Leading Effective
life changing
Small Groups
In Your Church
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Why Small Groups?

Why do we need Small Groups? Don’t we have enough to do already? Isn’t it enough that we come to church Sabbath mornings?

The emphasis on Small Groups is not about another extra programme or event but rather experiencing what church is really meant to be.

Small Groups...

- Are about a deeper level of community.
- Provide the best context for growing spiritual maturity and participation within the life of the church.
- Provide a context for personal evangelism.
- Decentralize church leadership and care
- Enable more people to serve
- Offer maximum flexibility

A caring community

A studying community

A Worshipping community

A Praying community

A multiplying community

A serving community
Small Groups In The Early Church

When you read Acts you can’t help but be excited by how the church is described, an energetic, vibrant, growing community. While the Acts 2 church was set in a different time and place there are principles that are transferable.

In Acts 2:42-47 we find that some key factors in this church are:

- **Teaching** – the value of teaching and training in discipleship was highlighted – read on in Acts to get an idea of the importance of teaching and training.
- **Fellowship** – all the believers were together and had everything in common. Even though there were at least three thousand members and the numbers were being added to daily there was a real sense of community.
- **Prayer** – Everything that happened in the church was immersed in prayer
- They met in Small Groups – They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.
- They worshipped together – Praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people
- Their evangelistic excitement for the gospel was catching – And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.
- **Every member** was involved - Early church does not have a priesthood – it was the priesthood, a natural part of being a Christian was ministry. We don’t read of people being burnt out, but rather ‘the work proceeded with joy’. Delegation was effectively happening, people were aware of what being a part of the church meant - giving every member an outlet to serve.

Small Groups were the key building block for the early church. Ministry happened in the context of Small Groups.
The Environment for Generating Small Groups

Understanding Your Church
Small groups often fail in Adventist churches because we often start out underlying values that do not foster small group life. Healthy Small groups need to grow out of the right environment. The culture of your church shapes the success or failure of a small group ministry.

Shaping a Healthy Picture of Church?
What is the first picture that comes to your mind when you think of the word church?
A healthy small group ministry is based on a correct understanding of what the church is to be and do.

1 - What The Church Is To Be?
Biblical Pictures of the church (Community on a Mission)

This is a crucial building block for small groups.

To Say Community Matters Is Like Saying Oxygen Matters

‘The yearning to attach and connect, to love and be loved, is the fiercest longing of the soul... Our need for community with people and the God who made us is to the human spirit what food and air and water are to the human body.’ John Ortberg, Everybody’s Normal Till You Get To Know Them

Community is not optional for Christians. One of the reasons the church exists is to provide fellowship for believers. One of the reasons you exist is to play a part in that fellowship.

Randy Frazee says it well:
The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be the church. This is a God ordained gathering of people that is so strong that even “the gates of hell will not overcome it”
Randy Frazee. Making Room for Life, Zondervan, 2003, 33
2 - What Is The Church To Do?

Our Five Purposes
The church must be structured in such a way that the following five purposes are facilitated:
(1). **Connecting** - genuine fellowship must be facilitated among believers (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:24-25; Philemon 2:1-4; 1 John 1:3.)
(2). **Worshipping** – The church must facilitate worship (John 4:23-24; Acts 2:42)
(3). **Growing** – Instruction, reproof and spiritual growth must happen in an intentional way. (Acts 20:28-32; 2 Timothy 2:2; Ephesians 4:12-13)
(4). **Sharing** - A continuous effort to find lost people must be made. (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15, Acts 1:8; Colossians 1:28.)
(5). **Serving** – Each member is to be glorifying God and edifying one another through ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12, 1 Peter 4:10, 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12:6-11)

**Seventh-day Adventists Believe…**

The church is the **community** of believers who confess **Jesus Christ** as Lord and Saviour. In continuity with the people of God in Old Testament times, we are called out from the world; and we join together for **worship**, for **fellowship**, for **instruction** in the Word, for the **celebration** of the Lord’s Supper, for **service** to all mankind, and for the worldwide **proclamation** of the gospel. The church derives its authority from **Christ**, who is the incarnate Word, and from the Scriptures which are the written Word. The church is **God’s family**: adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the **body of Christ**, a **community** of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head.

