


Practical Ministry Skills:

Making a Case for Small Groups

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How to Use This Resource

Take a quick peek here to maximize the content in this training download.

It can be awfully lonely when you're launching or leading a small-group ministry. You may feel like you're the only person who understands how important small groups are for spiritual growth. It's frustrating when something so obvious to you is so unclear to others—small groups matter. We've created this resource so you'll learn practical ideas for helping others better understand what small groups are all about. The overview is a great reminder of the biblical basis for small groups and their overall purpose.

Much-Needed Encouragement

We believe you deserve some encouragement. It's hard work being a small-group director, pastor, or champion. Get some encouragement from a former small-group director, and hear some truth from Jenifer Aguilar to combat some of your biggest complaints.

Practical Tips

In this section you'll gain practical tips for making a case for small groups—to your senior pastor, church leadership, and church members who aren't yet involved in small groups. Plus, Steve Grusendorf helps you promote small groups in 60 seconds or less.

—AMY JACKSON is Associate Editor of SmallGroups.com.

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Why Small Groups?

The reason behind intentional Christian community

By Carolyn Taketa

Churches use all sorts of names for small groups—life groups, growth groups, home groups, cell groups. They also use various models, numerous strategies for connection, various plans for assimilation, and church-specific vision and goals for their group ministries. Yet all would agree that small groups are a means to an end, not an end in and of themselves. Small groups exist as a way for people to engage in biblical community that helps them become more like Jesus in every area of their lives. The following are a few key biblical foundations, ministry purposes, and benefits of small groups.

Biblical Basis for Small Groups

God himself is in a community of three persons in one—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who exist in perfect unity. So it is not surprising that from the beginning, God created us to be in community with one another. Genesis 2:18 states: "It is not good for man to be alone." This passage is often used in the context of marriage, but it also speaks to our fundamental need to connect with others in the human community. What is striking about this statement is that God makes it before the Fall. There's no sin yet and no disobedience; man is in perfect intimacy with God. And yet, God declares that man is alone and that it is not good. [Dr. Gilbert Bilezikian](#) points out:

Community is deeply grounded in the nature of God. It flows from who God is. Because he is community, he creates community. It is his gift of himself to humans. Therefore, the making of community may not be regarded as an optional decision for Christians. It is a compelling and irrevocable necessity, a binding divine mandate for all believers at all times.

When Jesus' ministry began, he called 12 disciples to be his primary relational and ministry community. Did Jesus need this motley crew to help him? Not really. But Jesus chose to love them, teach them, and pour himself into relationships with them, thereby creating the first "small group."

The apostles continued Jesus' model and formed a community of believers who loved God and loved one another. Despite incredible persecutions and against all odds, this rag tag group of Jesus-followers launched small communities (i.e. church) that proclaimed the gospel and changed the world forever.

Purpose of Small Groups

When we look at the early church we get a picture of small communities of people who followed Jesus together. The Book of Acts, especially Acts 2:42–47, gives us a great picture of the early church and the components of biblical community, which encompassed both the "temple courts" and "house to house."

These believers engaged in life together through teaching, fellowship, communion, prayer, miracles, radical generosity, and corporate worship. They spent time together eating, learning, celebrating, proclaiming the Good News, and supporting each other. In addition, the 50-plus "one another" verses in the New Testament flesh out other aspects of this community. For example, it was a place where people loved, forgave, served, bore burdens, encouraged, exhorted, prayed, equipped, spoke truth in love, confessed sins, and treated each other as precious members of one body.

God never intended for us to live the Christian life alone. How can we apply these "one another" references unless we are in intentional, close relationships with each other? God calls us to love, not in an abstract or superficial way, but in a deep, face to face, life-on-life, transformative way—which is difficult and inevitably messy.

In our modern culture, small groups are often viewed merely as a program or a fellowship ministry within the church. But for the New Testament church, it was a way of life, encompassing every area of their lives. Their relationships with one another were critical to their pursuit of Jesus, their growth in Christ, and their witness to the Good News. It would be impossible to experience biblical community apart from spiritually significant,

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intentional relationships with other believers. Relational structures like small groups, therefore, are an integral part of "being" the church and not just "doing" church.

Character Change Happens Best in the Context of Community

The consumer mentality rampant in our culture has permeated our understanding of community. We focus on what we are going to get out of church or small group rather than what God is going to do in us and through us because of our relationships within community. We need each other to help us know the truth about who we are, who God is, and how we can live in light of those truths. Like iron sharpening iron, the relationships we form within our small communities can become a tool for God to use in our character transformation. [Dr. Bilezikian](#) writes:

It is in small groups that people can get close enough to know each other, to care and share, to challenge and support, to confide and confess, to forgive and be forgiven, to laugh and weep together, to be accountable to each other, to watch over each other and to grow together. Personal growth does not happen in isolation. It is the result of interactive relationships. Small groups are God's gift to foster changes in character and spiritual growth.

We live in an increasingly fragmented and disconnected world. Though social media and other technology have made our world seemingly more connected, people have fewer genuine friends than ever before. It feels scary and threatening to allow ourselves to be known or to invest in knowing someone else at a deep level. It is much easier and more convenient to stay on the surface. Yet when we take the risk of being authentic with a small group of people, we can experience God's grace and love coming through others, which leads to freedom and transformation.

[John Ortberg](#) writes: "God uses people to form people. That is why what happens between you and another person is never *merely* human-to-human interaction—the Spirit longs to be powerfully at work in every encounter." So the goal of small groups is to create environments where Spirit-driven, life-giving experiences can flourish. While the type of group or study can help promote a positive environment, the real things that promote a healthy environment for flourishing are prayer, support, service, confession, worship, accountability, conflict resolution, social gatherings, and simply doing life together. Regardless of the specific guidelines a church may have in their small-group ministry, its objective ultimately is to help people engage in relationships that help them become more like Christ. Spend time building an environment that allows true relationships to flourish.

Small Groups Are on a Mission Beyond Themselves

The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20 mandates that every follower of Christ is on mission to "go and make disciples of all nations." Jesus gave this instruction to all his followers, both as individuals and as the body of Christ. We, as a small group and as a church, bear collective witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.

One of Jesus' final instructions to his disciples is found in John 13:34–35: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Note that Jesus did not say people will know we are Christians by how many churches we build, how many Bible studies we complete, how many prayers we say, or how many people come to our church. The litmus test is clear: people will know we are Christ-followers when we love each other the way Jesus does.

Theologian Francis Schaeffer asserted, "Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful—Christian community is the final apologetic." Our non-believing friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors are watching and deciding on the validity of the gospel message. We need others to help us live lives worthy of God's calling so that people will see the power of God's love in and through us.

