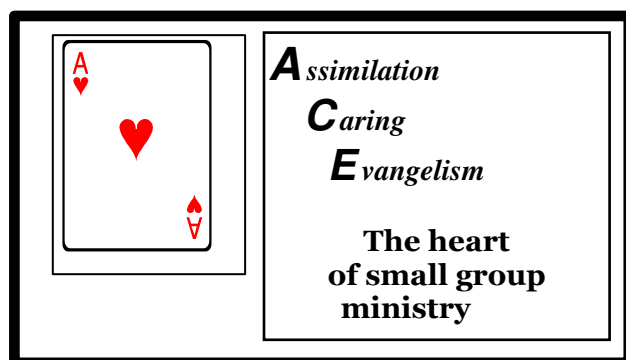


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Acknowledgement

The materials included in this manual are based upon the work of several individuals and little should be consider as original to the author. Much of the material came to my attention while attending a *Church Growth Through Small Groups* course offered by Harding University Graduate School of Religion in Memphis, Tennessee.

The class was taught by John Ellas who provided the basis for the majority of what will be found in this manual. My thanks to him for the vision he provided for what could be accomplished in the kingdom for the glory of God.

Small Groups Orientation

What are Small Groups?

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.

Romans 8:29

To be conformed to the image of Christ can be described as the process of spiritual formation. Following the example of Jesus with his apostles it would seem that this process takes place most effectively in a small group setting. A small group of five to fourteen (5–14) adult can significantly contribute to the spiritual formation of each individual involved. This happens as they fulfill the directive of Hebrew writer to encourage one another as they follow Christ.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25

In a medium-sized to larger church¹, like the Grand Central Church of Christ, there is a need for a well organized and managed system to enable the development of relationships that will contribute to the process of spiritual formation. While medium-sized and larger churches have a number of distinct advantages over smaller churches, some have lamented the lack of closeness that they remember having experienced in a smaller church. A small group ministry is one way of fulfilling the need for closeness. In a sense, this is a way for a church that is larger to adapt the best characteristics of a smaller church so that closer relationships will be encouraged.

Many have noted that as a church becomes larger it must also become smaller. For this to happen there is need to develop a new way of thinking (a “paradigm shift”) and of viewing the work of the church. Her definition of success may also be altered. It can no longer be assumed that the maxim “bigger is better” is always true. There will be many times when it is discovered that “smaller is better.” Success will be measured not simply in numbers but by how well the ministry or activity aids in contributing to the overall health of the Body of Christ.

John Ellas, a recognized authority in church growth, often states, “small groups are not difficult, but they are complex.” Due to their complexity small groups require more effort in the development and ongoing training of leaders. This manual can help leaders develop a clearer understanding of small groups and aid in equipping them for effective service and leadership.

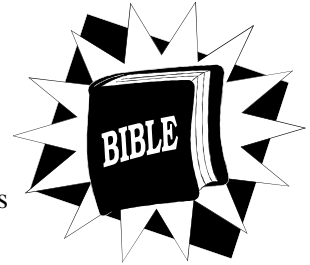
Small groups are not meant to supplant corporate worship or Bible classes. Larger group gatherings enable us to worship, to proclaim our allegiance to God, to learn the Word of God, and to enjoy some fellowship. Bible classes and seminars alternately provide an excellent setting for the in-depth study of the scriptures and the possibility for closer fellowship. It is in small groups that we can do all these things as we help each other put God's Word into action.

¹ Gary McIntosh divides churches into three size ranges according to Sunday morning attendance: Small (15-200), medium (201-400), and large (401+). Gary McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 18. It is also helpful to note the way in which John Ellas classifies churches by size. His classifications are based upon a sample drawn exclusively of churches of Christ. Four different Sunday morning attendance ranges are identified and correlated to the size of the church staff (defined part- or full-time ministers in contrast to secretaries and custodians who are classified as support staff): Single (100-199), large (200-399), very large (400-699), huge (700-1250). John Ellas, *Measuring Church Growth* (Houston, TX: Center for Church Growth, 1997), 15-16.

A Biblical and Historical Basis for Small Group Ministry

◆ The early church (the biblical record)

A continual emphasis the American Restoration Movement has been the call to “go back to the Bible.” The book of Acts, a record of the beginning of the church, indicates that the early church met in both large and small groups (2:42-47; 5:42). The Jerusalem church (a very large church, Acts 4:4 & 6:7; estimates range from 30,000 to 100,000 members) met in homes on a regular basis (2:46; 5:42). This pattern was so well established that the persecution of the church is recorded as having taken place in both contexts (4:1-3; 5:12, 18; 8:3).



Other passages indicate that meetings in homes were a common practice. Several of Paul’s letters include references to those who met in individual homes (Romans 16:15; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2). These meetings, which took place regularly, served several different purposes. In Acts 2:42 four purposes for Christians meeting together are specifically mentioned: teaching, fellowship, eating, and praying. Not all meetings are multifunctional. Some appear to have served a single purpose. One example would be the prayer meeting in Acts 12 (12:12). Far from being a modern innovation, small groups have a rich biblical heritage.

◆ The church for the first 250 years (the historical record)

Historical records indicate that the church through 199 AD met in homes with some citywide meetings taking place. The citywide meetings would, in many places, have been limited as the persecution of the church grew. It is also interesting to consider how the rulers of the Jews would have reacted to a Christian worship assembly with the observance of the Lord’s Supper taking place in the temple courts. The relationships of the Lord’s Supper to the annual observance of Passover would surely not have gone unnoticed by those who continued to follow the old covenant.

