that directly impact their work and the organization as a whole.¹⁹ Implementing self-directed teams represents a tangible step toward cultivating an empowered culture, enabling those closest to the job to make critical decisions about their work and interactions.²⁰

Levels of empowerment in Sociology

Examining the culture of empowerment is valuable in assessing the levels of empowerment and participation in the model of sociologists Arnstein and Chanan. The work of these two sociologists has resulted in a complex model that examines community processes from the perspective of individual involvement.²¹ It is worth examining our communities from this perspective as well. The key question is who makes the decisions in a group.

The first two levels in Arnstein's model indicate manipulation and therapy, denoting the complete absence of genuine participation. At the third, fourth, and fifth levels (information, consultation, and reconciliation), participants have some limited ability to influence processes. The top three levels define the levels of genuine community governance (partnership, delegated power, and community governance). In Chanan's model, the lowest level of participation is information, the second level is consultation, the third level is

¹⁷ Julian Barling – Amy Christie – Nick Turner: Pseudo-Transformational Leadership: Towards the Development and Test of a Model. *Journal of Business Ethics* (2008) 81:851–861. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25482259?seq=1> (accessed 20 March 2024).

¹⁸ Okunbanjo Olajide – Adewale Noah – Wasiu Kehinde: Influence of Leadership Approach on Employee Empowerment: A Study of Selected Small-Scale Businesses in Nigeria. *Management and Economics Research Journal*. 2016/08/01 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/307141760> (accessed 18 March 2025).

¹⁹ Drita Kruja – Huong Ha – Elvira Drhisti – Ted Oelfke: Empowerment in the Hospitality Industry in the United States. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*. 25. 25–48. (2016.) 10.1080/19368623.2015.976696. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273677386_Empowerment_in_the_Hospitality_Industry_in_the_United_States/citation/download (accessed 18 March 2025).

²⁰ Wellins, Richard – Sykes, Peter: How to Build Self-directed Teams. *Executive Development*. 7. (1994.) 25–28. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247624480_How_to_Build_Self-directed_Teams/citation/download (accessed: 21 March 2025).

²¹ Jonathan Tritter – Alison McCallum: The Snakes and Ladders of User Involvement: Moving beyond Arnstein. *Health Policy* 76 (2) 2006. 156–168.

involvement, the fourth level is collaboration, and the highest level of participation is empowerment.²²

Empowerment in congregational practice

When examining congregational practice, one can see that participation levels in congregational events and programs are largely characterized by the lower two-thirds of Arnstein's ladder. Most community events proceed in a therapy-like, predetermined manner, where individual decisions or expressions are given only limited roles. The community typically strives to involve congregational members in organizing programs or in the liturgy of worship; however, the state of complete empowerment, where congregational members initiate and lead a process or define the course of a worship event, is quite rare. Congregations also include a layer of power dynamics; therefore, the exercise of power on the participants' level is not fully realized. In contrast, smaller groups work consistently well only on a partnership basis. In the long term, a group can function effectively only if participants feel they can be involved in the decision-making process and if they can have a sense of ownership of the community. Many painful experiences, injuries, and conflicts in congregational practice stem from the unidimensional and non-communal exercise of power. Community governance requires time and assumes an investment of quality time. It follows that the greater the burden on a leader, the less they will be able to operate decision-making processes at higher levels of participation.²³ That those small groups are missing from the congregational practice where community leadership could be effectively realized has already been shown. Regarding participation and empowerment, we assume that this occurs within the Christian community in a pragmatic and not a critical sense.²⁴ The condition for the existence of small discipleship groups is partnership and empowering leadership towards a common goal. The guiding principle of the discipleship groups is the development of faith and commitment to Jesus Christ, rather than commitment to social development, deconstruction, or the redistribution of power. Based on this, our hypothesis is that the culture of empowerment in congregational groups, when used properly, leads to the practical realization of their multiplication and promotes the rise of independent, mature leaders. Partnership and empowering leadership are necessary for the functioning of discipleship small groups, where the leader transfers the leadership role to the

²² Reisinger Adrienn: A társadalmi részvétel a helyi fejlesztési politikában Magyarországon – fókuszban a civil/nonprofit szervezetek. *Civil Szemle*, 1. 2012. 23–44.

