Vision Groups Synod Presentation: Continuing to Live the Vision

Continuous Culture of Innovation: John Wesley

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Brothers and sisters… When I arrived in Bristol in 1739 I saw a crowded and confused city, with many neglected needs and little or no church presence. But God gave me a vision: a vision of a family: a family full of devotion to God, full in their exercises of devotion, and exemplary in every branch of Christian holiness. And so, as you know, I undertook a grand experiment. So, I took a risk: I began, for the first time, to preach in the open air, not in the churches, but on the streets. And by God's grace, I attracted 3,000 souls to my first event. Some of you have called my outdoor preaching profane, even, my Anglican brothers have called it seditious. But the spirit of God was upon me: "preach the gospel to the poor" – and nothing could stop me.

Now while this innovative form of preaching attracted large crowds, I quickly learned that most people come to faith not through large audiences, but through close relationships with caring people. So I have devised another new idea, another experiment: Small groups, or societies, or bands: places where spiritual intimacy can occur, where discipleship can flourish. Those who hear the gospel in the larger events can join these small gatherings (10 or 12 people) where together they are learning about God's love, about forgiveness, about how to grow in holiness, how to take steps of discipleship and more. As they grow, they advance from group to group, and at every stage believers grow in grace, develop relationships, and learn how to walk as Disciples of Christ.

Now today, I am pleased to report that these bands now exist all over England and Wales. As such, what you have heard is true: revival is spilling out from these societies. These new followers of Jesus may not be in your churches on Sunday mornings but they are growing in grace, serving our city with compassion and indeed both the church and society benefits from this mighty work of God.

They told me you can't preach outside, you have to preach in a church. Yet, thousands are hearing the gospel like never before. They told me, send these new converts to church on Sunday morning, but on Wednesday nights these little groups are making disciples like never before! My friends, God is doing a new thing. I only pray we might all follow where he leads.