Ultimately, small groups are a way of living out our purpose, both as individuals and as a collective group of believers—to be the church. We share a common foundation of faith and God has called us to live out the implications of that faith in a relational community, in the context that we call a small group.

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—CAROLYN TAKETA is Small Groups Director at Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village, California; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How clear is your vision for small-group ministry?
2. How familiar are you with the "one another" commands that lay out a vision for biblical community?
3. What especially appeals to you about living life together with a small group of people?

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The Difference a Small Group Can Make

A story of small-group success

By Seth Widner

We live in a world of technology. Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail have become primary vehicles for communication. Although most people have a cell phone, verbal communication is often replaced by text messages. There is absolutely nothing wrong with these growing technologies. Still, they cannot replace the power of a face to face gathering. Our technologies can enhance communication, but they cannot sustain relationships. Something amazing happens when friends spend time together. It paves the way for life change and spiritual growth. In the realm of personal growth, nothing trumps face to face friendships—and I know firsthand.

The Big Move

On February 15, 2007, my life changed forever. On that day, I accepted an invitation to serve on a church-planting team. I had been serving as a student pastor for ten years, but church-planting was a new area of ministry for me. It would require lots of sweat, time, research, and execution. And communication skills with adults! Up until then, my time had been spent with teens. My new ministry would also require a move. This was the biggest change for me. My wife, Melissa, and I moved from our east Tennessee home to relocate in Fernandina Beach, Florida. We said goodbye to our family, friends, and the land we called home.

The initial transition happened quickly. We moved into our new house the week of our launch. I juggled my time preparing for Sunday's service and helping Melissa decorate our new house. During those first few weeks, my life resembled a pinball as I bounced from place to place. Everything seemed to flash before my eyes at hyper speed. In fact, I rarely thought about the family and friends we had left in Tennessee. The busy schedule kept my mind occupied.

Feeling Our Loss

After a few months, things settled down for us. I began keeping more regular work hours at the church office, and I was able to balance my ministry and marriage. As life slowed down, the reality of our big move began to sink in. I realized that Melissa and I no longer lived in a familiar place. My family and friends lived over eight hours away! I couldn't simply call them to go hang out on a Friday night. Familiar faces and surroundings were not a part of our day-to-day lives.

Technology was a blessing to me in those days. If I missed a family member or friend, I would give them a call or send them a text message. It seemed to put a Band-aid on my home sickness. I would find temporary relief from my loneliness, but it always came back. The text messages and phone calls were not enough. Although Melissa and I had a great marriage, loved our church-planting team, and enjoyed our new church home, our homesickness grew. We believed we were called to live in Fernandina Beach, but we were desperate for friendship connections.

My source of comfort came from a promise in God's Word. Mark 10:29–30 says, "No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age . . . and in the age to come eternal life." What a promise! God promised to replace what was lost for the sake of the gospel. I believed that he would fill my need for family and friends in his timing and in his specific way. Whenever my feelings of homesickness came around, I would hold on to that promise.

The Start of a Beautiful Thing

About five months into our church plant, we decided to launch our small-group ministry. From our beginning, we planned to be a church of small groups. The time had come to gather potential leaders and start training. Although I had little experience in adult small groups, I believed the ministry would be a good one. As I trained future small-group leaders, I became more enthusiastic about the concept of small groups. My passion for helping people connect in small groups was growing.

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Melissa and I agreed to lead a small group, too. We were looking forward to meeting new faces and making some new friendships. Our target would be young married couples without children. Honestly, it was for selfish reasons. We didn't have kids, and I didn't want screaming babies or diapers in our home. Thankfully, we found three couples to invite to our small group, and we decided to meet at a local restaurant for our first meeting.

That first evening was a breath of fresh air. The only thing on the agenda was to enjoy good food and conversations. We had some great talks. We learned that most of the small-group members had moved from other states. So we shared about our old homes, what brought us to Florida, and how the transition was going. It was such a relief to be able to talk to people who felt homesick from time to time! These couples understood what Melissa and I were going through.

Our Expanded Family

Since that first meeting, our small group has been doing life together. We gather regularly for food, fun, fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. No matter what kind of day I'm having, I know that my small group will be there for me. We have laughed, cried, and prayed together. We have discussed God's Word and voiced our questions about life. We have each experienced spiritual growth. And I finally got over my fear of diapers! At this point, most of us have become parents.

Over the years, I've found an interesting connection between my small group and homesickness. As my small-group friendships have grown, my homesickness has diminished. I still miss my family and friends in Tennessee, and I still communicate through technology. From time to time I will enjoy a phone call, send a quick text message, or touch base through Facebook. But my intense homesickness has gone away. Melissa and I have transitioned into our new home in Fernandina Beach.

God fulfilled his promise that he gave me in the book of Mark. And he did it through our small group. Although Melissa and I left family and friends in Tennessee, God has truly blessed us with family and friends in Florida.

My life stands as a testimony to the power of connecting to a small group. We are created in God's image and are designed to walk in relationship with one another. Face to face friendships provide opportunities for both spiritual and relational growth. I'm thankful that God has taught me this truth. It was well worth the move.

—SETH WIDNER is Family Pastor of The Journey Church in Fernandina Beach, Florida. Copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. When and how were you convinced that small groups matter? How does that experience drive your leadership today?
2. When has your small group felt like your expanded family? How did you get to that point?
3. How can you share stories of the difference small groups make with those in your church who haven't bought in to small groups yet?

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Gaining Buy In

Encouragement from a former small-group director

By Amy Jackson

A few years ago, I had the privilege of starting a new small-group ministry from the ground up. A small church hired me to bring my knowledge of small groups and start a brand-new program. There were no small groups meeting at the time, although there were a few Sunday school classes and a women's ministry that met regularly. I brought immense energy and excitement to my new role. I had been changed by small groups, and I was eager for the people in this church to experience them, too.

I immediately started three small groups: a young married group, a weeknight inductive Bible study of Ephesians, and a study on authentic community during the Sunday school hour. What I learned very quickly was that most people had no idea what a small group was. Instead, they came to the group with expectations of things they'd experienced in the past that didn't quite hit the mark: intense prayer groups, social clubs, and Sunday school classes. Their expectations weren't met, and I found myself having to explain over and over again what a small group was, how it was different from other ministries, and why it was beneficial.

