

HISTORY OF RENEWAL RETREAT GROUPS & THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The first Renewal Retreat Group was led by Les Scarborough from John Mark Ministries Inc. in 1995. Various members of the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales recognized that a strategy was needed to enable ministers to develop healthy, sustainable ministries and to encourage healthy relationships between ministers across the denomination.

The original group completed the three-year cycle and divided to form two groups in 1998. This process of multiplication has continued with some variation and there are now over ten men's groups and two women's groups, encompassing seventy-nine men and twenty-one women in New South Wales, and sixteen men in Victoria.

Within NSW, Renewal Retreat Groups are funded by Ministry & Mission Committee with assistance from the Sylvia Evans Trust, and by the members of each group.

TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE RENEWAL RETREAT

- Come expecting God to grow and change you to become more fruitful
- Be willing to trust the process of the group
- Allow space before and after the annual retreat
- Leave work behind
- Bring an attentive, non-judgmental, attitude
- Be prepared to listen
- Be open, prepared to share with the group
- Commit to turning up for each retreat in the three year cycle



WHAT IS A RENEWAL RETREAT GROUP?

A Renewal Retreat Group is a small group of between eight to ten people involved in ministry, who are committed to developing and maintaining healthy lives, relationships and churches.

Retreat Groups are a safe community where members covenant to respect the trust and confidence of each group member, to meet for an extended period once each year for three years away from normal commitments, to engage with and share their stories, and contribute to a community focused on spiritual growth.

Through the retreat process, members explore what God is doing in their own lives and contribute to the spiritual growth of others through the gift of listening and reflecting on how God is growing each one of us 'up' in Christ.

Each retreat includes time alone with God, listening to and telling life-stories, ministry workshops, sharing the Lord's Supper, time for fun, and, through formal affirmations, a time to encourage and affirm what God is

The model followed by a Renewal Retreat Group includes three phases, each phase corresponding to a year of the three-year cycle. In between retreats, catch-ups are held either in person or through an electronic medium.

Phase 1 is an opportunity for group members to connect, develop a group covenant, tell life stories, reflect and minister to each other, affirm each group member, and enjoy time in God's word for personal meditation and spiritual reflection.

Phase 2 is a time of growing as group members reconnect and share catch-up stories. In addition there is time for workshops covering leadership principles, ministry models, theological reflections, personal issues, time alone with God and affirmation.

Phase 3 incorporates elements of phase two, however the purpose of this phase is to prepare the group for division and multiplication and includes the affirmation of additional facilitators.

While the process of reflecting on our life story may prompt us to recognize areas in our personal life, family life or ministry that God is seeking to transform, the group is not designed to provide any of the following:

- Direct support on an ongoing, regular basis. Members can choose to set up accountability processes with other members of the group, and seek prayer support. Any further support should be sought through alternative channels.
- Therapy. Counseling services are available through the Presbyterian Social Services.
- In-depth bible study. At different points within the retreat cycle group members may bring discussion papers on biblical, theological or ministry topics that challenge and broaden our horizons, however, the retreat group is not a bible conference or an opportunity to hone preaching skills.
- A holiday. Members will find the process of personal reflection and listening to others stories requires effort and concentration.