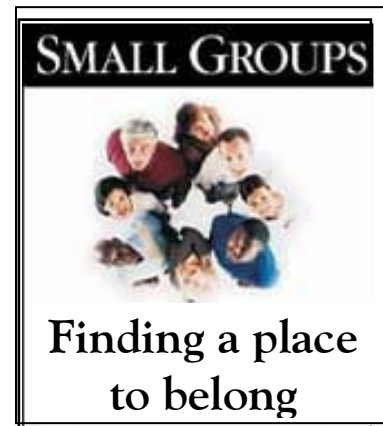
Until the fourth century there were only a few small buildings (usually remodeled homes that could hold no more than 100 people) that were used as places of meeting for Christians. It was not until Constantine that larger facilities were built.

Characteristics of Good Small Groups:

A good small group will develop a sense of community. Building community takes time and requires certain agreements among the participants.²

To successfully accomplish its purpose of spiritual formation a good small group will develop all of the characteristics found below.

- **A sense of belonging:** a place where I matter ("where you belong")
- **Honesty:** vulnerability and willingness to bring deepest needs to the group
- **Trust:** all members affirmed and confidentiality maintained
- **Accountability:** mutual caring; at times loving confrontation
- **Responsibility:** meeting needs and having needs met by others³



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 small group ministry in the Grand Central church. The three objectives of the small group ministry have been drawn from a study of the early church.

1. Assimilation

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 See "Group Agreement", p. 25.

³ See FOPC On-line Manual. David Weidlich, *Small Group Leaders Manual* (url: www.fpoc.org/info/training/html)

2. Caring

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 their needs after which the damage of perceived neglect has already been done.



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

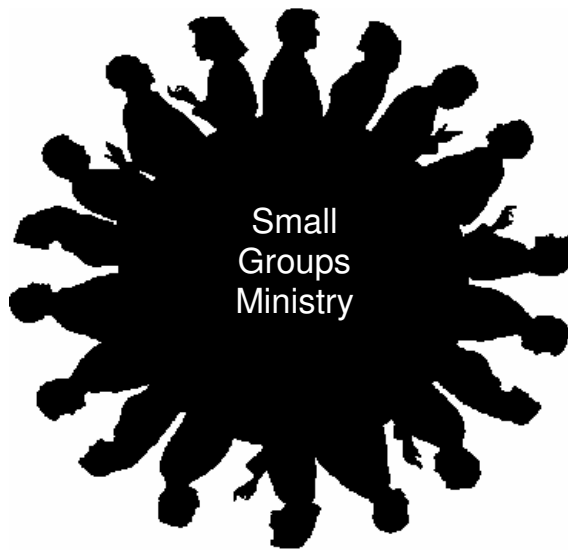
3. Evangelism

The disciples are not to limit their concern to the ones who are a part of the body. Echoing the concern of their Savior, they are to actively seek the opportunity 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**

Small group leaders must make a commitment to incorporating each of these objectives in their group and group meetings. Without such a commitment 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. 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 takes place. A handful of elders can not be expected to personally shepherd a church of 500 or more, but small groups provide a way for 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.

Group Composition: Why Homogeneous Groups?

A basic principle of small groups is that they should be homogeneous. 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, or ministry interests. This allows for natural points of connection with one another.

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. The conclusion of almost 45 years of church growth studies clearly indicates that the end result is normally the formation of a group that is less effective in meeting the objectives of assimilation, caring and evangelism

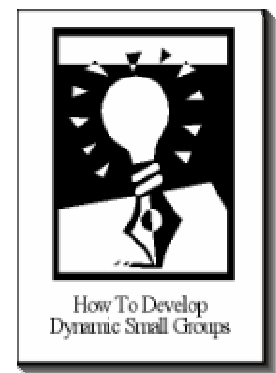
An example of this would be the strong desire of many to supply meaningful intergenerational group interaction. This is certainly a worthy and desirable goal.⁴ It is, however, a clear violation of the homogeneous principle and groups so composed will often fail. Intergenerational group interaction is 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.

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 teachers; they are discussion facilitators.

This is not meant to imply that there are no wrong answers. It simply emphasizes that learning is a process of discovery. While good leaders will aid the group by eventually guiding them to the correct answer (when one is discernible), they will allow the group members to occasionally go afield in their search for answers. The members of the group are to be aiding one another in this search. All group members have access to the Bible. Those members who are Christians have the Spirit. Allow them to learn (as opposed to simply being taught) the lesson!



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.

- **Caring** (friendliness, support, encouragement, feedback)
- **Giving meaning** (clarifying concepts, enabling others to understand ideas, etc.)
- **Emotional stimulation** (helping others reveal their feelings in a secure environment)
- **Executive functioning** (goal-setting, scheduling, setting limits, pacing discussions, etc.)

⁴ A biblical example of the need for intergenerational relationships can be found in Titus 2:2-3.
Small Group Leaders Manual (Fall of 2003)

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.

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

If you do not receive a response because it is a poorly worded question, then 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.

"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?"

3. Acknowledge everyone who contributes 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 will 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 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.

Why the Discussion Method?

- Discussion promotes openness.
- Discussion, done well, allows all to contribute to the process of learning.
- Discussion promotes discovery.
- Discussion provides reinforcement and clarification.
- Discussion develops boldness to witness and explain their 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 Holy Spirit in him/her.
- People listen better when they have been listened to.
- People process new ideas better when they can discuss them.

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. Group members should be encouraged to cover only one or two items.
- 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.

Caring

Koinonia: For Christians to be assimilated into the body, they must experience koinonia.

What Is Koinonia?

Koinonia (Acts 2) is more than social interaction. True fellowship includes a sense of intimacy. It means "having things in common or sharing." It is the basic ingredient of the Christian community, the church. To give one an idea of the intimacy involved this is the root word for the "communion" (often used to refer to the Lord's Supper). Communion, as it is practiced in our assembly, is to be a participation in the death and life of Jesus and the life of his body on earth. Where true fellowship (*koinonia*) is practiced there is real participation in the life of another.

