ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BREAKING THE GROWTH BARRIER AT MUSKOGEE FIRST ASSEMBLY:

FACILITATING ASSIMILATION AND DEVELOPING COMMUNITY

THROUGH SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT COMMITTEE

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEPARTMENT

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ABSTRACT

Muskogee First Assembly, a church of over a thousand adherents with three Sunday services, seven staff members, and a host of ministries, provides outstanding ministry to the community. Each week numerous visitors attend, and people find Christ; nevertheless, over the past seven years, the church continued to experience a plateau in attendance. For many people in this rural community, the church seems too large to facilitate a personal connection. This project established small groups at Muskogee First Assembly in order to assimilate new people and help them experience community. The implementation of small groups resulted in both personal and corporate growth.

The development of small groups enabled Muskogee First Assembly to break the growth plateau and effectively retain people through authentic connections that result in true discipleship. With the Great Commission as the focus, the ministry intervention trained leadership to produce a discipleship revolution. Small groups motivated and challenged people inside and outside of the church to participate in fellowship opportunities.

Measurable results indicate a 9 percent attendance gain from the previous year, a 300 percent increase in the number of adult groups, and a 54.5 percent increase in the number of adult disciples. In addition, small group leaders grew through ministry expression, and individuals grew through spiritual transformation. The information from this project could assist other churches desiring to break their own growth plateaus.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When a person contracts a rare disease, medical professionals search for the best

knowledge and information to help restore his or her health. Likewise, subtle destructive

forces invade the healthy growing organism of the church and cause atrophy, which

results in little or zero growth. Even successful churches must overcome growth plateaus

in order to fulfill the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples."

Every church needs ongoing, affirmative action that pushes it to the next level.

Attendance growth in the typical evangelical churches no longer occurs easily.

Robert D. Putnam, in *Bowling Alone* says, "Over the last forty years mainline

denominations … have heavily lost 'market share,' while evangelical and fundamentalist

groups … have continued to grow, although sometimes at a pace slower than before and

now barely matching national population growth."[1] Although political, civic, and

religious participation in America declines, small groups, of all kinds, encounter

explosive growth. Putnam further explains, "The clearest exceptions to the trend toward

civic disengagement are the rise in youth volunteering, the growth of telecommunication,

the vigorous growth of grassroots activity among evangelical conservatives, and the

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[1]Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 76.

increase in self-help support groups."[2] The churches must work what works. Making disciples through small groups presents a workable solution.

This project seeks to overcome the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly by facilitating assimilation and developing community through small group ministry. Chapter 1 provides an introduction that explores the context, problem, purpose, definition of terms, and description of the proposed project.

The Context

The dynamics of effecting change relate directly to ministry context. Human transformation rarely occurs in sterile, laboratory settings. Real people, in real-life environments, experience change through countless variables. To understand Muskogee's ministry matrix requires an appreciation of the history of the city and the church.

The City

According to the 2000 census, Muskogee's population numbers 38,310 and includes 15,523 households and 9,951 families making it the eleventh largest city in Oklahoma.[3] In 1909, during the early days of statehood, Muskogee grew faster than any city in the Southwest.[4] Despite a strong economic base, access to major waterways and

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[2]Ibid., 180.

[3]"Muskogee City, Oklahoma," United States Census Bureau American FactFinder, http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/QTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US4050050&-qr_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U_DP1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U&-_lang=en&-_sse=on (accessed September 2, 2008).

[4]C. W. West, *Muskogee, From Statehood to Pearl Harbor* (Muskogee, OK: Muskogee Publishing Company, 1976), 13-25.

four highways, the population has remained unchanged since 1950.[5] This growth plateau creates a sense of hopelessness for many residents.

Muskogee's cultural diversity parallels many large cities. The racial mix is 61.12% White, 17.90% Black, 12.34% Native American, 3.28% Hispanic, and 5.36% from other races. The following shows the ranges of age in Muskogee: (1) Median age—37 years; (2) 0-24 years—35.4%; (3) 25-44 years—25.8%, (4) 45-64 years—21.4% (5) 65 years and older—17.4%.[6] The Cherokee and Creek tribes moved from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1838 on the infamous "Trail of Tears."[7]

Muskogee's economic system strongly affects ministry context. The median household income in the greater Muskogee area tops out at $28,546. Per capita income is $16,858.[8] The average house sells for $77,140, and owners occupy 55 percent of the homes. An average three-bedroom, 2,000-square foot home rents for $650 a month.[9] Most Muskogee residents live in sub-standard housing. A large number of diverse companies in Muskogee make the area the third-largest manufacturing community in Oklahoma.[10] However, unemployment soars at 20 percent.[11] Due to the high rate of

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[5]"Muskogee City, Oklahoma," United States Census Bureau American FactFinder.

[6]Ibid.

[7]"City of Muskogee," http://cityofmuskogee.com/shell_print.asp?pg=341. (accessed September 2, 2008).

[8]"Housing," Greater Muskogee Development Corporation, http://www.muskogeedevelopment.org /housing.shtml (accessed September 2, 2008).

[9]"Muskogee Community Profile," Muskogee Oklahoma, USA, Chamber of Commerce Muskogee Chamber of Commerce, http://www.muskogeechamber.org/page14.html (accessed September 2, 2008).

[10]"Work in Muskogee," City of Muskogee, http:///www.cityofmuskogee.com/ shell_print.asp?pg=60 (accessed October 30, 2008).

[11]"Workforce," Greater Muskogee Development Corporation, http:///www.muskogee development.org/underemployment.shtml (accessed September 2, 2008).

unemployment, many people rely on welfare for financial support. This affects every social system from the family to the political arena. Recent statistics report that Muskogee remains Oklahoma's killing field.[12] The State Bureau of Investigation's "Crime in Oklahoma 2003" lists Muskogee County as one of the top centers in the state for corruption.[13]

The Church

Along with 104 other churches, Muskogee First Assembly shares a rich history. The church began with a handful of people on November 6, 1927, and presently, over a thousand people call Muskogee First Assembly their home. The church has experienced great growth and, at the same time, faced tremendous challenges. On April 24, 1981, the congregation moved to a new worship center on the south side of town. Over 600 people attended that Easter service.

Four years later, a split reduced the congregation to approximately one hundred adults and a few children. With a huge debt, the church struggled for its very existence. After I accepted the pastorate in 1990, the church grew steadily for ten years. Weekly Sunday attendance averaged approximately 600 people. In addition, many more people attended the various church programs throughout the week.

The Opportunity

In 2000, Muskogee First Assembly experienced the greatest challenge in its eighty-year history—a growth plateau. Numerous outreach programs produced thousands

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[12]Matt Elliott, "Statistics Show Muskogee is Oklahoma's Killing Field," *Tulsa World*, July 7, 2006, [newspaper on-line] http//www.tulsaworld.com/NewsStory.asp?ID=060702_To_Al_Stati38598 (accessed July 22, 2006).

[13]"Crime in Oklahoma 2003," State Bureau of Investigation, www.doc.state.okus/MAPS/OKUCR 2003map.pdf (accessed July 26, 2006).

of decisions for Christ, but failed to assimilate new converts. The rippling impact of the Brownsville Revival touched many lives; however, the attendance gains in Muskogee remained insignificant. Despite a host of new ministries led by eight staff members, the church exerted significant effort but was not realizing significant results.

The addition of a second Sunday morning service produced insignificant gains. Retiring the original building loan debt and channeling more money into ministry also failed to increase numbers. Transforming the sanctuary into a state-of-the-art worship center did not produce growth. In the past eight years, the church averaged between four to eight new visitors a week and 400 salvation decisions for Christ per year. In reality, new people came through the front door as fast as regular attendees left through the back door. At the same time, Sunday school attendance averaged approximately 200 people in all age levels. The church offered thirteen to sixteen adult classes. People enjoyed experiencing the presence of the God in worship, but felt little need for discipleship or community.

Even though a few Muskogee churches promote small groups, the area churches, as a whole, do not embrace small group ministry values. Church members from the eight Assembly of God congregations in the city readily "hop" from church to church—especially when a church experiences trouble. Christian immaturity remains a real issue. Many Muskogee residents feel that First Assembly, with its thousand-seat auditorium, seems too large for them. In spite of great people, programs, board members, staff, and facilities, the church hit a wall of plateaued growth.

The Purpose

The purpose of this project is to overcome the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly by facilitating assimilation and developing community through small group ministry. This urgent purpose drives the ministry intervention. As Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, in *Built to Last,* state, "An effective purpose reflects the importance people attach to the company's work—it taps their idealistic motivations—rather than just describing the organization's output or target customers. It captures the soul of the organization."[14]

In spite of Muskogee's lack of population growth in the past fifty years, the increase of people who need Christ, in a city riddled by drugs and crime, creates a huge challenge for the church. As people experience connection and spiritual transformation through the establishment of small groups, the results will produce both personal and corporate growth.

In order for Muskogee First Assembly to "grow large," it must "think small." Christian Schwarz, in *Natural Church Development*, notes,

> After we had processed all 4.2 million survey answers, we calculated which of the 170 variables had the most significant relationship to church growth …. If we were to identify any *one* principle as the 'most important' … then without a doubt it would be the multiplication of small groups.[15]

The development of small groups must take top priority in order for Muskogee First Assembly to grow and effectively retain people. The challenge of breaking the growth plateau in an eighty year-old church, located in a medium-sized town, presents an outstanding opportunity.

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[14]Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2002), 224.

[15]Christian C. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2003), 33.

Definition of Terms

Community. Community consists of sharing, participation, and fellowship among a similar group of people who partake in common interests, as they interact with one another in a particular environment. For the purposes of this project, the definition of community goes beyond defining a particular social group. Community describes the common feeling of togetherness as people relate to one another.

Small Group. A small group consists of three to twelve people who share common purposes and goals and meet on a regular basis for fellowship, relationship, interaction, and growth. Over time, small groups provide opportunities for developing healthy interdependence, which, in turn, can promote accelerated learning and productivity for its members. Small groups offer spiritual community and allow people to share their lives together.

Growth. Growth includes both quantitative and qualitative factors.[16] Quantitative growth consists of the statistical data pertaining to the number of small groups and overall church attendance. Qualitative growth exists by evaluating information gained from people's personal comments. Measuring personal transformational growth remains difficult to ascertain, yet remains subjectively observable.

Description of the Project

The project will break the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly by implementing a carefully designed strategy to produce small group ministry. Jim Collins in "Building Your Company's Vision" defines a strategy as "the route you intend to take

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[16]Lori S. O'Dea, "Breaking Growth Barriers in Small Group Ministry Glad Tidings Assembly of God, Decatur, Illinois" (D. Min. Project, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2002), 5.

and the general methods you intend to use to reach the top."[17] Core values and purpose

lead to specific goals. Goals go nowhere without an effective strategy to make these

objectives a reality. The following proposed ministry intervention proposes a carefully

designed plan detailing the scope and phases of the project designed to accomplish and

maximize effective results.

<div align="center">The Scope of the Project</div>

The following description spells out the details and expectations of the project and

includes the tactics to be used for effectively developing small groups. Ministry

intervention effectively occurs by focusing on God's plan, leadership participation,

people participation, evaluation procedures, and prescribed parameters.

God's Plan

This project will focus on the heart of God as revealed in the Great Commission.

Realigning churches to fulfill God's design to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19)

means reprioritizing values and purposes to align with tactics and resources.

John MacArthur, in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-*

28, states, "Those who become His disciples are themselves to become disciple makers.

The mission of the New Testament Church was to make disciples (see Acts 2:47; 14:21),

and this is still Christ's mission for His church."[18] Acts 2:42 records, "They devoted

themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to

prayer." The Great Commission occurs through the power of community. Robert

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[17]Jim Collins, "Building Your Company's Vision," Jim Collins.com, http://www.jimcollins.com/lab/building vision/p4.htm (accessed September 25, 2008).

[18]John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Matthew 24-28* (Chicago: The Moody Press/Chicago, 1989), 341.

Wuthnow notes that, "… 40 percent of adult Americans are currently involved in some small group that meets regularly and provides support for its participants; 60 percent of these members belong to groups formally associated with a church or synagogue."[19] Increased numbers of Americans involved in small groups reflect a trend in American life to engage socially. Small group ministry must exist as the central focus of the Church to make disciples. This philosophical change requires continual emphasis.

Leadership Participation

This ministry intervention will utilize key leaders committed to this project's success. As lead pastor of Muskogee First Assembly for eighteen years, I remain in a unique position to effect change. The lead pastor must not only embrace small group philosophy, but must lead the campaign because tenure makes change easier to accept.

Jim Collins, in *Good to Great*, identifies Level-5 leaders as possessing the highest level of leadership effectiveness.[20] He defines Level-5 leaders as those who "channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. … They are incredibly ambitious—*but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves*." In order for small groups to experience success, sacrifice and commitment must emanate from the top. Even though the church employs a full-time discipleship pastor, the lead pastor must initiate the change in order to insure that the congregation effectively grasps its importance. Max De Pree, in *Leading Without Power*,

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[19]Robert Wuthnow, *"I Come Away Stronger" How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 6.

[20]Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2001), 224.

says, "One of the first things required in movements is spirit-lifting leadership, leadership that enables, enriches, holds the organization accountable, and in the end lets go."[21]

Control and execution of the project will occur through the executive team (the board) and leadership team (the staff). Staff members will participate as small group leaders and give the project a complete hands-on approach. Leading a discipleship revolution requires sensitive leaders who commit themselves to loving people through change. This project will focus on recruiting, mobilizing, and training present and prospective small group leaders. The success of this project depends completely on people resources—not monetary resources.

People Participation

Motivating people to join a small group remains paramount; however, no congregational members will be forced to join a small group—only volunteers will participate. Leadership will promote small groups as an exciting opportunity for positive connection, especially designed to meet individual and collective needs. The schedule will offer a wide range of curriculum choices. Each group will fund their individual curriculum purchases. To enlist the greatest number of participants, groups will meet at various times during the week. The majority of the groups will get together either weekly or biweekly. Leaders will consider individual tastes and busy schedules in the development of the groups.

Several small group meetings will take place off the church campus—in homes, restaurants, and businesses. Leadership will schedule the various church facilities for those who prefer this "already-clean and ready-to-go" meeting place. Small group

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[21]Max De Pree, *Leading without Power: Finding Hope in Serving Community* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 25.

meetings will meet concurrently with the regular Wednesday evening services. However, adult small groups will not meet during Sunday evening services.

Small group sessions will offer fellowship opportunities for both church members and the unchurched. These groups will create a positive atmosphere for seekers to find answers to life's difficult questions and will center on reaching and teaching the unchurched in an atmosphere of love and acceptance.

Leadership will introduce small groups as a new church program. Small groups will incorporate the present Sunday school classes. This project will center on adult small groups, not children or youth. Capitalizing on the "small church" attitude of Muskogee residents, will create a natural fit for the common person in small groups.

Evaluation Procedures

Leaders will evaluate, tabulate, analyze, and compare both quantitative and qualitative statistical data and will measure attendance factors to determine the effectiveness of assimilating new members. A small group survey will evaluate church members' opinions and feelings about small groups. The results of this project will focus on both objective and subjective conclusions.

Prescribed Parameters

Clear, prescribed parameters for the limits of this ministry intervention remain necessary. The project will not focus on analyzing other Muskogee churches. Only a handful of the 104 existing churches utilize small groups. Smaller in size, they do not face the same growth-plateau issues that Muskogee First Assembly faces with its larger congregation. Studying other similar-sized congregations would prove insightful, but it goes beyond the scope of this project. This project will not focus on cultural issues of

Native Americans or other ethnic groups in the congregation, nor will it analyze teacher's

curriculum, or the facilities.

Phases of the Project

The project will include five phases: research, planning, implementation,

evaluation, and writing. Each step includes a timetable for completion, which ensures the

project's completion and maximum results. In addition to these five steps, some of the

processes will evolve after the project has been initiated. Collins and Porras note,

"Visionary companies make some of their best moves by experimentation, trial and error,

opportunism, and—quite literally—accident."[22]

Phase 1—Research

The first phase of the project necessitates comprehensive research in three areas:

(1) a biblical-theological literature review, (2) a general literature review, and (3) a

survey of small group models. This academic investigation will provide the practical

knowledge necessary to plan and implement small groups and overcome the growth

plateau at Muskogee First Assembly.

Biblical-Theological Review

Small groups will center on scriptural principles. Research will scan the Bible for

a fresh perspective on the nature of small groups. Without biblical foundations, small

groups would resemble just another program. A theology for small group ministry will

focus on the exploration of biblical community in the Trinity, in Creation, in the nation of

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[22]Collins and Porras, 8.

Israel, in Jesus' ministry, and in the New Testament Church. The dynamics of the Church formed in Acts 2 provide a solid underpinning and motivation for ministry.

Rediscovering biblical principles for community will empower small group leaders and members to partner with God in His plan to reach humanity. The biblical-theological review will provide scriptural insight useful in training, preparing sermons, and promotion. Initiating the project on a solid theological footing will infuse the ministry intervention with components that ensure success.

General Literature Review

The general literature review will provide secular, sociological support for small groups from an academic perspective. Society understands the power of community. This project will explore three secular topics that will provide evidence for the power of small group interaction: (1) Group Dynamics: How Social Units Function, (2) Andragogy: How Adults Learn, and (3) Attachment: How Humans Need Relationships to Thrive.

The power of community presented from a secular standpoint will validate what has already been discovered in Scripture. This will provide ongoing support, through secular sources, to strengthen people already in small groups to make the most of biblical community and to encourage those contemplating joining a small group to get involved.

Small Group Models Review

Exploring various small group models in other ministry settings will provide the necessary information to create a unique, small group model suited to Muskogee First Assembly. Leadership training will necessitate promoting a small group prototype. This research will focus on the following questions: (1) Why do we do small groups? (2) Who makes up a small group? (3) Where do small groups meet? (4) When do small groups

meet? (5) What do small groups do? and (6) How can I be successful? The small group

models review, in combination with the biblical-theological review, will form a "How to

Do Small Group Ministry" manual for training leaders in March 2008.

Phase 2—Planning

The second phase of the project will focus on planning to ensure success.

Strategic planning will include preparatory work to develop a system that will

successfully create small groups. The plan will include four necessary procedures: (1)

construct a survey, (2) coach leadership, (3) cast vision, and (4) coordinate facilities.

Construct a Survey

The pastor will formulate and utilize a small group survey to determine

congregational values regarding small groups during January 2008. In order to encourage

complete and open feedback, respondents will remain anonymous. During three Sundays

in August 2008, secretaries will tabulate and compare the answers from both surveys.

Leaders will note the similarities and differences that occurred.

Coach Leadership

The project necessitates the use of small group leaders. During the ministry

intervention, each member of the executive and leadership teams will lead a small group.

In an effort to increase the number of small groups, these leaders will personally recruit

small group leaders before and during the ministry intervention beginning April 2008.

Present and prospective small group leaders will study the "How to Do Small Group

Ministry" manual and participate in training sessions. To accommodate everyone's busy

schedules, leadership will present four identical training sessions, complete with a PowerPoint presentation, during the month of March.

Cast Vision

Every member of the leadership team will cast vision to the congregation. Creative announcements during worship services will advertise small groups and encourage everyone's participation. All pieces of printed literature from the church will also emphasize small group participation. During March 2008, I will preach a sermon series about community based on the biblical-theological review. This pastoral vision casting will emphasize the need and benefits of being in a small group from biblical and human perspectives. The sermons will feature personal stories of people whose lives have been changed through small groups.

Coordinate Facilities

Major changes in the use of the physical facilities and service times will go into effect April 2008. Janitorial services will accommodate the new schedule of small group meetings.

Sunday morning small groups will need more time than the traditional hour between the 8:30 a.m. and the 10:30 a.m. services. One month prior to the launch of small groups, leadership will combine both morning services. Beginning April 2008, the early service will begin at 8 a.m. This will allow the Sunday morning small groups to utilize a full hour and one-half for fellowship and instruction. Printed media will strategically advertise the major schedule change during February and March 2008.

Phase 3—Action

The third phase will launch the project into action. Research and planning naturally leads to implementation. The execution plan will require focus on the ministry intervention timetable, leadership motivation, and pastoral involvement.

Small group ministry intervention will last for four months. Small groups will begin the first Sunday of April 2008 and conclude the last Sunday of July 2008. April 2008, I will present to the congregation each small group leader and the subject he or she presently teaches. As a leader who believes that those who move into action and embrace small group ministry by example will ignite a fire in other leaders, I will personally lead my own small group. The congregation will formally commission the small group leaders during the second Sunday morning service. Furthermore, this commission service will provide one more opportunity to invite church members to join a small group.

During the ministry intervention, small group leaders will meet for leadership motivation. The time will include encouragement and training. Communicating to these leaders remains a high priority. During the meetings small group members will share stories to inspire others.

Phase 4—Evaluation

The fourth phase of the ministry intervention will focus on both quantitative and qualitative evaluation. Statistical data for the adult attendance in both Sunday school and worship services will focus on the following four time frames:

- April 2007 to July 2007—one year prior to the project
- December 2007 to February 2008—three months prior to the project
- April 2008 to July 2008—during the project
- August 2008—one month following the project

I will analyze and compare all the data upon completion of the project. This information will provide a foundation to determine whether or not small groups made a positive impact on the attendance at Muskogee First Assembly.

Qualitative measurement will focus on comparing the answers to a small group survey conducted during the month of January 2008—immediately before the ministry intervention—to the month of August 2008—immediately after the ministry intervention. Spiritual transformation remains difficult to measure, but these surveys will focus on people's general attitude toward small groups.

