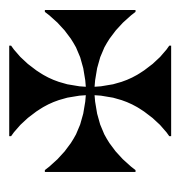


Forming and Running Local Maranatha Groups



Local initiatives

Maranatha Groups

Maranatha groups now form a growing network of believers throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. Maranatha is not a church but a means of strengthening the church. Maranatha groups serve as a direct help and encouragement to local churches and individuals. They enable Christians to pray and worship as one, and to speak with one voice and to enjoy fellowship, which is enriched from different traditions.

They are essentially listening groups and those who attend are built up in the Christian faith. Their prayer life is deepened. They have first-hand experience of being members of the flock of Christ the Good Shepherd, of the living, healing Body of Christ and of the loving family of God the Father. Spiritual gifts are identified. Local initiatives for combined witness and service may be taken. Active participation in Maranatha group meetings is strongly encouraged. Members can share deeply in the life of a national Christian movement which is totally committed to the Lordship of Christ.

The first step to forming a group

In the first instance a small group of four or five will share in prayer to confirm that God wishes them to take this initiative. Then this small group will approach several others, preferably drawn from different Churches. Tell them of the intention of forming a Maranatha group, perhaps offering each of them an introductory leaflet about the Community. Those taking the initiative will be given positive encouragement and direct help by Maranatha's UK Office team and in particular by Maranatha's Support and Development team. The inaugural meeting should preferably be held in a small room. Invitation cards, together with a sheet about Maranatha (both provided by the Maranatha office) should be passed to individual members of the various Churches. They should be given a personal encouragement to attend. Information about the meeting should be passed to local churches for them to use in their magazines, newsletters and in church announcements. Also local press might be informed. Posters, available

from the office, should be displayed on church premises and public places including libraries and shops. Priests, ministers and pastors should be informed and where appropriate a pack of information will be mailed to them from the office.

The first meeting

In most cases this is a meeting of a small group of 12-15 people, although sometimes this may be as large as 40. A special part of this inaugural meeting will be devoted to an introduction of the Maranatha Community, with special leaflets being distributed and possibly a short visual presentation. A special video is available entitled 'Call to Change'. The first meeting will give some indication of the pattern and frequency of future gatherings. Most groups meet monthly. Some groups meet on different church premises; others find it convenient to have a fixed venue.

The Setting

Seating is normally in a circle, emphasising that we belong together in the Body of Christ. At the centre we find it helpful to have a small, low table with a cross, a lighted candle and an open Bible. These remind us that Christ is the living Word, that he is the light of the world and that he died on a cross and rose again for each one of us. Jesus is the centre and focus of our meetings.

The programme

We endeavour to avoid a rigid agenda in order to allow the movement of the Spirit. There are, however, a number of basic characteristics of any local Maranatha group gathering. Light refreshments are usually served prior to the commencement of the meeting and whilst this is taking place, gentle Christian music may be played as a background. The meeting starts with a welcome, followed by an inaugural prayer when we usually hold hands as a sign of our unity.

The gathering will include praise, silent listening and readings from scripture. A guitar or piano would be helpful to accompany the singing of songs and hymns. The theme of the meeting may be presented in a few short sentences followed by an appropriate Bible reading, possibly

supplemented by a relevant extract from a Christian book or Maranatha material. Alternatively, an extract from a Maranatha CD or cassette could be used.

At some point in the gathering we share in giving and receiving ministry by providing opportunity for those who desire prayer to come forward to the table and asking two others to support them and pray for God's blessing. There are no onlookers in this - we all join in silent prayer for those at the table. During this time it is helpful to have some quiet background music. Tapes are available for this from the Maranatha bookshop. At the end of the meeting we again affirm our unity as we join together in praise. We join hands to say the Grace and we then share the Peace.

Shared Leadership

We endeavour to avoid one person dominating Maranatha group meetings. We all have gifts to contribute. It has been found very helpful for two people to speak for no more than ten minutes on a suitable theme.

Responsibility for preparing and praying for themes and meetings is normally shared by a small group who act as Servers. These may be the same people as those who formed the initial core to pray about the formation of the group. Servers meet regularly between Group Meetings to pray, to seek God's will and to plan the way ahead.

Each group meeting is led by a small team of approximately three. It has also been helpful to have a further two quietly discerning the way the Spirit is shaping the meeting.

Specific tasks in the group are shared and it is important to have someone allocated to welcome and register people as they arrive. As the life of the group develops, the gifts of more and more people should be identified and used.

The Life of the Group

Maranatha groups vary greatly in size and character. As the group members meet together the particular calling entrusted by God to them becomes clearer.

They may be prompted to take special initiatives and undertake specific projects. They may be led to arrange training sessions, Days of Quietness or involvement in Community events such as weekends and larger gatherings. Help for all this is available from the Maranatha office.

Support & Development

No group should feel that it is isolated. In the early days, suggestions for themes, together with help in producing literature, will be available from the Maranatha office and visiting teams to share in leadership can be provided. The Office welcomes being informed about attendance and new people coming into the group.

The Support and Development Team is convened by Mary and George Pendleton (01724 711553) and they can be called upon to give advice, encouragement and help. A member of this Team will be in telephone communication to share and pray as needed.

A wide range of Maranatha literature is available and a starter pack is provided for new groups.

Sharing in the life of the Community

Although each group has its own distinctive style and calling there is a strong bond of belonging across the Community. This is fostered in many ways.

Every two months National Representatives from all the groups and areas of the Community life meet together in Birmingham, to pray, to listen to God and discern the way forward. These are times of great joy and fellowship, where all aspects of the community's life are brought together. Every group is invited to send representatives and when they do, the life of the group is considerably enriched.

Regional meetings

From time to time larger gatherings are held on a regional basis. These are of great value in building up bonds of fellowship between neighbouring

groups and giving a wider vision of God's work in the Community.

Part of a praying Community

As individual groups we share in the overall life of the Maranatha Community, particularly through our prayers. When a team visits Northern Ireland, for instance, Maranatha groups take responsibility to cover the whole time in prayer.

There is a constant stream of requests and initiatives passing through the Maranatha Office. There is a prayer rota in which each group is asked to participate to uphold and protect the Office, the work that takes place and all who work or visit there. Every day lunchtime prayers are held in the office. Members of local groups are always welcome at the Maranatha office, at its Café, Bookshop (which services the Community), its Prayer Room and the nearby House of Peace.

Come Lord Jesus!

This is our prayer and this is our name - 'MARANATHA'. We pray for the coming of Jesus into every group, into the Life of our Community, into our churches, our communities and our homes. In every group we strongly affirm the Lordship of Jesus. We look to him with expectant hope for guidance and protection.

Maranatha is a thriving community of thousands of Christian believers within all the churches. We are committed to work and pray for Christian unity, Christian renewal and Christian healing. We are pilgrim people. We travel light. We are open to the Spirit. We are little brothers and sisters of Jesus.

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