This is a relationship that can withstand crisis and differences of opinion. The intimacy required cannot usually be experienced in a middle-sized or larger group. Where there is such a relationship,

- people going through separation or divorce have someone who will listen and help
- bereaved families find prepared meals on their doorstep
- parents in pain have people with whom they can share their fears and pray
- those who are ill or hospitalized receive calls, visits, cards, and needed assistance
- Christians in the midst of a faith crisis can share their struggles with a fellow believer
- the doubtful seeker discovers a place where they are allowed to explore faith questions
- the returning prodigal finds a home where she/he is loved and accepted

Getting to Know You

For caring to take place relationships must be built. The leader's job is complex. Not only is he working to build his relationship with group members, but he is also encouraging and facilitating group members as they build relationships with each other.

The level of relationship that we are seeking is known as *primary group interaction*. For primary group interaction to develop, communication must be progressing into deeper levels of self-disclosure. Trust is built as relationships are deepened within the context of the group experience. This deepening trust provides each member with the permission to reveal more about herself, her needs, thoughts, and true feelings. These have often never before been shared with anyone in the body.

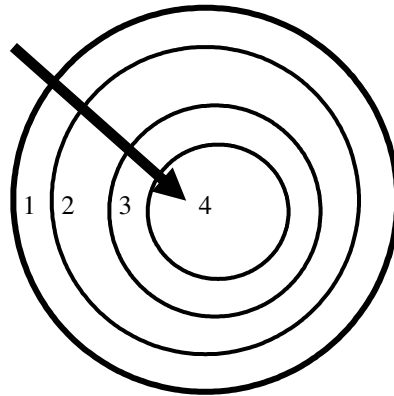
There is a certain amount of danger involved with this level of relationships. There is also the possibility for greater rewards as individuals can now respond to needs that have been revealed and aid one another in their personal relationship with God.

Warning. As small groups develop, members will begin to share their struggles. Some will be tempted to offer advice. Resist this temptation, if at all possible!!!
Offering advice, especially when unsolicited, can destroy your group.

Four Levels of Communication:

1. **Cliche conversation.** Discussing "safe" public information takes place during the first few minutes of a meeting. Topics include the weather, family and friends, and current affairs.
2. **Sharing information and facts.** People talk generally about events, ideas and facts, but not about themselves, their commitments, and their beliefs about Scripture.
3. **Sharing ideas and opinions.** This deeper level of communication involves a willingness to talk about personal ideas and opinions. There is some risk-taking at this level.
4. **Sharing feelings.** People are willing to risk telling group members what they feel, not just what they think. Members are less protective and more open.

Why be concerned about developing deeper levels of communication? Why do we seek self-disclosure?
The goal is to spur one another to self-examination and, ultimately, to enhance spiritual formation.



Dropping Your Guard

Our culture values radical individualism (independence) and privacy (isolation). For relationships within a small group to develop beyond the safety of superficial interaction, members must be encouraged to *drop their guard*.

Self-disclosure is the process of deliberately revealing information about yourself that is significant and that would not normally be known.

When group members drop their guard, they can begin to practice what is called *self-disclosure*. This cannot be forced nor should it be manipulated. The effective group leader will gradually introduce self-disclosure into the life of the group by modeling it in group interaction. For the sake of the health of the group, this concept must be introduced gradually and in appropriate increments.

Through self-disclosure we are attempting to build an atmosphere that gives permission to bring struggles and burdens to the group so that they might be shared and genuine caring might be encouraged. In such an atmosphere the biblical imperative to "bear one another's burdens" might be practiced and all group members may then realize the God-ordained benefits.

The value of self-disclosure-

- Builds relationships (personal sharing attracts us to one another)
- Validates self (discovery of strengths and abilities)
- Clarifies self (opportunity to discuss leads to personal processing)
- Practices God's love (rejoice and mourn together; bear one another's burdens)

Caring for One Another

The New Testament scriptures contain several references to the individual Christian's responsibility to the other members of the family of God. These instructions were not delivered as suggestions to be accepted or rejected at the whim of the hearer but as commands. The imperatives of these "one another" and "each other" passages should be viewed as being no less binding than any other that calls for a response.

The **Caring** emphasis of the small group ministry indicates our desire to practically apply and practice these imperatives. These passages address how we are to act towards one another. All indicate that our participation in the lives of others is to be practical and for the express purpose of building them up in Christ. This emphasis upon caring relationships is a reflection of the royal law that states, "love your neighbor as yourself" (James 2:8).

Here is a list of some passages that directly address the subject of our responsibilities to one another.

<i>Actions</i>	<i>Passage(s)</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Passages(s)</i>
Accept	Rom. 15:17	Agree	Phil. 4:2
Bear with	Eph. 4:2; Col. 3:13	Concern for	1 Cor. 12:25
Confess sins to	James 5:16	Encourage	1 Thes. 4:18; 5:11; Heb. 3:13; 10:24, 25
Forgive	Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13	Greet	Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14
Hospitality	1 Peter 4:9	Kind/compassionate	Eph. 4:32; 1 Thes. 5:15; 1 Peter 3:8
Live in peace	1 Thes. 5:13	Love	John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; 1 Thes. 3:12; 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5
Pray for	James 5:16	Serve	Gal. 5:13
Submit (humility)	Eph. 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5	Teach (instruct, speak)	Col. 3:16; Rom. 15:14; Ephesians 5:19

Activities to avoid:

<i>Actions</i>	<i>Passage(s)</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Passages(s)</i>
Biting, devouring, destroying	Gal. 5:15	Causing others to stumble	Rom. 14:13
Envy	Gal. 5:26	Grumbling	James 5:19
Judging	Rom. 14:13	Lying	Colossians 3:9
Provoking	Gal. 5:26	Slandering	James 4:11

Evangelism

Groups Reaching Out to the World: G.R.O.W.

Most groups experience some difficulty in going beyond assimilating and caring. While there is the aspirational goal of being evangelistic, it has not yet become a core value. For evangelism to become a core value there must be a strategy for implementing (e.g., small groups) and incorporating evangelism into the life of the church and the leadership in order to guide and encourage the process.