Objective and subjective analysis, through both quantitative and qualitative evaluation, provides keys for assessing the validity of small groups to overcome the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly. A staff of secretaries will calculate the numbers and ensure their accuracy. The discipleship pastor will chart the responses of the small group surveys and independently evaluate the feedback. Appraising the effectiveness of the ministry intervention will document the merit of small groups for Muskogee First Assembly.

Phase 5—Writing

The fifth phase of the ministry intervention captures the project through writing. Chapters 2 and 3 will present the research conducted in the biblical-theological review (completed February 2008) and literature review (completed May 2008). Chapter 4 will feature the actual description of the field project completed September 2008. This writing will focus on the actual execution of the ministry intervention. Chapter 5 will conclude the writing phase with a written project summary completed October 2008—providing project evaluation, implication, and recommendations for the church and for future study.

The written results of this project will focus on contributing to the ministry of other leaders and to churches that experience the same growth challenges.

Conclusion

A child naturally grows into an adult body and reaches his or her maximum height. However, at some point, the average adult begins to shrink in size. But in the realm of spiritual maturity, shrinking is not to be normative. Christ's Church has enjoyed explosive growth from the Day of Pentecost until now. God has designed the Church to experience never-ending, dynamic growth. He desires his Church to never plateau or decline. The local church must follow God's plan for continual growth as presented in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples." Evangelism and spiritual transformation occur naturally through small groups.

The introduction to this project explored the context, problem, purpose, definition of terms, and description of the proposed project. This ministry intervention will attempt to overcome growth plateaus by facilitating assimilation and developing community through a small group ministry at Muskogee First Assembly. In turn, this will result in powerful growth in the body of Christ.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Contemporary churches are growing through the exponential power of small groups. Biblical community, based on timeless principles found in God's Word, stimulates church development around the world. The New Testament carried out a practical theology of evangelism and discipleship by utilizing the dynamics of small groups. Rediscovering the biblical principle of community remains essential in America's current, cultural context. Gordon Fee explains, "The early believers did not have buildings called 'churches': they did not 'go to church.' They *were* the church, and at appointed times they assembled *as* the church."[1] The New Testament Church understood the true meaning of the Church by participating in community of a higher order.

They regularly assembled in home small groups, and when possible, met collectively in large groups. They took Jesus' words seriously, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations … teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).[2] By exploring key biblical texts about the nature of community in the Trinity, in creation, in the nation of Israel, in Jesus' ministry, and in the New Testament Church, this chapter will present a biblical theology for small group ministry.

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[1]Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 876.

[2]All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version.

The Nature of Community in the Trinity

Introduction

A biblical foundation for small group ministry must begin with the nature of God. Julie A. Gorman observes in *Community That is Christian*, "Community is rooted in the very nature of God's personhood and, therefore, existed before creation."[3] Each member of the Godhead participates in reciprocal interdependence and interrelationship.

Interdependence

The Trinity exists in perfect interdependence. God exists as "a community of three persons," and, at the same time, remains one being.[4] Each person of the Godhead participated in the creation of the world in Genesis 1 by working in perfect unity. But, they were still three distinct persons. Genesis 1:1-3 records, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light."

God, the grand designer, conceived Creation.[5] The power of the Holy Spirit formed the world as He hovered over the waters. The life-giving power of His Word spoke the universe into existence. The same Word that created the temporal world, created eternal salvation (John 1:1-14). Genesis 1:1-3 aligns perfectly with John 1:1-3: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He

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[3]Julie A. Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 25.

[4]Gilbert Bilezikian, *Community 101: Reclaiming the Church as Community of Oneness* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 16.

[5]Ibid., 16-17.

was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."

Gilbert Bilezikian in *Community 101* shows the interdependence of the Trinity when he says,

> The Father is as the forefront of the work of creation, but both the word and the Spirit are present and involved with the Father in creation. The Son is at the forefront of the work of redemption, but both the Father and the Spirit are present and involved with the Son in redemption. The Spirit is at the forefront of the work of sanctification, but both the Father and the son are present and involved in the work of sanctification.[6]

The mutuality and equality of the Trinity functioning together are the best examples of the community God intended for the Church. Individualism, isolation, self-sufficiency, and personal independence are foreign concepts to the very nature of God. Both the Father and the Son portray interdependence between them when Jesus says, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word" (John 17:6). Intimacy and oneness, working in perfect harmony, characterize the Trinity.

God exemplifies the perfect model of interconnectedness in the oneness of community.[7] Augustus Hopkins Strong states, "The sun is as dependent upon the sunlight as the sunlight is upon the sun; for without sunlight the sun is no true sun. So, God the Father is as dependent upon God the Son, as God the Son is dependent upon God the Father; for without the Son, the Father would not be a true Father."[8] Each member of the Godhead depends on one another and lives in perfect community.

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[6]Ibid., 19.

[7]Gorman, 27.

[8]Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1907), 342.

Interrelationship

Next, the Trinity exists in interrelationship. Most Christian concepts of the Trinity seem to focus on the various functions of the Godhead and miss their social nature. Stanley J. Grenz in *Theology for the Community of God* asserts, "The Father, Son, and Spirit are the social Trinity."[9] As a divine family, three persons exist in perfect communion with one another. The Trinity enjoys complete interrelationship through self-knowledge, self-communication, self-revelation, and self-giving. Before creation, God was alone, yet He was not alone.[10] This unique relationship goes beyond human knowledge, but remains basic to understanding God's nature.

John 1:1 reveals the social nature of the Trinity, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Scripture clearly distinguishes between the Son and the Father, even though they dwell in close physical proximity. The preposition *pros* (with) indicates an intimacy of fellowship.[11] The relationships within the Godhead serve as the supreme model for small groups. In the very nature of the one true God exist three eternal distinctions. These are best described as persons who co-exist in perfect community with one another.[12] John 16:12-15 clearly reveals not only interrelationship in the Trinity, but social interaction as well.

> I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

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[9]Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 76.

[10]Charles W. Lowry, "God as Three-In-One," in *Readings in Christian Theology: The Living God*, vol. 1, ed. Millard J. Erickson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 434.

[11]Millard J. Erickson, *Introducing Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 100.

[12]Strong, 343.

He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

This passage demonstrates what Jesus taught about the relationships of the Trinity.[13] Even though His words are far beyond human comprehension, they provide a verbal picture of what God expects His people to capture about community. God's image, revealed through the Trinity's relationship, remains a model for community at its best. The power of biblical community goes beyond human aspects of interaction. God's divine essence permeates the relationships found in biblical community and makes small group connection possible.

Conclusion

Each member of the Godhead participates in reciprocal interdependence and interrelationship. After encountering God, one will experience divine community at the highest level and can interact with the personalities of the Godhead.[14] The very essence of community with God continues through interaction with the people of God. The nature of the interrelationship of the Godhead progresses to the interconnection of God to humankind through salvation. Believers find fulfillment in small groups because they relate to one another through divine interdependence. Community that begins with the essence of God finds final fulfillment in the essence of the Church.

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[13]Bruce B. Barton, et al., "John," in *Life Application Bible Commentary,* ed. Grant Osborne (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 328.

[14]Grenz, 52.

The Nature of Community in Creation Design

Introduction

In addition to beginning with the nature of God, biblical foundations for small groups must be rooted in the very design of Creation. Humankind was created for community by God, disconnected from community by sin, and restored to community by sacrifice. God has created a plan for the world that exists in the establishment of community.

Created for Community by God

God created humankind for community. Genesis 1:27 states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him." God created humanity with a "community gene."[15] The Creator provided humans with a soul dimension that made them unique and embedded them with a relational DNA that separated them from the rest of creation.[16] God created a social being like himself. Men and women's capacity for relationship was modeled after a triune God who does not exist in isolation.[17] Humankind finds ultimate fulfillment in relationship with God, because God desires to connect with them as the significant apex of His creation.[18] At the same time, God's image bearer longs for authentic fellowship with fellow image bearers.

God created Adam to bear His image and to have community with Him. "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for

[15]Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 23.

[16]Ibid., 24.

[17]Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

[18]Clark H. Pinnock, *Tracking the Maze: Finding Our Way through Modern Theology from an Evangelical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 193-194.

him'" (Gen. 2:18). The human's aloneness was not good. God made woman, not just for procreation, but also for a relationship that would fulfill God's community design.[19]

The first small group consisted of five personalities—the Trinity, man, and woman. In their relationship, divine community interconnected to human community. Together, this ultimate small group enjoyed close bonds. Gareth W. Icenogle in *Biblical Foundations for Small Groups Ministry* affirms that "the foundational theological community is man, woman, and God together."[20]

<div align="center">Disconnected from Community by Sin</div>

Next, sin disconnected Adam from community with God. The Fall produced a discontinuity of relationship, "because one part sought to become the other."[21] Perhaps man and woman broke relationship with one another when Satan tempted only the woman—not both of them together. Satan tempted just Eve, but they performed their sin together. Genesis 3:6 notes, "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it."

The first couple connected intimately with God. But, because of Satan's direct influence, they were disconnected through willful sin. Wayne Grudem observes, "After the Fall, then, we are still in God's image—we are still like God and we still represent God—but the image of God in us is distorted; we are less fully like God than we were

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[19]Gorman, 28-29.

[20]Gareth W. Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Groups Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 22.

[21]Gorman, 29.

before the entrance of sin."[22] Adam and Eve demonstrate how distorted their relationship

with God had become when they attempted to hide in the Garden (Gen. 3:8). God

punished Adam and Eve by casting them from the Garden and separating them from the

Tree of Life (Gen. 3:24).

A two-fold relationship loss occurred. First, sin produced isolation from God.

Second, Adam and Eve became alienated from each other.[23] Reticence replaced true

openness with God and with one another. They covered themselves with fig leaves, but

more importantly, they concealed themselves emotionally and spiritually from one

another and tried to appear better than they really were. True intimacy with God and with

each other was broken. Adam and Eve displayed shame and mistrust when they hid in the

Garden. Cain further fractured their family relationships by murdering his brother Abel

(Gen. 4:8). Sin distorts and breaks human relationships.

<div align="center">Restored to Community by Sacrifice</div>

Ultimate community with God and humanity remains possible only through

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Out of God's desire for community, He initiated the search

for Adam. "The Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Gen. 3:9). Taking no

responsibility for their sin, the first couple made excuses for their behavior. Again, God

took the initiative and made garments from animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's

nakedness. God's initiative made interaction between God and humankind possible. The

sacrifice of animals to cover the first couple's sin foreshadowed God giving His only Son

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[22]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 444.

[23]Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 33.

to be the perfect sacrifice for humankind's sin. The covering not only restored God's image, but made true community possible.

Every sinner is part of a community where self-interests remain paramount. Robert Banks, in *Paul's Idea of Community*, writes, "And it is into a *new* community that their reconciliation with God in Christ brings them, however much they experience that event as an individual affair."[24] Small groups exist for the supreme purpose of reconnecting people to God. Paul states, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled *us* to himself through Christ and gave *us* the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:17-18; italics mine).

The Apostle John understands this principle and pens, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). True relationship occurs through God's provision of redemption. God reversed the curse of isolation and alienation by restoring humankind to true relationship and fellowship through the Cross. God's original idea for humankind became possible through Christ's sacrifice. Robert C. Brow and Clark Pinnock explain in *Unbounded Love*, "The image of God in us is being restored as we fellowship with God and with others. By the grace of God, we are being restored to the family."[25]

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[24]Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 35.

[25]Robert C. Brow and Clark H. Pinnock, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 169.

Conclusion

God created humankind for community, sin disconnected them from community, and Christ's sacrifice restored community. He created Eve so Adam would not be lonely, and they experienced true community. Because Adam and Eve's sin changed the original plan, God designed a new plan. Jesus brought humankind into a realm of fellowship that would last for eternity. Grenz states, "What begins in the Garden of Eden finds its completion at the consummation of history. God's will for his creation is the establishment of a human society in which his children enjoy perfect fellowship with each other, the created world, and the Creator."[26]

The Nature of Community in the Nation of Israel

Introduction

The nature of community in Israel provides a biblical foundation for small groups. The Old Testament contains no specific theology of small groups, yet the nation of Israel was a model of a covenant community structured around family and friendship groups that formulated into individual identities. As Isaac said when he sent Jacob his son to Paddan Aram to find a wife among his mother's people: "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples," he said (Gen. 28:3). To understand this concept of community, one must view Israel as "a group of people, living under God's rule, who are learning how to love God

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[26]Grenz, 179.

and love one another."[27] The next sections provide insight into this community of peoples by examining their family and friendship groups.

Family Groups

Ancient Israel consisted of a covenant community made of tribes, clans, and households. The social structure for each of these divisions related to family.[28] The tribal community of Israel consisted of twelve tribes named after patriarchal fathers that were the sons of Israel (with the exception of Joseph, but including Joseph's two sons). Tribes consisted of clans. Numbers 26 records that in the last year of Israel's journey through the wilderness, fifty-seven families were listed as a part of the twelve tribes.[29] Clans consisted of large households who lived together, including slaves, concubines, foreign residents, and servants. Abraham, at one time, counted 318 trained men in his household (Gen. 14:16). Abraham's immediate family had three members: Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac.

God made a covenant with Abraham when there was just himself, Sarah, and Lot (Gen. 12:1-5). The fulfillment of the covenant was far reaching in numbers, but it all started with one family.[30] When God made a covenant with Noah, it all began with his immediate family of eight people (Gen. 7:13) and resulted in populating the world. When God called Moses, he began with his family—including Zipporah and his two sons

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[27]Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 86.

[28]Jeffrey Arnold, *Starting Small Groups: Building Communities That Matter* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 20.

[29]Neal F. McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1990), 14.

[30]Icenogle, 39.

(Exod. 4:19-20). Before Moses led Israel, he met with a small group of elders for confirmation (v. 29). Moses, Aaron, and Miriam formed a leadership small group team.

Family groups were connected to God in a covenant community. As Icenogle states, "Every covenant group has a call to itself and a call beyond itself."[31] Israelite fathers were the spiritual leaders responsible for training their families (Deut. 6:7). Circumcising children was a family affair that impressed spiritual values (Gen. 17:23). Even the celebration of the Passover was a small group/family teaching opportunity (Exod. 12:24-27).[32] Small groups worked together in covenant and resulted in large groups of God's people.

<div align="center">Friendship Groups</div>

Israel's friendship circles were small groups involved in covenant relationships. The writer of Proverbs captures the essence of friendship through community when he states, "Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one's friend springs from his earnest counsel" (Prov. 27:9). Scripture gives both good and bad examples of friendship groups.

Job and his three friends provide an example of a friendship group that started out right but went wrong. When Job lost his children, wealth, and health, his three friends "set out from their homes and met together by agreement to go and sympathize with him and comfort him" (Job 2:11). In covenant relationship, they shared Job's suffering as they wept, mourned, and sat in silence "on the ground with him for seven days and seven

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[31]Ibid., 42.

[32]Robert Banks and Julia Banks, *The Church Comes Home: Building Community and Mission through Home Churches* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 25.

nights" (v. 13). When time came for them to speak, they gave bad counsel (42:7). God condemned the ineffectiveness of this small group (vv. 7-9).

David and Jonathan enjoyed a healthy friendship group. David was in a strong friendship relationship with Jonathan, and they shared life together in covenant, love, possessions, and one spirit (1 Sam. 18:1-4). Friendship, loyalty, and support for one another grew through adversity. When David received information that Saul intended to kill him, Jonathan "helped him find strength in God" (23:16). As a small group of two friends, they encouraged one another through intense struggles. Jonathan gave David preference above himself when he told him, "You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you" (v. 17). This friendship group showed every working dynamic needed for effective small group ministry.

The Book of Ruth begins with the friendship of three women—Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah. They assisted each other after the loss of their husbands. When Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, "Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her" (Ruth 1:14). As a loyal friend, Ruth says, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (vv. 16-17). Later, the story revolved around Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. Even though their relationships were much different from a typical small group, they lived in community and experienced life together.[33]

Friendship circles in the Old Testament display both the best and worst of small group interaction. Small groups should avoid the problems encountered in Old Testament

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[33]Icenogle, 21.

small groups and seek to develop each member's full potential. Biblical friendship circles provide effective potential for growth.

Conclusion

The nature of the community of Israel structured around family and friendship groups provides a foundation for understanding small groups in the New Testament. Family groups made up the overall community of Israel. God's covenant with Israel serves as the foundation for the New Covenant that evolved as Jesus founded the Church.

The Nature of Community in Jesus' Ministry

Introduction

Exploring key biblical passages about community between Jesus and the twelve disciples provides a theological foundation for small group ministry. He knew how to minister in both large group and small group contexts. Matthew 5:1-2 states, "Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them." Jesus ministered to the multitudes, yet He used a small group as His primary means of discipleship. The Incarnation resulted in a new community and order. Jesus and the disciples presented the greatest model for how small groups should work. The following examines how Jesus led a small group and how the group learned from its leader.

Jesus as a Small Group Leader

Jesus was the greatest small group leader of all time. First-century discipleship in Jerusalem began with the student joining a school identified by a noted teacher, memorizing the instructor's words in the oral tradition of the day, replicating the rabbi's

life, and re-teaching the material. Then the student became a teacher and taught his own

apprentices with the same pedagogy.[34] On a trip to Jerusalem with His parents to

celebrate Passover, Jesus discovered one such teaching community at the Temple (Luke

2:41-47). On the return trip to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph discovered Jesus was missing.

They immediately returned to Jerusalem and searched for Him. "After three days they

found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking

them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his

answers" (vv. 46-47). At the age of thirty, Jesus took the rabbinical model to a new

level.[35] "He taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Mark

1:22-23).

Robert and Julia Banks note, "It comes as no surprise to find Jesus gathering his

disciples in homes for instruction (Mark 3:20, 7:17, 9:28, 33, 10:10) and for meals (3:20,

14:12-21, 2:19), as well as for preaching and healing (2:1-12)."[36] Jesus, the Teacher, was

God. He personified the face and community of God incarnate on earth.[37] Jesus'

followers experienced discipleship on a completely new level when they experienced the

living Word (John 1:14).

The first Adam experienced a unique association with God, until sin altered the

relational picture. The second Adam restored authentic community with God (1 Cor.

15:22). Humankind was able to relate to the person of Jesus Christ through personal

interaction. Jesus revealed himself to His followers and modeled how one leader can

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[34]Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Spring: NavPress, 2006), 62-64.

[35]Jeffrey Arnold, *Big Book on Small Groups*, 18.

[36]Banks and Banks, 26.

[37]Icenogle, 117.

bring a small group together to experience the intimate presence of God in supernatural community.

<div align="center">The Small Group Jesus Led</div>

Prospective small group leaders should examine the small group that Jesus led. Large crowds followed Jesus as He began His ministry (Mark 2:13). In the beginning of His ministry, John, Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael had life changing encounters with Him (John 1:35-52, Luke 5:1-11). The time came for Him to personally select a small group of twelve individuals who would be with Him (Mark 3:13-19). Some speculate that the Disciples' intensive training occurred in the last half of Jesus' three-year ministry.[38] This selection process happened as a result of a night spent in prayer (Luke 6:12-13). Leroy Eims in *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* states, "He did not hastily rush out and grab the first people who showed interest. To him, this was a momentous decision that would have far-reaching consequences."[39]

For three years, Jesus concentrated on the personal training of twelve ordinary men. He poured everything He had into them and believed they would change the world.[40] From the beginning, Jesus purposed to work the plan of redemption through a

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[38]John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants To Do with You* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2002), XIV-XV.

[39]LeRoy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 29.

[40]Steve Barker, et al., *Good Things Come in Small Groups: The Dynamics of Good Group Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 18.

framework of interpersonal relationships.[41] The twelve disciples were a diverse, small

group. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson note their unique social mix.[42]

> Thomas was the perennial skeptic, Peter the impulsive, and James and John, fighting for prominence at Jesus' side and wanting to call down fire on cities that rejected their message. Then there's quiet Bartholomew, Matthew the tax collector, Simon the Zealot, eager to overthrow the Roman authorities, and all the rest—each personality headed on a collision course with the others.[43]

These twelve followers were called disciples—learners, followers, and

apprentices. In the oral culture of Jesus' time, believers mentored through discipleship or

apprenticeship.[44] The master imparted wisdom and skill to his students. As their master,

Jesus, through His relational connection and authority, transformed the lives of His

disciples. The Disciples were also called Apostles—ones who were sent forth. They

learned by watching Jesus, so that they might duplicate the process of bringing

redemption to a lost world. Learning was only possible in a corporate setting. Gorman

notes, "Being in community enabled them to learn how much they needed the others and

what they could contribute to the building up of the whole."[45] Jesus was establishing a

model that the Disciples would later replicate in the Book of Acts.

For three years, the Twelve were constantly with Jesus. They traveled, ate, and

experienced hardship as they dwelled together (Mark 3:14). The Twelve watched Him

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[41]McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups,* 16.

[42]Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Walking the Small Group Tightrope: Meeting the Challenges Every Group Leader Faces* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 98.

[43]Ibid.

[44]M. Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 24.

[45]Gorman, 36

perform miracles, pray, preach, teach, and even deal with difficult people.[46] The Disciples had opportunities to ask Jesus questions (Matt. 13:10, Mark 9:28) and dialogue with each other about what they heard (8:14-21). Jesus influenced them through a direct, accessible relationship. He personally committed himself to His Disciples when He said, "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). Among the Twelve, there were three—Peter, James, and John—who spent more time with Jesus. They witnessed His miraculous power behind closed doors (Mark 5:37), His transfiguration on a mountaintop (9:2), and even His anguish in the Garden before His death (14:23). Together, they created a small group of four that experienced a deeper level of community.

