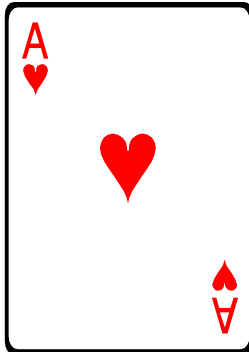


## Three Objectives of Grand Central's Small Groups Ministry:



### A. C. E.

The book of Acts serves as the model for much of what is done within the body of Christ. This is certainly true of the development of the Grand Central Church of Christ's small group ministry. The three identified objectives of the small group ministry were drawn from a study of the early church as revealed in Acts and various letters by the apostle Paul.

#### 1. A \_\_\_\_\_

The Grand Central Church of Christ must seek to intentionally incorporate (assimilate) every member into the life of the body. This involves an emphasis on relational ties to one another and to God. These ties to the body provide a support system for all in their own spiritual walk with our Lord. This objective reflects what Luke records as having taken place immediately following the establishment of the church in Jerusalem.

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

**Acts 2:42, 44**

#### 2. C \_\_\_\_\_

Within and without the body there will be those who have physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Christians will actively respond to such needs, as they become aware of them. Small groups provide a setting for raising our awareness of one another's needs so that an appropriate and timely response might be given. Without some mechanism in place, too many needs go unanswered. This happens not because of a lack of caring but because of a lack of communication concerning needs. When these needs go unmet relationships are damaged due to the perceived neglect.

*Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.*

**Acts 2:45, 46**



3. E \_\_\_\_\_

The disciples are not to limit their concern to the ones who are already a part of the body. Adopting the concern and motivation of their Savior, they are to actively seek opportunities to proclaim “the good news that Jesus is the Christ.” Small groups provide a welcoming atmosphere where Jesus can be introduced to those who do not know him

*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:47*

*Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Acts 5:42*

### A. C. E.: Three Objectives of GC’s Small Group Ministry

Below you are asked to name the three objectives of Grand Central’s Small Group Ministry and to explain, in your own words, your understanding of their meaning, and their biblical rationale.

1. A

2. C

3. E

All of those involved in a small groups ministry must make a commitment to incorporating these objectives as a part of the value system that drives their participation.

Small group leaders must model this commitment in each meeting and in their communication with other group members.

A healthy small group will emphasize the inclusion of each of these three objectives. When one or more is ignored, or receives undue attention, the groups development may be stunted or prove unhealthy.

Grand Central’s small groups have been designed to contribute to the balanced growth of the church and her members. Lacking a commitment to all three, the groups will be unable to accomplish the purposes for which they were designed.

Groups may accomplish one, or even two of these purposes, but to ensure that all three goals are actively pursued the leader must make a conscious effort.



## **Assimilation**

Every member of the Grand Central Church of Christ should be assimilated into the life of the body as quickly as possible. This does not mean that they are to lose their individuality. Rather, this is a statement addressing their need to become a part of the functioning within the Body of Christ as described by Paul in Romans 12.

Small groups provide a means for doing this in an effective manner. Each member of the small group is to accept a sense of responsibility for every other member of the community. In small groups, pastoring/shepherding takes place. A handful of elders cannot reasonably be expected to personally shepherd a church of over 300 or more without the cooperation of those who are members of the flock. As overseers of this church, our elders have chosen to make use of small groups as one way of contributing to the care and feeding of members and insuring that such shepherding does take place.

“All the believers were together” points out the vital need for every member of the body to be connected. In a good small group every member feels that he/she is an important, contributing member of the group. The time together- sharing times of worship, learning, fellowship, and prayer- contribute to a growing sense of community.

Assimilation is about:

Helping people \_\_\_\_\_ to the Body  
and find ways to contribute  
to the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Church.