Effective Evangelism

For many, evangelism is a canned, confrontational presentation. This model may have worked in the past, but in each generation there is a need to seek those forms which will be most effective in reaching the world for Christ. In today's culture evangelism focuses more upon relationships than a single event. Small group leaders are to model an evangelistic emphasis in their lives.

Evangelism: Today vs. Yesterday

- **More relational than verbal**
- **More listening than talking**
- **More vocalized suggestions than propositions**
- **More of a process than an event**
- **More of a team effort than an individual pursuit**

Learning to S.E.E. like Jesus (Strategic Emphasis on Evangelism)

Small groups provide one of the most effective means for moving evangelism from an aspiration to a core value of the church. Within the small group, evangelism can be emphasized and realized as it is made a part of every meeting's agenda. *The agenda is the single most effective way for maintaining an emphasis on evangelism.*

Groups will move in the direction of the most dominant thoughts. Effective leaders will model, discuss, and display this emphasis on evangelism in creative ways. Small groups provide a conducive atmosphere for evangelism. Therefore, small group members should be constantly seeking individuals to invite to their group meetings. In addition to friends, family members, and neighbors, guests to our assemblies, classes, seminars, and other activities are candidates for an invitation to a small group meeting.

This emphasis can be demonstrated at each small group meeting with the presence of an *empty chair*. This reminds everyone of the group's goal to reach out to others. The chair serves as a silent witness to the group's purpose, their agreement to seek others, and the possibilities that surround them each day.



Groups move in the direction of their most dominant thoughts.

Remembering that a small group includes five to fourteen adults, each group should begin with some stated **expectations** as it relates to growth and evangelism. A guiding principle is that each group is expected to grow numerically and spiritually. Small groups will normally begin with eight to ten members. As these groups grow the members should be prepared to give birth to a new group when they reach fourteen in attendance. The new group should be formed within one month of reaching this milestone.

Other expectations should include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. **A “receptive individuals” list being drawn up at the pre-meeting**
2. **A group commitment to invite at least one guest each week**
3. **A group commitment to strive to grow by at least one member each quarter**
4. **A group commitment to give birth to a new group at least every other year**
5. **A group commitment to have social events for guests at least once a quarter**
6. **A time set aside each meeting to plan and report on outreach activities**
7. **A time set aside each meeting to brainstorm about future possibilities**
8. **A time set aside each meeting to pray for the harvest**

Maintaining an Emphasis on Evangelism

An emphasis on evangelism can be maintained if the group leaders constantly model and support this as a “core value” of the group. There are several activities that can be planned to reinforce this emphasis. Group leaders can:

- pray for someone to occupy the empty chair.
- pray for a lost world.
- specifically pray for mission works that the Grand Central church supports.
- plan a Christmas party, Super Bowl party or Fourth of July picnic and invite his friends.
- collect medical items or other supplies for a specific mission work.
- sponsor or mentor a child in need.
- have members participate in World Bible School and discuss their progress in meetings.

How to “ACE” a Small Group Meeting

A successful small group meeting will be one that is purposefully designed to include time for all of the ACE elements. There are actually several types of groups possible. A variety of groups may be added as the need and leadership arises. Groups will not be started without trained and dedicated leaders. This may mean that a need will go unfulfilled for a short time. This is to be preferred to a failure that insures that the need will go unfulfilled for an even longer period of time.

Types of Small Groups

There are several types of small groups but most seem to be oriented toward one of two general categories. The two categories of groups are those that are **task** oriented and those that have a **relational** orientation. A short list of groups found in these two categories is found below.

Task Oriented

1. In-depth Bible Study
2. Task-oriented evangelism groups
3. Ministry teams (Ushers, benevolence, teachers)
(Tend to be more open, and experience less primary group interaction)

Relation Oriented

1. Fellowship groups
2. Accountability groups (Promise Keepers)
3. Support/Recovery groups (HOPE, Divorced)
(Tend to be more closed, greater emphasis on primary group interaction)

The most successful model for small groups, as measured by their ability to successfully implement all of the objectives of the ACE model, has been one that seeks to incorporate elements of both categories. The successful incorporation of these elements depends upon the formation of the groups' agenda, the leader's understanding of the purpose, and continuing evaluation of the group's performance.

Small Group Meeting Agendas

The composition of a group's agenda determines the direction of the group. In forming an agenda, the small group must formulate a purpose that will serve as the guide for choosing the items. Once chosen, the items serve not as a rigid form but as basic guide of what needs to be covered in the meeting.

Two examples of small group meeting agendas can be found on the following two pages. One is for a balanced small group; the other is for a ministry group. Small group meetings should normally be of one and one half to two hours in duration. **It is a general rule that this time limit is not to be exceeded. When a group habitually exceeds this limit a timekeeper should be appointed.**

A Balanced Small Group Meeting Agenda

Assimilation Time (30 - 45 minutes)

Welcome (2 minute)

Words of welcome

Devotional (5-10 minutes)

Song, prayer, and/or reading (related to lesson)

Learning Time (25-40 minutes)

Bible lesson (10-30 min.)

Icebreaker or warm-up questions

Introduction of text

Thought provoking questions

Applications of lesson (10-30 min.)

Reflect questions

Summary statements

Caring Time, part 1 (10-15 minutes)

Prayer (15 min.)

Review prayer journal

Prayer requests

Intercessory prayer

Evangelism, (5-15 minutes)

S.E.E. (14 min.)

Planning for the future

Reports from follow-up on guests

Outreach project reports

Coordinating lessons, contacts, etc.

Prayer for the harvest

Communications (1 minutes)

Special church functions

Announcements about the next meeting

Community Time (25-45 minutes)

Refreshments and social interaction

Total Time: 45 minutes – 1 hour, 45 min.

