

Healthy Small Groups



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



Healthy Small Groups

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HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

Leader's Guide

How to use "Healthy Small Groups" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.

Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Leadership Resources/Christianity Today, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.

BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS is not just another program. Each theme contains materials on the topic you choose—no tedious program to follow. The materials work when you want, where you want and the way you want it to. It's completely flexible and easy to use.

You probably already have regularly scheduled meetings with board members or with other committees or groups of leaders. BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS fits easily into what you're already doing. Here's how to use BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS at the beginning of a board meeting or committee meeting:

1. Select a learning tool. In this theme of "Healthy Small Groups," you'll find multiple types of handouts from which to choose:

- ◆ interview
- ◆ assessment tools
- ◆ case study
- ◆ devotionals
- ◆ how-to articles
- ◆ activities
- ◆ resources
- ◆ sample retreat

2. Select a handout. Suppose, for example, you have decided that your board or team needs to assess its understanding of church membership. There are three assessment options in this theme: "Small Groups that Grow a Church" (p. 5), "From Committee to Community" (p. 6), and "Handling Difficult Personalities" (p. 7). From these options, select the one that best fits what you want to accomplish.

3. Photocopy the handout. Let's say you selected "Small Groups that Grow a Church." Photocopy as many copies as you need—you do not need to ask for permission to photocopy any material from BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS (as long as you are using the material in a church or educational setting and are not charging for it).

4. Prepare for the discussion. We recommend you read the Scripture passages and identify key discussion questions. How will you apply the principles to specific decisions your church is making?

5. Lead the discussion. Most handouts can be read within 5 minutes. After you have allowed time for reading, begin the discussion by asking one of the provided questions. Be ready to move the discussion to specific issues your church is facing.

Most BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS handouts can be discussed in 15 or 20 minutes (except the Bible study, which may take longer). Your board, committee, or team will still have plenty of time to discuss its agenda.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

To contact the editors:

E-mail BCL@christianitytoday.com
 Mail BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS, Christianity Today
 465 Gunderson Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

Building a Church from the People Up

Healthy small groups begin with believing in people.

Psalm 78:2: Acts 6:3–4

*Saddleback Church in Mission Viejo, California, is well known for its approach to ministry, explained in the best-selling *The Purpose-Driven Church* (Zondervan) by senior pastor Rick Warren. What many people outside Saddleback do not know about, however, is its strong small-groups ministry. To find out more, BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS spoke with Saddleback's pastor of membership.*

It seems there are never enough qualified and willing leaders for small groups. Where do you find them?

Brett Eastman: For years most churches in America looked down to the ballfield. They looked for nine star players. That's the wrong place to look. Take your eyes off the field and look at the stands and say, "What are their next steps?" If you focus on the stands, you will find more people than in your wildest dreams.

So we don't have enough leaders because we're not willing to let ordinary Christians lead?

Gather people in circles of two or three and share Christ and start pulling them along. All of a sudden you build yourself a little group from the bottom up. When most churches want to start or fix a small-group ministry, they go build a little leadership team. I say find people who want to be in a group based on some relational affinity. You start with the people.

What do you mean by "relational affinity"?

The way we place people in groups is by starting with the type of group, such as a couples' group. Then we go to geographical affinity. But you have a stronger affinity with some neighbors than others. So, we ask people, "What is common among you?" It may not be perfect math, but we're asking for just a short term, six-week commitment to experience community together. If it doesn't work, then go ahead and reshuffle and try another group.

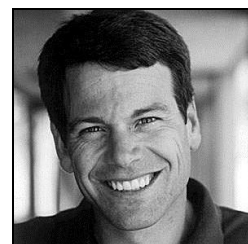
But who leads the group?

The group selects its leader. That follows the Acts 6 method of selecting leaders from the body. In Acts 6, the people had a need. The apostles said, "Go ahead and select leaders from among yourselves."

I have underestimated the number of underutilized members in the body. If you let members identify their leader in any circle of ten, it's the most natural process for people to be identified and confirmed in leadership. The people selected feel a sense of blessing and honor and gratitude and disbelief and excitement and fear—what I call the "sweaty palm feeling." And the right posture for sweaty palms is hands in the air: "Lord, I need help."