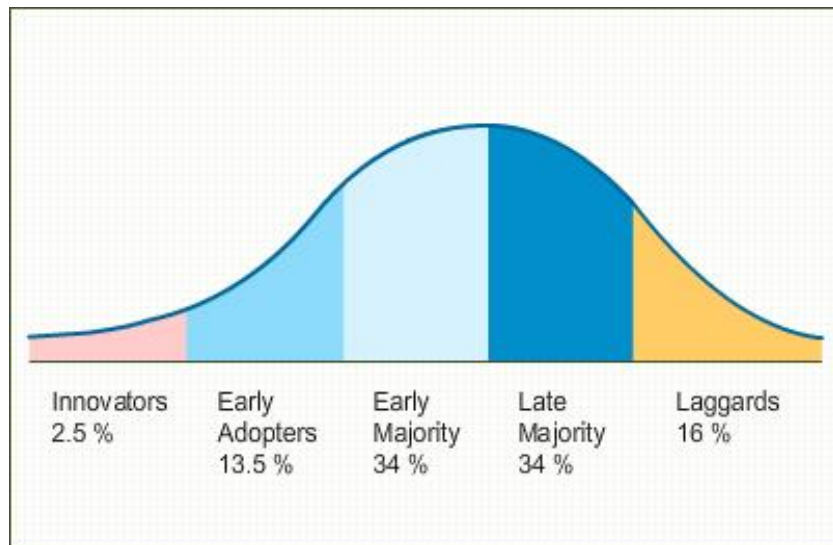
On the other hand, there were a few people who immediately caught the vision. They were at every meeting, ready and willing to dive in and invest in others. They sent me cards of encouragement, and they told me stories of how their small group had changed their thinking and actions. Despite these encouraging few, my eager excitement was dashed pretty quickly. I couldn't understand why so few people were excited about small groups like I was.

The Stages of Adoption

Then I learned about the stages of people adopting new ideas, and I was introduced to the chart below (statistics from *Diffusion of Innovations*). Innovators are adventurers and risk takers, and they're the first to get behind your ministry. They're the ones who have your back from the beginning and want to see you succeed just as much as you want to.

Innovators may become small-group leaders and coaches in your ministry. However, only a few—2.5 percent of your congregation—will get behind you this early on.

Early Adopters are guided by respect for you and what you're trying to do. They are the opinion leaders in the church, and they tend to adopt fairly early, but want to see clear plans and examples. They will be the members of your first small groups.



Early Majority adopters will choose very deliberately—and it will be later on. Not only will they want to see the plan and purpose behind your ministry, but also they will want to hear stories from people in the small groups. They'll want some proof that small groups are working. When this group of people get on board, you'll have half of the church behind you—and your groups will see lots of growth.

When the stories of small-group success start circulating—and they will because half of your church is involved—the Late Majority will be willing to join in. They will be skeptical from the beginning and will want to see a good chunk of the church in small groups before they join. Their backing will send your ministry into a time of significant growth.

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The last group is the Laggards. It's a hard truth to bear, but 16 percent of your congregation will not support your ministry. They will be the very last to join in . . . and they may never want to. Unfortunately, these are the people many small-group directors focus on—myself included. I spent a lot of time and energy trying to explain why small groups were beneficial to this group. Eventually, I had to make the decision to pray for them and trust that God would bring them around if and when he wanted to. I then shifted my focus to those who were already behind me and those who would become the Early Adopters and the Early Majority.

I learned that as I focused on those who already had buy in and those who were close to buy in, the ministry grew more slowly than I'd originally hoped, but it also grew much stronger. The people in the ministry had full buy in, and their experiences helped convince others at the right time. And while I desired quick growth, I realized that healthy growth was a much better goal.

Do What You Can and Wait Upon God

It's difficult to wait for others to catch the vision that is so blatantly obvious to you. It's tiring to explain your vision over and over again to people. It's trying to stand up for your ministry when you feel you're standing alone. It's frustrating to keep fighting when you don't get the support you desire—especially from the church leadership.

But hang in there. Set yourself up for success by making a clear plan that takes into account the culture and structure of your church. Do your research on small-group ministry models and best practices. Surround yourself regularly with the Innovators in your church so you'll be mutually encouraged. Find a group of close friends who can serve as a safe place—people who may or may not be involved in your church but who care deeply about you outside of your role. Be humble and willing to listen and learn from other people and ministries in the church. Try and try again. Prepare a brief statement about the purpose and importance of small groups that you can share on a second's notice. Have hard conversations with those who criticize you and actually listen to what they have to say. Don't take shortcuts. Be patient—change takes time, and it will take time for people to buy in. Keep your passion for small groups alive: go to conferences, read books, and train yourself with helpful resources. Write down why you love small groups and how small groups have changed your life, and keep it somewhere close so you can refer back to it when you're discouraged. Above all, go daily to God, clinging to the truth that he is able to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

—AMY JACKSON is the Associate Editor of SmallGroups.com and has served as a small-group leader, coach, and director; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. On which group of adopters do you spend the most time and energy? Why? Do you need to change this approach?
2. Have you identified your Innovators? How can you spend time investing in them and empowering them to lead? Who are your Early Adopters? How can you invite them to be more involved?
3. How do you feel about the Laggards in your congregation? Do you need to bring your feelings and attitudes before God?

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Six Reasons You Want to Give Up

And why you shouldn't

By Jenifer Aguilar

Are you a small-group pastor or director who is starting to feel tired, discouraged, disappointed, and ready to quit? If so, you definitely aren't alone. Most small-group point people have felt that way at one time or another. You can point to a million different things to rationalize why small-group ministry won't work for you, but success comes only when we keep trying. I want to urge you to stay the course. Whatever your complaint, I want to give you some truth to consider.

Complaint: I don't have adequate support from the senior pastor and the leadership.

Response: Do it anyway.

When you're the point person of a small-group ministry, you look for certain signs of buy in from the leadership: small-group ministry is mentioned from the pulpit, gets the most attention at leadership meetings, occupies the largest space in the newsletter, appears first on the church website, and is the focus of several sermon series. But finding your desired leadership support may not be entirely possible. You may feel you are just doing it alone.

Instead of depending on the leadership to promote your ministry, do it yourself. Lead a transformative small group so people can experience small-group life firsthand, help new leaders form their own groups, invite everyone you talk to, and share stories of transformation. Don't keep what you're doing a secret from the leadership, but don't depend on them to catch the vision right away. Obediently follow the Lord's leading in your small group leadership and trust that the results will come. Before you know it, you'll have influenced lots of people through your small groups who will be willing to make a case for small groups with you. When the leadership sees the results of your hard work, they will take notice.

Complaint: I'm not seeing results.

Response: Wait for them.

Most small group ministries won't show significant growth or results for three to five years. The biggest difference between churches that see results and those that don't is one presses on while the other gives up.

