

HOLISTIC SMALL GROUPS

Develop small groups for disciple making

Jesus started the first small group. He chose only 12 men to travel and live with him nearly every day for three years. Other people accompanied them at times, and often large crowds gathered around them, but Jesus lived with these few men. He taught them, prayed with them, mentored them, challenged them, scolded them, and encouraged them. Jesus gave his followers what they needed to continue his work when he was gone. And with the help of the Spirit, that's what they did.



Not every small group, of course, will spend most of their time together. Not every group has the same purpose or calling that the Twelve did. One purpose, however, remains the same—to make disciples. Nothing is more holistic than Jesus' call to follow him. He said we must be ready to give up everything for his sake and for the gospel to be his disciples. Being Jesus' disciple is a whole-life commitment; nothing remains untouched—or unchanged when we have given our lives to follow him.

We have countless opportunities to join groups in our communities, groups with important goals, groups that do good work. Only in the church do small groups have this singular purpose of making disciples. It will happen nowhere else. Our small groups may have many secondary purposes and goals—a choir, a women's group or men's group or youth group, a Bible study class, a mission team, a committee, a sports team—but their primary purpose remains the same. Small groups in the church exist to make disciples.

Train leaders for small groups

Disciple-making groups need transformational leaders who create bold vision, who build healthy relationships, who transform conflict into positive change, and who inspire confidence in the people. Training for such leaders will require more than developing skills for leading small groups. We cannot just purchase materials for a small group study, recruit someone who is willing to facilitate a discussion, invite a few people to come for six weeks, and think that we will be successful at making disciples. Many churches have "tried" small groups and say they haven't "worked" because they have taken this minimal approach. They may not realize what was missing, but perhaps they know in their hearts that something "more" was needed, more depth, more commitment, more transforming power.



Where do we find transformational leaders for small groups, and who will mentor them? Begin by identifying in your congregation any individuals who indicate a desire to be disciples, to mature spiritually, and to help other people do the same. In every congregation there will be a few, and in that group there will be two or three, perhaps, who have a level of experience and maturity that gives them the ability to be the mentors. All a church needs is one mentor and one leader-in-training to start the first small group. Anyone can learn basic skills of leading a group. What is primary and essential is the desire to be a disciple and a leader and, then for some, the maturity to mentor others in their journeys.

As the newer leader matures and gains experience and knowledge as a transformational small group leader, that leader becomes a mentor for someone else. The original mentor finds a new leader-in-training, and now the church has two small groups with leaders who can teach, inspire, encourage, and love the people in those groups as they all continue their journey of discipleship.

Create a plan for multiplying small groups

One name given to a common model is “cell groups.” The idea is that cells in the human body multiply through division. Healthy cells sustain and grow the body. In the same way, disciple-making small groups are meant to grow and multiply, sustaining and enlarging the congregation. Our bodies have their own created plan for cell division and multiplication leading to sustained health and growth. In the churches we need to create a plan to support health and growth.

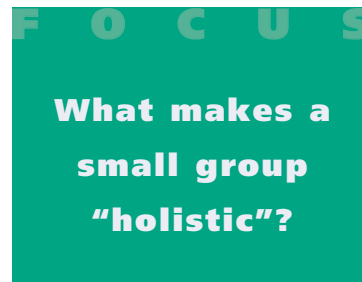
Once the congregation has a vision for multiplying small groups with the primary purpose of making disciples, they can plan to explore options for the secondary purposes of these groups. Almost every growing congregation today has what some call “multiple entry points” into the life of the church. Most of these are small groups that meet for a variety of purposes, depending on the needs and interests of the group members. They may be more traditional small groups that meet for Bible study and prayer or around gender and age concerns (men’s, women’s, and youth groups, for instance). They may be groups with a “program” concern within the church, such as a choir, a committee or board, or a task group or ministry team. They may be a scrapbook group, a sports team, a dance group, a singles group, a grief group. Wherever a common concern, need, or interest can be identified for a few people, a new small group can be formed. They may meet in homes or at the church building, in restaurants or at a ball field—the locations are as varied as their purposes.