Creating oneness was Jesus' primary goal. His last words were a plea for oneness.[47] Jesus prayed, "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name— the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:11-12). Jesus prayed that His followers would experience the same quality of relationship that He experienced with the Father. He prayed for the restoration of oneness experienced in the Garden before the Fall.[48] Jesus realized that Christians have the power to influence a world through their love for one another. He prayed, "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (v. 21).

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[46]Jeffrey Arnold, *Big Book on Small Groups*, 19.

[47]Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 41.

[48]Bilezikian, 36.

Andy Stanley and Bill Willits in *Creating Community* state, "The credibility of His life and message in the eyes of unbelievers is dependent upon the way we as His followers relate with one another. Somehow their belief and our behavior are connected."[49] Jesus even gave the Disciples the source for oneness: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one" (John 17:22). He made His final plea for oneness to eleven men who did change the world through the power of community.

Jesus pushed His followers to both closeness and openness. Joseph Myers in *The Search to Belong* discerns that "Jesus never forced strangers to become intimate. Instead, he encouraged them to move from stranger to public belonger."[50] Jesus pushed an agenda of both personal and corporate intimacy. With an inclusive community in mind, He said, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20-21).[51] Oneness portrayed through the love that the Disciples had for one another was to be contagious and attractive to the world. Everyone should experience the same kind of love. Above all, Jesus taught the Disciples to evangelize the world through community of a higher order. Jesus modeled a divine plan before twelve men who, in turn, changed a world.

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[49]Ibid., 43.

[50]Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 112.

[51]Donahue and Robinson, *Walking the Small Group Tightrope*, 144.

Conclusion

When Jesus became God incarnate on earth, it meant living in fellowship with others. Jesus was not an isolated, self-sufficient recluse.[52] Rather, He knew that to live in humanity and to redeem humankind from sin's bondage meant living in community that includes a mutuality of friendships. Through the Incarnation, Jesus accepted the role as the leader of a small group. The way He taught the Twelve provides an example and theological foundation for duplicating the process in the twenty-first century. Clearly, Jesus was not only an advocate for small groups, but He also gave us an example of how the same ministry concept remains possible for contemporary believers.

The Nature of Community in the New Testament Church

Introduction

Key biblical texts concerning the nature of community in the New Testament Church provides a theological foundation for small group ministry. The particular characteristics of the churches in Jerusalem (Acts 2:42-47), Philippi (Acts 16:12-34), Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), Ephesus (Acts 18:18-19), Rome (1 Cor. 16:19), Troas (Acts 20:7-9), and Colosse (Col. 4:15, Phil. 2) will be explored. Examination of these congregations reveals that the nature of community in the New Testament Church revolved around house churches. These house churches varied in size according to the dwelling, formed a network clustered within a city, utilized various kinds of leadership, consisted of a diverse congregation, and exploded through house-to-house evangelism.

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[52]Grenz, 284.

In Jerusalem

Community in the New Testament Church in Jerusalem centered on small group meetings in private homes. After Jesus ascended (Acts 1:9), approximately 120 believers joined together for a ten-day prayer meeting and waited for the promised Holy Spirit (vv. 12-15). When the Day of Pentecost came, "all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them" (2:4). The Holy Spirit was outpoured on believers who were "all together in one place" (v. 1).[53]

Excavations conducted in 1971 on Mount Zion, near Zion's gate, revealed many Herodian-era two- and three-story homes where wealthy residents lived. Archaeologists uncovered the "Palatial Mansion" with a room thirty-six feet by twenty-one feet that early Christian tradition identifies as the "Cenacle," which some historians speculate might have been the original sight of the Pentecostal outpouring.[54] Historic evidence reveals that well-to-do homes in Jerusalem were able to hold a maximum of fifty people. Large, courtyard homes accommodated up to 120 people.[55]

After the initial Pentecostal outpouring, the sound of those speaking in tongues spilled into the streets and attracted a large crowd. Peter took advantage of the opportunity by preaching the gospel to the many Jewish pilgrims from outside the land of Israel who were there to celebrate *Shavuot*, the Feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-16). As Peter invited sinners to accept Christ, three thousand were saved, and the Church was

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[53]Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 131.

[54]Clinton E. Arnold, "Acts," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 227.

[55]Bradley Blue, "Acts and the House Church," in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting: Graeco-Roman Setting,* vol. 2, ed. David W. J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 119-122.

born (Acts 2:41). What started in one place spread throughout Jerusalem. From the

beginning, the New Testament Church enjoyed both large meetings (5:12) and small

community (v. 42). Since large places for the church to gather were rare and hard to

obtain, the most common meeting places were the homes of the believers. Arnold in *Big

Book on Small Groups* explains, "The church needed the house church for survival."[56]

This made it possible for the church to face persecution and still grow without the need of

big buildings.

On the Day of Pentecost, a community was formed when people, from all over the

Mediterranean area, came together to understand one another and unite to heal a broken

world.[57] A new family was formed in one day that included brothers and sisters called the

Church. Clark Pinnock in *Flame of Love* states, "Through the Baptism in the Spirit, the

Disciples were formed into an agency of the Spirit and a community in which God would

work to rescue the world from self-destruction."[58]

Acts 2:42-47 best summarizes the marks of that small group community:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the
breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many
wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were
together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they
gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the
temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and
sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the
Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The New Testament Church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to

the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Where did this occur?

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[56]Jeffrey Arnold, *Big Book On Small Groups*, 21.

[57]Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 118.

[58]Ibid., 118.

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts" (v. 46). As a result, "the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (v. 47).

Unlike secular organizations, New Testament small groups existed for a unique purpose. The Greek word *ekklesia* means "gathering" or "assembly." Originally, the word had a secular meaning that referred to a town meeting where Hellenistic government formed a unique public gathering of citizens who carried out community business.[59] Elmer Towns and Ed Stetzer state, "Literally, this word refers to the 'called (*kaleo*) out (*eke*) ones.' This means that the church is 'called out' from the world by God and 'called out' to proclaim His greatness."[60] *Ekklesia* is the same Greek word scholars used in the Septuagint to refer to Israel as the "congregation" (*kahal*) or "assembly of the Lord," which He called out of the wilderness.[61]

The New Testament Church was the *ekklesia* of God (Acts 20:28)—in one sense, a continuation of what the Lord began through Abraham (Gen. 28:3-4, 35:11-12). Jesus never came to form a separate synagogue. Christ formed His fellowship based on the continuity of Old Testament Israel, and He offered himself as their Messiah. "This *ekklesia* is in a peculiar way the *ekklesia* of Jesus: 'My *ekklesia*,'" states theologian George Eldon Ladd.[62]

Following the Pentecostal outpouring, the new community of believers appeared, at first considered just another Jewish sect that continued to participate in Jewish ritual

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[59]Brow and Pinnock, 133.

[60]Elmer L. Towns and Ed Stetzer, *Perimeters of Light: Boundaries for the Emerging Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 66.

[61]Grenz, 464-465.

[62]George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 108.

prayer (Acts 3:1) and other observances.[63] The New Testament Church did not suddenly

break with Jewish practices. Jewish believers and their Gentile brothers and sisters

continued to observe customs such as Shabbat, biblical festivals, and kashrut even into

the fifth century A.D. until a series of complex theological, social, and political realities

forced a distancing from the Church's Jewish roots. Earlier on, however, at Pentecost and

immediately after, the Holy Spirit was "imparted to create and sustain the new

community of believers."[64] According to Frank D. Macchia, "The difference between

Israel and the church is thus found in Spirit baptism."[65] The New Testament Church's

small group meetings included people brought together by the Holy Spirit, belonging to

God, and bound to one another through Christ. More than a secular organization, God's

community remained a dynamic organism of people who anticipated the imminent

Kingdom. As Brow and Pinnock note, "The church is a pilgrim people being led by

God's Spirit into the future."[66]

The context of the usage of *ekklesia* in the New Testament shows the assemblies'

uniqueness. Separation from secular society remains rooted in the reality of who

assembles people and why.[67] The *ekklesia* remains unique from anything the world has to

offer because the Church belongs to Christ to fulfill His plan in saving the world.

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[63]Ibid., 386.

[64]I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson, *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 528.

[65]Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 200.

[66]Brow and Pinnock, 132.

[67]K. L. Schmidt, III, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrick, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), Vol: 398.

They worshiped together in homes as "all the believers were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32). Bradley Blue in "Acts and the House Church" elaborates,

> The early believers met in houses *not by default alone* (i.e., there was nowhere else to meet) but deliberately because the house setting provided the facilities which were of paramount importance for the gathering. For example, the culinary appearances necessary for the meal. Furthermore, the "house" gave the early believers an inconspicuous place for assembly. It was private. For this reason, Rome found it expedient to tolerate the Christian presence and, at the same time the Christians had a means by which to distinguish themselves from outsiders.[68]

Some Christians sold their houses and took the money to give to the needy around them (Acts 4:34-35). Others kept their homes and opened them as house churches to reach and disciple people. The social status of early Christians enabled them to facilitate the hospitality and reception of sizeable groups of people. This indicates that many New Testament Church believers had a measure of affluence.

The New Testament Church grew in the face of persecution and house churches flourished. In Acts 5, The Sanhedrin and the High Priest flogged the apostles and ordered them not to preach in the name of Jesus. Acts 5:41-42 records,

> The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

The New Testament Church believed in discipleship. They taught publicly in the Temple and in small group discipleship. Just as Jesus discipled His followers through the intimacy of a small group, the New Testament Church followed Christ's example by gathering as a New Covenant community.[69] Ted Haggard calls discipleship a "two-

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[68]Blue, "Acts and the House Church," 121.

[69]Gorman, 101.

pronged fork: training and modeling."[70] Both of these occurred naturally in small home groups.

The Sanhedrin could not stop the followers of Jesus from preaching and teaching publicly in the temple courts and, especially, in private homes. The three thousand saved (Acts 2:41) on the Day of Pentecost could have never obtained a building large enough to accommodate them. The congregational model in Acts of a mega-church meeting—at one time in one building—does not exist, but "the pattern is rather that of many smaller 'house-churches'—separate congregations, analogous to Jewish synagogues."[71]

Disciples went into the homes of believers to proclaim Christ as revealed through Old Testament Scripture.[72] In addition to "teaching and proclaiming the good news," early members enjoyed a corporate fellowship *agape* meal, associated with the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20). These house church groups provided strong personal relationships through a structure that was conducive for evangelism.

One of the clearest examples of small group meetings in a home is in Acts 12:5-17. King Herod arrested the Apostle Peter and had him thrown in prison, "but the church was earnestly praying to God for him" (v. 5). Suddenly, an angel appeared and escorted him miraculously out of jail. Instinctively, Peter "went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying" (v. 12). Presumably, Peter regularly attended that particular house church in the Jerusalem area.[73]

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[70]Ted Haggard, *Dog Training, Fly Fishing, and Sharing Christ in the 21ˢᵗ Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 64.

[71]Ladd, 386.

[72]Clinton E. Arnold, 260.

[73]F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 238.

Mary, almost certainly financially wealthy, opened her large home and was able to accommodate a large group of people in a place of worship.

Peter spent time knocking at the outer entrance of her home (Acts 12:13) that must have had a large courtyard similar to that of the high priest's home in Matthew 26:71.[74] Rhoda, a servant girl, answered the door. Hearing Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed that she ran back to the others without opening the door and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" (Acts 12:13-14). Mary's small group included a variety of socio-economic levels like her wealthy family, a servant girl, and even perhaps the Apostle Peter, a simple fisherman.

Later, after Peter related his miraculous release from prison, he instructed the house group to go "tell James and the brothers about this" (Acts 12:17). Then he left for another place—undoubtedly, another less conspicuous house church in another city.[75] Verses 12 and 17 of this same chapter indicate two places where Christians gathered in one city, which further suggests that the Jerusalem church was made of a network of small groups that met in houses all across the city.

In Philippi

In addition, the nature of community in the New Testament Church meant that small groups were continually living with the divine purpose of following Jesus' mandate to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of

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[74]Clinton E. Arnold, 368.

[75]Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1990), 440. Tradition claims Peter travels to Rome where he spends twenty-five years as Rome's first bishop. Evidence points to Peter leaving Jerusalem for some other unknown place in that he speaks at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), helps the Antioch church (Gal. 2:11-14), and spends time in Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12, 3:22) having a dramatic impact on the church.

the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). The Great Commission involved reaching people through evangelism and teaching them through discipleship.

The New Testament Church expressed great passion for winning the lost. One of the best examples of utilizing small group evangelism occurred in Philippi (Acts 16:12-34). On the Sabbath, Paul found a women's prayer group by a river, just outside the city. The overwhelmingly heathen Roman city had no local synagogue.[76] Lydia, a woman from Thyatira, was at the meeting. She probably traveled across the Aegean Sea to establish a business in Philippi to sell purple cloth. Luke states, "The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. 'If you consider me a believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my house'" (vv. 14-15). Small group evangelism that began by a river, opened many additional opportunities to share Christ in Lydia's home.

Opportunities for small group evangelism continued at the place of prayer by the river. In Philippi, a slave girl, who made her masters a fortune by telling other's fortunes, was miraculously delivered when Paul cast the demon from her (Acts 16:16-18). The girl was blessed, and Paul and Silas were bound and thrown into prison (vv. 19-24). Instinctively, Paul and Silas began a small group praise meeting in jail and witnessed to the other prisoners. "Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open and everybody's chains came loose" (v. 26).

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[76]Kistemaker, 589. Rabbinic law required the minimum of ten Jewish men to establish a synagogue.

Knowing the harsh realities of Roman rule, the jailer attempted to commit suicide because he thought the prisoners had escaped, but Paul's intervention stopped him just in time. "The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved you and your household'" (Acts 16:29-31). Evangelism moved from the river, to the jail, to the Philippian jailer's house as "they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (v. 32). That day, the jailer's household became "members of God's household."[77]

Paul believed in small group evangelism. Small groups were not a "secret society meeting" restricted to believers only. Evangelism in the New Testament took place in home churches and members invited seekers into their homes.[78] Christian households kept their roots deep in heathen soil to undermine and change the values of a pagan culture. Blue notes, "The house-house expansion of the early church quickly spread Christianity from the shores of Galilee to remote corners of the Empire."[79]

<center>In Corinth</center>

In Corinth, lay missionaries Priscilla and Aquila positively influenced many cities and demonstrated the nature of community in the New Testament Church. Of the six times the couple's names appear together, Priscilla's name precedes her husband's name four times (Acts 18:1-3, 18, 26, Rom. 16:3, 1 Cor. 16:19, 2 Tim. 4:19), which implies her

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[77]Ibid., 602.

[78]Joel Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion: How Your Small Group Can Grow and Multiply* (Houston: Touch Publications, 1998), 23.

[79]Blue, "Acts and the House Church," 120.

prominence.[80] Certainly, she played a leading part in their small group ministry. They

were introduced in Acts 18:1-3:

> After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

> The name Priscilla (or "Prisca") was common among upper-class Romans.

Aquila (which means "Eagle" in Latin) was a common name among slaves. Stanley

Horton views Aquila as a Jew who the Romans freed and set up in business. "Apparently,

Aquila won his master's daughter to the Lord, was set free, married her, and they became

tentmakers."[81] Murphy O'Connor and F. F. Bruce conjecture that Priscilla and Aquila left

Rome when the Emperor Claudius closed down a Roman synagogue because of

disruption over Christ.[82]

Even though details surrounding why the couple left Rome are uncertain, Paul

met them in Corinth, and they had already become Christians (or Luke would have added

their conversion story).[83] Paul stayed in the couple's home in Corinth, and they worked

together making tents. Ben Witherington III in *Conflict and Community in Corinth* notes,

"After Paul's initial success and then rejection in a synagogue, it appears that he preached

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[80]Leon Morris, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 246.

[81]Stanley M. Horton, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1999), 169.

[82]Anthony C. Thiselton, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The First Epistle of the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1343.

[83]I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 293.

mainly in private homes."[84] Undoubtedly, Priscilla and Aquila's home emerged as a

meeting place for believers.

Blue notes in reference to the Corinthian church, "The central importance of the

Lord's Supper and the common meal in the New Testament Church established the

incontrovertible necessity of house gatherings."[85] Certainly Paul, Priscilla and Aquila

enjoyed the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-26) with the Corinthians in a house setting.

Because of Paul's success in small group ministry, and Priscilla and Aquila's later home-

church ministry, one can certainly conclude that this trio formed a small group in their

home.[86] Paul, the apostle, and Priscilla and Aquila, tentmakers, demonstrate the diversity

of small group leadership. The theological divisions at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:12) were

probably complicated by the divided loyalties represented by the individual house

churches and the difficulty of getting the church together in one location.

Perhaps Paul's first contacts in the community came through tentmaking. His best

teaching probably occurred in the workshop. Paul never separated work and preaching as

seen in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians: "We worked night and day in order not to be a

burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you" (1 Thess. 2:9).

Recent excavations in Corinth reveal the conditions surrounding the place where

Paul worked. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor notes De Waele's findings in "The Roman

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[84]Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 30.

[85]Bradley B. Blue, "The House Church at Corinth and the Lord's Supper: Famine, Food Supply, and the Present Distress," *Criswell Theological Review 5, no. 2* (1991): 238.

[86]Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002), 183.

Market North of the Temple at Corinth,"

> The shops had a uniform height of 4 meters (13 feet), and were just under 4 meters deep; the width varied from 2.8 (9 feet) to 4 meters. Frequently they had a communicating door or window with the shop next door. The space was not as cramped as one might have expected. The 2.3 meter-wide (7.5 foot-wide) doorway was the only source of light, and this would have created problems in the cold of winter … In the back of the shop a series of stone or brick steps was continued by a wooden ladder to a loft lit by an unglazed window centered above the shop entrance. This is where the family that owned the business slept, cooked, and ate. A hired man, such as Paul, would have slept in the workroom.[87]

The Corinthian workshop floor plans in Corinth are virtually identical to the ones found in Rome and the rest of the empire. From the wide open door of the workshop, Paul had access to the busy streets of the city. Most homes were uncomfortably crowded. Such resulted in life being lived on the streets and made privacy rare (Acts 2:6).[88] Paul was able to share Christ with clients and even teach his small group while he instinctively worked. His "tent-making small group" would have been well known among the other artisans in the area. Paul and his fellow tentmakers Priscilla and Aquila led a small group ministry in Corinth.

<div align="center">In Ephesus</div>

When the time came to leave Corinth, Priscilla and Aquila traveled with Paul to Ephesus and planted a house church. Acts 18:18-19 states,

> Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken. They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

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[87]Ibid, 194

[88]Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (London: Yale University Press, 1983), 143.

When they asked him to stay longer, Paul boarded a ship bound for Jerusalem to fulfill a Nazarite vow he had made at Cenchrea. Paul left Ephesus in the hands of Priscilla and Aquila—a capable couple he knew he could trust. During that time, Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos preach, even as "a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of Scriptures" (Acts 18:24). They discovered that Apollos needed his theology brought up-to-date. Not intimidated by Apollos' education or eloquence, Priscilla and Aquila "invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (v. 26). Apollo's life was changed forever. Disciples at Ephesus wrote to believers in Achaia and urged them to receive Apollos (v. 27). Clearly, a communication network linked the house churches together.[89] Only after being taught in a small group house setting by this dynamic couple was Apollos ready to help new believers in Achaia and to confront the Jews "in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ" (vv. 27-28).

Later, Paul returned to Ephesus (Acts 19:1). Priscilla and Aquila, who had planted a church in their home, welcomed him. Bruce Winter in *After Paul Left Corinth* states, "It might be more precise to call this the meeting in their reception room, for in the house of those with status this was a large area."[90] Paul later wrote these words to the Corinthian church from Ephesus, "The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house" (1 Cor. 16:19). Gordon Fee noticed a twofold meaning in this greeting:

> First, these were former Corinthians (Acts 18:2-3), who now join Paul in "warmly" greeting old friends; second, this is most likely the house church in

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[89]Kistemaker, 669.

[90]Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 211.

Ephesus to which Paul himself is attached. Hence the greeting comes not only from their friends, but from the church as well.[91]

Later at Miletus, Paul sent for the elders of Ephesus and reminded them how he served the Lord and was severely tested by the Jews (Acts 20:17-21). Paul summed up his discipleship and evangelism strategy when he said in vv. 20-21, "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Paul not only used a public approach, but a private approach that consisted of going from house to house in order to disciple people.

In Rome

From Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila returned to Rome. As Paul concluded his letter to the Romans, he illustrated the nature of community in the New Testament Church when he stated, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house" (Rom. 16:3-5). "All the churches of the Gentiles" implies that the husband-and-wife team had a powerful missional impact on the Gentiles.[92] This missionary couple influenced a growing network of communities

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[91]Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 835.

[92]Ben Witherington, III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 386.

to spread the gospel. Paul attended the small group meetings at Priscilla and Aquila's home.[93] The "behind-the-scenes" small group ministry in their home provided "hospitality, friendship, and person-to-person teaching."[94] Paul called them "fellow workers" because they participated with him in the spread of the gospel and were constantly on the move—perhaps even as much as Paul.[95] They were effective "mobile merchant missionaries."[96]

Douglas J. Moo in the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* asserts, "The size of the ancient Roman home would also have meant that the largest congregation would have numbered no more than twenty to thirty Christians."[97] Robert Banks makes this observation, "The entertaining room in a moderately well-to-do household could hold around thirty people comfortably."[98] Banks further surmises that the large meetings of the "whole church" might have reached forty to forty-five people and homes with courtyards allowed for almost one hundred.[99] A comparison of the two authors' information suggests that the size of the small groups in the New Testament Church varied according to the wealth of the house owner. The actual size of a house church could fluctuate from twenty to thirty Christians in an average Roman home to a

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[93]I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 391.