This is an age of instant results, but we can't let that affect how we view small groups. Christians are on a spiritual journey—they do not have instant and full results over night. Small groups bring together many different journeys, and change may take awhile. While some groups may grasp the mission and take off, others will need a great deal of time and energy to become transformational communities. Take heart; it's worth the wait.

A great temptation for a small-group champion or director is to take shortcuts in order to see quick results. Don't fall into this trap. I have seen churches skip leadership training, allow groups to begin without a clear mission, and launch apprentice leaders before they were ready. These shortcuts only make the journey much longer, and they open the door for hurt, frustration, and conflict. Transformation has no magic pill—it simply takes time.

In the meantime, make sure you have a good plan in place. Take time to understand all the requirements of a healthy small-group ministry. Prepare and seek the Lord in prayer, plan and strategize for growth and multiplication, train leaders properly, connect regularly with your leaders, and monitor the groups along the way. This will help you avoid many of the headaches later on. And don't forget to celebrate small wins as they come.

Complaint: I'm not receiving any appreciation or encouragement.

Response: Start giving appreciation and encouragement.

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One thing a small-group champion or director needs to overcome is the hunger for appreciation and recognition. If you're not receiving encouragement, it's not necessarily because people don't appreciate you—they just need to learn how to let you know. Show them how by voicing your appreciation for small-group leaders, church leadership, and staff. This will help build a culture of appreciation and encouragement.

On the other hand, because growth and results take time, people may not notice your hard work until much later. Or worse, they may not notice at all. Do your work as unto the Lord and know that whatever you do for him is never in vain. Know that if you are obeying God, he is happy with your work.

On the practical side, plan small steps which lead to success and celebrate at each small milestone. Don't wait for big achievements. Whenever a small result is achieved, there is always a reason to celebrate. Learn to celebrate quick wins with people under your care. This should give you enough inspiration to work on your next goal.

Complaint: I don't have enough financial support.

Response: Raise your own funds.

While some churches spend a great deal of money to support their small-group ministries, many don't have the money for training, resources, and curriculum. Instead of focusing on what you don't have, figure out how much you need and set out to earn it. Think creatively about how to raise funds: holding garage sales, selling used curriculum to other churches, hosting a seminar or concert and using the profits, or auctioning off donated items. The sky is the limit! Additionally, look for ways to cut costs like sharing curriculum or having group leaders or members buy their own resources.

Additionally, talk to small-group leaders, church leaders, and the church staff about your financial needs. Sometimes the reason churches don't spend more on discipleship and small groups is that they don't understand the financial support they require. Educate people on what you need and why. Even if it's not in the budget this year, they may consider it when they're creating the next year's budget.

Complaint: No matter how much I promote small groups, there are not many people involved.

Response: Lead by influence.

You may be trying to hit a certain percentage of involvement, perhaps something you've heard from a big church or at a conference. The truth is that each church is different, and you shouldn't expect 100 percent involvement from the very beginning. Realistically, not everyone will be willing to try out small groups, especially at first. Trust God to bring them on board at the right time.

Instead of focusing on those who haven't caught the vision yet, focus on those who have. Work on their growth and let them help promote small-group participation. Your transformed small-group members are your most potent promoters—they will serve as "catalysts" for your small-group ministry. Who are the most influential people in your small groups? Enlist them in your small-group promotion team and encourage them to recruit others to small groups.

Don't forget to empower the newest members of small groups to share their experiences. You may have noticed that the most effective promoters of small groups are those who are new and have had life-changing experiences in small groups. Remember the Samaritan woman? She had to share her experience with everyone. Being new and full of zeal, these new attendees can be prone to ridicule, judgment, and persecution by their families and friends. Empower them to share their story and encourage them so their fire doesn't die down.

Also be sure that your small groups are visible around the church as much as possible. Mobilize small groups to serve together in different ministries: ushering, traffic, babysitting, communion, counseling, prayer, hospital visits, and serving at church events. As people begin to experience the significant role of small groups in the local church and in their lives, they will get involved.

Complaint: I've tried everything and nothing works.

Response: Try again . . . and stick with it.

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Remember that this is a process, and it may take longer than you expected. What you learn as you go through these difficulties, though, is never in vain. Continue to learn from each success and failure, making small changes to put into practice what you've learned, and soon you will see leaders increase, small groups multiply, and lives change.

As a caution, don't change things every few weeks, either. Too much change can actually work against you. Your people will grow tired of constantly changing course, and you'll never stick with anything long enough to see results. Take what you've learned and decide the course you want to pursue; then stick with it.

I believe small groups are the best way to disciple Christ-followers. They facilitate deep relationships, mobilize believers to live out their callings, and allow members to experience God in new ways by learning through the Word and others. Small groups also provide the perfect setting for leadership development, missional living, and deep care and support. I want to encourage you that God is behind you, and if you stick with small groups you will see results. Release your expectations and resolve to work alongside God for his purposes and plans.

—JENIFER AGUILAR works with small groups in Iloilo City, Philippines; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Which of these complaints especially resonate with you? Why?
2. What steps can you take to improve your situation?
3. Who are your chief supporters and encouragers? How can you make the best use of their gifts, talents, and excitement for your small-group ministry?

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Help Your Senior Pastor Love Small Groups

Tips for small-group ministry leaders (and senior pastors, too)

By Alan Danielson

Before I began consulting churches about small groups, I had the privilege of leading the small-group ministry at LifeChurch.tv, one of America's largest churches. Through my experience as a consultant and my time at LifeChurch, I have enjoyed hundreds of conversations with small-group ministry champions and leaders. One of the most frequent questions I hear from these ministry leaders is "What can I do to get my pastor to support small groups?"

Regardless of how things currently are with your senior pastor, these tips can improve and maintain your relationship. And if you're a senior pastor who's looking for ways to improve on your end, you'll learn great tips, too. Regardless of your reason for reading this article, the key to having a healthy and productive relationship between small-group ministry leaders and senior pastors is one word: communication.

Communication always has two sides. I'm currently a senior pastor and I've been a small-group ministry leader, so I've experienced both sides. Because of that, I can address both sides of the relationship. My goal is to improve communication between pastors and group ministry leaders so group ministry effectiveness is maximized.

Small-Group Ministry Leaders

Regardless of your title (small-group pastor, champion, director, etc.), if you are the person responsible for group ministry in your church, this portion of the article is for you. To improve communication with your senior pastor, I urge you to implement the following suggestions.

1. Put yourself in your lead pastor's shoes.

Ask the following questions regarding your senior pastor. Is my pastor in a group? Does my pastor speak about groups at weekend services? If you answered "yes" to either or both of these questions, it's likely that your pastor is supportive of small groups.

