

Small Groups Ministry—Introduction

By Bob Young

The need for change: The death of American churches?

- Many US churches are plateaued or declining; some dying. Most decline to 20-30 people, stay there with flat vital signs. Life support system is vital infusion of funds.
- 50-60 congregations dissolve every week—maybe 5-10 are able to redefine their role and survive. 3500-4000 churches die every year. In next few years, 100,000 churches will close their doors (out of 350,000). We are already halfway there.
- “Christianity Today”: Many church observers believe that most of the generation of churches planted just after WW2 are in the final stages of institutional life.
- Why are these churches dying?
 1. lack of financial and structural support,
 2. failure of churches in high-density urban areas to meet wide variety of choices and demands,
 3. inability of 70% of churches in America to break through 200 barrier, which is the metropolitan size necessary to provide a minimum level of expected services,
 4. inability or lack of willingness to provide adequate staffing and groups ratios,
 5. lack of vision in the pulpit,
 6. lack of vision and skills in the church leadership,
 7. lack of direction with negative impact on those in the pew,
 8. lack of evangelism, accompanied by natural/normal decreases in attendance.

The need to rethink church (major points from Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next*)

Looking at future must see—

1. Church of future must move from living in the past to engagement in the present.

- The church has been traumatized by internal problems, failed to notice the cultural shift around us. What are we about if we are internally focused?
- What is happening now—we know about the wrong things.
- I brought you the world, and you didn't go to any of those groups.
- All roads now lead to the US (not Rome).
- If we are to be alive, we must engage the present.

2. Church of future must move from mission to market, not vice versa.

Mission is primary. We will respond to needs, must needs are not the first priority. We must move from focusing almost exclusively on needs to mission. If the church is driven by market and felt needs, it will always see first its own internal needs.

Be mission driven. In market, customer is right, attendee is sovereign. God is sovereign. We must be attention to world, yes, but more so to God.

3. Church of future must move from rituals to relationships.

- Among us, we got baptism right and the Lord's Supper, but we didn't get relationships right! We should have never split in 1906.
- Stop degrading the church.

4. Church of future must move from generic, non-demanding congregations to incarnational bodies.

- Forget the mega-church model, it can't transfer. Forget cloning. Be real in ministry in your context. Philippians is not Colossians. Thessalonica is not Athens. The Gospel bridges between church and culture.
- Here's how not to do it—decide that we must get it all right before we begin.
- We will get to heaven with right relationships, love God and others.

- What did you do for others? Matthew 25.
- There is a way to do it—congregations sending out people to do it, with full intent.
- We must mentor in church—mentor young men. White males are lost in church, ridiculed in the sitcoms. Develop shepherds, from leaders at home.

Six essentials:

Have clear ministry objectives: know the destination before you begin the journey

Choose a point leader: select leaders with the right gifts

Build a coaching structure: key to sustainable growth

Define “small group”: purpose and a variety of experiences

Have an open group mindset: the courageous group stays open to new people

Constantly develop leaders: the importance of a leadership development culture

Five Small Group Myths

Small groups are a wonderful evangelistic tool

Small groups unite the Christians in a neighborhood

Bible study is the centerpiece of a small group

A small group needs one strong leader.

Small groups multiply by cell division.

Reasons Small Groups Are Needed in Every Church

1. Biblical mandate

- a. Jesus was a small group leader
- b. House churches were a part of the NT beginnings of the church
- c. Achieving the greater intimacy of genuine koinonia
- d. Can provide support for evangelism

2. Social necessity

- a. Declining role of family
- b. Breakdown of traditional community networks
- c. Preoccupation with consumption and success
- d. Low loyalty and high mobility
- e. Searching for personal worth and dignity
- f. Increased sense of individual loneliness, isolation, alienation
- g. Renewed interest in spirituality
- h. Reaction against “bigger is better”

3. Practical Benefits

- a. Helps people feel sense of purpose and belonging
- b. Builds relationships
- c. Identifies and meets needs
- d. Aids understanding and application of biblical truth
- e. Enables person-to-person evangelism
- f. Helps people discover and exercise spiritual gifts
- g. Trains leaders
- h. Multiplies opportunities for ministry leadership

What Small Groups Can Do

Sustain new members

Build strong relationships

Identify needs

Building a Healthy Small Group Ministry

1. What is the vision for small groups in your church?\
2. What kind of groups will we use?
3. How will we “fill” these groups with people?
4. Who will lead the groups?
5. How will we insure the growth of this ministry?
6. What kind of accountability will we require of leaders?
7. How can we communicate unique ministry desires to potential leaders and members?

Starting a Small Group Ministry: Decisions and Issues

1. How do we get key players to agree with and support a small groups ministry?
2. What are the needs of the congregation which can be met by small groups?
3. What are our goals for the small groups ministry?
4. What level of control of groups is needed?
5. What amount of organization is needed?
6. What levels of leadership do we need?
7. How will the groups ministry fit into the total church program?
8. What different types of small groups will we have?
9. When will the groups meet?
10. What activities will the groups do when they meet?
11. Will our groups have a fixed or open membership?
12. What will be the recommended group size?
13. Will group membership be homogeneous or heterogeneous/
14. Will people be assigned to groups or allowed to choose groups?
15. How long will groups remain together?
16. When do new groups start?
17. What will be the frequency of group meetings?
18. Place?
19. Length of time for each group meeting?
20. Who will lead the groups?
21. What about the children?
22. Youth?
23. Who is responsible for selecting group leaders?
24. Who is responsible for training group leaders?
25. What are the qualifications of the small group leader?
26. What are the duties of the small group leaders?
27. What topics should be included in the initial training?
28. What curriculum will be used, or will this be the choice of the leaders/groups?
29. Will the curriculum be content or relationally oriented?
30. W=How and when will we do in-service training?
31. How will group leaders be supervised?
32. Who will evaluate?
33. When do we evaluate?
34. Who and what do we evaluate?
35. How do we evaluate?
36. How do we make the necessary adjustments?