[94]Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, and Neil Wilson, "Romans," in *Life Application Bible Commentary,* ed. Grant Osborne (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 328.

[95]Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 532.

[96]Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 322.

[97]Douglas J. Moo, "Romans," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. Vol. 3, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 92.

[98]Banks, 35.

[99]Ibid., 35-36.

congregation of 120 people in a house with a courtyard. Clearly, these individual house churches, clustered together in a given locality, formed the Roman church.

Romans 16 contains many references to people who were part of house churches. John Stott notes that Paul probably refers to six house churches in Romans 16 alone (Rom. 16:5, 10-11, 14-15, 23).[100] The Roman church, in essence, consisted of a number of house churches. This probably contributed to the disunity Paul addressed in Romans 14-15. In Romans 16:5, 1 Corinthians 16:19, Philippians 2, Paul used the term *ekklesia* to refer to a group of house churches in a region. Recently, scholars have discovered that Paul used *ekklesia* to generically refer to many house churches that made up one church association, usually marked by a close geographic proximity to each other as in Rome (Rom.16:4, 16).[101] James Dunn notes, "Church gatherings consisted of more regular small house groups interspersed with less frequent (weekly, monthly) gatherings of 'the whole church'."[102]

In Troas

In Acts 20:7-9, Luke gave an eyewitness account of the nature of community in the New Testament Church and provided several important details for what small group meetings were actually like in Troas.

> On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a

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[100]John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 397.

[101]D. J. Tidball, "Church," in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 409-410.

[102]James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 541.

deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead.

Certain words provide clues about where the small group meeting took place: upstairs room, seated in a window, and the third story. A typical three-story Roman *insula* featured stores on the street level and apartments on the upper two floors. This "house church" was actually an "apartment church."[103] Wealthy people usually had meetings on the first floor of a large house. These Christians were certainly not among the socially elite, because they lived on the third floor.[104]

Robert Banks and Julie Banks note the informal elements of this house church: "Church is a place where it is all right to sit on a window sill, where unexpected happenings are not unexpected, and where church life can occur down in the street as well as up in the room."[105] Paul intervenes and proclaims that the young man is alive. The miracle just encourages them all to go upstairs and continue the meeting until daylight. Acts 20:7 contains the first direct mention of meeting together on Sunday to celebrate the Lord's Supper.[106] The ingredients of this New Testament Church house meeting were preaching, teaching, and communion. They had fellowship when they ate the *agape* feast together.

In Colosse

There were several churches in the Colosse area, but the New Testament highlights two small group leaders and their house churches: Nympha in Colossians 4:3

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[103]Clinton E. Arnold, 421.

[104]Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 607.

[105]Banks and Banks, 30.

[106]I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Commentaries*, 325.

and Philemon in Philemon 2. Paul and Timothy both write the letter to the believers at

Colosse (Col. 1:1) during Paul's imprisonment in Rome (4:3). As Paul ended his letter to

the Colossians with greetings from his eight coworkers in Rome, he then stated in

Colossians 4:15, "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the

church in her house." Paul greeted the church at large; then he greeted one specific leader

and her house church.

As seen in this writing, Nympha lived in Laodicea. She opened her home as a

house church to those in the Laodicea area. F. F. Bruce agrees with Lightfoot that

Nympha leads and ministers as a woman.[107] She was apparently a well-to-do Christian

who opened her home in her area for a small group of Christians to meet.[108] Few doubt

that the church that met in Nympha's home was one of many.[109]

The Book of Philemon gives another example of a leader of a house church who

was most likely from Colosse.[110] Within the story of Paul seeking to restore a converted

slave to his owner, one finds a house church. Philemon 1-3 states, "Paul, a prisoner of

Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to

Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your

home." There is little doubt that Philemon's family's affluent position provided him a

house with a sizeable meeting room as well as an inner courtyard.[111] Their ability to own

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[107]F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 183.

[108]Moo, 400.

[109]Meeks, 29.

[110]Most scholars put Philemon at Colosse by linking Archippus in Philem. 2 to Col. 4:17—where addresses him. What does "–where addresses him" mean?

[111]Moo, 515.

slaves (Phil. 10-11) and have an extra guest room for Paul (v. 22) indicate they lived in privileged circumstances. Further speculation has Apphia as his wife and Archippus as his son. Whether true or not, Philemon's house provided a small group experience for his household and other Christians in the city who wanted to know more about the truth of Jesus. Clearly, the way Philemon handled Onesimus could jeopardize his effectiveness as a small group leader.[112] Scholars are confident that Philemon restored Onesimus to a right standing with him and his household.

Conclusion

The analysis of key biblical texts regarding the particular characteristics of churches in Jerusalem, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Colosse, and Philemon (Acts 2:43, 5:41-42, 12:12, 18:26, 20:8, 1 Cor. 16:19, Col. 4:15, Phil. 2) provided a theological basis for understanding the nature of community in the New Testament. Conclusions revealed that the New Testament Church experienced small groups through the development of house churches. These house churches varied in size according to the dwelling, formed a network clustered within a city, utilized various kinds of leadership, consisted of a diverse congregation, and exploded through house-to-house evangelism.

A common metaphor describing the church was "house" or "household." Paul encouraged the Galatians to do good to all people, especially to those who "are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10, KJV). He reminded the Ephesians that they were "no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household" (Eph. 2:19-20). Peter described the Church as "the family of God" (1 Pet. 4:17) and "a spiritual house" (2:5). The New Testament Church used words that

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[112]Bruce, *New International Commentary: The Epistles to the Colossians*, 206-207.

naturally signified relationships in the family of God.[113] Only much later did the house church evolve into something much different. Blue, commenting on the later development of house churches notes,

> The gathering of Christian believers in private homes (or homes renovated for the purpose of Christian gatherings) continued to be the norm until the early decades of the fourth century when Constantine began erecting the first Christian Basilicas. For almost three hundred years the believers met in homes, not in synagogues or edifices constructed for the sole purpose of religious assembly.[114]

In summary, the preceding data revealed three house church sizes: twenty to thirty people in average homes, forty to fifty people in well-to-do homes, and 120 people in courtyard settings. Limited only by physical space, the small group meetings in houses encouraged the building of close relationships in the family of God. Randy Frazee in *The Connecting Church* believes, "The development of meaningful relationships where every member carries a significant sense of belonging is central to what it means to be the Church."[115] Modern concepts of "church" primarily focus on a building or a meeting of a large group of believers in a large place, but the nature of community in the New Testament Church focused on small group meetings in homes.

Analysis of the various small groups clustered in a city revealed networks of house churches, which combined and formed "the church" in a particular city. The house churches of Jerusalem (Acts 5:41-42, 12:12, 17), Ephesus (Acts 20:20), and Rome (Rom 16:5-16) formed one church affiliation that shared close proximity and relationship to one

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[113]McBride, *How to Lead Small Groups*, 18.

[114]Blue, "Acts and the House Church," 120-121.

[115]Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church: Beyond Small Groups To Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 35.

another. Individual house churches helped the Church to survive underground. At the same time, their common association caused them to thrive.

This section demonstrated that the New Testament Church utilized a variety of leaders in small group ministry. Men and women, couples and singles, apostles and lay preachers (Acts 18:18) all led small groups. Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, lay leaders were equipped and empowered to take the gospel to all people.

Examination of the seven churches revealed broad congregational diversity in the New Testament Church. House churches included men and women (1 Cor. 16:19), Jews and Gentiles (Acts 20:20-21), rich and poor (Acts 4:34-35), educated and common (Acts 18:24-26), business owners (Acts 16:14) and slaves (Acts 12:13), and people from all classes and walks of life (Phil. 1). One can only imagine the diversity of the crowd that attended the prayer meeting at Mary's house (Acts 12:12), or the small group meeting at the Philippian jailer's house (Acts 16:32). Small groups in the New Testament Church included a rich variety of people.

The natural community in the New Testament Church resulted in explosive growth through house-to-house evangelism. In Jerusalem, the church went from 120 followers of Jesus "who joined constantly together in prayer" (Acts 1:14-15), to multiplied thousands of believers (4:4). The secret of church growth remained in the power of small groups. Acts 5:42 states, "Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ." During New Testament times, the churches in Jerusalem, Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus, Rome, Troas, Colosse, and throughout the world, advanced through small group evangelism.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the nature of biblical community lived through small groups. Community was God's idea from the creation of the world and will be to the end of time. Heaven holds the realization of total community. "For the Lord himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The redeemed enjoy complete community in the Father's house in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-4).

This section presented a theological foundation for small group ministry by exploring key biblical texts for the nature of community in the Trinity, the Creation, the nation of Israel, the ministry of Jesus, and the New Testament Church. The biblical basis for small groups permeates Scripture as the one method, that when done right, will produce a harvest of souls living abundant lives. It is time the Church begins to "think small" in order to "grow big."[116]

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[116]Donahue and Robinson, *Walking the Small Group Tightrope*, 163.

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Presently, four out of ten Americans belong to some type of a small group that

meets regularly.[1] These organized groups include Sunday school classes, civic groups,

and emotional support groups—newspapers list self-help groups like Alcoholics

Anonymous and Overeaters Anonymous.[2] Small group expert Robert Wuthnow claims,

"Millions of Americans, it appears, are joining small groups."[3] Countering the tide of

American self-interest individualism, the proliferation and popularity of small groups

remains unprecedented. From a secular point of view, humanity's desire for small group

connections finds support in a wide spectrum, ranging from social psychology to social

science in general literature. Secular society portrays the power of community.

This general literature review will explore three topics that demonstrate the power

of human connection through small group interaction: (1) Group Dynamics: How Social

Units Function, (2) Andragogy: How Adults Learn, and (3) Attachment: How Humans

Need Relationships to Thrive. Through analysis of these topics, the validity of both

spiritual and secular small group connections will emerge.

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[1]Robert Wuthnow, "How Small Groups Are Transforming Our Lives," *Christianity Today*, 7 February 1994, 21.

[2]Robert Wuthnow, ed., *I Came Away Stronger: How Small Groups Are Shaping American Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 1.

[3]Ibid.

Group Dynamics: How Social Units Function

Introduction

An observer, looking at planet earth from a distant star, would see over six billion people, separated into thousands of people groups, living in hundreds of nations, speaking a multitude of languages, and functioning together in everyday life. To a degree, understanding humankind requires an examination of how people function in groups. Psychology defines group dynamics as "the branch of social psychology that studies the psychodynamics of interaction in social groups."[4] The attitudes and behaviors of individuals in groups influence how groups function.

Part One of the general literature review will examine seven observable facts about group dynamics that show the nature of how people interact in social units: (1) group structure, (2) group facilitation, (3) group loafing, (4) group size, (5) group decisions, (6) group cohesion, and (7) group leadership. Each of these areas uncovers the nature of small groups and unravels the mystery of how people work together through relational interaction.

Group Structure

First, group dynamics show how people interact with one another through group structures. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines a human group as "an assemblage of persons" or "a number of individuals considered together because of

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[4]"Group dynamics," Dictionary.com, http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/group dynamics (accessed May 1, 2008).

similarities."[5] However, the dynamics of the word goes far beyond conventional

meanings. David G. Myers in *Social Psychology*, defines a group as two or more people

who, for longer than a few moments, interact with and influence one another, and

perceive one another as "us."[6] A group enjoys a reason for existing. Small group

structures provide many forms, norms, status, and advantages.

Group structure offers many forms of expression. Gloria J. Galanes and Katherine

Adams, in *Effective Group Discussion*, classify a small group as either primary—meeting

the needs of inclusion and affection, or secondary—focusing on doing a task.[7] Galanes

and Adams further identify four categories of groups within the previous two groupings:

activity, personal growth, educational, and problem solving.[8] Groups might be further

categorized as formal—defined by an organizational structure with an assigned task, and

informal—identified by a non-structure arising from a natural desire for social contact.[9]

Stephen Robbins and Timothy Judge, in *Organizational Behavior*, state that, according to

L. R. Sayles' research, "it's possible to further sub-classify groups as command, task,

interest, or friendship groups."[10]

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[5]"Group," Dictionary.com, http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/group (accessed April 28, 2008).

[6]David G. Myers, *Social Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 314.

[7]Gloria J. Galanes and Katherine Adams, *Effective Group Discussion: Theory and Practice* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 10-11.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Timothy A. Judge and Stephen P. Robbins, *Organizational Behavior* (Upper Saddle River, NJ; Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007), 300. (L. R. Sayles, "Work Group Behavior and the Larger Organization," in *Research in Industrial Relations*, ed. C. Arensburg, et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 300.)

[10]Judge and Robbins, 300.

Group structure further defines acceptable norms to which members conform. Standards determine what people wear, absenteeism, lateness or promptness, the level of socializing, and expected performance.[11] After several meetings, every group understands the unique rituals that define expected group behavior. New members carefully watch others for clues—especially when punished for violating a norm.[12]

Belonging to a group can bring members a degree of status.[13] Groups impart self-worth and self-esteem to members. Social interaction satisfies the deepest needs for friendship. Groups shield individuals from personal responsibility when unreasonable demands for performance come from outside forces. A group enables an individual to attain goals through the collective use of talents and abilities. Every group structure consists of a status hierarchy and gives members "a prestige grading, position, or rank within a group."[14] The social status system defines the behavior of the group, as members express admiration for particular areas such as education, age, wisdom, skill, financial ability, or family background. These factors become the measure of how groups place individuals into status categories. These structures of positional groupings affect every aspect of the meetings, which range from where people sit to how people communicate.

A small group offers distinct advantages. Group structure allows people to

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[11]David A. DeCenzo and Stephen P. Robbins, *Fundamentals of Management: Essential Concepts and Applications* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005), 283.

[12]Steven A. Beebe and John T. Masterson, *Communicating in Small Groups: Principles and Practices* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1986), 62.

[13]DeCenzo and Robbins, 282.

[14]Ibid., 284.

achieve tasks they consider impossible to attain alone.[15] As Stephen L. Franzoi states,

"Becoming a group member provides people with the opportunity to satisfy such

affinitive motives as the desire for approval, belonging, prestige, friendship, and even

love."[16] Group membership provides added security through numbers. Individuals change

more readily when they exist in a group.[17] Cheryl Hamilton notes, "Resistance to change

is reduced, and decisions that are arrived at jointly are usually better received because

members are committed to the solution and therefore are more willing to support it."[18]

Group structures provide common solutions to complex problems. Understanding basic

group structure provides the first step to utilizing the power of group dynamics.

<div align="center">Group Facilitation</div>

Group dynamics show the nature of how people in groups interact through group

or social facilitation. In the presence of others, humans do certain things faster and better.

Two joggers running side-by-side will each run faster and further. This social-facilitation

effect happens in the presence of a group of the same species.[19] Social psychologist

Robert Zajonc found that "increased arousal enhances performance on easy tasks for

which the most likely—'dominant'—response is the correct one."[20]

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[15]Stephen L. Franzoi, *Social Psychology* (Dubuque, IA: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1996), 521.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Kurt Lewin, *Field Theory in Social Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 227-228.

[18]Cheryl Hamilton, *Communicating for Results: A Guide for Business and the Professions* (Belmont, CA: 2005), 208.

[19]Myers, 315.

[20]Ibid., 316.

Social-facilitation works best with simple or well-learned tasks in the presence of others. In the 1920s, psychologist Floyd Henry Allport asked five people in the same room to individually cross out vowels in a column, perform simple math problems, and write rebuttals to various logical arguments. In each other's presence, they performed the assignment better than when alone.[21] Pool players who average 70 percent of their shots improved their game to 80 percent when four people watched them play.[22] When an answer or variable remain unknown, people tend to perform and produce better in a group than as individuals.

Conversely, studies confirm that when groups of people attempt to solve complex problems, where the answers were not dominant, the individuals in the group performed poorly due to increased arousal or anxiety, which led to wrong answers. This social inhibition of performance produced more inferior work than they would have performed without the group members present.[23] When an actor initially attempts to present his or her lines flawlessly by memory, anxiety experienced in front of a crowd might make the performance a huge challenge. After the second or third time through, the anxiety of being in front of a crowd begins to work in his or her favor and turns the acting into a great performance.

Generally, individuals in groups will perform better, unless they experience hyper-arousal or extreme self-consciousness. People's opinions impact behavior. Large crowds inspire well-trained athletes to play better sports, or make a great basketball

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[21]David O. Sears, et al., *Social Psychology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: 1985), 383.

[22]Myers, 317.

[23]Sears, 384.

player miss a free throw in a critical moment. The home court advantage wins more ball games.[24] On the other hand, a large crowd creates arousal, which increases blood pressure, perspiration, muscle tenseness, and breathing rate. This anxiety can cause some people to stutter and have trouble speaking in front of a crowd.

Social-facilitation can produce higher performance levels. Joggers at the University of California ran faster when a woman sat on the grass watching them.[25] Open office designs with unrestricted work areas encourage people to work together at optimum levels. This open office design might energize work on simple tasks, but hinder performance on complex tasks. Groups motivate people to pay attention and work more efficiently. Small groups produce peak performance if the presence of others creates positive energy to do dominant tasks. When individuals focus on their goals, groups bring out the best in people.

<div align="center">Group Loafing</div>

Group dynamics indicate how people in groups interact with one another, through the examination of social loafing. Social loafing includes the social impact theory that people in groups do not work as hard as they do when performing alone.[26] Max Reingelmann, a nineteenth-century French agricultural engineer, used a strain gauge to measure exertion levels. When pulling on a rope alone, individuals averaged 85 kg.[27] When pulling in groups of seven, the total individual output fell to 65 kg per person. A

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[24]Myers, 318.

[25]Ibid., 320.

[26]Sears, 385.

[27]Ibid.

group of fourteen people produced 61 kg per person. According to social facilitation, one would expect that a team would encourage more individual output, but the opposite occurred.

One study measured the maximum noise undergraduate men made by clapping or cheering alone, and then, calculated the noise in groups of two, four, and six. Clearly, each individual produced less noise as the group increased in size.[28] The likelihood of one person stepping forward to give assistance at an accident decreases when the number of people witnessing the accident increases. Groups produce greater amounts of output, but individual output diminishes.

How can a group's presence, on one hand, produce social facilitation and, on the other, social loafing? In social facilitation situations, individuals feel pressure from the rest of the group. In social loafing, if pressure comes from an outsider, work output declines.[29] The larger the group, the more the sharing of responsibility lessens the feelings of pressure felt by individual group members. As group members evaluate the output of fellow co-workers, they will adjust their own output—usually down—to keep everything equitable.

According to Judge and Robbins, "When managers use collective work situations to enhance morale and teamwork, they must also provide means by which individual efforts can be identified."[30] Individual accountability and evaluation must occur in order for the group to perform at optimum levels. Work groups in the People's Republic of China and Israel display no social loafing. The motivation to perform comes from in-

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[28]Sears, 385.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Judge and Robbins, 317.

group goals. The individualistic culture of the United States operates totally by self-

interests. Understanding how to unlock personal interest, without disregarding others'

interest, produces results.

When a group leader or outside management communicates to an individual

regarding the unique contribution he or she makes to the group, the person performs at

higher levels.[31] Providing greater individual responsibility, involvement, and recognition

for individual group members produces greater results. Myers states, "When being

observed *increases* evaluation concerns, social facilitation occurs; when being lost in a

crowd *decreases* evaluation concerns, social loafing occurs."[32] An understanding of

social loafing provides keys to developing more effective groups.

<div align="center">Group Size</div>

Group dynamics show how people in groups respond according to group size.

Large crowds have a life of their own. Thousands of rock fans do things at a concert that

they would never do alone. Twenty-three policemen did nothing, as four fellow officers

beat Rodney King senseless.[33] As John W. Santrock states, "Deindividuation occurs when

being part of a group reduces personal identity and erodes the sense of personal

responsibility."[34] Large groups provide an individual anonymity and incite excitement.

The bigger the crowd, the more individual members lose their awareness. Regarding this

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[31]Sears, 386.

[32]Myers, 323.

[33]Ibid., 326-327.

[34]John W. Santrock, *Psychology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 664.

phenomenon, Charles G. Morris, in *Psychology: An Introduction*, states, "His individual responsibility is downplayed and diffused by his feeling of being part of the mass."[35]

Anonymity does not always unleash the worst in humans. Myers relates an experiment performed by Swarthmore, a group of four college researchers.[36] Eight strangers, of both sexes, were placed in a dark chamber for one hour with the option that they could leave at any time. The researchers urged them to act in any way they wanted and informed them that, at the end of the hour, they would leave alone. Other participants, placed in a lighted room, sat and talked. The eight people in the dark chamber talked less, but spoke about significant things with intimacy and affection. Myers states, "Ninety percent purposefully touched someone; 50 percent hugged another. Few disliked the anonymity; most deeply enjoyed it and volunteered to return without pay. Anonymity 'freed up' intimacy and playfulness."[37]

The nature of small and large groups produces notable differences. Smaller groups complete tasks faster than larger groups.[38] Better individual performance occurs in small groups than large groups. However, large groups provide better problem solving dynamics than small groups. Judge and Robbins state, "Large groups—with a dozen or more members—are good for gaining diverse input … . On the other hand, smaller groups are better at doing something productive with that input. Groups of approximately

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[35]Charles G. Morris, *Psychology: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 544.

[36]Myers, 330.

[37]Ibid.