Ask yourself, is my pastor stressed? I'm willing to bet that you answered "yes" to this question. Most pastors are worked hard, spread thin, stretched, attacked, and criticized. You may feel like your pastor doesn't support your ministry because he or she doesn't pay as much attention to your ministry as you'd like. Keep in mind, however, that senior pastors face the same kind of stresses that CEOs face. On top of that pressure, senior pastors are Satan's favorite targets. Our spiritual enemy wants us to think less of our pastors. Satan wants us to believe the worst about our pastors. Don't add to your pastor's stress by falling into Satan's trap.

2. Get inside your pastor's head.

The only way for you to truly understand your pastor is to seek honest answers to honest questions. Interview your pastor. Spend time with your pastor figuring out what aspects of biblical community make his or her eyes light up. Discover his or her heartbeat for community. Use the following questions as a template for your interview:

- From your perspective, why do we have small-group ministry?
- What is your desire for our small-group ministry?
- What are your favorite biblical passages and/or stories related to small groups?
- In your mind, what will successful small-group ministry in our church look like in one year, five years, and ten years?
- How will I know the small-group ministry is successful in your eyes?
- Are there any group strategies or approaches that you believe *won't* work in our cultural context?
- Are there any group strategies or approaches that you think *will* work in our cultural context?

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- Does our church need or want a small-group ministry that grows quickly or one that grows steadily?
- What would you like to know about progress in our small-group ministry?
- How often would you like me to communicate with you about small-group ministry progress?

Small groups will work better in your context if you are committed to asking and getting answers to these questions. This exercise will give you immediate insight regarding expectations, strategies, and communication. Realistically, if you aren't willing to spend the energy getting answers to these questions, you're in the wrong church or you've already given up on the relationship you have with your pastor.

3. Communicate how your ministry is winning and losing.

Tell your pastor about your successes. Celebrate your wins! Share stories of changed lives and victories of goals met. Sharing the good news helps your pastor know what efforts are being successful in the small-group ministry.

You can't just share the good news, though. Tell your pastor about your ministry struggles, too. Be honest about how you assess your ministry's progress. Don't ever blow smoke. Nothing erodes trust with a leader faster than false or inaccurate information. Your pastor wants you to succeed, so don't be afraid to share your honest evaluations about the ministry. Your pastor can't help you be successful while being kept in the dark.

4. Ask for your pastor's support.

I once had a young small-group pastor ask me how to get the support of his senior pastor, and I replied with a question: "Have you asked for his support?" The young man stammered for a moment then said, "It never occurred to me." The moral of this story: ask your pastor for help when you need it. If you need your pastor to make an announcement regarding groups, ask for it. If you need your pastor to come to a training meeting, ask him or her to be there. If you need your pastor to promote a curriculum, ask him or her to review it and write a recommendation. If you need help recruiting new leaders, ask for your pastor's support. The bottom line is this: never say "no" for your pastor. Clearly communicate what you need and when you need it. Give your pastor the opportunity to say "yes" or "no" on his or her own.

5. Give more support than you request.

This final point is the most important. Do you remember Jesus' command, "Love your neighbor as yourself?" The principle of that command applies to your relationship with your pastor. If you want your pastor to support you, you must support your pastor. Be your pastor's number one advocate. Never talk negatively about your pastor. Don't disrespect his or her authority. Don't roll your eyes at his or her suggestions. Ask how you can help. Serve your pastor. By putting yourself last, you will gain your pastor's respect. Your pastor will be much more likely to support your ministry when there is mutual respect and support.

An Assignment

Ready for a tough assignment? The rest of this article is written for senior pastors. Ask your senior pastor to read it. Be humble about it! Say something like, "I'd like for us to work together more effectively. I've been thinking about how I can support your ministry better and I'd like to ask you to do the same for me."

Senior Pastors

Every church with small-group ministry must have one indispensable staff person. No, I'm not talking about a small-group pastor. I'm not talking about a small-group champion, administrator, director, or coordinator. The position every successful small-group church must have is a Senior Pastor of Small Groups. What do I mean? As a senior pastor myself, I believe I can say with absolute certainty that no church can have a truly successful small-group ministry unless the senior pastor is the number one supporter of the ministry. Below are some practical ideas that can help you make your small-group ministry a smashing success.

1. Be the loudest voice.

Don't waste money hiring a small-group pastor or budgeting for your small-group ministry if you aren't committed to being the most vocal proponent of the ministry. Rick Warren sets a fantastic example for us all when he says, "I'm the small-group pastor of Saddleback Church." That philosophy has become my own, and I can't recommend it strongly enough.

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Champion small-group announcements from the stage and on video. Mention groups in every sermon. Tell a story about your own group or say something simple like, "Maybe you need to talk about today's message in your small group." The point is this: talk about groups as often as possible so they will become a part of your church's DNA.

2. Share the blame.

Senior pastors who are not the Senior Pastor of Small Groups in their churches can find themselves quickly frustrated with the results of their small-group ministries. They'll sometimes blame the staff members who are in charge of groups by saying things like, "I made a bad hire." They might blame the members of the church saying, "My people just aren't interested in groups." They occasionally even blame the culture at large by saying, "Small groups just aren't relevant anymore." Before leveling blame for small-group ministry failure, ask yourself how you may have contributed to the failure.

Resist the urge to blame staff. I'm currently a senior pastor, but I've also been a small-group pastor. I've also consulted with churches all across America regarding small groups. In all of this I've learned that no small-group pastor, no matter how gifted, will be successful without the senior pastor's partnership.

Resist the urge to blame the church. I've seen clear evidence that the people in a church will value what their senior pastor values. When church members see the senior pastor's strong commitment to groups, their own commitment grows as well.

Resist the urge to blame the culture. People in our culture are desperate to belong. They are naturally "grouping" with people who love them, accept them, challenge them, and care for them all the time. TV shows like "Friends" and "Big Bang Theory" demonstrate this readily. With coffee shops on every corner, it's hard to honestly say that small groups are not culturally relevant.

When groups aren't working like you think they should, ask how you can take some of the blame and be part of the solution. This humble approach will earn the respect of your followers. It will also help you focus more on their successes than their failures.

3. Become passionate about small groups.

You'll most effectively promote groups when you're in one and when you are educated about them. So be in a small group and be committed to it. Then read some books on the subject. A few suggestions are *Creating Community* by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* by Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Simple Small Groups* by Bill Search, and *Small Groups Big Impact* by Jim Egli and Dwight Marable.