I met with 45 of these leaders three weeks ago, and they are the most teachable, responsive, scared, excited, reluctant leaders you've ever seen. I don't even say, "If you want to be a small group leader, come to this meeting." You know why? Oswald Chambers says, quoting Scripture, "If you seek great things for yourself, seek them not." You want the reluctant leaders, the people who would never show up unless their group chose them.

Also, we try to have an assistant leader or apprentice leader in each group. ➤



BRETT EASTMAN

A small group is the smallest form of the church."

Building a Church from the People Up *continued*

How do you encourage new leaders who worry about their lack of biblical knowledge?

Gather them with other new leaders, and they provide care and coaching to each other.

People need to get more than they're giving or they will not last the long haul. You need to be available and nurturing and affirming and offer directive coaching.

Another thing that helps is that I don't call them small group leaders. I call them shepherd leaders. Psalm 78:2 says that "David led with the heart of a shepherd and the skill of a leader"—a shepherd leader. A shepherd leader just has to care about people, to grow and develop people.

Then, you let that group of shepherd leaders select its shepherd leader.

Does a small group need a mission?

A small group is the smallest form of the church, and the purposes of the church are five: fellowship, discipleship, ministry, mission and worship. The question is balancing those.

Before people leave a group on the first day it meets, we give people a role to make sure that each purpose gets attention. Somebody is in charge of championing the purpose of fellowship, and so he or she hosts a social for the group within the next two weeks. Somebody is in charge of discipleship, and he or she tries to help people take their spiritual next step. And so on.

Most small groups focus on care and content. So they're strong in fellowship and discipleship, but that produces Christians who have more knowledge than zeal. How do you get zeal? You get people out of those comfortable pews and into missions and service and evangelism.

But aren't you creating five leaders?

No, seven leaders: the leader, the apprentice, and the five "purpose people."

Many churches have tried small groups, and often, those groups have struggled. Are they really worth the effort?

Most churches see small groups as a program. But there's a big difference between a church with small groups and a church of small groups.

But the goal is not small groups. The goal is developing people. And you can develop people much more effectively in a group of ten than in a large group. Developing people happens more life-on-life than it does lesson-to-lesson or classroom-to-classroom or auditorium-to-auditorium. There's a huge difference between proclamation in a big room and getting that message down to the life of one. When one person's life changes, everything changes.

The only way for a church to get larger is to get smaller. You want to get down to the smallest form, to the atomic level. That's where people change and grow and develop. And when that happens, the church grows.

Discuss

1. What is the mission or purpose of our small group ministry? How are we achieving this mission—and where are we falling short?
2. What do you think about the seven-leader model for small groups? Is this realistic? How could we make this happen in our small groups?
3. What are some natural affinity groups among our church attenders? How can we gather these people together?

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

Small Groups that Grow a Church

How open are our groups to newcomers and non-members?

2 Corinthians 5:17–21; Romans 15:7

Most of us recognize small groups as vehicles of care and support. But do small groups contribute to a church's outreach and numerical growth? Not necessarily. In fact, small groups often can inhibit growth in two ways:

1. By failing to seek out non-Christians. Most small groups, in fact, aren't open to non-Christians.
2. By excluding new church attenders. In general, newcomers won't feel welcome in groups that have been together for over two years—which describes 90 percent of small groups in churches today.

Here is a checklist to help your church reach new people through small groups:

	Yes	Usually	Some-times	No
<p>1. Are we regularly starting new groups? Win Arn (<i>Church Growth Ratio Book</i>) suggests that an ideal ratio is seven groups for every one hundred members. Groups that have been around for two years or more typically become “saturated”—like a sponge that cannot hold another drop of water.</p> <p>A saturated group cannot add new members unless someone else departs to make room for them. Since half of all groups become saturated after only one year, new groups are necessary to provide entry points for newcomers. Some symptoms of a saturated group are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ When it reaches eight or more (for a more intimate group that focuses on caring and sharing). ◆ When it reaches 15 or more (for a task-oriented group). ◆ When it reaches 35 or more (for a fellowship group). ◆ When it fills 85 percent of the room capacity on a regular basis. ◆ When it's been together for two years without adding any newcomers. 	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>2. Is at least one out of every four groups in our church open to outsiders? Are they planned and promoted for the unchurched? The success of these particular groups should be measured by how well they involve non-members.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>3. Are we encouraging greater diversity among our groups? When you offer more choices to people, you'll provide them with more ways for involvement. Usually, the more specific the group focus, the better.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>4. Do we evaluate small groups annually? Your goal should be that 70 percent of your new members, and 10 percent of the attending non-members be involved in small groups. Reach those goals, and small groups will be not only a vehicle of Christ's love, they'll also be a means of growing your church.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—W. CHARLES ARN

Discuss

1. How many of our groups have reached saturation?
2. What kind of small group would be appealing to newcomers to our church? What group could we offer for non-members?
3. What is one step we can take to help our groups become more welcoming?