[38]Judge and Robbins, 316.

seven members, therefore, tend to be more effective for taking action."[39] Dorwin

Cartwright and Alvin Zander cite B. P. Indick's findings, "Large groups do have more

difficulties of communication and less satisfaction from work."[40] As the size of the group

grows, the attractiveness of the group diminishes. Cartwright and Zander state that a large

group, oriented around goal achievement, could provide more satisfaction than a small

group.[41]

Small groups consist of members who know each other and their functions. Gloria

J. Galanes and Katherine Adams believe three people represents the minimum number

needed in a small group and eleven the maximum.[42] With proper training, the group could

facilitate twelve to fourteen members. The authors stress that a small group must be small

enough for the members to develop relationship with one another and possess a sense of

belonging. Cooperation and communication make up the essence of small groups.

Small groups produce better interaction when a room seems full, but not

overcrowded. Myers states, "A class of 35 students feels more warm and lively in a room

that seats just 35 than when spread around a room that seats 100. This occurs partly

because when others are close by, we are more likely to notice and join in their laughter,

or clapping."[43] Studies indicate that putting ten people in an eight foot by twelve-foot

room resulted in higher blood pressure and an increase in errors on complicated tasks.

Crowding hindered performance on difficult tasks, but made no difference on performing

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[39]Ibid.

[40]Dorwin Cartwright, "Group Cohesiveness," in *Group Dynamics: Research and Theory,* ed. Dorwin Cartwright and Alvin Zander (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), 103.

[41]Ibid.

[42]Galanes and Adams, 8-9.

[43]Myers, 319.

easy tasks.[44] Large crowds provide tremendous power to help a football team win a big game. Small crowds relate in a different way and provide a better individual experience. Contrasting large groups with small groups provides a better understanding of the ways small groups facilitate personal growth.

<div align="center">Group Decisions</div>

As small groups meet, the dynamics of what happens leads members to make group decisions. Many inherent dangers exist in small group decision-making, including keeping members from making right choices. Studies prove that "when the initial opinions of group members are conservative, group discussion results in a shift toward more extreme conservatism. When the initial opinions tend toward risk, group discussion results in a shift toward greater risk."[45]

Group polarization occurs when group discussion leads to more radical decisions than would normally be determined. As group members communicate both positive and negative positions on a subject, the position with the most favorable arguments usually win—whether right or wrong.[46] Sometimes the loudest voice gets heard over the right voice because quantity and quality of information presented plays an important role in the decision. Those in a group, who take a strong position on a subject, may hear others express an equally strong position. As a result, individuals might feel encouraged to take an extreme position that hurts the overall performance of the group.

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Sears, 391.

[46]Ibid.

Groupthink happens when a group, through consensus, makes the wrong decision, because individuals fail to act independently or responsibly.[47] Social psychologist Irving Janis, after analyzing several government blunders such as Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, and the Vietnam War, "believed these blunders were bred by the tendency of decision-making groups to suppress dissent in the interests of group harmony."[48] High group cohesiveness, a seemingly positive characteristic, leads to increased conformity.[49] Finding acceptance in a group causes members to also accept each other's faulty thinking. Groupthink, which combines high cohesiveness with life-threatening situations and defective group procedures, can formulate a recipe for disaster. The stressful situation may speed up the decision-making process and produce huge errors. The illusion of unanimity, assumed consensus, and reluctance to go against powerful people or leaders can lead to decisions that go terribly wrong.

In order to make better group decisions and prevent the innate tendencies of group polarization and groupthink, members should recruit outsiders to present differing opinions. Criticism within the group must be encouraged, after a verdict has been reached. This allows members to verbalize any lingering uncertainties.[50] Group leaders should stress impartiality. Their persuasive influence could even cause members to play the devil's advocate.[51] Good critical analysis facilitates productive group results.

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[47]"Groupthink," Dictionary.com, http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/groupthink (accessed August 15, 2008).

[48]Myers, 340.

[49]Franzoi, 537.

[50]Ibid., 539.

[51]Myers, 345.

Although the majority usually wins, the minority influences decision-making by consistently and confidently applying valid informational pressure.[52] People strong in character and influence must distinguish themselves and stand out from the group. Studies indicate that, many times, jurors with a minority view persuade those of the majority opinion to change their minds.[53] Groups that allow minority opinion counter the natural, yet destructive, process of group polarization and groupthink. Groups strengthen their decision-making by considering the perspective of every small group member.

Group Cohesiveness

Group dynamics demonstrate the nature of how people in groups interact and develop group cohesiveness. Larry Barker says that generally, cohesiveness "… is regarded as the complex of forces that bind members of a group to one another and to the group as a whole."[54] Small groups provide interpersonal dimensions that bring the group together. The very feeling of togetherness forms powerful bonds that create powerful results. Some groups seem to relate better to each other by generating warm feelings. Other groups never seem to "get-it-together." Dennis Coon concludes, "Cohesiveness is the basis for much of the power that groups exert over their members."[55] Group cohesiveness consists of inclusion, control, affection, and common goals.[56]

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[52]Santrock, 666.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Larry L. Barker, et al., *Groups in Process: An Introduction to Small Group Communication* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987), 65.

[55]Dennis Coon, *Essentials of Psychology: Exploration and Application* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2000), 617.

[56]John F. Cragan and David W. Wright, *Communication in Small Group Discussions: A Case Study Approach* (Los Angeles: West Publishing Company, 1980), 153-154.

Out of a strong desire for inclusion, people join a small group with immense apprehension and anxiety. In an effort to "fit in," prospective members attempt to "size up" the group. The desire for inclusion and the fear of getting involved with unknown people causes individuals to either over-react and dominate the conversations, or under-react and withdraw to a quiet, safe world of little interaction.[57] As each person experiences inclusion, appropriate responses result.

Initial issues of control surface when the group attempts to self-align members into distinctive roles.[58] Leaders who influence, instruct, and guide rise to the top. Followers fall into line, forming subordinate positions that utilize their strengths, talents, and competencies. As the group becomes more cohesive, roles blend together and produce a unified effort. Individual strengths become less obvious because of the sheer effectiveness of the group.

Quality group time creates warm feelings of affection. Group cohesiveness generates a commitment to stay in a group and stick together.[59] Groups usually stay in close physical proximity and shower attention and affection on one another. As group members spend time with each other, communication and interaction increase. B. Aubrey Fisher believes, "Communication and only communication allows group members to fulfill the group purposes."[60] Face-to-face encounters connect people through both verbal and nonverbal communication and help them achieve optimum performance. Candid

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[57]Ibid., 153-154.

[58]Ibid., 154.

[59]Coon, 617.

[60]Fisher, 14.

conversations must encourage honest self-disclosure appropriate to the occasion and task.[61] As group members focus on goals, mutual affection produces powerful motivation for the group to succeed.

Common goals bring cohesiveness. The more the group's goals align with the individuals' goals, the better the degree of group cohesiveness.[62] If these goals line up with organizational goals, it produces peak performance and high productivity.[63] Groups with no clear purpose slowly disintegrate.[64] Relevant goals increase motivation and produce outstanding results.

Inclusion, control, affection, and common goals create group cohesiveness, which, in turn, produces results. John McDavid concludes, "One cannot say definitively whether groups perform better because they are cohesive, or whether groups are cohesive when they perform more successfully; one can only say that cohesiveness and the level of group performance and achievement are associated."[65] Understanding the nature of group cohesiveness lies at the heart of effective, relational interaction in small groups.

Group Leadership

The group dynamics, created as a result of small group interaction, require group leadership. Everything rises or falls on leadership. In rare instances, leaderless groups

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[61]Ibid., 157.

[62]DeCenzo and Robbins, 285.

[63]Ibid., 286.

[64]Barker, 9.

[65]John McDavid and Herbert Harari, *Social Psychology: Individuals, Groups, Societies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 285.

exist; however, most small groups require effective leaders to achieve optimum results. Leaders create group stability and greater goal achievement.[66] Leadership matters.

Myers views leadership as "the process by which certain individuals mobilize and guide groups."[67] The essence of small group leadership centers on communication, which alters the behavior of group members to reach desired goals.[68] The manner in which leadership affects group process appears complicated. An examination of leadership traits, styles, emergence, power, communication, and flexibility provides a better understanding of how groups function.

Some small group experts suggest leaders possess traits such as self-confidence, physically striking features, high intelligence, great passion, and even a charismatic personality. The common proverb, "Leaders are born, not made" or the phrase, "He acts like a natural, born leader," seem to suggest that leadership ability comes through having the right DNA.[69] According to Franzoi, "A transformational leader is one who changes (transforms) the outlook and behavior of followers."[70] Still, no trait or grouping of characteristics exists that consistently defines the effective small group leader.[71]

Leadership styles define leaders. Some leaders excel when motivating a small group to achieve a task or goal. These leaders use a direct autocratic style that produces

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[66]Galanes and Adams, 245.

[67]Myers, 349.

[68]Galanes and Adams, 243.

[69]Barker, 151.

[70]Franzoi, 540.

[71]Barker, 151.

great results in the right situation.[72] Autocratic small groups perform well in the leader's

presence, but exhibit more aggressiveness and apathy.[73]

Social leaders support group members through enhancing relationships.[74] This

democratic style provides members great morale, satisfaction, and motivation to succeed,

especially when they have control over some tasks. Generally, men seem to lead in a

more directive style, which drives toward a goal or task, and women prefer a democratic

style with interpersonal methods.[75] Galanes and Adams state, "Democratic leadership is

more productive in natural settings and, in laboratory settings, seems to produce higher

productivity on moderately or highly complex tasks."[76]

A leader emerges from a group for a variety of reasons. This might occur because

of a person's verbal skills.[77] On the other hand, effectiveness in non-verbal

communication might also enhance a person's role as a leader. Leadership emergence

might happen because of an individual's high participation. The person might introduce

more subjects during the small group meeting than others. Usually, members choose a

leader from their ranks on the basis of their job performance.[78] However, a leader might

emerge in a group simply because of his or her high position.

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[72]Myers, 350.

[73]Galanes and Adams, 253.

[74]Myers, 350.

[75]Santrock, 667.

[76]Galanes and Adams, 253.

[77]Fisher, 215.

[78]Galanes and Adams, 249.

Positions and titles can give a leader tremendous power. Being related to or intimately knowing a person of high rank sometimes provides a leader with influence. Expert knowledge and skill offers yet another source of power for leadership. Galanes and Adams note, "Usually a leader's power stems from more than one source."[79]

Small group leaders possess tremendous power to reward or punish. Members who excel might receive tangible rewards such as money, or "intangible items such as special attention, acknowledgement, compliments, personal favors, [and] special titles."[80] Leaders punish members by refusing to provide these things. When powerful leaders guide small groups, they usually dominate the discussion and people collaborate less. In this situation, a less powerful leader provides a better small group experience.

Great groups require great communicators for their leaders. This skill must not be underrated.[81] Communication must be clear and to the point. The leader must speak with self-confidence, yet never with arrogance, as he or she illustrates the ability to relate to the task at hand.[82] Leaders must verbally inspire group members to achieve their goals. A group respects their leader when he or she exhibits an open mind. The effective leader applauds the group for achieving great results.[83]

Great leaders exhibit flexibility. No single trait or style clearly explains the sum of characteristics needed for effective leadership. As the need arises, leadership must flow from task to social leadership. Flexibility pays attention to the group temperature by

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[79]Ibid. 245.

[80]Ibid., 244.

[81]Ibid., 258.

[82]Ibid., 259-260.

[83]Ibid., 260.

creating possibilities for less dominant members to express themselves, while carefully

corralling the vocally dominant members.[84]

A contingency model of leadership ensures that a leader's unique personality

traits correspond perfectly with the circumstances of a specific group, at a particular time,

which helps make them more effective. A situational view of leadership allows for

different leaders to emerge as the needs of the group change.[85] Successful group

dynamics require effective leadership and enormous flexibility.

Conclusion

The study of group dynamics intrigues current leaders, but the subject of

relational interaction remains as old as the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale, "The Bremen

Town Musicians." Once upon a time, an old donkey was unable to work and feared his

master would put him to death. So, he fled down a road to Bremen to become a town-

musician.[86] He came upon an old hound too old to hunt, so the donkey invited him to join

him. Soon, they met a cat, too old to catch mice, and asked him to come along. Next, the

three travelers invited a soon-to-be-eaten rooster to join them. The four soon discovered a

house where robbers lived. Working together as a small group, the donkey placed his feet

on the window ledge, the hound jumped on the donkey's back, the cat climbed on the

dog, and the cock perched on the head of the cat. They sang, broke through the glass, and

scared off the robbers. Then, together they enjoyed a meal and the house.

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[84]Raymond A. Noe, *Employee Training and Development* (New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2005), 155.

[85]Santrock, 667.

[86]Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Bremen Town Musicians*, trans. by Anthea Bell (New York: Penguin Young Readers Group, 2007), 1-28.

Good things come to small groups who engage the power of group dynamics to produce powerful results. Part One examined seven observable facts about group dynamics that demonstrate how people in groups interact with one another from a secular perspective: (1) group structure, (2) group facilitation, (3) group loafing, (4) group size, (5) group decisions (6) group cohesion, and (7) group leadership. Together, people can achieve great things.

Andragogy: How Adults Learn

Introduction

The old adage, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" incorrectly describes dogs as well as people. In 2000, 39 percent of college students in institutions of higher learning were twenty-five years or older.[87] The average age for students attending college remains approximately thirty-eight years of age.[88] Rosemary S. Caffarella and Sharan B. Merriam realized the potential of adult learning when stating, "The consensus is that significant reductions in intelligence do not occur in most people until their eighties or nineties, and then, not in all abilities or all individuals."[89] Adults successfully learn, yet, they learn differently than children.

Malcolm S. Knowles in his seminal work, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy,* changed the entire field of adult education

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[87]Lee Bash, ed. *Best Practices in Adult Learning* (Bolton, MA: Anker Publishing Company, Inc., 2005), 49 (Iris H. Kelsen, Lawrence T. Lesick, "Recruiting and Admitting Adult Learners: They're Not Just Older—They're Different").

[88]Ibid., 83.

[89]Rosemary S. Caffarella and Sharan B. Merriam, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 190.

when he presented the theory that adults learn differently than children.[90] Knowles stated,

"The main reason why adult education has not achieved the impact on our civilization of

which it is capable is that most teachers of adults have only known how to teach adults as

if they were children."[91] Pedagogy refers to the art of teaching all ages—especially

children. Bringing European educational concepts to American educators, Knowles

popularized the term "andragogy," which means "the art and science of helping adults

learn."[92] In 1980, Knowles revised and updated his popular ideas in *The Modern Practice

of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* stating that both methods could be

used interchangeably with children and adults, depending on their particular needs and

situations.[93] Regardless of Knowles' modified position, the term "andragogy" helped

solidify new theories on how adults learn best.[94]

Part Two of the general literature review will explore how adults learn by

examining the five basic principles of andragogy: (1) learning becomes self-directed, (2)

experience provides resources for learning, (3) circumstances necessitate the need for

new learning, (4) situations demand immediate application, and (5) internal need

motivates learning. Each of these principles will clarify the necessity for human

connection through small groups.

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[90]Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy Versus Pedagogy* (New York: Association Press, 1970), 37.

[91]Ibid., 37.

[92]Ibid., 38.

[93]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 43.

[94]"Andragogy" can also be spelled "androgogy." This paper uses the spelling "andragogy" because Malcolm S. Knowles, more than any other educator, utilized this spelling in his books in regard to how adults learn.

Learning Becomes Self-Directed

Adults learn best when learning becomes self-directed. The responsibility for an elementary child's development lies in the hands of parents and educators who determine what that child will learn.[95] Students might rebel during early teen years to ensure control of their own destinies, but true freedom to choose a field of study remains illusive, because young learners depend upon educators to decide what they will learn. Natural maturation, which steadily occurs in the early stages of life, rapidly intensifies during teen years.[96] High school graduates move from passive dependence upon adults to true self-dependence as they gain control of their own lives and embrace their unique self-identity. Knowles states, "The psychological definition of adulthood is the point at which individuals perceive themselves to be essentially self-directing."[97] Daniel D. Pratt elaborates, "Self-direction has become a keystone in the arching methodology of andragogy: the needs and experience of the learner take precedence over the expertise of the instructor."[98]

Self-direction motivates adults to diagnosis their own needs, which motivates learning. The instructor must share the planning process for how learning will take place. Self-directed learning regards teachers as facilitators of learning—not endless sources of information. The self-directed adult thrives on a positive learning climate of mutuality

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[95]Ibid., 45.

[96]Malcolm Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston: Gulf Publishing Company, 1978), 54.

[97]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 46.

[98] Daniel D. Pratt, "Andragogy After Twenty-five Years," in *An Update On Adult Learning Theory*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), 19.

between teachers and students.[99] Susan Anderson observes that small groups build "self-esteem as members experience their positive impact on one another."[100] A sense of belonging, cohesion, and personal empowerment occur naturally through peer facilitation. Group members encourage learning opportunities that traditional student/teacher relationships miss. Through peer facilitation, members own the material they present. Andragogy measures the success of the learning experience by self-evaluation, not an arbitrary letter grade. Anderson developed a successful drug prevention program by empowering eight core members to be peer facilitators. The workshop succeeded because facilitators pooled resources, encouraged open discussion among a small group of parents, and gave the program shape and direction.

Through self-directed small groups, adult learning provides human connection and meaningful learning experiences. The traditional classroom setting, where the instructor lectures from a podium to students sitting in rows of chairs, ignores the dynamics of adult learning. Knowles notes, "Adults … find rooms in which participants are seated in small groups in circles or around tables more conducive to adult-type relationships."[101] Communication flows naturally when adult learners open up to new ideas in an unrestricted learning environment. Andragogy encourages self-directed learning with small group leaders and teachers, who personally know the members of the small group and believe in their ability to learn through self-direction.

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[99]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 47.

[100]Susan Anderson, "Peer-Facilitated Adult Education," in *Enhancing Creativity In Adult and Continuing Education: Innovative Approaches, Methods, and Ideas*, ed. Paul Jay Eielson and Patricia L. Malone (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 20.

[101]Ibid., 47.

Experience Provides Learning

Adults find that experience provides an added resource for learning. In traditional learning, the experience of the instructor and the textbook's author matter. Pedagogy emphasizes teachers giving lectures and students taking notes.[102] Andragogy assumes the collective experiences of adult students offer rich resources and adds an extra ingredient to the classroom not found in traditional education.[103] Jack Mezirow agrees. He states, "Formulating more dependable beliefs about our experience, assessing their contexts, seeking informed agreement on their meaning and justification, and making decisions on the resulting insights are central to the adult learning process."[104] In learning, adults enjoy distinct advantages over youth. Many colleges give older students college credit for their life experience.[105]

Determining the degree of knowledge that occurs from experiential learning remains complex.[106] Peter Jarvis, John Holford, and Colin Griffin, in *The Theory and Practice of Learning*, present three responses to experience: (1) non-learning—people fail to learn from experiences, (2) non-reflective learning—people learn facts and skills,

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[102]Malcolm S. Knowles, *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984), 8.

[103]Ibid., 10.

[104]Jack Mezirow, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 4.

[105]Elinor Lenz, *Creating and Marketing Programs in Continuing Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1980), 149.

[106]Colin Griffin, John Holford and Peter Jarvis, *The Theory and Practice of Learning* (London: Kogan Page Limited, 1998), 46-50.

and (3) reflective learning—people put theory into practice.[107] Each response to

experience results in either conformity or change.

Experience intersects with learning. Knowles states, "If in an educational situation

an adult's experience is ignored, not valued, not made use of, it is not just the experience

that is being rejected; it is the person."[108] When the undereducated experience validation,

they sustain personal self-identity and dignity. When teachers place value on personal

experience, students more easily assimilate the material into practical application as they

plan and rehearse behavioral changes.[109] The cyclical nature of learning takes past

learning and connects the new learning to future situations.[110]

Adult small groups provide human connection, where learners share experiences.

Early sharing, at the beginning of the course, provides an "unfreezing" opportunity that

allows adults to view themselves more objectively.[111] Sharing personal experiences helps

students to more readily accept a personal application of the material being presented.

Mezirow believes that reflective discourse challenges critical assumptions and leads to "a

clearer understanding by tapping collective experience to arrive at a tentative best

judgment."[112] The mutual sharing of teacher and student experiences holds potential for

both to learn. The instructor becomes the facilitator of a learning experience in an

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[107]Ibid., 50-55.

[108]Knowles, *Andragogy in Action*, 11.

[109]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 50.

[110]Caffarella and Merriam, 246.

[111]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 51.

[112]Mezirow. 11.

environment where all freely participate.[113] Adult learning encourages relationships.

Carolyn Clark states,

> There is also a relational foundation to the conceptualization of the teacher and learner in adult education … . Unlike the traditional pedagogic model where the teacher's focus is on the transmission of subject content to a passive learner, in adult education the learner is active and the teacher's role is to facilitate that learning process.[114]

Collaborative small groups provide a natural setting for human connection, where shared experiences can provide effective resources for learning.

Circumstances Necessitate Learning

Adults learn as circumstances necessitate the need for new learning. A child must learn to crawl before he or she can walk. As a product of their biological and mental development, pedagogy assumes children naturally desire to learn. Adults experience the same developmental dynamics as they embrace various social roles and age segments in their lives.[115] K. Patricia Cross identifies seven different life phases: (1) leaving home—ages 18-22; (2) moving into an adult world—ages 23-28; (3) search for stability—ages 29-34; (4) becoming one's own person—ages 37-42; (5) settling down—ages 45-55; (6) the mellowing—ages 57-64; and (7) life review—ages 65 plus.[116] Each of these developmental chapters necessitates the need for new learning.

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[113]Bash, 3.