There are many other ways to support small-group ministry as well. Consider writing a few small-group discussion questions and tacking them on at the end of your sermon notes in the bulletin. Champion small-group real estate by making sure small groups have great representation in the lobby, on your website, and in your bulletin. Refuse to only focus on groups when something is out of place or broken; instead, stay up to date with progress. Demonstrate your care for the ministry by being interested in it all the time.

I recognize you are stretched thin, and that the demands on your time are huge. I also realize that expecting small-group ministry success without showing your full support and commitment is an exercise in futility. Your time is valuable, so don't waste it by only partially being committed to small groups.

—ALAN DANIELSON is the Senior Pastor of New Life Bible Church in Norman, Oklahoma; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. When have you said "yes" or "no" for your senior pastor? When was the last time you asked for your senior pastor's support?
2. How well do you understand your senior pastor's thoughts about and dreams for small-group ministry? How can you become more familiar with them?
3. How often do you update your senior pastor about the progress and "wins" in small-group ministry? How can you ensure you are doing this on a regular basis?

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Get Your Church Leadership On Board

Five tips to make your church leadership your biggest proponents

By Spence Shelton

Ever wonder if anyone else on your staff team understands the value of small groups? If so, *thank you* because it means I'm not alone! I've stayed up late into the night staring into darkness saying to myself, "I think I'm the only one at this church who actually believes in this stuff."

What's helped me get more sleep is making sure the leadership at my church is on board with small groups. Of course, it's easier said than done. It's difficult to motivate your leadership to champion small-group ministry. But it can be done. Here are five principles I've learned to turn your church's leaders into the biggest proponents of group life in your church.

Repent and Believe

This may sting a little, but before you can start the work of trying to build God's church, you need to learn that there's nothing you can do to build God's church. The reason we get anxious, worried, frustrated, angry, and depressed about the success of our small-group ministry often comes from an underlying sin: pride. As leaders, we have a tendency to believe the success of our ministry rests on our strategic prowess. Therefore, if we are not heard and our plans are not executed, we fear the church will suffer. This is pride.

Let me relay something that is really humbling: God doesn't need you. He doesn't need your plans, your creativity, or your vision casting. The church is his, not yours. He loves it far more than you are even capable of. He's promised never to leave it. His Spirit raises people from death to life, unites the church, creates biblical community, and brings believers to maturity in Christ. There is not a single place you are needed. So if you've been fighting anxiety in this area of ministry, I encourage you to confess that to God, repent, and then rest! Rest in God's promise for his church.

Now some great news: though he doesn't need you, God *wants* to use you to build his church. And the aim we're all going for in small groups is what he's called the church to be: healthy gospel-centered community. Know that God's mission for the church is the mission of small-group ministry. There is power in that! So believe that God wants to build the community of faith you are in. Then pray for him to unleash his power to do it!

Clarity Is Critical

I've found it easier to get key leaders on board when I am able to clearly communicate the concept of small-group ministry. As point people, it is our job to do all of the research, read all of the books, and work through all of the revisions of philosophy and strategy. You should spend time doing that hard work. In fact, this will make you a better leader as well as reinforce the power of your communication to those you want to get on board.

We must then distill our philosophy and strategy into clear language that can be mentally digested in one conversation. This may be hard work, but the payoff is significant. Here are a few of questions you should be able to answer in one short thought, questions that church leaders will ask you.

What is a small group?

Why do we need small groups?

What is your plan for small groups?

What is the first step you need me to take?

Can you answer each of those in a sentence or two? Do your answers get you excited about small groups? If your answers seem long or uninteresting to you, they will definitely feel that way to other church leaders. Try

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practicing your answers on some friends who will shoot straight about your communication. Do not underestimate the power of clear, compelling communication.

Identify the Wins

I was in sales before becoming a pastor, and this point brings me back to my sales training. At the center, sales is about being able to answer the question "What's in it for me?" Like it or not, if you cannot articulate why small groups are critical for your church, you will not get any traction. When you talk to your lead pastor, talk about how discipleship happens in relationships, not by listening alone to a sermon. In fact, the best thing for the weekly sermons is to provide small groups where people in the church can actively engage the message and Scripture presented.

When you talk to the missions team, explain how small groups can become catalysts for local and global mission. In reality, group life is an expression of biblical community at work. And healthy biblical community, not an audience that quietly listens, will transform the world for the glory of God. Even the finance team should be excited about group life. If group life is going well, people grow in their understanding of the gospel, become more generous, and, in turn, become joyful givers!

Selling small groups isn't too difficult—they really do benefit the entire church. Simply connect the dots from Scripture to your present day context.

You Replicate What You Celebrate

Storytelling is one of our chief roles as small-group point people. If you want to get more people on board with group life, don't just tell them how great it is, show them. Find stories of life change and share them. If you are trying to get groups going, find stories from other churches. If your small groups are already meeting, find out what God is doing in and through your small groups. Then share these stories everywhere—in your weekend worship services, in hallway conversations with fellow leaders, in five-minute asides with your pastoral team, and anywhere else someone will listen. There is never a bad time to share what God is up to!

Even if your church leadership doesn't understand small-group ministry yet, they understand the power of a transformed life. What you know, and what others will learn, is that small groups are catalysts for life change, and stories showing life change will convince others to join you in this journey.

Share Ownership to Spread Buy In

To move group life from marginalized to mainstream, ask your church leadership to participate in small-group ministry. It's going to be hard for the leadership to really own the small-group vision if they're not involved in the ministry in some way. Depending on where you are in your small-group ministry, ask for participation in different ways. If you're just starting out, invite your lead pastor or other leaders to participate in a small group with you. Or you could ask a few leaders to serve as small-group leaders for short-term groups. If your ministry is more established, you might ask them to coach a couple of small-group leaders. Get creative with how they can experience small-group ministry. The best way to get others to buy in to the small-group vision is to let them own a piece of it.

Three Action Steps to Get You Going

1. **Pray.** You don't need to wait another minute before you start creating buy in. Spend time before God, seeking his power and blessing over group life at your church. Ask for wisdom on how to proceed.
2. **Clarify.** Do the hard work of clarifying why small-group ministry is so important to your church. Answer the four questions above in clear, concise, and compelling language. I promise you'll be happy with the results.
3. **Find a story.** If you already have small groups up and running, ask your small-group leaders for stories of life change. Ask leaders to set aside one small-group meeting to share testimonies of how group members are being changed by the small group. Then have small-group leaders e-mail the stories to you. I love having the stories in my e-mail inbox. I save them in a special folder. Then, whenever I'm looking for a story to share with leaders or an illustration at weekend services, I can pull out a few stories of what God is doing.

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As I stated before, God doesn't need us to cast vision, lead training sessions, or spread the news of what he's doing in small groups. At the same time, he chooses to involve us. What an amazing privilege!