Note: This is a balanced agenda in which Assimilation, Caring, and Evangelism all receives emphasis.

It is provided for the use of group leaders as they plan and conduct meetings. It is not to be passed out to the group as a rigid form that dictates the meeting.

Good small group meetings have a feeling of spontaneity. In reality, their leaders have taken the time to plan them well.

One way of evaluating the balance of the group's meetings is to determine how much time has been dedicated to each of the three ACE goals.

Several of these time periods serve more than one purpose. Still this basic time breakdown would seem like a good goal for balanced meetings.

Assimilation	30 minutes
Caring	15 minutes
Evangelism	15 minutes

(For evangelism, the atmosphere of the meetings is of vital importance. Actual teaching will usually take place in a more personal setting.)

Evangelism is not to be limited to the time indicated on the agenda. It is a central aim of all that is done within the group. Every moment is to be infused with an evangelistic thrust.

What is done, and how it is done, will be influenced by those in attendance at any particular small group meeting.

When there is a new guest present for a meeting it should be expected that the sharing would not be as open as when all are more familiar with one another. When non-Christians are present the emphasis (even subject, at times) may also need to be modified or changed to accommodate their level of spiritual maturity and their search for the truth.

For this reason leaders are encouraged to have two "plans" for each evening.

* Obviously assignments to visit guests should not be made in the presence of the guests!

Initially the majority of the small groups at the Grand Central Church of Christ will be the balanced small groups (called by various names: ACE, *koinonia*, or home groups). There may also a place for ministry-based small groups that could incorporate the groups that several of our deacons are building to support their specific ministry areas.

The agenda for such meetings will be determined by the purpose of the ministry group. These groups are usually open so there will be less primary group interaction but they do provide an excellent avenue for assimilating new members and guests into the life of the body.

A Task-Oriented Small Group Meeting Agenda (Ministry, Support,)

Assimilation Time (25-40 minutes)

- Welcome (1 min.)
 - Words of welcome
- Devotional (5-15 min.)
 - Song & prayer (related to lesson topic)
- Learning Time (15-25 min.)
 - Bible lesson (10-15 min.)
 - Icebreaker or warm-up question
 - Lecture or handouts on text
- Application (5-15 min.)
 - Reflections and summary statements

Caring Time (25-45 minutes)

- Prayer (10 min.)
 - Prayer journal (review)
 - Prayer requests
 - Intercessory prayer
- Outreach Through Service (19 min.)
 - Report on status of ministry projects
 - Planning for the future
 - Assigning tasks for the coming week
 - Reports on follow-up of guests
 - Coordination with other ministries
- Communications (1 min.)
 - Special church functions
 - Announcements about the next meeting

Evangelism (5-15 minutes)

- Opportunities for evangelism through projects
- Reports on guest visits (assemblies & small group)
- Review and expand prospects list
- Coordinate teaching and activities for prospects
- Prayer for the harvest

Community Time (20-45 minutes)

Refreshments and Social Interaction

Total Time for this Agenda: 1 hour, 15 minutes to 2 hours

Note: This agenda differs from the balanced agenda since these groups have a different purpose.

Ministry group leaders should use this agenda as they plan and conduct meetings.

Spontaneity, especially as it relates to the time spent addressing the group’s specific ministry, is not desirable for this group. A list of the topics to be covered would prove helpful in these meetings.

In evaluating these groups’ meetings leaders should take care in measuring the effectiveness of the ministry’s subsequent actions.

Healthy groups will set aside time for each of the ACE elements. It is the time breakdown that will differ as it reflects their task orientation. Task oriented groups should allot times in this approximate manner:

Assimilation	20 minutes
Caring	30 minutes
Evangelism	10 minutes

Groups might consider serving snacks and drinks during the meeting. This could cut some time out of the agenda, if that is needed or desired by group members.

Small Group Leaders and Leadership

Leaders need to be Faithful, Available, and Trainable (F.A.T.)

Successful small groups are very dependent upon good leaders. A small groups ministry is a high demand ministry. This means that those who accept positions of leadership must “count the cost” and be willing to pay the price required.

We are looking for **FAT** people: **F**aithful, **A**vailable and **T**rainable. You do not have to have already arrived spiritually, but you must be involved in the journey of faith. Potential small group leaders need to be aware of what is expected of them. Many who would like to be involved in leadership may have to wait until they have adequate, available time. There must also be a willingness to take advantage of training opportunities and to learn from ongoing evaluations.

Small groups mean different things to different people. Those who have led a group before need to know *the way we do small groups*. To aid in this process, our small group **facilitator/leaders** and **apprentice facilitator/leaders** are expected, as much as they are able, to participate in all of the following.

- Grand Central’s small group leaders training and orientation seminar
- Monthly VHS meetings
- Small group leaders and ministry retreats
- Weekly meeting with the small group ministry coordinator
- Special training seminars
- Filing of weekly reports

Characteristics of an Effective Small Group Leader

1. Models and maintains a deep, personal relationship with Christ

- **Real relationship with Christ:** You recognize that “all have sinned” (Romans 3:23) and have responded in faith and obedience to God’s gracious offer of forgiveness of all your sins through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- **Portrays the love of Christ:** Your relationship with your family, friends, associates and others is characterized by the love of Christ. This is evident to both believers and non-believers.
- **Devoted to God's Word in its power for life:** You constantly strive for obedience to the commands and principles of God's Word. You are growing in your practice of the spiritual disciplines (e.g. personal Bible study, prayer, worship, and giving).

**Before you can manage others, you must first
manage yourself.**

2. Communicates in such a way as to influence others for Christ

This should be evident in all arenas of your life. In the small group setting it means you have the ability to keep the group focused and guided toward its purpose. Let's face it. Some people are natural-born leaders. Others can learn to lead. Small groups must have someone leading them!