[114]Carolyn Clark, "Truth, Belief, and Knowledge," *Adult Education and Theological Interpretations*, ed. Peter Jarvis and Nicholas Walters (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 1993), 25.

[115]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 51.

[116]K. Patricia Cross, *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 169-175.

Various personal motivations drive adults to learn. Many times, adults will "name reasons connected to job security or career advancement" for embracing new learning opportunities.[117] A new readiness to learn can occur through life events such as a job loss, divorce, death of a spouse, or even a change in location. Caretakers often experience a deep need for personal growth and decide to do something for themselves. Challenging events and changing seasons of life open up new doors of opportunity for individuals to reinvent their lives.[118] Cross understood this, when she said, "Adults learn not so much because it is 'natural' for human beings to learn, a humanist position, but because transitions are an inevitable part of life, and change creates the challenges and stimulation that promote learning, and therefore development."[119]

Circumstances that necessitate the need for new learning allow adults "to advance from one phase of development to the next."[120] Each of these stages comes with learning opportunities. Robert J. Havighurst concurs,

> The tasks the individual must learn—*the developmental tasks* of life—are those things that constitute healthy and satisfactory growth in our society. They are the things a person must learn if he is to be judged and to judge himself to be a reasonably happy and successful person.[121]

An adult secures employment, works hard to master the job in order to keep it, and then, continues to advance in their skills until they move up the occupational

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[117]Kathleen Taylor, Catherine Marienau, and Morris Fiddler, *Developing Adult Learners: Strategies for Teachers and Trainers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 9.

[118]Ibid., 9.

[119]Cross, *Adults as Learners*, 30.

[120]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 51.

[121]Robert J. Havighurst, *Developmental Tasks and Education* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1962), 2.

ladder.[122] Learning adults make progress, feel a sense of accomplishment, and experience

the motivation to continue.[123] Successful accomplishments lead to further success in the

future. Each of these developmental tasks provides a "teachable moment."[124] When adults

exhibit a readiness to learn, they must receive appropriate materials to advance in their

development. Presenting the wrong material, at the wrong time, results in a wasted

"teachable moment."

Accelerated learning occurs by placing the right group of learners together. At

times, placing adults into a homogeneous group works best; at other times, a

heterogeneous group works best.[125] Adults need the flexibility to choose which small

group will best help them advance to the next level in their development.

<div align="center">Situations Demand Immediate Application</div>

Adults learn when they realize that situations demand immediate application.

When sensing an urgent need for instant solutions, adult motivation soars. They desire to

apply tomorrow, what they learned today.[126] According to Knowles, adults enter the

learning situation "in a *problem-centered* or *performance-centered* frame of mind."[127]

Andragogy provides adults with the opportunity to solve real issues with

immediate application instead of focusing on abstract subjects that need attention in the

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[122]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 51.

[123]Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1986), 55.

[124]Havighurst, 5.

[125]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 53.

[126]Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, 58.

[127]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 53.

future. In order to apply the student's knowledge, the teacher must understand what needs

drive the adult learner because learning must occur naturally. Cross notes, "As the

learning situation moves toward coercion or compulsion the power to determine what is

studied moves from learner to teacher, and learner orientation moves from solving the

learner's problem to satisfying the teacher's requirements."[128]

Educators must provide adults with learning opportunities, which synchronize

with the immediate concerns in the workplace or in the management of everyday life

rather than being concerned with the systematic teaching of a subject. Spending two years

studying foundational courses, in order to spend the last two years in practical courses,

makes little sense to the adult who seeks immediate relevancy.[129]

Instructors must help the adult learner identify heartfelt learning needs at the

beginning of the course.[130] Course design should provide practical answers for real

concerns and down-to-earth descriptive titles to identify the useful nature of the study.

This will produce strong enrollment and high student involvement. Keeping the course

centered on the immediacy of application ensures the adult learner's attention.[131]

Small groups provide problem-solving opportunities through good dialogue and

feedback. Marcia L. Tate believes groups go through four development stages: (1)

Forming transpires when the group centers around a leader and members express

personal ideas; (2) *Storming* occurs when the group exerts influence, conflict, and

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[128]Cross, *Adults As Learners*, 243.

[129]Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 58.

[130]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 54.

[131]Doug Aloof, *How to Teach Adults in a Fun and Exciting Way* (Crows Nest NSW 2065, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 20.

struggle; (3) *Norming* takes place as the group accepts each other; (4) *Performing* occurs through effective problem-solving.[132] Through this process, high-level learning occurs.

Andragogy begins with high involvement of the leader and low involvement of the group. As the group meshes cohesively, the facilitator exhibits low-control and the members take high-control. This approach works because it engages the adult in a pleasurable learning experience. As leaders discern the circumstances that necessitate successful adult learning, small groups provide an effective means for connection and, simultaneously, produce great results.

<div align="center">Internal Need Motivates Learning</div>

Adults learn when motivated by internal factors. In pedagogy, the drive to learn often comes from external factors such as making grades, outperforming the competition, or attempting to please parents and teachers. Adults generally learn when motivation comes from internal sources such as "self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, greater self-confidence, and self-actualization."[133]

Abraham Maslow formulated a theory of motivation based on observation of humankind as a whole, rather than acts of animal behavior.[134] He proposed that humans must be understood in their endeavor to reach ultimate goals, not apparent goals. Maslow developed his famous hierarchy of needs to include physiological needs, safety needs,

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[132]Marica L. Tate, *"Sit and Get" Won't Grow Dendrites: 20 Professional Learning Strategies that Engage the Adult Brain* (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 2004), XXV-XXVI.

[133]Knowles, *Andragogy in Action*, 12.

[134]Herbert L. Petri, *Motivation: Theory and Research* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1986), 289.

belongingness needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization.[135] Lower needs, such as

physiological needs, must be met before meeting higher needs. In regard to learning,

Maslow states, "With self-actualizing people, repetition, contiguity, and arbitrary reward

become less and less important."[136] He questioned why educational psychology focuses

on the means, such as good grades, rather than concentrating on the ends, such as

wisdom. Maslow affirmed "the 'learning of the heart' has been neglected."[137]

 First, instructors must focus on understanding the adult student's immediate needs

in order to properly motivate them to change.[138] Next, instead of making learning a "one-

size-fits-all" system, andragogy seeks to help individuals discover their present needs,

which produces a natural inward motivation for action. Last, as the adult needs are met,

the teacher encourages the student to fulfill their ultimate needs and attain maturity.

 Maslow states, "It is a characteristic of the human being throughout his whole life

that he is practically always desiring something."[139]Andragogy taps into an adult's natural

desire for self-actualization and moves them up the ladder to reach their full potential.

Maslow believes that the growth process which produces self-actualization takes

"considerable time and that most self-actualizing persons are 60 or more years old."[140]

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[135]Ibid., 289.

[136]A. H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 364.

[137]Ibid., 365.

[138]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 29.

[139]Maslow, 69.

[140]Petri, 292.

Knowles agrees with Maslow in that an individual's ultimate need centers on attaining maturity.[141] When adult learners find motivation from internal factors, small groups provide a framework for self-discovery through discussion and the guidance of a teacher. Small groups produce a feeling for needed change. Cross states,

> One of the purposes of creating uncomfortable ambiguities is to promote the process known as unfreezing or unlearning or reduction of defensiveness. In the absence of familiar procedures, behavioral grooves are upset and group members are forced to search for new behaviors and thus to begin the process of new learning.[142]

Small groups promote a non-threatening environment that motivates people to change and move toward self-actualization. Andragogy results in real learning because it focuses on an adult's natural internal motivation, not external incentives.

Conclusion

Teaching an "old dog new tricks" requires using different methods to instruct the old dog, who no longer learns like a puppy. Adults possess outstanding potential to learn, but they learn differently than children. Knowles affirmed this and changed adult learning, as well as educational history. Andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn, holds exciting possibilities for discipleship through small groups. Teaching adults in small groups requires ongoing methods that relate to their special needs. Just as educators realize the obvious presence of adult learners in college and utilize relevant teaching methods, the Church must identify the many adult learners in their ranks and implement applicable methods of instruction.

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[141]Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, 29.

[142]K. Patricia Cross, *Accent on Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1976), 176.

The answer to the question, "How do adults learn?" has been offered by presenting four principles based on the concepts of andragogy: (1) learning becomes self-directed, (2) experience provides resources for learning, (3) circumstances necessitate the need for new learning, (4) situations demand immediate application, and (5) internal need motivates learning. Each principle presented practical ways to show how adults learn in groups.

Attachment: How Humans Need Relationships to Thrive

Introduction

"I thrive on solitude," wrote Henry David Thoreau, three days after Christmas in 1856.[143] Even though some might admire Thoreau's frequent retreats to Walden Pond, humans, in general, hunger for intimate connection. John Donne better expresses the human reality, when he wrote, "No Man is an Island."[144] Lillian B. Rubin understood the human need for attachment, when she wrote, "Intimacy. We hunger for it, but we also fear it. We come close to a loved one, then we back off."[145] Rubin calls this the "approach-avoidance dance."[146] People seek connection, and then, back away, fearing all that accompanies it.

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[143]Odell Shepard, ed. *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1961), 169.

[144]John Donne, "No Man is an Island," *The Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Donne,* ed. Charles M. Coffin (New York: Random House, 1952), 441.

[145]Lillian B. Rubin, *Intimate Strangers: Men and Women Together* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983), 65.

[146]Ibid., 65.

Kendra Van Wagner understands the power of what connects us to other people when she notes, "Attachment is an emotional bond to another person."[147] Psychologist John Bowlby believes that a child's earliest bonds with his or her mother and family impact the child's psychological connectedness throughout life.[148] Evidence from social anthropology, medical science, and the emergent culture proves that humans need attachment through groups in order to thrive. Investigating these three aspects of connectedness provides proof for the need of relational interaction and small groups.

Social Anthropology

Social anthropology confirms that people need human attachment in order for humankind to thrive and "deals with human culture and society."[149] This study reveals that people, from the beginning, depended on one another for their very existence and explores people's basic need for attachment in order to thrive, find identity, love, and connectedness.

Social anthropology provides evidence that humans need attachment to establish individual identity. Humans clearly have the distinction of being fundamentally different than non-humans.[150] Further, humans appear different than other humans physically, socially, and mentally. Through others comes an awareness of individuality, which provides personal identity.

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[147]Kendra Van Wagner, *Attachment Theory: An Overview of Attachment Theory*, About.com, http://psychology.about.com/od/loveandattraction/a/attachment01.htm, (accessed August 12, 2008).

[148]Ibid.

[149]"Social anthropology," Dictionary.com, http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/social anthropology (accessed August 6, 2008).

[150]Ray Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1982), 44-45.

In reality, the only way one finds meaning as "other" occurs by being a member of a group. As John Macquarrie states, "The first reality that he knows is a personal reality other than himself. He knows this reality before he knows himself as distinct from it, before he says 'I'."[151] Martin Buber, an Austrian Jewish philosopher, postulates that life's existence revolves around either an "I" and "It" relationship, where a person experiences something, or an "I" and "Thou" relationship where a person forms a living relationship with another.[152] Buber states, "I require a You to become; becoming I, I say you."[153] Buber views one as finding identity through God and through living in relationship with others.

Humankind's life conquests find constant tension between two poles in life—individualism and collectivism.[154] Humanity exists as co-humanity, living in co-existence. Macquarrie states, "The singularity of my humanity is determined by the other."[155] An individual can never be self-determined without differentiation, which "requires reciprocity of being."[156] People need others to establish personal identity.

Social anthropology provides evidence that humans need attachment to thrive as they experience love. Individuals react to and with one another through actions and

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[151]John Macquarrie, *In Search of Humanity: A Theological and Philosophical Approach* (New York, The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985), 83.

[152] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 51-168.

[153]Ibid., 62.

[154]Macquarrie, 83.

[155]Ibid., 45.

[156]Ibid., 46.

emotions in social encounters. They feel something psychologically through the personal exchange.[157] Hans Urs von Balthasar, a Swiss theologian, states,

> After a mother has smiled at her child for many days and weeks, she finally receives her child's smile in response. She has awakened love in the heart of her child, and as the child awakens to love, it also awakens to knowledge: the initially empty-sense impressions gather meaningfully around the core of the Thou.[158]

As Balthasar attempts to show how a person might first encounter God's love, he illustrates how good social encounters bring the positive psychological consequences of love. According to Ray Anderson "Love is the result of a good relationship, not the cause of it. A good relationship is one which acknowledges the fundamental structure of co-humanity as the core of personhood, and which values the other as constitutive of the self."[159] Social anthropologists acknowledge peoples' strong need for positive social encounters. As Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy affirm, "The persistent human cry is for someone to love us. Our need for relationship is even more powerful than our need for food."[160] Positive relationships produce love, which in turn, produces positive self-esteem, inclusion, and affection. Humans need one another to know love.

People need human attachment in order to thrive through connectedness. As people establish individual identity and love through social encounters, they develop closeness to others and form groups. The expression "birds of a feather flock together"

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[157]Ray Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 46.

[158]Hans Urs von Balthasar, "Love Alone is Credible," Ignatius Insight, http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features/vonbalthasar_love_sept04.asp (accessed August 6, 2008).

[159]Anderson, 170.

[160]Tim Clinton and Gary Sibcy, *Why You Do the Things You Do* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 8.

identifies a natural tendency to order the environment according to "us" and "them."[161]

Charles Kraft notes three bases for grouping: (1) the kinship basis; (2) the territorial

basis; and (3) the association basis.[162] Examining these three categories reveals how

people need connectedness to thrive.

First, humankind finds connectedness through the kinship basis from birth to

marriage. A person born into a family inherits a group of relatives. Though most

voluntarily pick their marriage partner, they involuntarily inherit a kinship system made

of "mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, and uncles … . determined by

factors others than choice."[163] Hopefully through family, a person finds connectedness by

experiencing unconditional acceptance and love. Through a kinship system, an individual

makes sense of the world.

Next, humans find connectedness through the territorial basis. Individuals born in

a particular nation, state, city, county, and urban setting possess a sense of groupness with

those who live in the same general proximity. While territorial associations happen

involuntarily, they provide the basis for relational interaction and connectedness.

Last, connectedness occurs in society through associations, technically called

sodalities.[164] Associations based on sex, age, interests, occupations, ranking, and social

classes determine connectedness factors and their results. People join these groupings,

both voluntarily and involuntarily, and achieve more together than they would attain

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[161]Charlie Lang, *The Groupness Factor: How to Achieve A Corporate Success Culture through First-Class Leadership* (Causeway Bay, Hong Kong: Progress-U Limited, 2005), 9-10.

[162]Charles Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 331.

[163]Ibid., 332.

[164]Ibid., 337.

alone. Associations possess the potential (among other things) to instruct, prosper, protect, aid, entertain, and conquer. Groupness, through associations, powerfully positions individuals to succeed together.

William B. Gudykunst defines two group types, "The groups of people with whom we are taught to associate are our ingroups … The groups of people with whom we are taught not to associate, in contrast, are outgroups."[165] Connectedness and self-esteem occur through people's relationship in ingroups as members naturally discriminate against members of an outgroup.[166] Individuals expect similar behavior and experience less anxiety interrelating with members of their ingroup.[167] These factors bring a sense of inclusion and connectedness. Humankind's egotism cries out for expression; yet people's basic humanity cries out for togetherness. Gudykunst states, "The most important component of our self-concepts influencing our communication with strangers is our social identities, which are based on our group memberships."

Social anthropology reveals that people naturally form groups and need human attachment. From the beginning of time, humankind formed groups to survive. Small groups form during the natural course of life and make group members thrive by providing identity, love, and connectedness.

Medical Science

Medical science also confirms that people need human attachment to thrive. The composition of body, soul, and spirit creates the complexity of each human. The power of

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[165]William B. Gudykunst, *Bridging Differences: Effective Intergroup Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 75.

[166]Ibid., 76.

[167]Ibid.

human connectedness affects every aspect of a person's psychological and physiological makeup and allows them not only to survive, but also to thrive. The field of medical science, through its study of basic relational interaction in the womb, family, and health, provides conclusive evidence of the power of small groups to help people thrive.

Human attachment begins with conception. From that moment, the embryo relates to the mother in the security and warmth of the womb. Some doctors theorize that a consciousness exists from the moment of conception, which gives the embryo self-awareness. Studies confirm that, by the sixth month, the fetus "can already remember, hear, and even learn."[168] A fetus, in the sixth month, moves in rhythm to their mother's voice and even responds to different kinds of music.[169]

Regarding this phenomenon, Thomas Verny states, "A child hears his father's voice in uteri, and there is solid evidence that hearing that voice makes a big emotional difference."[170] In cases where a man communicated soothing words to his unborn child in the womb, a few hours after birth, the newborn responded positively to the father.[171] A child experiences relational bonding in the womb, not only with his or her biological mother, but also, with influencers outside the womb. Positive relational interaction in the womb provides attachment power necessary for a person to thrive.

Seconds after a child enters the world, special relationships with family begin. The newborn exists as a part of a small group. A baby enters the world with the biological necessity of being loved and wanted. Human attachment occurs as the mother

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[168]Thomas Verny, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child* (New York: Summit Books, 1981), 19.

[169]Ibid., 21.

[170]Ibid., 31.

[171]Ibid.

reaches out for her newborn in love. The child responds to a familiar touch and voice and feels acceptance. Human rejection can possibly lead to early death.[172]

Physical touch creates a dramatic increase in hemoglobin in the blood, which carries oxygen to the brain and heart.[173] A vital link exists between human touch and good health. In the thirteenth century, German emperor Frederick II performed an experiment with newborn babies. He isolated them from their mothers to see what language they would speak without human contact. The nurses who cared for them were forbidden to touch or speak to them. The experiment failed to produce a new language because all the babies died before they could speak. They could not live without human touch.[174] During the nineteenth century, 50 percent of babies died in their first year from a disease called *marasmus*, which means, "wasting away."[175] Infant mortality of those less than one year of age, in foundling institutions in the United States, ran at nearly one hundred percent.[176] Institutionalized infants entered the wards as hopeless. Studies proved that marasmus even occurred in the best homes. These failure-to-thrive newborns died from lack of relationship—a simple hug. At the same time, destitute mothers who showed their babies love watched their infants thrive. Studies conducted after World War II illustrated the importance of nurturing babies while in hospital care. This dramatically

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[172]Ibid., 152.

[173] Helen Colton, "The Gift of Touch," in *The Connecting Church*, ed. Randy Freeze (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 32-33.

[174]G. H. Colt, "The Magic of Touch," *Life* (August 1997), 55.

[175]Ashley Montagu, *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 77.

[176]Ibid.

decreased infant mortality rates and changed previous thinking concerning the value of human touch.[177] Human touch made the difference between life and death.

These concepts illustrate the power of nurture, not only in institutions, but also in the nuclear family, a small group that provides essential human connections. When an infant peers into his or her mother's face, personal identity remains one with the mother. Through contact with the father and siblings, a baby feels loved, accepted, and a part of a community. Positive family connections, from the womb through adolescence, remain vital to life.

Furthermore, medical science asserts the power of human attachment through the healing effects of relational interaction. Dean Ornish, medical doctor and Clinical Professor of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco, states, "Our survival depends on the healing power of love, intimacy, and relationships. Physically. Emotionally. Spiritually. As individuals. As a country. As a culture. Perhaps even as a species."[178] Proper diet, exercise, and the elimination of smoking reverses the deadly effects of heart disease; however, the power of community prevents people from getting sick and provides healing, illustrating the power of human connection.[179]

In a mobile society, people frequently change jobs, churches, and neighborhoods. Loneliness and isolation adversely affects one's health.[180] Those unable to connect in positive ways often turn to negative groups such as gangs or cults, and may even go so

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[177]Ibid., 79.

[178]Dean Ornish, *Love & Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 1.

[179]Ibid., 3.

[180]Ibid., 13.

far as to perform the ultimate individual act—suicide. People who find love and intimacy

discover meaning and purpose to life and, additionally, enjoy health and longevity.

In 1979, Lisa Berkman, chair of the Department of Health and Social Behavior at

the Harvard School of Public Health, followed the lives of seven thousand people for

nine years in Alameda County, California. This extensive study, including people ages

thirty to sixty-nine, "found that the most isolated people were *three times* more likely to

die in that nine-year period than those with stronger social ties."[181] The study proved that

the type of connection didn't matter and several kinds of connections produced a longer

life.[182]

In another study, paid participants ages eighteen to fifty-five, received nasal drops

containing a cold virus. All were infected, but not everyone developed cold symptoms.

Participants who maintained only a few relationships were four times more likely to

develop a cold than those with many personal relationships. Relational interaction

increased their resistance to getting the common cold.[183]

According to Chris Crowley and Henry S. Lodge lonely people are "twice as

likely to have ulcers. … unmarried men are two or even three times as likely to die of

heart attacks as their married brethren."[184] Of 2,300 men who survived heart attacks,

researchers found those overly stressed and isolated experienced four times the risk of

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[181]Edward M. Hallowell, *Connect: 12 Vital Ties that Open Your Heart, Lengthen Your Life, and Deepen Your Soul* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1999), 5.

[182]Ibid., 5-6.

[183]S. Cohen, W. J. Doyle, D. P. Skoner, et al. "Social Ties and Susceptibility to the Common Cold," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 277 (1997): 1940-44), quoted by Dean Ornish, *Love & Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 62.

[184]Chris Crowley and Henry S. Lodge, *Younger Next Year: Live Strong, Fit, and Sexy—Until You're 80 and Beyond* (New York: Workman Publishing, 2007), 271-272.

death as survivors who were well connected.[185] Community relationships outweighed

other factors such as smoking, diet, genetics, and exercise.