²³ Robert Adams: *Empowerment, Participation and Social Work*. 4th edn. Red Globe Press. <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2995889/48> (accessed 4 September 2024).

²⁴ Gyurkó: *A közösség ereje*, 46.

group, encourages, and supports the members in their faith development. According to the hypothesis based on personal experiences, these group connections promote faith development, personal unfolding, and connections to the Christian community and congregation. Observations show that personal commitment is more likely to develop in such small group environments.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH ON SMALL DISCIPLESHIP GROUPS AS A MODEL OF EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP

In 2019, John Wiest's handbook "Banding Together," which deals with small group discipleship, was published in Hungary, offering a method that can easily be adapted for cooperative, transformative, self-organizing small discipleship groups.²⁵ During the preparation of the Hungarian translation, a community emerged among pastors who used some form of conscious discipleship model in their own communities. John Wiest's method is based on empowering existing congregational members. This emerging movement encouraged congregational members to form self-organizing small communities where they read the Bible together, share their experiences, acknowledge their weaknesses before one another, and pray for one another. The five principles of the method are the simplicity of the process, the Bible as study material, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, voluntary obedience, and multiplication of the community as an outcome.²⁶ The three practical tools used in small groups are interactive Bible reading, accountability, and prayer for others.

Overview of the methodology

In the "Banding Together" research group, we researched this small discipleship group method involving active group leaders over a 10-month participatory action research process. The research group consisted of six diverse Adventist and Methodist group leaders with high commitment and at the highest level of participation.²⁷ During the research process, while operating at the highest level of participation, the group conducted 18 in-depth interviews, and 70 small group participants completed the questionnaires. The research group then analyzed the data from the questionnaires and in-depth interviews together.

²⁵ John Wiest: *Banding Together. A Practical Guide for Disciplemakers*. Fishers, Indiana, Wesleyan Publishing House, 2018. 10–18.

²⁶ Wiest: *Banding Together*, 21–37.

²⁷ Gyurkó: *A közösség ereje*, 47.

Data on our discipleship small groups

Of the group members completing the questionnaire, 59% were women and 41% men. The ages of the respondents ranged from 15 to 73, with an average age of 44.6 years, which is close to the average age of 44.2 in Hungary. More than 55% of the respondents had a university degree. 70% were Adventist, 15% Methodist, 4.5% Reformed, and 4.5% non-Christian. 82% of group participants had a high level of religious commitment. 44.3% of the groups consisted of four members, meeting weekly in 90% of the cases, with 67% operating online and group meetings lasting about one hour 60% of the time. A large majority of respondents, 55-67%, reported growth in trust in God, sharing struggles, personal Bible reading, and applying what they read in the Bible during group activities. Two-thirds of the respondents also experienced growth in self-awareness, struggles with bad habits, and being more attentive to God in their daily lives. In 54% of closed groups, the decision to end the group activities was made collectively by the group members. 22.4% of respondents indicated that new groups were formed.²⁸

Key findings

Based on the main research question of the group (How does an effective small discipleship group operate?), the study revealed three factors to be crucial to the effective functioning of a small group.