He who thinks he leads and has no one following him is only taking a walk. -John Maxwell

Leaders possess the power to influence other people. Christian leaders recognize their power as God-given. As good stewards they must use it responsibly for the glory of God.

Christian leadership is different from the worlds in that it is **servant leadership**:

- under the authority of Christ.
- under the authority of this church's leaders.

A servant-leader recognizes God has placed him/her in a group to serve the needs of the group's members. Sometimes, this is difficult to exercise in a small group. You will need to maintain a constant balance between speaking and listening.

Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. -Jesus (**Matthew 20:26**)

3. Dares to become involved in the lives of others

Effective small group leaders genuinely care about others. A small group leader must have the ability and willingness to share his/her life with the other members of the group. This involvement in the lives of others should promote the development of relationships characterized by sharing and accountability. This is to be a voluntary, mutual relationship that promotes each individual's transformation into the image of Christ (Romans 12:1-2).

4. Seeks to develop others' vision and skills for leadership

A small group must include a facilitator/leader and at least one apprentice leader. This individual is to be recruited by the small group leader with the aid of the small group coordinator. The effective leader is constantly scouting for those who display the potential for leadership. He is to model leadership, provide guidance and actively aid in the development of the apprentice's skills.

5. Counts the cost of commitment and willingly pays the price

Becoming a faithful follower of Christ has always entailed great cost. A Christian leader is called upon to count the cost of leadership before accepting a position of responsibility. Real leaders understand that the spiritual returns of leadership far outweigh its cost.

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?
Luke 14:28

These are some questions that a potential leader should consider before making the commitment to become a small group facilitator/leader.

- Am I willing to take **responsibility** for seeing that my small group succeeds?
- Do I have the **maturity** in Christ to lead a Small Group?
- Do I have the **ability** to lead a Small Group?
- Will I commit the **time** to prepare for each small group meeting, attend our small group's meetings, and attend the leadership meetings?
- Is **my spouse** willing to make this commitment?

Obstacles to Effective Leadership

- Wrong motives for leadership: self-exaltation
- A sense of inadequacy (To overcome seek training)
- Having a short fuse or exhibiting outbursts of anger
- A fear of failure, discouragement, or disappointment
- Unrealistic schedule
- Constant relational conflicts
- Constant conflicts with those in authority or unwillingness to work with other leaders
- Inability to handle a diversity of opinions within a group
- Inability to restrain from offering advice to others

Good Leaders rise up on wings of EAGLES

Small group leaders realize that all Christians are called to live lives in mutual submission to one another. To maintain the quality of our small groups, each leader must be open to group evaluations. These evaluations are not to be viewed as threatening but as a tool to provide insight into the functioning of the group and to allow for each leader to grow in his/her ability to lead.

But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall rise up on wings like eagles.
Isaiah 40:31 (KJV)

The process of evaluation encourages group leaders to renew their strength as they are constantly seeking to improve in their service to the Lord and others. The EAGLE evaluations look at the life of the group and the effectiveness of the individual leaders. The evaluations' results will be used to encourage leaders and aid them in directing their efforts to improve their small group.

The evaluations are to be made by group members, group leaders, apprentice leaders and the small group coordinator. Group evaluations should take place at the end of the first, third, sixth, twelfth, and twenty-fourth months of the group's life. Evaluations for leaders will take place in the group and in VHS meetings. The twin EAGLE's of evaluation involve:

- **Evaluating and Assessing Group Life,** (and)
- **Evaluating Group Leaders.**

The individual leaders and the coordinator on a regular basis will review evaluations.

The Jethro Principle

Jethro's suggestion, given to Moses as he began the task of leading God's people, is as appropriate today as it was when it was originally offered. The small group's ministry will be constantly seeking to identify, train, and encourage the development of new leaders. All small groups will be expected to have a leader and an apprentice leader. The apprentice leader is one who is receiving training while awaiting the opportunity to lead a new group. Normally this opportunity will come in two years or less.

What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. But select capable men from all the people-- men who fear God, trustworthy men... appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."

Exodus 18:17-18, 21

In any larger group there is a need to share the responsibilities of leadership. In a church the size of the Grand Central church it is unrealistic to believe that our shepherds could personally perform all of the shepherding that is needed (nor would it be particularly biblical). Their responsibility is to see that the flock is shepherded.

Key to chart:

X- Leader of Small Group (8-14 members)
Xa- Apprentice Leader
C- Coordinator (Coach), Oversees 5 X's
D- Director (Staff member for Small Groups)
Shepherds- Insure shepherding takes place
Staff- Public support and involvement

For more insights on the Jethro Principle see Carl F. George's book Prepare Your Church for the Future.

Monthly V.H.S. Meetings

Each month the small group leaders, apprentice leaders, coordinators, director, and pulpit minister will meet on a Sunday evening. These VHS meetings will be a time when those involved with this ministry will receive encouragement, support, and help in developing their ability to lead.

The V.H.S. meetings have three purposes.

- V** Vision: a monthly reminder of where we are going and what we are seeking to accomplish in our small group ministry. ("We haven't arrived, but we are on our way!")
- H** Huddle: these meetings will serve as a "support group" for those who lead small groups. It is a time to share our various experiences, our joys and frustrations, and to pray for one another.
- S** Skills: three or four times a year the opportunity to develop skills that leaders need (like conflict resolution, group evaluation, leading a discussion) will be provided.

Barriers to the Introduction of Small Groups

As small groups are introduced to the Grand Central Church of Christ there is a need to realize that there may be some objections. Please assume that those who raise objections are well intentioned and motivated by a sincere desire to follow Christ.

When objections are raised, please allow the individual raising them to clearly articulate their concerns. It would be impossible to anticipate all those that might be raised but these are those that it is believed will most likely be heard most often.