From Committee to Community

5 questions to turn a traditional committee into a mission-focused community

Acts 6:1–7; Hebrews 10:25

I reject both the impersonal committee approach and the ingrown, feel-good group approach. We need a new understanding of how we minister together. I've called this new approach a "mission-focused community." Answer these five questions to determine how well you're becoming a mission-focused community:

	Yes	Usually	Some-times	No
<p>1. Does our commitment level equal the task? For the average committee member, commitment means "I come to meetings and respond to anything I'm supposed to vote on. If something doesn't happen, it isn't my fault." In addition, the traditional time commitment is usually inadequate. Most committees assume a handful of people meeting once a month can renew a church in areas like worship or Christian education or discipleship.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>2. Does the frequency of our meetings allow the job to get done? A committee usually meets according to a set calendar. A mission-focused community, on the other hand, meets as often as is necessary to get the task done.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>3. Are we living out our callings? "Please tell people," my banker friends plead, "that bankers don't necessarily want to serve on the finance committee." In the traditional system, a nominating committee would have put Saul, the tent maker from Tarsus, on the maintenance committee. Men like Saul will cheerfully do this work, but they need a way to discover other gifts.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>4. Are we keeping responsibility and authority together? In one church, the elder board didn't like how the Christian education office looked. They reasoned, "We are elders; we have the authority." So, one Saturday they came in and rearranged it. When the women who ran the program came in on Sunday, they were dismayed, and quit on the spot. Traditional committees often separate authority from responsibility. Mission-focused communities tend to keep responsibility and authority closer together.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p>5. Are we inviting the whole person? There are always invited guests at a conventional committee meeting: our brains and our seats. The uninvited guests are our emotions, family problems, and personal concerns. Like little gremlins, they sneak in and mess up a meeting by discharging frustrations in speeches on topics totally unrelated to what is really bothering us.</p> <p>In a community, there are no uninvited guests. We take time to catch up with each other, pray for needs, and then go on to business.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

—ROBERTA HESTENES

Discuss

1. Which of these questions can our group answer with a strong yes?
2. If we polled members from various groups, how would they answer?
3. What is one way we can encourage one another in our committees (Heb. 10:25)?

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

Handling Difficult Personalities

It starts with knowing your heart.

Colossians 3:12–14; Ephesians 4:29–32

There will always be some personalities with whom the leader struggles. This exercise can help you to work through your feelings toward some different types of people.

1. What kind of person do you struggle with the most? Look over the following list and mark the three types of people who aggravate you the most. You have complete freedom to define what is meant by the following:

- _____ a male or female chauvinist
- _____ a self-assured person
- _____ a genuinely spiritual person
- _____ an expert
- _____ a person who is always happy
- _____ an obvious hypocrite
- _____ a complainer
- _____ a racial bigot
- _____ a selfish snob
- _____ a self-taught theologian
- _____ other:

2. Answer these questions for each type of person you checked:

What makes you dislike this person so much?

In what ways are you like and not like this person?

3. Imagine you have a small group with four people plus yourself. Included in the group are all three

of the personality types you marked. Your role as small group leader is to provide an environment in which each individual is ministered to. Yet you struggle with the people that you have in your group. List five things that you can do to face the situation in a positive way.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

If you can put the five steps above into practice, then you can give each individual in your group the same opportunity for growth that you have.

—JEFFREY ARNOLD

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To purchase this book: <http://www.gospelcom.net/cgi-ivpress/book.pl/code=2370>.

Discuss

1. Do you need to forgive “a difficult personality” who has hurt you?
2. What does Colossians 3:12–14 say to the leader of a group that includes a difficult personality?
3. When does a difficult personality need to be asked to change? How would you go about that?