Sanford Medical School studied women with metastatic breast cancer in an effort

to disprove that psychosocial connections prolong life.[186] David Spiegel summed up the

results by stating, "I finally got around to looking at the data, and I almost fell off my

chair. Those women who had the weekly support group lived on average *twice as long* as

did the other group of women who didn't have the support group."[187]

Positive human attachment through small group community produces health and

longevity. When humans undergo extremely stressful situations, certain hormones

produced help the body handle the emergency. If stress continues for a long time, the

prolonged adrenaline and noradrenaline production damages a person's health.[188] John

Robbins, in *Healthy at 100*, notes, "Social support seems to neutralize the effect of

stress by lowering the production of these stress hormones."[189] Positive relational

interaction remains the secret of the healthiest and longest-lived people on earth. People

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[185]W. Ruberman, E. Weinblatt, J. D. Goldberg, and B. S. Chaudhary, "Psychosocial Influences on Mortality after Myocardial Infarction." *New England Journal of Medicine*, 311(9) (1984): 552-59, quoted in Dean Ornish, *Love & Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 44.

[186]D. Spiegel, J. R. Bloom, H. C. Kraemer, E. Gottheil, "Effect of Psychosocial Treatment on Survival of Patients With Metastatic Breast Cancer," *The Lancet*, ii (1989): 888-91, quoted in Dean Ornish, *Love & Survival: The Scientific Basis for the Healing Power of Intimacy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998), 51-52.

[187]Ibid., 53.

[188]John Robbins, *Healthy at 100: The Scientifically Proven Secrets of the World's Healthiest and Longest-Lived Peoples* (New York: Random House, 2006), 226.

[189]Ibid.

who surround themselves with positive people who affirm their worthiness, in turn, promote their personal healing.[190]

Walt Larimore, in *10 Essentials of Highly Healthy People*, points to research that indicates that people with little social support have low HDL cholesterol (good cholesterol that protects the heart) levels.[191] No one knows why lonely people tend to have low HDL cholesterol. It cannot be explained through diet, exercise, or smoking. Larimore adds, "Swedish researchers have shown that women who have low levels of social support have more severe disease in their coronary arteries."[192] To reverse the effects of loneliness and improve health, community must occur. According to Larimore, "You don't need a large group of friends; a small group will do. Even one or two very close friends with whom you share interests and affection can do the trick."[193]

Relational interaction provides essential emotional strength, which individuals simply cannot live without. Edward M. Hallowell, psychiatrist and faculty member of the Harvard Medical School states, "To thrive, indeed just to survive, we need warmhearted contact with other people … . Just as we need vitamin C each day, we also need a dose of the human moment—positive contact with other people."[194] People void of love and intimacy require the connection of a small group to break the frustration of their busy and hectic lives. Community provides food for the emotional soul by giving stability and support. Connection breaks the power of depression and might prevent mental illness.

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[190]Ibid., 241.

[191]Walt Larimore, *10 Essentials of Highly Healthy People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 140.

[192]Ibid.

[193]Ibid., 141.

[194]Hallowell, 3.

Psychologist Larry Crabb postulates that, "beneath what our culture calls psychological disorder is a soul crying out for what only community can provide."[195]

Scientific evidence regarding attachment beginning in the womb and among family members, coupled with the health benefits associated with human attachment, provides solid evidence for the necessity of small group connection. The power of community provides the glue that keeps heart, mind, soul, and body together. Gary Smalley believes, "Relationships are not an option … . Your only real choice is whether you will work to make your relationships healthy."[196] Vital connections remain important to the pursuit of happiness. Exploring the realm of medical science brings conclusive evidence that individuals were created for small group community and cannot survive, or even thrive, without good human relationships.

Emergent Culture

People need human attachment to thrive as is also seen by examining the emergent culture. According to Stanley Grenz, "Our society is in the throes of a cultural shift of immense proportions."[197] Postmodernism, for a lack of a better term, refers to a cultural shift of epic proportions consisting of many observable, cultural changes. Postmoderns abandoned the absolute values of modernism—those founded on reason carried over from the Enlightenment—and embraced new approaches to life, founded on

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[195]Larry Crabb, *Connecting: Healing for Ourselves and Our Relationships* (Nashville: Word, 1997), xvi.

[196]Gary Smalley, *The DNA of Relationships* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2004), 21.

[197]Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 11.

current experiences.[198] Postmodernism assumes that absolute truth does not exist; truth

remains subjective based on a personal interpretation and investigation. Earl Creps

captures this perspective accurately: "Truth, then, is a hostage of our point of view and

the arbitrariness of the sounds we organize into language. The singularity created by

these forces leads to total rejection of all certainty at its core."[199] While postmoderns

embrace truth, obtained through individual experience, the emergent culture prizes the

power of experiencing community on its quest for truth. Postmodern values include the

need for connection as the culture morphs into the digital age. This section examines the

emergent culture's cry for human attachment in cyberspace, coffee cafés, and church.

Among postmoderns, the need for human attachment finds expression through

cyberspace. Businesses that make products and services available through the Internet

provide a meeting place that resembles a "town-square" marketplace.[200] Leonard Sweet

agrees, "Both eBay and Amazon.com say they are in the "connexity" business—making

connections and building communities. Both demonstrate that the Web is less an

information source than a social medium."[201] Many transactions on eBay include a high

degree of personal dialogue and exchange, which creates opportunity for the buyer and

seller to get acquainted.

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[198]Jerry Haselmayer, Brian D. McLaren, and Leonard Sweet, *The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 239.

[199]Earl Creps, *Off-Road Disciplines* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 30.

[200]Leonard I. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21st Century World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 109.

[201]Ibid., 109.

MySpace hosts America's most popular "social networking website offering an interactive, user-submitted network of friends."[202] Users display personal profiles and photos and invite relational interaction. An average of "three-hundred thousand new people sign up for MySpace every day."[203] This social interactive network consists of one hundred and ten million monthly, active participants worldwide.[204] One in four Americans—of which 85 percent are eighteen and older—use the site regularly to stay connected to friends and meet new people.[205] The popularity of MySpace proves the value the emergent culture places on connection.

Facebook, launched February 4, 2004, provides a social Website for people to connect using region, city, workplace, and school networks.[206] With more than ninety million users, Facebook enjoys immense popularity as the fourth most-trafficked Website in the world.[207] College students and postgraduate users spend an average of twenty minutes a day sharing with friends.[208] *Washington Post* staff writer, Leslie Walker writes, "While growth is slowing at most top Internet sites, it is skyrocketing at sites focused on

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[202]"Facebook, MySpace Statistics," TechRadar Web2.0 Encyclopedia, http://techradar1.wordpress.com/2008/01/11/facebookmyspace-statistics/ (accessed August 5, 2008).

[203]Ibid.

[204]Ibid.

[205]Ibid.

[206]"Facebook, Home Page," Facebook, http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/facebook?ref=pf (accessed August 5, 2008).

[207]"Facebook, Pressroom," Facebook, http://www.facebook.com/press/info.php?statistics (accessed August 5, 2008).

[208]"Facebook, MySpace Statistics." TechRadar Web2.0 Encyclopedia.

social networking, blogging and local information."[209] Many people in the emergent

culture, who revolt against the individualism created by the modern era, find relational

community in Facebook.

The popularity of chat rooms, blogs, and e-mail shows the attractiveness of the

Internet primarily as a relational tool for connectedness. Hunger for face-to-face

community will intensify as the emergent culture finds more ways to connect to cyber-

friends.[210] The more people disconnect from one another, choosing instead to connect

through electronic means, the more people will desire intimate personal connectedness.

The need for human attachment in order to thrive relates directly to the current

success of coffee cafés. As the proliferation of new technology invades the current

culture, a renewed need for human touch will surface. John Naisbitt agrees, "The more

high tech, the more high touch."[211] Starbucks grew from one store to eleven thousand

stores worldwide.[212] Stocks rose 5,000 percent since 1992.[213] This worldwide brand

created new words in the American vocabulary and changed the cultures of entire

neighborhoods.[214] Starbucks' success goes far beyond providing a superior cup of coffee

to providing people a connective experience. In *The Starbucks Experience*, Joseph A.

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[209]Leslie Walker, "New Trends In Online Traffic: Visits to Sites for Blogging, Local Information and Social Networks Drive Web Growth," The Washington Post, April 4, 2006, Page D01, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/04/03/AR2006040301692.html (accessed August 5, 2008).

[210]Leonard I. Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 115.

[211]John Naisbitt, *Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming Our Lives* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1982), 39.

[212]Joseph A. Michelli, *The Starbucks Experience: 5 Principles for Turning Ordinary into Extraordinary* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 2.

[213]Ibid., 3.

[214]Ibid., 4.

Michelli notes, "People come into a comfortable setting where they are valued on a personal level, and where a meaningful connection is made."[215] The store's atmosphere creates a place where people "hang out" with friends. While Starbucks' partners create special drinks, they form special bonds with customers that change lives and produce a profitable business.[216]

Moving from celebrated coffee to award winning music and movies, Starbucks not only perceives the needs of the emergent culture, but also seeks to shape the future of its customers through its products. Leonard Sweet, in *The Gospel According to Starbucks,* notes, "One reason is that coffee is a conversation drink, and Starbucks knows that conversations need 'third places' in which to thrive. And third places—which are not your office and not your home—need music and other media."[217] Starbucks connects people through sensory experiences.[218] Postmoderns desire more than a cyber experience. They long for intimate connections made in warm settings with people who will share their personal experiences. For many people, the local Starbucks coffee shop provides a secular sanctuary and place of community.[219] Drinking coffee in a café forms a hospitality ritual for the emergent culture desiring relational interaction.

The emergent culture's cry for human attachment directly relates to how postmoderns view the Church. Music artist, Sting, in his 1993 album, "If I Ever Lose My

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[215]Ibid., 11.

[216]Ibid., 11-13.

[217]Leonard I. Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2007), 12-13.

[218]Ibid., 13.

[219]M. Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 91.

Faith in You" sings, "You could say I lost my belief in science and progress. You could

say I lost my faith in the holy church. You could say I lost my sense of direction. You

could say all of this and worse, but if I ever lose my faith in you there'd be nothing left

for me to do."[220] Sting verbalizes the shift from modern to postmodern values; faith in

human connectedness trumps faith in science or God. The Church, the purveyor of

genuine community, appears disconnected from the emergent culture.

Earl Creps views the American Church "as organized around three major

philosophies, three brands within one Church: traditional, contemporary, and

experiential."[221] Creps categorizes current religious mindsets around three television

programs. *Gunsmoke* exemplifies the traditional church; *Frazier* represents the

contemporary church; *Seinfield* symbolizes the experiential church.[222] *Seinfield*, through

the connected experiences of the show's characters, makes fun of traditional values and

contemporary approaches to life in a search for whatever happens in the moment.

Churches that minister in a generational time warp and attempt to connect with a

Gunsmoke crowd or relate to a *Frazier* congregation will miss reaching the *Seinfield*

emergent culture that passes through their doors.

In the mind of postmoderns, belonging often precedes believing.[223] Churches

operating in a modern mindset generally promote the opposite reality—you must believe,

before you belong. "Postmoderns would rather be close than right," observes Leonard

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[220]Sting, "If I Ever Lose My Faith in You," *Fields of Gold: The Best of Sting, 1984-1994* (A & M Label, 1994).

[221]Creps, 105.

[222]Ibid., 106-113.

[223]Jerry Haselmayer, Brian D. McLaren, and Leonard I. Sweet, *"A" is for Abductive: The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 44-45.

Sweet in *SoulTsunami*.[224] Postmoderns view everyone as existing in process, on a journey. The trip needs fellow travelers as guides in order to reach the desired destination.[225] Leonard Sweet succinctly summarizes the postmodern perspective of community: "A postmodern 'me' needs 'we' to 'be.'"[226]

The emergent generation rebels against Church rules and regulations, but seeks relationships where they can check out each other's personal stories. Postmodern seekers desire to investigate truth in such a way that the questioner does not feel "put down" or "preached to."[227] The "hard sell" tactics of the traditional evangelical church fail to reach the emergent generation. The emergent culture cries for human attachment to fellow seekers who do not appear as belonging to an "elite inner circle" of people who exist "in the know" and possess all the right answers to the great questions of life.[228] Instead, postmoderns desire inclusion into a community of discoverers, who will invite them along for the ride of their lives.

This section examined the emergent culture's cry for human attachment in cyberspace, coffee cafés, and churches. These discoveries validate the necessity for small groups in a postmodern world where experiences in seeking truth require human connection. The new paradigm that results in dramatic change from a modern to a postmodern world will forever affect how people perceive the spiritual world.

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[224]Leonard I. Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 195.

[225]Ron Martonia, *Morph! The Texture of Leadership for Tomorrow's Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 2003), 61.

[226]Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims*, 117.

[227]Ibid., 61.

[228]Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 183.

Conclusion

A review of general literature explored three secular subjects concerning the power of human connection through small groups: (1) Group Dynamics: How Social Units Function, (2) Andragogy: How Adults Learn, and (3) Attachment: How Humans Need Relationships to Thrive. A summary of several significant findings follows.

Group structure remains either primary—centered on inside inclusion needs, or secondary—focused on outside tasks. Small groups empower people to do things they regard as impossible to do alone. Group facilitation enables group members to perform better on easy tasks within the confines of a group. Work output declines, or group loafing occurs, when members feel pressure to perform from people outside their group. However, pressure from within the group produces positive results. Small groups help to unlock personal interests and inspire individuals to greater results.

The optimum size group ranges between three to eleven people. To produce an atmosphere for maximum participation, leaders should select a room to match the size of the group—not too big or to small. Small groups must encourage minority ideas to surface to prevent group polarization and groupthink. At the same time, inclusion, control, affection, and common goals create group cohesiveness and produce greater levels of group performance. Great groups emerge, because of great leaders who communicate, applaud the group for achieving results, and exhibit flexibility.

Adults learn best through self-directed learning. An adult's drive to learn does not come from external factors, but from internal resources that bring self-actualization. Readiness to learn occurs when life's circumstances produce "teachable moments" that motivate adults to learn as they advance to the next level in their development. Adults

learn best when subjects provide immediate relevancy and practical answers to their

heartfelt questions. Life experience provides rich resources for learning.

Medical science confirms that people were created for community and cannot

survive or thrive without good human relationships. Human attachment begins with

conception and remains necessary throughout life to insure proper mental and physical

health. The emergent "Starbucks" cyberspace culture cries for human connection.

Churches that include postmoderns in their small group community of discoverers will

find themselves better poised to reach the current culture.

Countering the recent decline of civic organizations in America, in the last forty

years, the growth of small groups presents a social movement sweeping across America

in epic proportions. Robert Putnam observes this trend:

> Not all organizations in America have lost membership over the last quarter
> century … At one end of the spectrum of size, privacy, and informality is the
> plethora of encounter groups, reading groups, support groups, self-help groups,
> and the like that have become important anchors in the emotional and social lives
> of millions of Americans … Could new "virtual communities" simply be
> replacing the old-fashioned physical communities in which our parents lived?[229]

The need for connection and intimacy remain an intrinsic human trait. As this

general literature review illustrates, without human relationships, humans deteriorate and

die (at least prematurely). How adults learn in small group settings reveals their need of

structures that provide an atmosphere in which they can flourish and succeed. The current

small group phenomenon presents an opportunity to connect people, not just through

secular means, but also in spiritual ways. Through the family of God, they ultimately

connect to God.

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[229]Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 148.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Preparation of the Project

Success requires preparation. Chapters 2 and 3 prepared the mind and the heart to integrate small group principles and values and provided a basis for action. Every project must move from the thinking stage to the preparatory stage. Overcoming the growth plateau through the utilization of small groups necessitates laying the important groundwork of preparatory assessment and action.

Preparatory Assessment

Jesus realized the power of doing the preparatory work necessary to build something great. He said, "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?" (Luke 14:28). Small group preparatory assessment "counts the cost" in four areas: (1) assessing past attendance, (2) assessing the Sunday school, (3) assessing the congregation, and (4) assessing small group strategies.

Assessing the Past Attendance

Assessing past attendance records reveals that Muskogee First Assembly has experienced a general growth plateau for the last eight years. Sunday school records reveal that from January 2000 to December 2007, the average number of adult students

numbered approximately 135. The Annual Church Ministries Report figures over the past five years reflect the same attendance plateau.[1]

To understand where the church stood in attendance before the project, I assessed the statistics of three time segments: (1) one year prior to the ministry intervention, (2) winter months prior to the ministry intervention, and (3) one month prior to the ministry intervention. The general accuracy of these figures comes from the independent tabulation of the discipleship pastor and two secretaries who helped compile the data. I compared the overall church attendance with the adult attendance, the number of adults who attend small groups, and the number of small groups.

A year before the ministry intervention (April 2007 to July 2007) the church attendance averaged 538.5 people.[2] The adult attendance in Sunday school small groups averaged 137.5 people per week in thirteen classes.

The winter months generally produce the strongest numbers; historically, January produces the best attendance figures of the year. The average regular church attendance from December 2007 to February 2008 numbered 552.3; Sunday school averaged 136.3 adults. Thirteen adult classes met in December 2007, and eleven met in January and February 2008.

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[1]The Annual Church Ministries Report attendance figures reported 800 people for the past four of the last five years. These estimated numbers seem to be inflated. Still the numbers reflect a general attendance plateau.

[2]A church program called *Inspire* tabulates regular church attendance figures. Different people who attend any church program from Sunday to Wednesday make up the regular church attendance total. Easter Sunday, April 8, 2007, was taken out of the number so as not to skew the results. On Easter the church presents a full drama throughout the week and an illustrated sermon on Easter morning with thousands attending.

In March 2008, the regular church attendance averaged 529.[3] Sunday School averaged 131 people in eleven classes. March experienced unusually low numbers because of the extensive preparation for the ministry intervention and should be considered separately.[4]

Assessing the Sunday School

Sunday School statistics for all three time segments averaged approximately 130 adults in twelve classes. The largest class, on marriage, averaged approximately thirty-five individuals. The second largest class averaged twenty-five. Every quarter, most classes featured a qualified teacher, but few attended. These instructors chose their own curriculum—subject to the approval of the discipleship pastor.

The analysis of the present core of Sunday school classes revealed that enhancing the current classes remained the best approach. New small groups could recruit hundreds of adults who do not attend a discipleship class. The leadership team dropped the name "Sunday School" and now refers to all spiritual transformation classes as "small groups." To avoid confusion, on March 15, 2008, the current Sunday school teachers received instruction in the small groups ministry procedures.

Assessing the Congregation

Small Group Survey One, designed to determine adult perceptions of small group ministry, helped assess the congregation's views. The leadership team distributed the

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[3]Easter was March 23, 2008. This figure was taken out of attendance figures (see above).

[4]One worship service was offered instead of two preparing for the new worship service time changes and extended small group time.

thirty-two question survey every Sunday in March.[5] Every adult anonymously completed

the survey regardless of whether or not the individual participated in a small group. The

staff entered the information from the 219 surveys into a computer and tabulated the

results. The congregation seemed ready to embrace small groups by their answers to the

first three questions:

(1) I am currently in a small group: No—50%, Yes—48%, Blank—2%
(2) I feel I would benefit from a small group: No —7%, Yes—91%, Blank—2%.
(3) I believe small groups can be effective in changing my life: No—6%, Yes—
90%, Blank—4%.

Everyone indicated the topic that interested him or her most. The respondents

chose five top studies: (1) God's plan for marriage, (2) general Bible study, (3) effective

prayer, (4) the end times, and (5) a stronger relationship with God. The survey presented

more than eighty opportunities for classes and asked adults their preferences for small

groups. The respondents selected five top types of groups: (1) Bible study, (2) camping,

(3) prayer, (4) walking, and (5) fitness. The survey listed more than thirty types of small

groups and captured a general feeling of people's receptivity to small groups. People

realized that small groups could provide unique opportunities for fun, fellowship,

spiritual transformation, and many more possibilities.

Assessing Small Group Strategies

Preparatory assessment necessitated assessing seven current books on small

groups and formulating a strategy that best corresponded to the needs of Muskogee First

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[5]See Appendix A for a sample of Small Group Survey One.

Assembly.[6] Each contemporary model of small group ministry demonstrated how its particular program worked best to achieve spiritual transformation in its setting. After synthesizing the material, I developed the small group ministry plan for Muskogee First Assembly. This small group strategy focuses on the right approach, the natural groups already in existence, the types of groups, the size of groups, the frequency of group meetings, the utilization of relevant discipleship materials, an open group policy, and leadership training.

Community modeled after God's Word presents the right approach for winning and discipling people. Muskogee First Assembly's small group strategy consists of biblical principles found in the Biblical Theological-Literature Review in Chapter 2. True community remains a work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised His presence where two or three gather together in His name (Matt. 18:20). A biblically based small group strategy took top priority.

The right strategy for small groups first focused on natural groups of people that already exist within the church. People usually connect with people of similar values and interests. Most people desire to take their natural connections to a higher level through spiritual community. After people identified their natural group of friends, through the help of leadership, group formation easily occurred.

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[6]Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Walking the Small Group Tightrope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); Julie Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002); Ted Haggard, *Dog Training, Fly Fishing, and Sharing Christ in the 21st Century* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2002); Joseph R. Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); Joseph R. Myers, *Organic Community: Creating a Place Where People Naturally Connect* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007); Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004).

In order to encourage maximum involvement, I suggested a variety of small group types. The selection included evangelism, nurture/discipleship, study, support, recovery, equipping, fellowship, prayer, missions, worship, service and tasks, and special age categories such as single and senior.