1. We've never done it this way before (or some variation thereof).

For the most part, Churches of Christ have been built on middle-sized groups (15-80, e.g., Bible classes). These serve an important function but they do not effectively allow for the development of caring relationships where the "one another" passages are fulfilled. It should be noted that the "one another" passages are not to be understood as *suggestions* but as *commands*. They are, therefore, nonnegotiable and must be honored by the church.

2. Isn't this how the Crossroads/Boston/International Church of Christ operates (or infiltrates a church)?

Surprisingly, to many, the International Church of Christ (Crossroads and Boston are now very dated misnomers for those in the movement) is NOT at fault because of their use of small groups.

Most studies have demonstrated that the problem is the amount of control and submission they require versus the model of mutual submission that good small groups utilize. Quality controls are designed into good small groups to prevent this from happening.

3. I've never seen or heard anything about small groups in the Bible.

As noted in the "biblical and historical basis of small groups" section found earlier in this manual, there is ample evidence of small groups being the dominant structure of the first century church.

Care must be taken to note that there is a difference between forms (where God gives great latitude) and function (which is God-directed).

4. Everyone should meet at the building on Sunday nights.

This is an example of viewing our present forms (or methods) as being the only way to please God. Again, the section on the "biblical and historical basis of small groups" should prove helpful in answering this concern. Also, it is advisable to continue to have weekly meetings at the building for those who do not wish to participate in the small group ministry.

- 5. I have plenty of close relationships with others in the church and I don't see why we need anything like this. This will take us away from what we really need to be doing, worshiping, and the church will just become a social club.**

These objections spring from a common background. Those making them may not recognize a need for close relationships. This is generally true of those who are from the pre-World War II generations and of those who have a large family presence within a congregation. Of course, there will be several exceptions to this *general* rule.

The New Testament is full of “one another” passages that are an integral part of the life of the church. The life of a Christian is not limited to those times when we meet together as a large group. Prior to the twentieth century, few churches met for two services on Sunday. This is an example of allegiance to a form (that may serve a good function) that is mistakenly equated with allegiance to God and his kingdom.

Several in the church, especially those born after World War II, recognize a need for quality, community experiences. These are not simply for the purpose of socializing (a part of true fellowship) but also providing a means for encouraging one another in their walk of faith.

Group agreement

Each small group is asked to consider how the following eight elements could aid in the development of relationships between the various members of the group.

1. **Affirmation.** I will love you, affirm you, and I recognize your right to your opinion. I may not always agree with you or approve of your actions, but you can't make me to stop loving you.
2. **Availability.** I will make myself available to you. *I will make our small group meetings a top priority in my schedule.*
3. **Prayer.** I agree to pray for you regularly and often.
4. **Openness.** I will seek to develop a more open relationship with you. I understand that I am only to confess my struggles, not the struggles or failures of another.
5. **Honesty.** I will strive to speak the truth in love. I will seek to express this honesty in a spirit of sensitivity, compassion and unconditional love so that we may all become more like Christ.
6. **Sensitivity.** I want to understand you and be aware of your needs and feelings. I take seriously my God-given responsibility and privilege to work with Him to encourage you.
7. **Confidentiality.** I understand confidentiality to mean that nothing of a personal nature shared within the group is to be shared with others. This is absolutely essential to the building and maintenance of trust among us.
8. **Accountability.** I ask you to watch my life and to lovingly check on my progress in achieving my personal and spiritual goals so that I might be conformed to the image of God's Son.

I will uphold this Group Agreement and all additional agreements made within this group led by _____ and _____. This agreement will be honored from _____ until _____. At that time a decision will be made whether we wish to continue this group or to be reorganized. Any time a new group is "birthed" this agreement is to reviewed and renewed.

Signatures:

Group Leader

Group Member

Each group member is asked to keep her/his own sheet. No copies are to be kept by the Group Leader or others. This is simply a reminder for each individual member.

NOTE: This sheet is to be shared with each member of the small group. More than anything, the purpose of the agreement is to inform participants what is expected of them as a group member and the attributes needed to encourage personal spiritual growth.

Especially in light of #7 above it should be understood by all that there is no desire to keep a "list of sins" to be used for spiritual coercion. Reports to the office and shepherds should only deal with matters that are non-confidential. To report other matters, express permission would need to be received from the individual(s) involved.

Other Considerations for new groups:

What do we expect of our experience in this group?

When and where will we meet? (Suggest: Sunday evening/afternoon)

Do we want to have refreshments at meetings? Who will provide? (Suggest: Yes, rotate)

How will we handle interruptions (phone, beepers, and friends dropping by)?

What will we do about children? (See suggestions about childcare)

May we bring visitors? (suggestion: Yes!)

What will we do if the group gets too big (14 or more) (Suggest: reproduce)

Is it OK to share phone numbers?

Help! There's a Need We Can't Meet!

Your group meetings will aid in the process of assimilation, caring and evangelism. These aims may also be met outside of the confines of the group meeting. Group members may help each other by assisting a group member move, taking flowers and meals to a sick member, serving as a listening ear, or praying over the telephone.

Small group leader must also develop the ability to discern when the burdens of counseling are more than they are able to bear. Your group has certain limitations that are defined by your group's purpose and group agreement. Small groups are designed to promote the spiritual formation of all her members. When one individual's problems begin to so dominate group meetings (more than two) that others' needs are not being met, the group's life and existence may be threatened.

Some individuals require so much effort that if their needs are to be met within the group the rest of the members will not receive the care they need. These individuals are referred to as EGR's (Extra Grace Required) and God loves them too! For the sake of their health and the health of the small group these individuals should be referred to the small groups coordinator, a professional Christian therapist (names can be supplied by the office), staff member or shepherd.

When should a small group leader refer an individual to someone else?

- ◆ when they threaten violence to self or others
- ◆ when their dominance of the group begins to drive off other group
- ◆ when you simply don't have the time or energy to meet their expressed needs

It is hoped more recovery and support groups will one day be available so that more needs can be met within the body of Christ.