## **Group Composition: Why Homogeneous Groups?**

A basic principle of small groups is that they should be \_\_\_\_\_ . This means that those who are members of the same group will usually share some specific characteristics with one another. This could include such elements as background, life experiences, age, family situation, ministry interests/pursuit or any of several other points of commonality. The homogeneity of a group present several natural points of connection for those involved in the group and is especially important when introducing someone who is new to the group.

Homogeneity is not a policy of exclusion but rather a commitment to become more effective. The points of commonality may take variety of forms. The design is to become more inclusive, by providing multiple points of entry, rather than to demand they all must be conformed to a community standard that is any more than what is required for one to be conformed to the image of Christ.

This general principle applies to home groups, ministry groups, support groups, and to almost all known forms of small groups. For the sake of the success of small groups, this principle should not be violated.

Caution should be employed when forming small groups. Some will resist the homogeneous principle in the pursuit of other worthy goals. Other methods of composing groups appear desirable. Almost 45 years of studying small groups in the setting of a local church has led to the conclusion that the formation of groups that are not homogeneous normally result groups which less effectively meet the objectives of assimilation, caring and evangelism

An example of this would be the strong desire of many to supply meaningful intergenerational group interaction. This is certainly a worthy and desirable goal.<sup>1</sup> It is, however, a clear violation of the homogeneous principle and groups so composed will often fail. Intergenerational group interaction is to be encouraged, but small groups are not the ideal place for this to take place.

With the large number who currently attend the Grand Central Church of Christ from locations that are more than 15 minutes away, it is possible that there could be some successful geographically based groups. Still it should be noted that such should be only one consideration when forming small groups. Other factors that should take precedence would be the availability of trained leaders, those whom the leader wishes to recruit, and the homogeneity of the group members.

List some possibilities for homogeneous groups.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

<sup>1</sup> A biblical example of the need for intergenerational relationships can be found in Titus 2:2-3.

## The Group Discussion Method

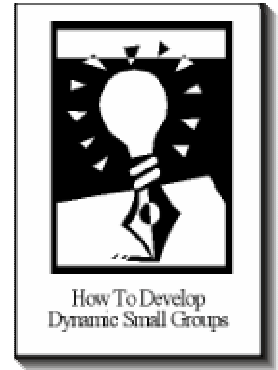
The primary teaching method for small groups is the discussion model. This method focuses on an inductive rather than deductive style of presentation. Using the inductive method requires that small groups' leaders rethink their role. They are not so much teachers as facilitators.

Spiritual growth is a process of discovery. As individuals probe God's Word they will his will for their lives. Since this is a process, and everybody develops and learns in a different way, or at a different pace, than others it is helpful to allow each individual to participate and contribute during a small group discussion.

This is not meant to imply wrong answers or statements that are misguided will not be offered during a discussion. These will take place and the group leader, like any Christian who is more mature, has the responsibility to present the truth without compromise. However, since we are talking about a process of discovery, good leaders are counseled to not too quickly provide "the answer" (when one is discernible).

Good group leaders will allow group members to occasionally explore territory that does not appear to be related to the subject or scripture being discussed. As group members aid one another in their search they will be challenging their own faith, developing a deeper appreciation for the value of Bible study and discovering the advantages of discussing spiritual matters with one another. Eventually a group leader may have to push the group in the right direction but there is a need to resist the tendency to "rescue" the group too quickly. This is an atmosphere meant to provide opportunities for spiritual growth—so let them grow rather than simply passively sit and listen to you.

It is good to remember all group members have access to a Bible (and if they don't, the group leader needs to make sure that they obtain one as soon as possible). As Christians they have the indwelling of the Spirit. Allow them to learn, to grow and mature as they participate in the group discussions.



*There is a difference*

between learning

and simply being \_\_\_\_\_ .

## Characteristics of Those Who Lead Good Discussions

*A Training Manual for Small Group Leaders* (Julie A. Gorman, gen. ed.) includes a study by Lieberman, Yalom, and Miles (1973) suggesting that there are four qualities that a good discussion leader must develop. Here, ranked in order of importance, are those qualities.

- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_ (friendliness, supportive, encouraging)
- ◆ **Give** \_\_\_\_\_ (clarify concepts, enabling others to better understand ideas, implications, etc.)
- ◆ \_\_\_\_\_ **stimulation** (help others reveal their feelings by creating a secure environment)
- ◆ **Executive functioning** (set goals, scheduling, setting limits, pacing discussions, etc.)

## Some Guidelines for Leading Successful Discussions

### 1. Ask good questions

Good questions...

- use vivid imagery
- are clear
- do not have obvious answers
- make group members the experts
- correspond to the aims of the study
- are open-ended (generate discussion)
- encourage members to study God's Word
- allow members to make their own discoveries
- move the group through the passage in a logical sequence
- draw out and apply the main points of the passage

### Discussions in Small Groups:



Developing a community of faith

**Give three examples of good questions:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Provide an example of a “poor” question:**

## 2. Let more than one individual offer answers to your question

When you do not receive a response, and you believe it may be because it is a poorly worded question, rephrase it. On the other hand, if you don't receive an answer because the question requires more thought or a decision to move to a deeper level of self-disclosure, then learn to grow comfortable with periods of silence. As you receive responses encourage others to participate by asking follow up questions like those listed below.

"How do the rest of you see this?"

"What would you add to what has already been said?"

"(Name), what are your thoughts on (the subject or another's response)?"

"Which response comes the closest to what you would say?"

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*As Bill Buckley mentioned in our initial training session...*

Small groups are not simply attended—they are meant to be **experienced**.

Where some Bible classes or sermons may primarily be designed to **educate**, the discussion within a small group setting is designed to go beyond this, to penetrate the heart. Small groups are meant to be as much, or more, of an **emotional** experience as an **educational** opportunity.

Biblically, both emotional and educational responses are needed in the process of spiritual change.

Those on the Day of Pentecost were pricked to the heart (*emotional response*—Acts 2:37)

Peter answered them, "Repent and be baptized" (*educational response*—Acts 2:38)

Both were necessary in the process of their conversion!

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## 3. Acknowledge everyone as they contribute to the group's discussion

Avoid being judgmental. Affirm answers. This should be done both verbally ("That's right." You may not be wrong, but I'm not sure you're right." "What do the rest of you think?" "You've really thought about this, haven't you?"). Non-verbal cues are also needed (eye contact, nodding, smiling). All group members should receive affirmation for their contribution to the discussion.



#### 4. Include everyone

One reason for studying in a small group is to receive input from all the members of the group. Be sure everyone understands that this is the expectation. You can encourage quieter group members by having them read Scripture or ask them direct questions where you are aware they are knowledgeable about the subject.

Also, by establishing eye contact with them you may elicit a response from them since you are non-verbally communicating that “I’m listening” or “I’d really like to know what you have to say.” Avoid becoming the “answer person” for your group.

#### 5. Keep everyone on task

Good leaders know the intended destination of the discussion. Part of the task of a small group facilitator is to help provide the group with summary statements when they are needed so that the group is reminded of the question that is being discussed.

There will be many tangents. When the discussion begins to veer off course, you are there to gently guide them back onto the path, but allow for the leading of the Spirit. The group can be guided back by repeating the question as you ask for comments from another group member (“Jim, what do you think about that?”) or from the whole group (“Does anyone have anything else they’d like to add/say about this question?”).

#### 6. Pace the questions

There's never enough time for everyone to give an adequate answer to all questions. That's where your guidance comes in. Don't spend too much time on a simple question. Note prior to the meeting those questions that are most important. Your goal is **not** to “check off” each question but to consider and promote application of the biblical concepts.

#### What about lectures and “real” teaching

Often there will be little or no lecture. Leading a discussion is different from leading a Bible class. Some group leaders will provide a prepared lecture at the beginning of the Bible discussion in order to bring the group up to date with what has been studied in past meetings as well as the historical and theological context of the passage for current study. Another time for a lecture could be at the end of the discussion time for the purpose of summarizing the main points of the passage and giving some ideas for application.