The church is the **bride** for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a **glorious church**, the faithful of all the ages, the **purchase of His blood**, not having spot or wrinkle, but **holy** and without blemish –

*Fundamental Belief, 12 (was no 11 before introduction of new fundamental at 2005 General Conference Session)*
Being a Church of Small Groups
not a church with Small Groups

A church of Small Groups is one that has placed Small Groups at the core of its ministry. Small Group ministry is not another program; it’s the very environment of the church. Many churches have small-groups, however on most occasions these groups are an additional ministry of the church and the life of the church does not really happen at this level.

In a church of Small Groups:
- The Small Group meeting is given priority in time, resourcing and training.
- The Small Groups will become the building blocks through which other programs are filtered. e.g a church wide reaping project would involve the various Small Groups working together and the people then being channelled into groups where they are grown spiritually, trained for ministry and ultimately bring other people to Jesus through the group.
- The Small Group becomes a primary focus of evangelism.
- The Small Group becomes the place where people develop community, where they are nurtured, where they can fellowship, where they feel supported.
- The Small Group becomes the place where people can minister to one another and have the support to minister to people in the community.
- The church is structured in a way that ensures Small Groups are supervised, integrated and resourced to grow.
- Teams for outreach, service and ministry placement are made up from the groups. Initially this would have to co-exist with a system that also integrates people who are not in groups but are in units within the pastoral groups.

The Small Groups become a Web of muscles and sinews in the church body.
Small Groups are not an appendage, demanding attention like all the other programs, they are the program.

The Small Groups come together on Sabbath for wider training, and worship as a congregation.

A Small Groups structure ‘meta-church’ is the Biblical way to minister and handle rapid church growth (which we are to expect as end-time issues become clearer). The meta-church concept allows for effective church planting and increased ministry involvement.
As Christian Schwartz puts it, after studying over one thousand growing churches worldwide: “the most outstanding principle for church growth is the multiplication of Small Groups”

**Small Group Values**
Growing a Small Group Ministry

1. Pray for God’s direction in the life of your church and how to respond to His burden on your heart for small groups

2. Work through small groups values, vision, mission.

3. Determine what a successful small group ministry will look like in your church environment.

   What do we want to turn people into?
   How will we form groups?
   How will we integrate the small group network with the other ministries of the church.
   Who will lead our groups? How will we Identify, recruit and develop leaders and apprentices
   What will be the balance of discipleship, evangelism and other purposes?
   How do we address problems in our groups?
   How will groups relate to our church?
   What happens when a small group becomes a large group?

Shape small group life with cultural appropriateness in mind

Will you have groups that are shaped for children and teens?

In most cases, don’t ask the congregation to volunteer for small groups and assign them to leaders

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4. Identify, resource and train leaders

Care for your leaders on an on-going basis
Be intentional about raising up new leaders and creating an environment of on-going care

Don’t
Recruit leaders and neglect to train them
Train a bunch of leaders in a classroom setting divorced from the environment of a small group

5. Understand change dynamics in your context. Know that the entire congregation will not be on board at the beginning. Pace the rate of change. Successful transition usually takes 3-5 years.

6. Start small with a pilot group of innovators. Train them in a functioning small group

7. Begin two to three prototype groups with early adopters – make sure you have a trained leader and apprentice in each group

8. Allow the system to grow through multiplication rather than trying to implement a church wide system in entirety

9. Make sure that evangelism happens in the prototype groups

10. Maintain the desired DNA in each group (evaluation tools, mentorship)

11. Ensure there are regular coaching and vision casting opportunities

**Continuing care for leaders is critical to the on-going life of small groups**

12. Continue to promote a small groups culture.

13. Raise up new leaders. Few leaders will miraculously appear without intentional recruitment and training.

14. Recognise and use all levels of training
   on-the-job training for small group experience
   personal mentoring for character and skill development
   classroom style instruction for conceptual ideas
   leadership community meetings for mutual support and visioning
in-service retreats for in-depth training

15. Make sure accountability systems are in place
16. Put in place systems for multiplication.

Speak to the average Small Group leader about multiplication and they often react with fear ‘Don't break up our group!’. A healthy Small Group does not exist for itself (while acknowledging some groups might need to be closed for a period to address a specific issue)

The group will, every 6-12 months, grow to a point where it is ready to multiply. A process of training a new leadership nucleus and having a healthy movement of people into a new group will be followed.