We're Not Growing Anymore

What do you do when a group has lost its purpose?

Philippians 3:12–16; Romans 15:5–7

The Case The small group Linden has led for years is well-known in the small group ministry at Baseline Church. In fact, at least half of the group's current members have been in it for five years or more. Over the years this group has been "the group" to belong to and has been a model for other small groups at the church.

Yet a noticeable change in the group began last year. Ron Jones, a newer group member, put it most succinctly: "We have not had anyone new join our group since my wife and I joined two years ago, and we have lost four group members who moved away. I think we need to expand."

Karen Anderson, a long-time member, however, felt the group was better off as it was: "It takes a long time to really get to know each other. If more people start coming, we are going to lose the intimacy we have worked so hard to build."

This contradiction troubled Linden. At the next leaders' meeting he raised the deeper issue with the other leaders and Pastor Greg: "It seems that we have lost our sense of purpose. The group has plateaued, and we're not sure where to go."

- What Would You Do?**
- ◆ What do you see as the main problem in Linden's group: the need for growth; the conflict over openness or intimacy; or a lack of purpose?
 - ◆ What are the primary purposes for small groups?
 - ◆ How can a group encourage outreach and still remain close?
 - ◆ What things cause a group to lose its focus?
 - ◆ What would you recommend to Linden?

What Happened Pastor Greg asked the other group leaders, "What has your group done this year to breathe life into the group?"

Gene recalled his group's experience in January, when they read, prayed through and reaffirmed the group covenant they had written in September. Sean shared about the time his group invited some children in foster care to a hockey game. Len added, "We had a great time when my group went Christmas caroling, and it turned into a prayer walk for our neighbors."

Linden began to recognize that his group was floundering because it had become inward focused. He was thankful group members loved one another deeply but he acknowledged the group seldom reached beyond itself.

Pastor Greg suggested that the leaders identify key elements that contribute to a group's vitality and focus. So profitable was the dialogue that Linden took from his leader's notebook the Small Group Mission statement and promised to make that his group's prayer focus at their next meeting.

—GARY D. PRESTON

- Discuss**
1. How can a group keep its focus?
 2. What contributes to a group's vitality? What do Philippians 3:12–16 and Romans 15:5–7 say to this question?
 3. What one thing can we do now to help the groups in our church?

Wanted: Small Group Leaders

Finding the right people when they're needed—now!

Exodus 18:13–24

The Case The small group ministry of Grace Church was only three months old, but the original six small groups were all full, with at least 14 people in each group. Yet all those who had been trained as small group leaders were currently leading a group.

The group ministry had been launched with the promise that it would remain “open to new members at all times.” Nevertheless, given the leadership shortage, the leaders suggested a church-wide announcement that groups would remain closed for the next three months while new leaders were trained.

This didn't sit well with Pastor Tom. “But the groups are such a great way to assimilate new people,” he said.

So they all probed for other ideas. One leader volunteered that he could divide his current group in half so two groups could meet on different nights. Another leader identified two couples who were newer to the church but who had led small groups in their former churches. They could likely start two new groups. Someone else raised the idea of using current groups as places for giving potential leaders “on-the-job training.”

- What Would You Do?**
- ◆ Would you freeze the current groups for three months while new leaders are trained? Why or why not?
 - ◆ What approach would you recommend for identifying, recruiting and training new small group leaders?

What Happened The leaders came to agree with Pastor Tom that the small groups were one of their best resources for assimilating new people, and they particularly liked the apprentice leader idea. Every current leader agreed to recruit an apprentice leader immediately. An apprentice could come from the current group or be recruited from people who were not yet in a small group but who had leadership potential. The leaders then developed a simple Small Group Leader Profile to help them identify apprentice leaders. The two newer couples who had led small groups at their former churches would definitely be invited.

Finally, one leader volunteered to divide his group into two smaller ones and lead them both until he could get one of his apprentice leaders ready to lead.

Everyone agreed that ongoing small group leadership development must become an integral part of the existing small groups.

—GARY D. PRESTON

- Discuss**
1. In Exodus 18, why did Jethro tell Moses that his approach “is not good”? What lessons can we learn for our development of small group leaders?
 2. What criteria would we use to evaluate a potential leader?
 3. What is our best way, or what could become our best way, of developing small group leaders?