Small groups can be a great catalyst for making disciples, and if your church wants to develop disciples, they will benefit from getting behind small-group ministry. So in the power of Jesus, go after that disciple-making vision with everything you've got!

—SPENCE SHELTON is the Small Groups Pastor at Summit Church in Durham, North Carolina; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. In what specific ways has pride affected how you see your small-group ministry? Have you repented of it?
2. How would you answer the author's four questions? How might you make your answers more clear, concise, and compelling?
3. How can you more effectively share small-group stories with other church leaders? What steps can you take to ensure you are regularly hearing stories from small-group leaders?

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Small Groups Aren't for Me!

Combating common excuses

By Allen White

To many churchgoers, "you should be in a small group" sounds like the modern version of "everybody ought to go to Sunday school." The problem is that "ought" is not a strong motivator for most people. If you want to motivate people, give them a cause to champion or a purpose to support. Using "ought" as your primary motivator will just convince people they ought to try another church.

When pastors and directors make invitations for folks to join groups, there's usually a mixed response. Some will join; others won't—and they'll give a number of reasons why. Let's focus on some of the common excuses that people give for not joining a group. They will help us better understand the people at our churches better and how to communicate more effectively about small groups.

"I'm too busy."

Students are busy, retired people are busy, and parents are busy—we're all busy! "I'm too busy" really means "I have other priorities" or "I have better things to do." People make time to do the things they want to do. If you're hearing "I'm too busy," it simply means they're choosing something over small groups.

In order to move small group higher on their priority lists, they will need to demote or eliminate something else. Most people don't make changes like this unless there are compelling reasons for the change, so give them an opportunity to try out small groups and see why they're important. If you offer groups for a limited time period—like a trial run—and offer groups at times that could fit in their schedules, they might give it a try. Additionally, share stories from small groups at weekend services and from the pulpit. If people see the value of small groups—and not just because they're a fun, social hang out—they'll be more likely to reprioritize.

"I already have friends."

Too often we simply tell people to join a small group to make friends. But this doesn't speak to people the same way anymore. Years ago, Leith Anderson gave an illustration of people being like Lego bricks. Every Lego brick has a certain number of connection points, or dots, on the top. Some have one or two. Others have eight, ten, or more. In a person's life, each dot represents a relationship. Think about your relationships: family, friends, coworkers, sports team members, book club members, parents of your kids' friends, etc. Most people have all of the dots on their Lego bricks filled. There's no room left for a small group.

So let's think about this in a new way: how can you help people leverage their existing relationships to form small groups? They don't need to divorce their friends to join a small group—their friends can be their small group! You can train one person to be the leader, or if you follow more of a host program, simply provide a DVD or curriculum to help them talk about spiritual things. There is great power in asking people, "Who in your life would enjoy or benefit from a group study?" Groups very quickly will go well beyond the four walls of any church.

"We have kids."

The easier you make childcare, the easier it is for people to join a group. Whether the group pools their money to hire a babysitter or rotates responsibility for the kids among group members, this is a necessary part of groups for young families, especially at the beginning. For more on childcare solutions, read my [blog post](#) or "[The Childcare Checklist](#)."

"I'm already involved in ministry."

Serving in a ministry is a great way to allow God to use us in our church body. It's also a great way to connect new people to your church. When they serve, they feel a sense of ownership. But, activity doesn't guarantee

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community—just because someone serves as a greeter every week doesn't mean he or she feels connected or has a safe place to go for support.

Most groups build community around a Bible study. The idea is to create a place where people are known and know each other. They care for each other, support each other, and share God's Word with each other. Can similar goals be met in a group that forms around serving instead of a Bible study? I think so. This is more than ushers joining hands before they pick up their stack of bulletins. Serving teams can share personal needs and God's Word together. This may involve a meeting apart from the serving opportunity. For instance, the ushers could meet every Tuesday night to share life together in addition to serving at weekend services. The worship team could share a devotional time before beginning practice each week. When serving teams gather for intentional community, needs are met without adding another circle of friends or another ministry to the mix.

"I've had a bad experience with small groups."

Most people who've participated in groups over the years realize groups aren't perfect. As Steve Gladen from Saddleback Church says, "If you had bad service at a restaurant, would you stop eating at restaurants in general?" While you might not go back to that particular restaurant, I doubt you'd stop going to restaurants in general.

There are good small groups, and there are not-so-good small groups. But a bad experience in one group doesn't guarantee a bad experience in every group. Help people get their feet wet in a new small group through a six-week study. It's a great way to test drive a small group. If the group works, they can stick with the group. If the group doesn't work, there's a natural time to step out. Letting people know that they have time to decide whether to commit frees them to try out a small group without feeling guilty if it doesn't work out.

"I don't trust other people."

This statement comes from a lot of pain. Granted, there are some people who aren't trustworthy, but when someone globalizes distrust to the entire world and all seven billion people in it, there's certainly a deeper issue.

Distrust comes from fear: "If I let others in my life, they will only hurt me." Let the person know that you hear their concern and that what's shared in small groups is confidential. You can also let them know they can attend for a few meetings before committing to the group—a sort of trial period.

On the other hand, this could be a much deeper issue. If the person recognizes this is an issue, the first step might be counseling or a support group. A regular small group won't be the cure. In fact, this person's presence in a small group might create a bad experience for everyone involved.

"I don't want to be part of a small group that will just end up splitting."

What we often call multiplying, dividing, or birthing actually feels a lot more like divorce. We invite new members and grow the size of the group until it's too large. Then we split the group down the middle, damaging relationships and group dynamics in a traumatic experience.

While I would never want a group to become ingrown or stagnant, I don't push birthing unless a group feels the pain of an overcrowded house. Over time, the need will arise on its own. By encouraging the positives of inviting and including others, groups will eventually see the need to subgroup and later form new groups. The driving force is from the group, though, not the small-group pastor, so it feels much less traumatic.

There are also other less-traumatic forms of [birthing](#) you can emphasize such as commissioning a leader to form a new group without splitting the current group. You can also have an apprentice leader take over the current group while the existing leader leaves to start a new group.

"My relationship with God is personal."

A believer's relationship with God is *personal*, but it's not *private*. While every believer should experience quiet times alone with God, God didn't intend for us to live our lives alone. Jesus himself lived a life in community with his disciples. God lives in community as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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Before I was in a group, I was a great Christian in my own mind. I kept away from the things I shouldn't do and did many things I should. But because I was my own judge, I felt I was a lot better than I really was. Letting other believers in helps us to gain a truer picture of ourselves. We also have people to encourage us and allay our fears. The Bible has much to say about encouraging one another, building each other up, and spurring one another on. Faith is lived out in relationship, not in isolation.