1. The first is that the effective functioning of a group is primarily determined by the organizational efficiency of the group meetings. At the start of the group, it is vital that the group receives proper information about the method and that commitment happens freely, without any coercion. According to our research findings, the operation is most effective when the group can meet regularly with 3-4 members, flexibly find meeting times, manage their time well, and remain together for at least a year.
2. Another area affecting the effectiveness of such a group is the effectiveness of interactive Bible reading. In our research, we found that a group operates most effectively and can exert a truly positive impact when the majority of group members read the Bible at least 3-4 times a week and take notes on their experiences. This maximizes the effectiveness of sharing and collective learning. We also collected numerous creative ideas to motivate Bible reading. Accountability and the use of monitoring

²⁸ Gyurkó, Donát Sámuel: Tanulóközösségek a gyülekezetben. A tanítványi kiscsoportok és a tanítványság gyakorlati koncepciójának kérdései. in: *Teológia és tanulás*, Budapest, Luther kiadó, 2024. 287.

questions are crucial for the effectiveness of the group. It is important that the depth of sharing naturally develops within the group without any coercion. A key aspect of effectiveness is that natural topics of life be shared freely in a safe community space. In this regard, balance, honesty, and freedom are key concepts.

3. A third factor which influences the effectiveness of the method is service to external individuals. The group can function effectively only if it does not remain self-serving but also supports its members in service towards others. Effectiveness increases when we pray for specific things and receive confirmation on those topics week by week.

EXPERIENCE FROM THE RESEARCH

Participatory action research in this area provides congregations with the opportunity to critically reflect on and develop their discipleship practices to better meet the needs and expectations of today's believers. A community knowledge base is created through direct observations, interviews, group discussions, and the journal entries and notes of the participants. The findings of the research can lead not only to theoretical conclusions, but also to concrete practical steps to increase the effectiveness of community life and service.

1. The strength of participatory action research lies in the sharing of experiences and the learning process.
2. Empowerment creates a sense of uncertainty and alienation.
3. Experiencing community and shared results alleviate uncertainty.
4. Community motivates and inspires individuals in their personal lives.

In connection with this, an empowering leadership style emerged from practice and from observations of decision-making mechanisms during the study that support the functioning of groups and the development of discipleship. Within the framework of empowering leadership, leaders' main role is to assist members' growth, encourage their self-organization, and motivate them to actively fulfill their roles in the community. Participation and empowering leadership fundamentally involve the leader. This ensures that group members receive what is necessary for successful, independent functioning while also creating an environment where the contributions of the community are treated as real values along clearly communicated organizing principles. This leadership approach significantly contributes to the growth of congregations and the formation of new communities.

My personal experience is that over the course of five years, in the three small discipleship groups in which I personally participated, the attrition rate

was one-third, and the remaining group members innovatively created new groups in a self-organizing manner, while remaining strongly committed to their larger community.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPOWERING LEADERSHIP IN THE COMMUNITY RESEARCH GROUP

During the research period, ten leadership traits were identified that promote the development of a well-functioning community in groups and in leadership behavior in general.

1. Trust and delegation: One key to empowerment is trust in group members. The leader trusts that group members can act independently and responsibly. This is based on a shared commitment as leaders of disciple groups. The collaborative work of the research group deepened this trust during the process.
2. Sense of mission: The leader helps group members see the broader context of their work and its connection to the organization's goals, increasing their motivation and commitment. The main driving force of our research group was that we all saw the positive impact of this work on our larger community.
3. Providing autonomy: The leader respects the autonomy of group members and allows them to make independent decisions during joint work. We paid great attention during the research process to having group members make independent commitments and contribute to the process.
4. Participation in decision-making: Defining the entire process together and shaping it as we went along increased the commitment within the research group. Involving group members in the decision-making process not only increases acceptance of the decisions but also provides opportunities for contribution and commitment.
5. Encouraging participation: We aimed to create an atmosphere where everyone feels that their contribution is important and is encouraged to communicate openly and participate in essential activities organized by the team or organization.
6. Sharing resources: We shared all available information with the group about participatory action research, the group method itself, conducting in-depth interviews, methods of recording interviews, and data analysis, enabling them to make informed decisions and perform their tasks effectively.
7. Delegating responsibility: An important part of empowerment is that the leader can delegate certain responsibilities to group members, thereby

increasing their participation and commitment to the success of projects. Group meetings and research sub-tasks were realized in this way.