Facing Foreclosure

When he really needed help, he turned to his small group.

Hebrews 10:19–25

Read *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:19-25).*

Comprehend When a friend of mine couldn’t sell his home after a move, he decided to rent it out. Twice in three years, tenants broke the lease and skipped town after trashing the place, leaving my friend with thousands of dollars in repairs. He tried to sell the house again, and it sat on the market for months while he made mortgage payments he couldn’t afford. His credit cards maxed out, foreclosure became a possibility, and his stress was sky-high.

When he finally told friends at church about his problem, within 48 hours:

- ◆ His couples’ Bible study gave him and his wife a check that more than covered their next mortgage payment, giving them more time to sell the house
- ◆ His Sunday school teacher—a Realtor and financial adviser—prayed with him and his wife, encouraging them
- ◆ A church elder—an attorney my friend could never afford—spent 90 minutes on the phone, giving advice.

My friend was striking out, and the church stepped up to the plate. But it never could have happened if he hadn’t put his pride aside and made his needs known.

—MARK MORING

- Discuss**
1. It’s possible for a small group to meet for a long time yet never have someone admit a deep need. How come? What would make it easier for small-group members to be honest and vulnerable?
 2. How could we increase the level of safety and community within our small groups? Within our church?
 3. What does the passage from Hebrews say to us now? How can we respond to it?

Please Touch

Closeness is key to powerful community.

Acts 4

Read Acts 4:1–37, focusing on verses 32 and 33: “All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.”

Comprehend Many museums have a “hands off” policy, keeping their exhibits strictly off limits, but not the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Beside the placard describing a towering elephant is a tusk right where you can reach it. Outside the glass-front room where workers are restoring the giant flag that flew over Fort McHenry, there are samples of fabrics like those used in the flag. A little sign says, “Please Touch.” That’s important. When we touch, artifact becomes fact.

My small group learned how closeness affects community one summer when our usual meeting room was under renovation. The only place we could meet was the preschoolers’ room. A dozen of us crowded into the space already filled with toys, a jungle gym, and a play kitchen. We sat in the story corner on chairs built for three-year-olds. We bumped knees as we shared what was happening in our lives. Moving from a large room to a tight circle brought us closer spiritually as well. Our prayers for each other deepened as our intimacy deepened. We prayed for wayward children and very personal illnesses among us. We prayed for the unique challenges our church faced. We celebrated God’s answers. And we found our study of Scripture refreshed. As our lives touched, we were touched by the Spirit of God. We began experiencing that summer the kind of powerful community described in Acts 2 and 4.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit brought new believers from many ethnic groups together in a way they had never before experienced. They shared a gospel, a faith, a Lord. They shared their possessions. They shared their lives. Soon after, persecution forced these believers together. After the inquisition of Peter and John by the Jewish religious leaders, the church’s only respite was prayer. Out of that prayer came bold preaching, great power, and abundant grace. The believers in Acts 4 were close physically out of necessity, secreting themselves away. They were close spiritually, seeking God’s protection, guidance, and power. But the evidence of their emotional intimacy cannot be overlooked. In prayer the congregation was united in heart and soul, Luke says, holding nothing back from a brother in need. And “abundant grace was on them all” (v. 33). They were a people willing to open their lives to others and say “please touch.”

—ERIC REED

- Discuss**
1. What makes people afraid to get close, to really touch each other’s lives?
 2. On a scale from 1 (low) to 10 (high), how would you rate your small group’s (a) present closeness, (b) willingness to be open, (c) strength of prayer life, (d) power of witness?
 3. How can we make our small groups safe places where people can share their lives on a deeper level?

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

5 Small Group Myths

The conventional wisdom about small groups may not be right.

Ephesians 4:11–16; 1 Corinthians 12:12–20

Myth 1: Small groups are a wonderful evangelistic tool. One of my early misconceptions was about the very purpose of home Bible studies. At first I said, “Home groups are our outreach to the city.”

Several years and much experience later, I said, “The evangelistic results of home Bible studies are indirect, for the groups draw from the congregation rather than the neighborhood.”

Although home programs are not in themselves evangelistic, they contribute to church growth by strengthening the whole fiber of the congregation.