People resistant to group life need help crossing the bridge. Some need a challenge. Some need encouragement. Some need an easy entry point. Everyone in our churches comes from a different place—spiritually, emotionally, and geographically. By offering multiple entry points into groups, we can serve their needs for community rather than expecting them to fulfill our need for effectiveness or success.

—ALLEN WHITE blogs at allenwhite.org; copyright 2012 Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. What are the common excuses you hear for not joining a small group?
2. How do you normally respond to excuses? After reading this article, do you feel you will respond differently? Why or why not?
3. What steps can you take in your communication about small groups that can help to correct common excuses and misconceptions about small groups?

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Minute to Win It

Promote small groups in 60 seconds

By Steve Grusendorf

I hate to admit it, but this past summer I was sucked into watching ordinary people attempt silly carnival games for big money—I'm a "Minute to Win It" fan. There is something incredibly captivating about the show: a lot can happen in 60 seconds. The producers of "Minute to Win It" realized this and capitalized on it. So as people who are passionate about small groups, why shouldn't we do the same? I am not saying we should have group members balance six dice on a craft stick held in their mouths as an icebreaker (although that's not a bad idea). But we should have a plan to promote small groups in 60 seconds—from the stage or pulpit, in conversations, and in the church lobby.

Many of you would agree that one of the biggest challenges facing small-group ministries is limited promotion. There never seems to be enough time to get a promotion from the platform. There is a struggle to find adequate space within the weekly bulletin to list all of your small groups. The church website is, well, the church website. Yet as frustrating as this reality may be, we don't have to be defeated. By concentrating on promoting small groups one minute at a time you no longer have to worry about the "big" promotion, instead you can have countless interactions that involve one or two people at a time.

Consider the possibilities if your small-group ministry caught a vision for recruiting small-group members one minute at a time. If one person showed up 10 minutes before your worship service and stayed 10 minutes afterward, they would have the potential of talking with 20 different individuals about small groups in a single week. Now imagine if that were two, three, or four people! By coming in 20 minutes early and staying 20 minutes late, a small band of 50 could speak to every single attendee of a church of 2,000 in a single week.

The question is not *if* we should but *how* we can win people to small groups one minute at a time. The key is creativity. Take a minute to consider each of the following ways you can promote the benefits of your small-group ministry in 60 seconds or less. Allow them to serve as a starting point to get your creative juices flowing. Then go for it!

Faces of Change

Collect two or three stories of life change due to small-group ministry from different small-group members. Use the stories to create cards to hand out at weekend services. Simply use a word processing program to divide up a standard sheet of paper into quarters. Include the story, a picture of the group member, the group information, and his or her e-mail address (or your e-mail address). Print and cut out the cards. Whenever you meet new people at church or people not involved in small groups, pull out a card and offer to share with them one brief story of how a life was affected by your small-group ministry. In 60 seconds or less, you will leave them with the name, face, and contact information for small group.

iPad Party

Ahead of time, ask three or four group members with iPads to join you after weekend services in a mini recruitment drive. Have each wirelessly connect to the Internet and have the following information on hand:

- A map of the locations of groups.
- A small-group application form that allows perspective group members to sign up immediately to be in a group (could be an online form, a Google Document, or even just a spreadsheet).

Once this is ready, release these individuals to mingle within the congregation after the service has concluded. In 60 seconds or less, potential group members can see where groups are located, sign up for a group, and give accurate contact information for follow up.

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Survey Says

Prepare a three-question survey to give to your congregants after a church service. You can use these survey questions to understand how your congregants feel about small groups. They also help to break the ice and provide an opportunity to invite people to join small groups. Consider these possible questions:

1. Are you part of a small group?
2. How would you describe what a small group is?
3. How might/has joining a small group make/made a difference in your life?
4. What are some of the barriers that prevent you from joining a small group?
5. Would your ability to attend a small group increase if childcare were provided?
6. What is the number one thing you would love to gain from being in a small group?
7. Would you like to be part of a small group that discusses the weekend sermon together? Why or why not?
8. Would your interest in small groups increase if they provided regular serving opportunities?
9. Have you been in a small group in the past? How did your time in that group end?

When people finish the survey, thank them for taking 60 seconds to assist you. Then hand them a card with information on joining a small group and any helpful contact information. We also like to provide a certificate for a free coffee from our church coffee stand. You could also do this for a local coffee shop.

Limited time does not mean limited opportunity. If you believe that small groups can make a difference in the life of your friends and family you need to be prepared to capitalize on every moment afforded. Let's commit to changing lives one minute at a time through small groups.

—STEPHEN GRUSENDORF is a pastor in Wisconsin and blogs at www.martyrpriest.com; copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. Do you normally depend on the church to promote small groups or do you take the initiative? Explain your answer.
2. Which of these three ideas are appealing to you? How can you implement the idea(s)?
3. What other ideas can you come up with for promoting small groups? (Hint: think outside the box)

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Further Exploration

Websites and books to help small-group directors, pastors, and champions share the vision for small groups

[SmallGroups.com](#). We specialize in equipping churches and small-group leaders to make disciples and strengthen community.

- [Casting a Vision for Small Groups](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Improving Communication for Effective Small-Group Ministry](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Launching a Church-Wide Campaign](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Physical Presence Matters](#) (Practical Ministry Skills)
- [Small-Group Director Orientation Guide](#) (Orientation Guide)

[BuildingChurchLeaders.com](#). A website with practical training tools for various church leadership roles.

[Kyria.com](#). A website ministering to women leaders within the church.

[LeadershipJournal.net](#). This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

[Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture](#) by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits. The authors describe how they established a small-group culture at North Point Community Church (Multnomah, 2005; ISBN 978-1590523964).

[The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love](#) by Dr. James Bryan Smith. Discover what it looks like to live life with other apprentices of Jesus (Intervarsity Press, 2010; ISBN 978-0830835331).

[Groups: The Life-Giving Power of Community, Pursuing Spiritual Transformation](#) by John Ortberg, Laurie Pederson, and Judson Poling. You're invited to discover the rewards and risks of life in community (Zondervan, 2000; ISBN 978-0310220763).

[Love One Another: Becoming the Church Jesus Longs For](#) by Jerry Sittser. Examine the "one another" commands to discover what biblical community should look like (Intervarsity Press, 2008; ISBN 978-0830834495).

[Sticky Church](#) by Larry Osborne. The author shares his success in closing the back door through sermon-based small groups (Zondervan, 2008; ISBN 978-0310285083).