8. Developing competencies: We actively supported the personal and professional development of group members, providing necessary training in participatory action research and grounded theory, and ensuring they had access to the ATLAS.ti program for data analysis and joint coding.
9. Access to problem-solving: The leader creates an environment where employees can easily access problem-solving tools and resources, and are able to initiate change or improvement.
10. Feedback and reinforcement: Throughout the research process, we regularly provided constructive feedback, recognized each other's work, results, and efforts, and encouraged each other for the sake of further development.

SUMMARY AND QUESTIONS

The potential for enhanced organizational performance via empowerment, coupled with opportunities for participation and continuous learning, is increasingly recognized by numerous organizations.²⁹ It also offers new ways of leadership in ecclesiastical contexts. The implementation of empowering leadership necessitates a multi-faceted approach that incorporates various organizational, leadership, employee, and work-related characteristics.³⁰ Empowering leadership departs from the traditional hierarchical model, where leaders retain decision-making authority, instead distributing responsibilities to individuals closest to the operational realities.³¹ This approach not only enhances individual capabilities but also cultivates a sense of ownership and shared responsibility among team members.³² The decentralization of authority, a core tenet of empowering leadership, allows individuals to exercise autonomy and discretion in their roles.³³ This autonomy, in turn, fuels intrinsic

²⁹ Penny Gardiner: "The Case for Employee Empowerment as a Means of Enhancing Organisational Performance", *Management Research News*, Vol. 19 No. 4/5, 68–69. <https://doi.org/10.1108/eb028467> (accessed 21 March 2024).

³⁰ Gary Yukl – Wendy S. Becker: Effective Empowerment in Organizations. *Organization Management Journal*. 3. (2006.) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/32034337_Effective_Empowerment_in_Organizations (accessed 18 March 2025).

³¹ Wellins-Sykes: How to Build Self-directed Teams, 28.

³² Quiang Wang – Hong Hou – Zhibin Li: Participative Leadership: A Literature Review and Prospects for Future Research. *Frontiers in Psychology Volume 13*. 2022. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.924357/full> (accessed 21 March 2025).

³³ Hendrik Hüttermann – Stefan Berger – Max Reinwald – Heike Buch: Power to the People—And Then? A Multilevel Leadership Perspective on Organizational Decentralization. *Human Resource Management Volume 63 Issue 2*, 2024. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/hrm.22203> (accessed 21 March 2025).

motivation, as individuals feel a greater sense of control over their work and its outcomes.

Empowering leadership in the field of discipleship implies a new way of functioning in the community, which has two important components. One is a strong commitment to conscious discipleship grounded in Jesus Christ, while the other component is an equally strong commitment to the freedom and free choice of individuals. These two components carry various tensions. This freedom raises the issue of inclusivity in the context of small discipleship groups: How can one handle individual personal choices while considering the limits of the group's and the larger community's capacity to be inclusive? The decision regarding the extent to which someone participates and their level of openness to certain elements of the disciple group both raise fundamental questions for church groups about the empowerment of members and community dynamics. Is it possible for small groups to function in a way that encompasses the entire community? How can group members be motivated while maintaining their individual freedom of choice and autonomy?

In his book *Gemeinsames Leben (Life Together)*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses this as follows:

The community can only be advanced through communal work. It is not about private groups, but about the task of the church; it is not about more or less arbitrary individual solutions, but about the responsibility of the whole church. The task, though by no means new, is often approached with understandable reluctance, but over time this must give way to a willingness to cooperate within the church.³⁴

Three fundamental conclusions can be drawn from these statements. Firstly, the strength and effectiveness of a community are determined by the work individuals do for the community. Secondly, the Christian community is created by the shared calling received in Jesus Christ, which can be realized in many diverse and unique ways; yet it remains a common cause and shared responsibility. Thirdly, individuals always tend to evade the responsibility of building a community, yet cooperation and the development of community within the church remain possible. One tool for this may be empowering leadership behavior.

³⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer: *Közösségben*, Budapest Harmat/Luther 2020, 8. Translation mine.

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