We need to be careful in that we don't become so prescriptive about how a group should work that people become servants to the Small Group structure rather than served by it. The structure needs to facilitate leadership development, resource availability, adequate supervision and training around the values of our Small Group ministry. The exact nature of the group, meeting time, frequency etc is something that will vary form group to group.

**Ideas for Shaping a Small Groups Culture**

- Weekly small group resources to match the worship service
- Small group resource area
- Profile in testimonies and baptisms
- Preacher gives reference to small group life
- Articles and stories promoting small group life.

**Small Group Leader Skills**

- Establishing a covenant
- Understanding group dynamics
- Creating a holistic meeting schedule
- Planning logistics
- Asking good questions
- Sharing group care
- Preparing for future growth
- What people need to Know and Do
Stages of Small Group Life

Most small groups will find themselves moving through a series of stages:
Forming – honeymoon stage, people excited
Storming – in the conflict crises stage. Will stop or go deeper
Norming – Community stage. Needs to be careful not to get stuck here
Performing – Mission stage
Reforming – Multiplication

Four Keys For Leading Your Small Group
Adapted from the Saddleback Students Small Group Guide

Connections
"We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us." 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Superficial community exists at nearly every level of our lives, and we often settle for clubs and groups and miss out on powerful relationships. Your small group should be a safe place where people feel freedom to be real and take risks in sharing their struggles. The first step to creating this environment should be taken by the leaders.

Commitment
"Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." James 3:1

Your task is not to be taken lightly. As a mature believer, you have within you the ability to communicate God’s truth. Be committed with your diligence to prepare for your small group time. Follow up on important issues.

 Authenticity
"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." Colossians 3:16

Don’t seek to offer something that you don’t have. Maintain a vibrant relationship with Christ. Make filling yourself up with God’s Word your first priority, and then passing that along to others will require less effort, as you’ll be offering directly from your heart.
"The greatest thing we have to offer our people is not our education. It is not our good ideas. It isn't even our gifts and abilities. It is the fruit of the time we have spent with the Saviour, The utterly unique and unparalleled thing that happens to us When we are simply In His Presence."

Ben Patterson

Maturity

"But solid foods for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." Hebrews 6:11

The ultimate goal of your investment in students’ lives is to encourage them to grow closer to God. Help them mature in intimacy with God and the knowledge of the truth.

Some Small Group Do’s and Don’ts

Adapted from the Saddleback Students Small Group Guide

Don’t be afraid of silence.
Let participants sit for a moment and think.

Do value input.
Do whatever it takes to affirm the comments of participants, but do not be artificial with your praise. Be delicate with answers that are clearly wrong (you probably don’t want to put a big red “idiot” stamp on their forehead). Do not feel like you have to finish, complete, or correct a student’s answer.

Don’t feel like you have to know all the answers.
We are human, and it’s good for your group members to see that you are limited. You are, but most of them don’t think so.

Don’t read questions off the leader’s guide.
Understand the questions and be prepared to ask them in your own terms. Feel free to generate your own questions during your preparation AND even on the spot.

**Don’t talk more than the group members.**
Ask questions to generate discussion, ask people to explain their answers and go into more depth. Allow multiple members to respond, even if the first person gets the “right” answer.

**Do echo some responses to your questions.**
If a group member answer or comment is long-winded or unclear, repeat it back (summarize it) for clarity. This proves you are listening and it keeps the attention of the rest of the group.

**Don’t move to a new question too quickly.**
After person answers a question, ask, “Would anyone like to add to that?” or “Does everyone agree/disagree with that?”

**Do keep the group focused and on purpose.**
Don’t go down a rabbit trail and leave the topics and/or Scripture passages unless something “big time” comes up (e.g., a family crisis). Be sensitive to the Spirit (but that’s not an excuse to be lazy and let the group wander). Wandering is easy; being a leader isn’t!

**Do require and maintain confidentiality.**
This allows group members to open up because they feel their environment is safe. However, don’t keep potentially dangerous information to yourself (e.g. abuse, suicide, destructive intentions, etc.).