The plan a congregation creates for small groups will include the ongoing need for mentoring new group leaders. Keep the focus on the primary purpose of disciple-making and keep identifying people with a desire to become leaders-in-training with an experienced mentor. Continue to identify the needs and interests of people, not only in the congregation but in the larger community, which can provide common ground for them to form new small groups around these secondary purposes. Keep the cells growing, dividing, multiplying, and watch as the church sustains and grows itself year in and year out.

Engage in ministry in small groups

Holistic small groups provide a place where people’s lives are touched in many ways. Whatever the common interest or purpose that brought the group together, they engage in ministry with one another. They serve one another with compassion, humility, and patience. They build trust and confidence in each other. They pray together, learn together, laugh and cry together. They build friendships, provide

emotional and sometimes financial support, and help each other through the sorrows and joys of life.



Holistic small groups also engage in ministry beyond the group and beyond the congregation. They welcome other people who share the common interests and needs of the group, drawing guests into the ongoing life of the group. Sometimes these groups respond to a community or world need they become aware of—disaster relief, missionary support, a new church plant, a refugee family, or helping someone with a terminal illness. The group members may respond to needs on their own without involving the congregation or may present a need to the church to seek greater support. These groups see themselves as an integral part of the mission of the whole church.

Grow churches through small groups

Small groups with a primary purpose of forming disciples and a secondary purpose of responding to a common interest, and led by transformational leaders will enhance church health as the groups grow, divide, and multiply. This is one of the most important means of increasing disciples. It is also an excellent model for giving birth to new churches. Perhaps the best way to plant a church is by sending experienced transformational small group leaders to start a few small groups in an area where a new church is needed. Dare to dream!



GRUPOS PEQUEÑOS HOLÍSTICOS

En una iglesia discipuladora los grupos pequeños integran la alimentación espiritual, el aprendizaje, el cuidado pastoral y el ministerio. Tienen la clave del discipulado al proveer apoyo continuo, desafíos y motivación a las personas en su diario vivir como discípulos(as) de Jesucristo. Ofrecen oportunidades para aprender y crecer en habilidades y conocimiento para discernir los dones y el llamado. Y porque el enfoque no es interno, esto hace que los(as) participantes que ministran en nombre del Señor, inviten a otros(as) a hacer lo mismo. La "iglesia" toma vida de manera intensa y personal porque provee el ambiente en el cual las personas experimentan la realidad del cuerpo de Cristo.

ENFOCAR

¿Dónde podrá encontrar líderes de grupos pequeños para su iglesia?

Los(as) participantes se adhieren porque quieren hacer lo que el grupo está haciendo, pero algunas amenazas comunes se hallan en estos grupos. Existen para la propagación de discípulos. Con ese propósito en mente, todos ofrecen oportunidades para la oración en conjunto por las necesidades y preocupaciones corporativas. Todos proveen un ambiente en el cual se apoya el compartir asuntos de la fe. En todos se apoya el aprendizaje, a través de estudios bíblicos en particular, pero también en manera que ayuden a desarrollar la vida como discípulos(as). Finalmente, todos estos grupos poseen una dimensión de acción, que dirige a cada participante al servicio a los



demás en el nombre de Cristo. La mezcla precisa de estos elementos puede variar en cada grupo, pero todos cuatro estarán siempre presentes.

ENFOCAR

¿Qué es lo que hace a un grupo pequeño "holístico"?

Los grupos efectivos requerirán que los(as) líderes de grupo sean equipados. Los(as) líderes necesitan habilidades, entrenamiento y aprendizaje de líderes de grupo con experiencia. Los grupos que no tienen líderes entrenados(as) muchas veces no alcanzan su mayor potencial; se estancarán o se enfocarán en sí mismos o perderán el desafío de reproducirse por estar a gusto juntos. Cuando los grupos funcionan como comunidades discipuladoras verdaderas, el poder del Espíritu se desata y suceden cosas maravillosas.