Myth 2: Small groups unite the Christians in a neighborhood. People form small groups around centers of common interest; they cluster socioeconomically, not geographically. True, home fellowships are brought together by a common interest in the Bible, love for Christ, and dependence on interpersonal support. Yet, these common bonds would not suffice in themselves to form a particular small group without some additional commonality that draws people to one another. At the heart of the small-group phenomenon is an interdependence among friends.

Myth 3: Bible study is the centerpiece of a small group. I thought people wanted to gather in homes to study the Bible, so I put most of my efforts into preparing the lessons. Rather, they are attracted by their needs for social interaction, the support of caring and sharing friends, and a sense of belonging to a meaningful body of peers.

When I realized this, I organized the home meetings to provide for the whole range of needs. Our church’s home meetings now have four elements: fellowship (conversation and refreshments), Bible study, (a prepared lesson), self-expression (sharing, exhortation, and prayer requests), and prayer.

Myth 4: A small group needs one strong leader. On this score, I am glad I listened to the advice of Korea’s Cho Yonggi, who told me to put two teachers in each home. It was a stroke of genius. Neither feels the group is his or hers to control; both remain loyal to the church and the program. They simply alternate each week, one teaching and the other leading the rest of the meeting.

Myth 5: Small groups multiply by cell division. The popular idea compares home groups to amoebas that grow and then divide into two equally viable cells. I suggested a group should divide when it reached 20. Well, in the first three years only one group grew that large—and after it divided, only one of the two cells survived.

So how do we grow? The best way is simply to form new groups. Some people will come from other crowded groups, and the new home with its friendship connections will attract its own following. This is a constantly flowing process as some groups flourish, others stabilize, and still others fade.

—DAVID A. WOMACK

Discuss

1. Which of these myths, if any, have you ever thought might be true?
2. How would you rewrite each myth to better reflect what you’ve observed about small groups?
3. What do the Bible passages from Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12 say to us about how we should pray for our small groups?

Building (or Rebuilding) a Healthy Small Group Ministry

7 important questions to consider

John 15:1–17; Acts 2:42

- 1. What is the vision for small groups at our church?** This question is fundamental. Answering it requires asking two more questions. First, what is our overall vision for what small groups can and will do in our church? (And, What is our biblical basis?) Second, what kinds of people in our church can and must be reached by the small group ministry?
- 2. What kinds of groups will we utilize?**
- 3. How will we “fill” these groups with people?** People will go to the kind of group that best meets (and continues to meet) their needs. Consider how to recruit the people whose needs these groups will meet.
- 4. Who will lead these groups?** Will we have a program of “apprenticing,” where leaders-in-training get hands-on training? How will we discover and begin nurturing leaders?
- 5. How will we insure the growth of this ministry?** What goals do we have for six months? How will we deal with a group once it has 12 members (or, how can we help groups to effect positive group splits)? How will we continue to recruit members and leaders for this ministry?
- 6. What kind of accountability will we require of leaders?** What kind of ongoing training will we provide our leaders? What kinds of reporting will we require, and how often? What about periodic meetings? Who will oversee the ministry in general?
- 7. How can we communicate our unique ministry desires with potential leaders and members?** Many churches with dynamic small group ministries will sit down with their answers to the above questions and “codify” them into a small group manual or a philosophy statement.

—JEFFREY ARNOLD

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Discuss

1. Which of the above questions have we answered? Which do we still need to answer—or to revisit?
2. Which is the most important question for our church right now?
3. How would you suggest we work on that question?

Pray

Commit to follow Jesus’ command in John 15:12, and thank Jesus that he has made us his friends (v. 14).

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS**Past, Present and Future***Questions to help people build community*

1 Thessalonians 3:9, 12; Philippians 1:3–6

Community building begins when people are loved as individuals. Part of that is allowing people to share about themselves, specifically about their unique past, present and future. Early in a group's life, you can ask "past" questions. As the group begins to feel comfortable, move to the present. And finally, as the group matures and begins to grow, look to the future.

Past

- What is your favorite childhood memory?
- What was Christmas like when you were a child?
- Where did you live when growing up?
- What was your greatest struggle as a teenager?
- What is your earliest recollection of God?
- What did you want to be when you grew up?
- What is the farthest place you have ever traveled to?
- Who was your favorite teacher, and why?
- How do you feel the church (in general) has helped you as a person?