**Don’t be discouraged.**
When (not IF) you have a bad night. There is not a small group leader alive in the world that hasn’t had bad nights.
The Art of Asking Questions
Adapted from the Saddleback Students Small Group Guide

Telling someone what they need to know is seldom effective. Think back to all the pearls of wisdom you ignored from your parents... teachers... and even your pastor!

Telling someone what they need to know is ineffective for at least two reasons: a) The learner is passive and uninvolved; b) The learner may not be convinced they need the truth, and therefore the lesson doesn’t “stick.”

The eternal truths of God and wisdom for everyday living are too important (and complex) to reduce to a lecture of platitudes and clichés.

As a Small Group Leader, you are a teacher of God's truth. One thing you ought to continually work to master is The Art of Asking Questions.

The Benefits
A good question puts the ball in the court of the learner. Aside from generating verbal interaction, everyone can answer the question quietly and softly in the privacy of their own thoughts... when you hear a question, it's almost impossible not to think about your answer. Questions create an opportunity for your group members to become active participants. Good questions allow for self discovery, as after the need is recognized by the leader, he or she seeks to fill that gap in his or her knowledge, maturity, etc. Personal understanding and ownership can be facilitated by good questions. Teach people to think for themselves!

Some Keys to Good Questions

1. Think through a series of questions. Phrase the same thing in a couple different ways. Because people think differently, at times a single truth ought to be expressed in several different ways.
2. Discern the particular truth you hope to communicate, and then create good questions to lead your group there. Good questions build on one another and lead to a particular destination.

3. Ask questions that are understandable. In our curricula, we have tried to be clear as possible. But don't settle for that! If you can say something better, then do it!

4. Use every ounce of imagination you have, and consider where your group members are really “at.” Use this wisdom to craft your question beforehand and to make adjustments during your small group.

5. Maintain eye contact. It’s more personal and encouraging.

6. Don’t settle for the “Right Answers.” When someone gives you a quick answer, press them to determine confidence level—are they saying something they believe, or repeating something they’ve heard before. Ask them, “Ok, I hear what you’re saying, but what does that really mean?”

7. Create confusion; don’t shy away from things that are difficult and controversial. Don’t let your group members off the hook with difficult issues. Healthy confusion leads to growth. This is based upon the “Poor in Spirit” Principle: if a learner doesn’t feel the need to learn, he or she won’t.

8. Admit confusion. You don’t know everything, so don’t worry about hiding this when you’re confused.

9. Be positive. According to the example set by Jesus, only hypocritical religious leaders deserve negative input...chances are you don’t have too many of those in your small group.

10. Be focused. Being sensitive to the Spirit doesn’t mean wandering around every spiritual truth, guided only by the tangents of your group. Rather than covering a ton of subjects on a surface level, go deep with just one or two.

11. Repeat long answers with a quick summary. When one student talks for a long time and is confusing, you’ll lose the rest of your group. To bring them back in, give a quick summary, or gently ask for one.

12. Don’t answer your own questions... or let other leaders answer.
13. When you ask a question, don't settle for just one answer from a single person—even if it's the “right” answer. Prompt further responses with phrases like “Good, who else...what's your take?” “Does anyone have something to add?” “Who agrees with what was said? Ok. Why?” “Who disagrees...why?”

14. Learn multiple sides of an issue. Consider common misapplications/misunderstandings/myths. This will help you create “healthy confusion” and present different angles on the same subject.

15. Be transparent. Share your inadequacies in understanding different truths.

16. Jesus commanded us to teach others to OBEY has commandments. Keep your discussions real. Head knowledge is for the classroom. You’re at a small group; keep the significance of the conversation in front of your learners.

17. Learn to push things to the extremes. We often accept truths because they are nice in the few situations in which we apply them. Challenge the answers your group members give you by applying them in all kinds of situations, test them for consistency, and accurately consider the implications.

18. Have group members write down especially good questions and tell them to journal on them. This is also great for questions you don’t have a chance to get to... but be realistic, don’t dish out a dozen questions!

19. Ignite your passion. If you’re never passionate when you teach God’s Word, spend a day or two fasting and studying and praying. If that doesn’t work, you need to talk with someone about your spiritual health, and you probably shouldn’t be leading a small group.