It is good to note that lectures are not to be the predominate method of teaching in small groups. A good rule of thumb is that if there is more than five minutes of lecture by the group leader, there has been too much lecture. This single consideration makes facilitating small groups a more difficult task for accomplished Bible class teachers than for many other members.

Churches of Christ have been built on a model that emphasizes middle-sized (Bible classes) and larger (assemblies) groups. While this model has done an excellent job of presenting information to large numbers it has a demonstrated deficiency in facilitating the building of deeper relationships. Small groups are not meant to replace these other group meetings but to supplement them in such a way that the emotional and relational components, that have too often been missing, may also be addressed.

### **Why the Discussion Method?**

- Discussion promotes \_\_\_\_\_
- Discussion, done well, allows all to contribute to the process of learning
- Discussion promotes \_\_\_\_\_
- Discussion provides reinforcement and clarification
- Discussion develops boldness to witness and explain one's faith
- Discussion promotes action
- Discussion provides the leader with clues as to how he/she should minister
- Discussion honors the fact that each believer has the \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ in him/her
- People listen better when they know they will be \_\_\_\_\_ to by others
- People process new ideas better when they can discuss them



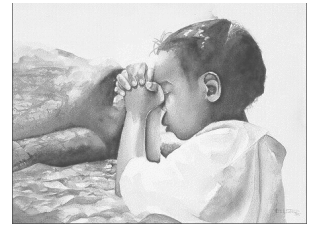
Lectures are “teacher” delivered and “content” centered

Discussions are \_\_\_\_\_ developed

and \_\_\_\_\_ centered

## Prayer in Small Groups

When seeking to meet another's need, the Christian's best tool is her/his prayer to God. Prayer can be considered a part of the assimilation process because as we pray our hearts are drawn together. Group prayer promotes greater intimacy with God and with the other members of the group.



Group prayers can draw us together. They can also be intimidating to some. For many this is dominated by a concern that they will not use the right words, tones, postures or whatever else they associate with praying correctly.

Have you observed the joy of a parent upon their child's first steps? There's a similar joy in escorting a timid seeker to the throne of our Creator God and supporting them as they venture their first, tentative syllables of public prayer! You can enjoy just such an experience if you approach the opportunity with care and patience.

### **Here are some good guiding principles for group prayer:**

- Be a person of prayer. Pray regularly for your group members, guest, and the church. Pray that you will be given the opportunity to see the empty seat(s) filled.
- In your shared prayers be sure to *model a style that is attainable to everyone*. Use a normal conversational voice and common language. Keep your prayers brief.
- Let everyone know that a sentence or paragraph is all that is needed for making our requests known to God.
- When calling on someone else to lead in prayer, always check ahead of time to be sure he/she won't be embarrassed or feel pressured.
- Approach "going around the circle prayers" with caution. A timid person may begin to tremble and sweat as the responsibility moves closer. It may discourage the timid from attending future meetings. No one benefits. Instead, ask for volunteers to pray for certain requests.
- You may find that forming smaller prayer groups of three to five members will lower the anxiety level for a number of those in attendance. Smaller groups allow more to become involved in prayer.
- Don't be afraid of silence. As we agree in our hearts in God's presence, we are praying.
- The usual approach is to allow a time for prayer requests and prayers after the Bible discussion. Avoid the tendency to spend 90% of the time with prayer requests (which can develop into something else entirely) followed by just 10% of the time in prayer. If this happens regularly or if your time is short, ask group members to share their requests and then have one individual close the time with a short prayer that asks God to respond to all the requests that have been made known.
- A **Prayer Journal** would be an asset to any group. These should include a list of prayer requests and dates, allowing space to later write in the answers to prayer. Groups should refer to these at every meeting. Over a period of time, this will be a great faith builder and will reinforce the core value of prayer.