Present

- What is a time during the week that you can relax?
- What do you most like about your life's calling?
- What do you least like about your life's calling?
- What is one thing that gives you satisfaction?
- Which household chore would you like never to have to do again?
- What one thing would you like to change about your life? Why?
- How do you work on your relationship with Christ during the day?
- What is your greatest joy in your faith?
- What is your greatest struggle in your faith?
- If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be, and why?

Future

- Where would you live if you could move anywhere in the world, and why?
- How would you like to see your closest relationship develop in the next year(s)?
- What area of your faith would you like to work on in the next few years?
- If you had three wishes, what would they be?
- If you could write one news headline for the whole world to see, what would it be?
- What is your greatest anticipation of the future?
- How do you feel God can use you in the next few years?

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Courageous Confession, Bold Encouragement

Leading a small group in repentance

1 John 1:5–2:2; Luke 15

Someone new to our church recently asked me, “Is there any forum for the public confession of sin in our church?” It was a great question. We talked about a number of scenarios but agreed that the context of a small group is key. A small group provides fellowship afterward, in which we give a fellow child of God courage.

The following activity will help your group cultivate openness with one another; it can create an environment where sin can be confessed and forgiveness and encouragement boldly offered. This activity works best with a leadership team or a more established group. Tell the group your plans beforehand so they are not surprised.

1. Give each person a piece of paper. Ask members to reflect on the sins they most often struggle with.
2. Ask them to determine whether they feel tempted or accused, and to write that sin on the paper. The tempted believer needs to know that the power of his sin is destroyed by the cross of our Savior. The accused believer needs to hear that her relationship with the Father has been changed through union with the Son.
3. After you have given people time to think and write, place a lit candle on a table away from the group. Tell the group that when they are finished writing, they can burn the slips of paper and thank God for destroying their sins.
4. Begin a time of sharing and confession with an example of sin from your life and illustrate how it makes you feel accused or tempted.
5. Read aloud a Scripture passage that applies to your sin, one that reveals a promise by God to either destroy sin (Ps. 130:3-4; Isa. 1:18; Lk. 15:7, 10; Rom. 5:8; Rom. 8:1-3; Gal. 2:20–21) or to restore relationship between God and people (Mt. 9:11–13; Lk. 15:11–32; Rom. 8:12–17; Gal. 3:26–4:7; Heb. 4:14-16; Heb. 10:15–22).
6. Encourage other people to share as they feel led, and invite other members to read one of the Scripture passages. The tendency of a group hearing a confession of sin is to make the afflicted feel better. Instead, lead your group in giving others the courage to repent and believe God. This courage is given only as we preach the gospel to the afflicted: Jesus Christ loves and reconciles sinners to God.
7. Close your time by singing a hymn or song that reinforces these promises of God, such as “O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” or “Rock of Ages.”

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

Further Exploration

Helpful resources in 4 key categories

BOOKS ON SMALL GROUPS

- ◆ **Small Group Fitness Kit** by *Thom Corrigan* (NavPress, 1996). Discusses the attitudes necessary to be an effective small group leader—flexibility, ability to manage chaos, willingness to make mistakes, etc., and offers solutions to the 10 most common problems that small groups encounter.
- ◆ **Leading Life-Changing Small Groups** by *Bill Donahue* (Zondervan, 1994). Insights from a leader in the Willow Creek Association.
- ◆ **Nine Keys to Effective Small Groups** by *Carl George* (Kingdom Publishing, 1997). The longtime consultant surveys what works and doesn't.
- ◆ **The Big Book on Small Groups** by *Jeffrey Arnold* (InterVarsity, 2004) Comprehensive guide for ministry trainers and small group leaders. Includes activities for groups.
- ◆ **How to Build a Small Groups Ministry** by *Neal McBride* (NavPress, 1995). Provides 12 logical steps for creating and developing a small group ministry. Includes case studies and worksheets.

BOOKS ON COMMUNITY

- ◆ **Life Together** by *Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1978). A short, powerful book on the nature of biblical community.
- ◆ **The Wounded Healer** by *Henri J.M. Nouwen* (Doubleday, 1979). Leads Christians to develop compassion and openness as they minister.
- ◆ **Experiencing Community** (NavPress, 1996) by *Thom Corrigan*. Tools to build authentic community in small groups by moving beyond meetings to building loving, supportive and encouraging relationships.