Note: The group cannot be sacrificed because of the needs of an EGR. Though some will consider this callused, the needs of the group outweigh the needs of the individual. If this principle is not followed, several individuals will be made to suffer. This is an area that demands strong leadership.

Group Dynamics

There are several factors that can affect the depth and closeness of a group during its lifetime. For instance, if very few people show up one week, communication may break down temporarily and as a result, closeness suffers. Conversely, smaller meetings can allow for an intimacy not normally experienced.

Here are some external, environmental factors that you should be aware of:

Group Size: The larger the group, the more impersonal it becomes. In larger groups it is more difficult to be heard and it also easier to hide. An effective leader will be forced to have firmer control of the meeting. This means there will be fewer opportunities for intimacy. Small groups have a greater potential for openness, participation, and intimacy.

One way to still achieve intimacy in a group larger than twelve is to break up into two or three groups for the discussion part of the Bible study and/or for prayer. In this way the opportunities for sharing and participation are doubled.

Frequency of Meetings: The more often a group meets, the closer it can become. A group that meets only once a month will find it very difficult to develop any appreciable depth of intimacy. Those that meet more than twice a month have a better opportunity to develop the type of intimacy that can encourage and enhance personal spiritual formation.

Location and Seating Arrangement: A working principle is that *we speak to those whom we can see*. This is why the members of a group should be seated in a circle where everyone can see and be seen. When someone is seated so that another person must move to be seen, he/she will feel excluded. For this reason care should also be taken to make sure that members are all seated at approximately the same level.

Small groups usually meet in homes because a living room provides a more comfortable atmosphere than a classroom. A living room or family room is usually the right size for a small group and the furniture is more comfortable so that members are not distracted by uncomfortable conditions.

Question:

How do you keep the group from becoming a counseling session that focuses on just one person's need?

- 1) Continually emphasize that the group exists for the benefit of all its members. Everyone should be given the opportunity to be heard; therefore, everyone must be brief when speaking so others have the same opportunity to speak. No one should dominate. If you exemplify and enforce this early on, you'll have less trouble later. (It is easier to lighten up than to clamp down on an already established group dynamic.)
- 2) Refer to another time and place. When an individual is going through crisis and needs to talk about it, allow enough time for that person to briefly tell the group what's going on. Then provide closure by saying something like this: "Jane, it sounds like you really are going through some struggles. We want to help if we can. After our meeting is over, but before you go home, can we get together and talk and pray about it?"

Options:

- Set up a separate time to speak on the phone. If possible, it is better to speak with them face-to-face. You may wish to seek the assistance of someone else, whose strength is sensitivity, to meet with the needy person.
- If the need is very pressing, one group member might take the hurting member to another room for immediate care and prayer.
- Be prepared to refer some needs to a professional Christian therapist, staff member, or shepherd.
- Never sweep the problem under the rug. Assure the hurting person that you do want to deal with the problem at an appropriate time.
- Never allow the group to participate in an “advice ambush”.

Life Cycles of a Small Group

A small group will go through various stages in its life cycle. Small groups at the Grand Central Church of Christ begin with an agreement to meet together for at least 12 months with an option to continue for an additional year (12 months). A healthy group with healthy relationships can expect to experience each of the stages listed below.

- Forming-** Initial meetings when members are nervous and unsure of how the small group experience will develop.
- Norming-** At this point the group members are exploring the boundaries and considering the possibility and advisability of self-disclosure.
- Conforming-** Group members begin to develop and identify their role within the group. There is now a group identity. Boundaries will be tested and some conflict should be expected.
- Performing-** Now the group is fun. Meetings are an integral part of the members’ lives. For some groups this stage is never experienced.
- Reforming-** This takes place when there is a re-organization or when a new group is given birth. This is a time when many experience a sense of grief or loss. The last meeting should be a time to celebrate and to share with one another the benefits they have experienced because they were a part of this group.

It should be noted that each time the group changes, it begins a new life cycle. In effect, it becomes a new group. At the group’s discretion it may wish to re-visit (and re-sign) the group agreement. When a new member is added, a new group is formed. When a group gives birth to another group, two new groups are formed. New groups will return to the “forming” stage of the small group life cycle and will then begin progressing through the other stages.

What About Child Care?

Small groups are primarily designed for adults. This is an important consideration if members are to develop intimacy and spirituality. In the small group pre-meeting, the issue of childcare should be addressed and agreed upon by all participants.

Studies of those who are involved in small groups have demonstrated that a vast majority of adults (68 - 80%+) prefer that children either not be present at group meetings or be present for only a short time.

There are several ways that this issue can be addressed. A few suggestions are found below but each group is encouraged to approach this question creatively.

1. Have each family provide its own childcare.
2. Bring the children to the home of the hostess and have non-group member serve as the babysitter (each parent pays).
3. Bring the children to the home of the hostess and have members rotate childcare responsibility.
4. Members trade-off missing meetings to keep children in their homes.
5. Hire a teen to keep children in her home.
6. Let groups rotate weeks that they will care for other groups' children.
7. Build groups so that some don't have to worry about children (homogeneous).
8. Provide activities for children at the building with groups being responsible to make those arrangements.

*Some will desire a family devotion atmosphere in small group meetings.
Those stating a preference for this should be placed in the same group.
Most adults prefer not to include children for the majority of the meeting.*

Appendix

Additional materials will be added as they are received, reviewed, and deemed to be useful for the building up of Grand Central's Small Groups Ministry. An updated title page for the Appendix will be distributed as the materials are made available.

Updates as of November 2003

- Excerpt from small group letter: Plugging kids into your small group
- How to give feedback
- Examples of Evaluation Sheets
- How to start a new group

Bibliography

The following sources are recommended for those who are serving in the small group ministry of the Grand Central Church of Christ. Books are available in the church office. See Joe Spivy concerning the availability of these materials.

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