Next to salvation, God’s Word is the greatest gift we have from God. YOU GET to COMMUNICATE IT! You don’t deserve it; neither do I. You aren’t good enough, and neither am I. But the mystery remains: God will speak through you! Get excited about that...or get excited about letting someone else lead your group.
Questions For Growing Community

If the sight of a once solo-minded man or woman who never shared a feeling or disclosed a secret to anybody in his or her life is now sitting in a circle of caring brothers and sisters freely giving and receiving love—if the sight of that person sitting around that circle stirs something deep within you, then you ought to give what’s left of the rest of your life to the small groups revolution that God is orchestrating in his church worldwide.

If the thought of moving a freshly redeemed but clueless brand new Christian into an established group of mature believers who are going to love that person and nurture him and push his roots down deep into the soil of faith—if that thought floods you with energy and passion, then you ought to rearrange your life and join the rest of us who are waving the flag of Christian community and inviting people into small circles of fellowship.

If the picture of six people standing around a hospital bed holding hands and singing worship songs as their apprentice leader loses her two-year fight against cancer and dies before their eyes—if the picture around that hospital bed grips your heart and quickens your pulse, then cancel your plans.

Find a way to join those of us on the front lines of the small groups battle and get yourself into the fray. And if at the end of your life it is enough for you to stand before the glorified Christ and hear him say, “Well done son, well done daughter, you gave your life for the very cause I gave mine—community—well done”; if the thought of that ignites your spirit and sets your soul a soaring, then you’re a goner. Just give it up! You might as well get it over with right now!

Join the ragtag under-resourced idealistic band of relational rebels who still believe—perhaps rather naively—that two are better than one, that a cord of three strands will never be broken, that what we can do together in the church of Jesus Christ is a hundred times what any of us can do alone. If that’s you, give the best that you could give, give the best days of what’s left of the rest of your life for this small groups revolution and the very cause that Jesus imagined in John 17—that his followers would be one. Will you do it? Will you give yourself to that?

We hope you will—that you will give the best that you can to building a church where nobody stands alone. Not now. Not ever.

Reflection Questions:

What has been your experience in small groups? What was most valuable? What was missing? What would you do differently?

What kinds of small groups do you presently have? What kinds would you like to have?

How will small groups be integral to fulfilling the vision?

In what ways will small groups enable people to live out the core values of the church?

Who will be the innovators who will help you from the vision for a small group ministry?

Who might be the blockers to the process? Why are they blocking? How can you help them catch the vision for small groups?

In what ways are you helping stimulate evangelism and outreach in the small groups?

What will prevent you from multiplying groups?
SMALL GROUP EVALUATION GUIDE
Adapted from the Saddleback Students Small Group Guide

Spend at least 10 minutes examining how well your small group went. There are different sections for the teacher, small group leader, and coach. Work through the section(s) that apply to your role. Being intentional to discern the effectiveness of your ministry will yield insights, improve your ministry, and increase your influence with the group members God has entrusted to your care.

Small Group Leader Examination Questions:

1. I was an effective small group leader this week.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree
   Write down goals or action steps if needed.

2. As a small group, we spent enough time talking about the Bible passage assigned for small group discussion and made personal applications.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree

3. Most of my group members felt spiritually challenged this week.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree

4. I kept my small group reasonably focused.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree

5. Everyone in my small group had an opportunity to participate in the discussion.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree

6. I have a good gauge of my group members’ spiritual condition and have some ideas for encouraging them to continue to grow.
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree

7. I feel like I KNOW the group members God has entrusted to my care (family issues, major struggles, how they like to spend their free time, etc.)
   1 2 3 4 5
   Agree Disagree
Useful Resources for Small Groups

Our Adventist Book Centre, (4 Cambridge St Epping – ph: 8876 5200) have a variety of resources that you will find useful in leading your small group.


*Willow Creek Coaches Handbook – Small Groups*, Willow, 1995
Join The Small Group Leaders Network

The Personal Ministries department is about to launch a small groups network. The network will bring together small group leaders from across the city for encouragement, resourcing and training. The small groups network will provide support with fortnightly resourcing newsletters, regular network get togethers and web based small group ideas.

Receive regular updates, resources and coaching support through the Greater Sydney Small Groups Leadership Network.

I would love to be part of the Small Groups Leadership Network.

Name: ______________________________________________________
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