BOOKS ON DISCIPLESHIP

- ◆ **Disciples are Made, Not Born** by *Walter A. Henrichsen* (ChariotVictor, 1988)
- ◆ **Discipleship** (Serendipity House, 1998). A Bible study guide for small groups on discipleship.
- ◆ **Basic Discipleship** by *Floyd and Frank McClung* (InterVarsity, 1992)
- ◆ **Daily Discipleship** by *Leroy Eims* (NavPress, 1999)

IDEAS AND LESSON STARTERS

- ◆ **101 Great Ideas to Create a Caring Group** by *Thom Corrigan* (NavPress, 1997). Activities aimed at achieving what the author describes as the “four C’s” of community (caring for groups, caring in groups, caring outside groups, and caring as a group).
- ◆ **201 Great Questions** by *Jerry Jones* (NavPress, 1989). The former president of Single Adult Ministries offers icebreakers and other questions.
- ◆ **Small Group Outreach** by *Jeffrey Arnold* (InterVarsity, 1998).
- ◆ **Discipleship Journal’s 101 Best Small Group Ideas** (NavPress, 1996). A compilation from Discipleship Journal.
- ◆ **New Testament Lesson Maker** (NavPress, 1992). Available in print and on CD-ROM. Includes Bible study outlines for every section of the New Testament.
- ◆ **Serendipity Encyclopedia**, *Lyman Coleman, editor* (Serendipity House, 1997). Creative ideas for small groups.

HEALTHY SMALL GROUPS

Sample Retreat Schedule

How to create a weekend retreat on the theme of “Healthy Small Groups.”

Building Church Leaders expands easily into a retreat format. Here is a sample retreat schedule you may follow for the Healthy Small Groups theme. The retreat offers two tracks:

Vision and Strategy Track—helps board members and ministry leaders learn how to make small groups more effective

Relationship-Building Track—helps small group leaders to become closer as a team and to experience activities they could use in their own groups.

Friday Evening

◆ 8–8:45 P.M. Opening Devotional: Begin the weekend with “Please Touch” on page 11. You can either photocopy and pass out the devotional or use the handout as your notes for the opening talk.

◆ 9–9:45 P.M. *Vision and Strategy Track*—Hand out copies of “5 Small Group Myths,” a how-to article on page 12. Then form groups of three or four. Give people time to read the myths and to discuss the first two questions at the bottom of the handout. In the final 20 minutes, reconvene as a large group and have one member of each small group report on his or her group’s conclusions. This will surface your members’ beliefs and attitudes about small groups. Then close with Question 3 under “Discuss.”

Relationship-Building Track—Discuss questions from “Past, Present and Future,” an activity on page 14.

Saturday Morning

◆ 9–9:45 A.M. Set the direction and tone for the day by handing out the two-page interview with Brett Eastman, “Building a Church from the People Up.” Discuss the questions at the bottom of the final page of the interview.

◆ 10:–11:00 A.M. *Vision and Strategy Track*—Pass out “Building (or Rebuilding) a Healthy Small Group Ministry,” a how-to article on page 13. Have each group discuss the 7 questions in the body of the handout. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and have one person from each group report on their conclusions. Then discuss as an entire group the 3 questions at the bottom of the handout.

Relationship-Building Track—Hand out “Handling Difficult Personalities,” an assessment on page 7, to each participant. Give each person 20 minutes alone to answer the three questions in the body of the handout. Then reconvene and discuss the three questions under “Discuss.”

◆ 101:00–NOON. Break-Out Session: Hand out copies of “Small Groups that Grow a Church,” an assessment on page 5, and break into groups of three or four. Have each group read and discuss how to keep small groups open to newcomers. Reconvene for the last 20 minutes and put on a whiteboard or chalkboard all the strategies that people suggested.

◆ NOON—Lunch.

Saturday Afternoon

◆ 1–2:00 P.M. *Vision and Strategy Track*—Hand out “We’re Not Growing Anymore,” a case study on page 8, to each participant. Spend time discussing the question, “What are the key elements that contribute to a group’s vitality and focus?” Close by determining one action you can take to strengthen the church’s small groups.

Relationship-Building Track—Close the retreat with the activity, “Courageous Confession, Bold Encouragement,” on page 15. Encourage the group to respond openly to one another as you confess sin and receive forgiveness.