The small group strategy focused on maintaining the most effective group size. Groups of seven to eight people seemed ideal. Most small group specialists agree that small groups should limit their numbers to ten to twelve people. During this time, large Sunday school classes continued to disciple students. Leadership urged these teachers to break into small groups at some point during the class time.

Preparatory assessment revealed that the most effective groups met at least once a week. Small groups should meet no less than every other week. Leadership encouraged groups to meet eight to twelve extended times a year, plus one overnight retreat. The small group program at Muskogee First Assembly functions within a semester system with several entry and exit points.[7]

The small group strategy centered on the utilization of relevant discipleship materials designed to meet people's needs. All discipleship materials presented sound doctrine and a life-changing message. Finding relevant materials required extensive research.

The plan encouraged members to invite and bring their friends to participate in existing groups. These small groups also encourage the unchurched to attend. Leadership stressed issues of intimacy, connection, and confidentiality to everyone—especially new group members.

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[7]The semester system contained a winter semester from September to December, a spring semester from January to May, and a summer semester from June to August. Each semester ended with a couple of weeks with no small group meetings to give people a break.

The small group strategy also placed a high priority for leadership training. The success of the project rested on people who possessed the right knowledge and used it effectively. Preparatory assessment revealed the great need for training small group leaders. The next section spells out the steps taken to equip these leaders.

Preparatory Action

After preparatory assessment came preparatory action. Priming the pump produced a positive payoff. Breaking the growth barrier required preparatory action through three steps: (1) training leaders, (2) casting vision, and (3) recruiting people.

Training Leaders

The first step in preparatory action involved the training of leaders. After reviewing training materials from other small group programs, I quickly realized the success of the ministry intervention depended on the development of an instruction manual uniquely designed for Muskogee First Assembly's leaders.

After months of gathering ideas and compiling research, in March 2008, I wrote *Small Group Leader Training: How to Do Small Group Ministry*.[8] The thirty-four-page instructor's manual provides concise information for training leaders in small group procedures. For practical purposes, I designed the training session to last one and one-half hours. Small group leaders received a fill-in-the-blank eight-page version of the larger manual and viewed PowerPoint slides that corresponded with the notes. Muskogee First Assembly offered *Small Group Leader Training* four different times in 2008 for prospective small group leaders:

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[8]See Appendix B for *Small Group Leader Training: How to Do Small Group Ministry*.

- Wednesday, March 26, 7:00-8:30 p.m.
- Saturday, March 29, 9:00-10:30 a.m.
- Sunday, March 30, 4:30-6:00 p.m.
- Wednesday, April 2, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Approximately 107 people attended the training. The sessions not only emphasized instruction, but also motivation. I personally taught each session and attempted to effectively communicate to prospective leaders the importance of small group ministry. Each training session included a question and answer time. People quickly comprehended the opportunity and sacrifice needed to make small groups happen.

Casting Vision

Casting vision begins with leadership. Communicating the vision for small group ministry became a regular part of the executive and leadership team meetings during the four months prior to the event. On March 19, I met with six Sunday school teachers to communicate my vision. Throughout March, leadership heavily promoted the upcoming small group opportunities in each of their respective ministries. On April 4, 2008, the weekly church newsletter, *Lifelines*, featured a church member's story that demonstrated the power of small groups.

As pastor, I communicated the vision of small groups through a seven sermon series entitled "Live Together, Die Alone." I used the following sermons to motivate people to embrace small groups:[9]

The Ultimate Reason for Community—March 2, 2008 a.m.
The Ultimate Small Group—March 2, 2008 p.m.
Where Ordinary People Become Extraordinary—March 9, 2008 a.m.
The Gathering—March 9, 2008 p.m.
Connecting Points, Part I—March 16, 2008 a.m.
Connecting Points, Part II—March 16, 2008 p.m.
Our Purpose in the Real World—March 30, 2008 a.m.

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[9]See Appendix C for abbreviated sermon notes.

Each sermon featured a movie clip from the television series *Lost*, which portrays the necessity of community on a hostile island far from civilization. The secretaries decorated the platform to resemble a deserted island complete with an old trunk, a fish net, palm trees, and greenery. The sermons encouraged people to hear God's voice concerning participating in a small group and experiencing the life-changing power of small groups.

Recruiting People

During the month of March 2008, the leadership team recruited prospective small group leaders. After the training sessions, many contacted the discipleship pastor and requested permission to start their own small groups. In turn, a core of newly trained leaders urged members of the congregation to join their groups.

The variety of ways people encouraged others to participate in small groups demonstrated the power of community. A staff member invited seven middle-aged men (of which six had previous drug problems and three had been incarcerated) to my small group that met on Sunday mornings. These seven men attended faithfully for four months. At the end of the session, one of them became the new leader of the group and encouraged me to start another small group. Recruiting people to join small groups posed no difficulty because many people longed for connection.

Execution of the Project

After the preparatory assessment and action phases, the time came for execution of the project. From April to July 2008, the attempt to overcome the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly by facilitating assimilation and developing community through

small group ministry occurred. In this four-month period, people observed both positive and negative aspects about the new ministry. The following section depicts what took place by examining the start-up, test phase, facilities issue, and ongoing training.

The Start-Up

Muskogee First Assembly's leadership launched small group ministry on April 6, 2008 with thirty-nine adult groups. People attended twenty-eight new small groups, which included several prayer and Bible study groups. Innovative activities such as transformation fitness, writers/speakers, chocolatherapy, scrapbooking, motorcycle riding, and water aerobics represent some of the venues used for fellowship and Bible study.

After surveying the congregation, the need to disciple young married couples had emerged. Thus, a new ministry called Fusion provided the answer. Beginning on April 6, 2008, an average of forty-five young married people (a total of seventy on roll) met every week in one main group and then divided into four small groups. During the four months, these young couples experienced two fellowship outings in addition to their weekly meetings.

The choir began small groups between Sunday morning rehearsals. After watching a John Bevere DVD series, the members divided into four small groups to discuss the material. Choir members, normally left out of the discipleship loop because of ministry involvement, experienced small group community in a new and significant way.

A commissioning service for small group leaders occurred April 20, 2008. Leadership introduced each small group leader and their specific ministry to the congregation. Many uninvolved members visually observed the great variety of available

group opportunities. To further strengthen the gift of teaching, the church honored a couple for twenty-four years of faithful service as adult Sunday school teachers.

The Time Issues

To ensure ample time for Sunday morning small group meetings, leadership expanded the schedule time to an hour and a half. The first service began at 8:00 a.m., small group ministry began at 9:00 a.m., and the second service began at 10:30 a.m. The additional time provided more opportunities for fellowship, Bible study, and discussion. The congregation generally speaking, received these service time changes and the lengthened discipleship time very well. On the one hand, some teachers complained about having too much time on their hands while, on the other hand, some felt the need for more time. Thirty groups met once a week, three groups met three times a week, three groups met every other week, and three groups met once a month. The great frequency of meetings produced positive experiences of closeness, while the groups that met once a month more effectively reached non-church people. The test-phase time frame of April to July proved difficult for initiating a new program. Yet, in the final analysis, the results proved that the intervention succeeded in accomplishing its goal.

The Facilities Issue

The leadership team employed creative ways to expand the number of available areas for small groups to meet on Sunday mornings and during the week. The church made classrooms available any time, day or night, for meetings. This presented unique challenges for keeping the building clean, electrical usage controlled, and the building secured.

Normal Wednesday evening ministries such as Youth, Royal Rangers, and Missionettes require nearly all available space; consequently, adult groups that met Wednesday evenings found it challenging to find adequate space. The popularity of the church as a meeting place—over homes—surprised the leadership team.

To adequately accommodate the large number of young married couples, the church remodeled its recording studio into one large meeting area with four smaller adjoining areas. The staff also cleaned out a storage space for an additional meeting place. The implementation of small groups maximized use of the facility and staff. Flexibility, both with leadership and the people, remained the key to making the facility's schedule work.

<p style="text-align:center">The Ongoing Training</p>

Leadership invited all small group leaders to attend a ministry meeting June 4, 2008 at 7:00 p.m. This training event occurred simultaneously with the Wednesday evening service. Seventeen people attended. The low attendance disappointed leadership, but the meeting inspired those who came. After reading to them about Starbucks' success in forming community, I asked three members of a small group to share their feelings about small groups. In essence, one man said, "I would be cooking drugs today, if I had not experienced the community of my small group." The meeting included a question and answer session. At the conclusion of the meeting, I gave each small group leader a five-dollar Starbucks gift card as an expression of appreciation for their ministry.

<p style="text-align:center">Results of the Project</p>

The results of the project included measurable outcomes. The project initiated small groups to overcome Muskogee First Assembly's growth plateau by facilitating and

developing community, which created computable data. I tabulated the following results relative to quantitative and qualitative types of growth.

Quantitative Growth

Statistics showed that through small group ministry, Muskogee First Assembly experienced an increase in weekly attendance. The church, by emphasizing small group ministry, went from an average weekly church attendance of 538.5 people in the period from April 2007 to July 2007 to 587.75 people during the same timeframe (April to July) in 2008. This represented a 9 percent increase in weekly attendance.

The number of those being discipled increased. An average of 137.5 people attended an adult small group from April 2007 to July 2007, compared to 212.5 people who attended from April 2008 to July 2008. This represents a 54.5 percent increase in the number of adults being discipled. Thirteen adult classes met from April 2007 to July 2007 and grew to thirty-nine adult classes during the same period a year later, which reflected a 300 percent increase in the number of classes.

The winter regular weekly attendance of 552.3 from December 2007 to February 2008 compared to the regular weekly attendance of 587.75 during April 2008 to July 2008 reflected a 6.41 percent increase. However, when comparing the regular weekly attendance of March 2008, to the regular weekly attendance for April 2008 to July 2008, the attendance increased 11% percent. The Sunday morning worship attendance figures did not change significantly, but the overall attendance figures for the week increased. Table 1 summarizes the statistics:

Table 1. First Assembly Quantitative Growth

	Apr-Jul 07	Dec–Feb 08	Mar 08	Apr–Jul 08	% Year
Church Attendance	538.5	552.3	529	587.75	9%
Small Group Participants	137.5	136.3	131	212.50	54.5%
Number of Small Groups	13.0	11.6	11	39.00	300%

Qualitative Growth

Leadership distributed Small Group Survey Two on August 24, August 31, and September 7, 2008.[10] As pastor, I wanted to measure any statistical change of people's responses to small groups after the ministry intervention. The comparison of the results of the first 219 surveys with the second 136 surveys validated the effectiveness of small group ministry.[11] Table 2 illustrates the results of the first nine questions:[12]

Table 2. First Assembly Qualitative Growth

Question	Date	Yes	No	Blank
1. I am currently in a small group	Mar 2008	48%	50%	2%
	Aug 2008	78%	18%	4%
2. I feel I would benefit from a small group	Mar 2008	91%	7%	2%
	Aug 2008	91%	2%	7%
3. I believe small groups can be effective in changing my life	Mar 2008	90%	6%	4%
	Aug 2008	90%	6%	4%
4. I feel uncomfortable sharing my issues in a small group and listening to others share their personal issues	Mar 2008	31%	63%	6%
	Aug 2008	25%	69%	6%

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[10]See Appendix D for Small Group Survey Two. Note that questions ten and eleven changed from Small Group Survey One.

[11]One reason for the lower number of surveys handed in the second time might be that some thought they gave sufficient information the first time and didn't see the need to fill it out a second time.

[12]See Appendix E and Appendix F for complete results of Small Group Survey One and Small Group Survey Two.

5.	I believe small groups help assimilate people in the body of Christ	Mar 2008 Aug 2008	95% 94%	2% 1%	3% 5%
6.	I need to be a part of a small group	Mar 2008 Aug 2008	77% 87%	18% 5%	5% 8%
7.	I feel like personal Bible study and prayer are more effective than a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with people who hold me accountable	Mar 2008 Aug 2008	49% 37%	42% 42%	9% 21%
8.	I feel like small groups are just another program and don't see the relevance in my life	Mar 2008 Aug 2008	13% 3%	79% 91%	8% 6%
9.	I do not have time to be in a small group	Mar 2008 Aug 2008	22% 12%	65% 73%	13% 15%

Because the number of surveys in the August 2008 group consisted of 62 percent of the number of surveys completed for the March 2008 group, and because the surveys remained filled-out anonymously, the survey results did not reveal true change in individuals' feelings about small groups. However, the survey did assess general feelings about small group ministry.

Question one revealed that more people now attend small groups. The answers to Question four indicate that more individuals enjoy a greater sense of comfort in sharing personal information in a small group. Responses to Question six showed that more people currently felt it necessary to connect in a small group. According to question eight's responses, a greater number of people now felt like small groups provided relevance for their lives. The survey also revealed that people had time to participate in a small group (question nine). Overall, the ministry intervention changed people's general attitudes about small groups in a positive way.

The Small Group Survey Two remained identical to Small Group Survey One, except for questions ten and eleven. The second survey asked: (10) Small groups have positively impacted my life in the last four months, and (11) I have learned new things about God in the last four months in my group. Out of 136 replies, 101 respondents expressed positive feedback concerning the power of small groups to change their life.[13] Small groups strengthened the past Sunday school classes, demonstrating the power of community. Here true spiritual transformation revealed qualitative growth. A comparison of both surveys revealed a general appreciation and greater need for small groups. The church's original perceptions of small groups changed through this proactive intervention.

The Project's Contribution to Ministry

I selected this project for my ministry intervention because of a great desire to see Muskogee First Assembly break growth barriers and experience assimilation and community through small group ministry. This project provided insight and direct input through a hands-on laboratory experiment that still continues at this present time. The project contributed to ministry growth in four ways: (1) the church grew numerically, (2) small group leaders grew in their ministry gifts, (3) individuals grew spiritually, and (4) other churches will receive vital information for church growth.

The Church Grew

The project produced solid numerical growth. Easter, April 8, 2007, the church moved out of a theater into a newly transformed sanctuary. This move increased the general attendance numbers in the April to July 2007 time frame. A number of families

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[13]See Appendix F for responses to questions ten and eleven.

moved away from the city of Muskogee in the last year. In addition, the executive team

dismissed a popular children's pastor, which resulted in approximately five families

leaving. These two factors hurt the April to July 2008 totals. Even though these factors

worked diametrically against growth, the church grew steadily from April to July 2008.

Statistical data revealed that more growth occurred when people reached out to the

unchurched. Leadership witnessed first-hand the power of small groups in evangelism.

What big event planning could not do, small groups accomplished, quietly. The greatest

contribution of small groups lies in their ability to win the unchurched.

Small Group Leaders Grew

The number of small group leaders increased, and their individual ministry gifts

grew. These leaders began to minister as pastors, shepherds, and evangelists. Ministry

now comes not only from the platform but also from the pews. Muskogee First

Assembly's perceptions of ministry changed. When the ministry intervention ended July

2008, leadership gave teachers the option of disbanding for a one-month break. However,

thirty-seven small groups desired to continue—to stop, seemed unthinkable. Small group

ministry created new momentum. The church grew to an average of 676 regular attendees

during the month of August.

Individuals Grew

The project contributed to the growth of individual lives. Each Sunday morning

for four months, I met with seven other individuals who changed my life. The first week,

an usher brought a man to our class who had never been to the church. In the next few

weeks, he found Christ and experienced spiritual transformation. By the end of our time

together, he fell in love and married a girl from our church. Three of the seven members

in our class had prison backgrounds. One man knew Christ, but had social anxiety problems. All the men, except one, struggled with drugs. Everyone in this small group grew spiritually and emotionally. One day, one of the men looked at me and said, "I come to this church, not for your sermons, but because of this small group."

Church Growth

The project will contribute to other church ministries by providing vital information for breaking growth plateaus. Pastors desire to know how small groups work in smaller church settings. When one considers the mega-church examples of small group ministry with numerous pastors, coaches, and small group leaders, a tendency remains to think that small groups will not work with a smaller staff in a medium-sized church. This project proved that small groups could help overcome growth plateaus in medium-sized churches, in average-sized towns with stifled growth. It further shows how to transform an existing adult Sunday school program into a small group venue. This small group ministry intervention produced successful, measurable results and helped break the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly.

CHAPTER 5

PROJECT SUMMARY

The following compendium compiles essential elements from previous chapters

and provides a concise summary of this project designed to enhance future ministry. This

project précis centers on an accumulative evaluation regarding the project's effectiveness,

improvement issues, and the implications of the project. The project summary offers

practical recommendations for Muskogee First Assembly's small group ministry and for

similar churches in analogous situations that desire to overcome growth plateaus. This

chapter offers an effective catalyst for continual change in church ministry.

Evaluation of the Project

Retrospection recognizes the realities and possibilities for small group ministry

and provides a basis for future action. The project successfully produced a 9 percent

attendance gain from the previous year, a 300 percent increase in the number of adult

groups, and a 54.5 percent increase in the number of adults being discipled. In addition to

these figures, I discovered more plausible information than just statistical data. When

evaluating the project's effectiveness and required improvements, a clear picture emerged

of the project's validity.

Keys to Project Effectiveness

Four key elements made the project effective: (1) biblical values, (2) leadership

alignment, (3) group empowerment, and (4) communicating vision.

The first key to the project's effectiveness centered on leadership utilizing biblical criteria as the top priority for action. This project provided a valuable lesson about the power of establishing right values. As James Kouzes and Barry Posner state, "Values help us determine what to do and what not to do. They're the deep-seated, pervasive standards that influence every aspect of our lives: our moral judgments, our responses to others, our commitments to personal and organizational goals."[1]

Values define performance. An organization actually becomes what it really believes. Proper actions must stem from proper theology. Over time, the proliferation of church programs at Muskogee First Assembly obscured the central purpose behind these ministries. To correct the problem, leaders redirected the church by implanting biblical values that resonated from their hearts directly to the hearts of the congregation.

Chapter 2, the Biblical-Theological Review, provided the basis for action. Leadership refocused the church's vision to include Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19, "Go and make disciples." The Great Commission gives clear direction. The church rediscovered biblical values, recovered its mission, and, as a result, reproduced disciples through the power of small groups.

The second key, leadership alignment, enhanced the project's effectiveness and reinforced the power of teamwork. Just as a misaligned automobile fails to steer correctly, many organizations encounter guidance problems when their leaders function in a misaligned state. Alignment helps every leader in the organization head in the same

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[1]James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Keep Getting Extraordinary Things Done in Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1995), 212.

direction. "Alignment … refers to the integration of key systems and processes and responses to changes in the external environment."[2]

The small group ministry required total support of every church system. As pastor, I not only preached about small groups, but I also led a small group. Every staff member guided and participated in a small group—even secretaries. All but one member of the executive team led a small group. In addition, the leadership team motivated others to lead small groups, which resulted in the number of small groups tripling.

Small group ministry succeeded through a united, collaborative team effort. Each member of the team received training, understood the mission, and remained accountable. The leadership team scanned the membership rolls to find names of those not involved in a small group. Through concerted teamwork, leaders formed new small groups that provided exciting opportunities for the uninvolved. Aligned leadership produced effective results.

The third key, group empowerment, contributed to the project's effectiveness. Encouraging people to initiate, lead, and shepherd a small group empowered ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Ken Blanchard defines empowerment as "the process of unleashing the power in people—their knowledge, experience, and motivation—and focusing that power to achieve positive outcomes for the organization."[3] Empowered people led small groups. The priesthood of believers became a reality as unlikely, and in some cases, unqualified people (academically, not spiritually) directed small groups.

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[2]George Labovitz and Victor Rosansky, *The Power of Alignment: How Great Companies Stay Centered and Accomplish Extraordinary things* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1997), 5.

[3]Ken Blanchard, *Leading at a Higher Level: Blanchard on Leadership and Creating High Performing Organizations* (Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007), 68.

Leadership placed few limits on the parameters of a small group. The group leaders formed groups based on friendship, ministry, and learning connections. When members understood the myriad of small group opportunities, they initiated many creative groups. Fusion, the young married program, formed small groups around issues that young couples face. Many people participated in more than one group.

Leadership encouraged small group leaders to think "out of the box" regarding curriculum and to choose learning materials designed to address real needs. To guarantee doctrinal purity, the discipleship pastor screened all selections. The Sunday morning schedule also required the leadership team to think "out of the box." In April 2008, the service times were adjusted to allow small groups to have an additional half hour. This time change enabled the Sunday morning classes to maintain a more relaxed atmosphere.

The fourth key, communicating the vision, made the project effective. Peter Block confirms the value of communication when he states, "The essence of political skill is building support for our function and our projects. This takes place through dialogue, and the most compelling dialogue we can have is about our vision."[4] Beginning December 2007, the executive and leadership teams at Muskogee First Assembly continually communicated the vision for small groups. When March 2008 arrived, the church members shared the vision in their own words.

The training of small group leaders helped motivate people by communicating a passionate plan of action. The small group sermon series communicated vision by sharing the Word and powerful stories of lives changed through small group meetings. All

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[4]Peter Block, *The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills At Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1987), 128.

printed materials and announcements laid out a strategic plan for small groups. Clear and

consistent communication contributed to the great success of the project.

<center>Keys to Project Improvement</center>

The scope of the project required enormous time, energy, effort, and adaptability.

Leading a church through major philosophical shifts in transition and ministry

methodology presented formidable challenges. Unanticipated learning opportunities

presented themselves at every point of the project. Even though the small groups

achieved a measure of success, the project needs numerous adjustments to achieve an

even greater degree of excellence. Careful evaluation of the small group ministry

revealed that the project needed (1) a more stable time period to initiate small groups, (2)

enhanced and ongoing training of small group leaders, (3) improved small group survey

instruments, and (4) quality upper-level lay leadership.

First, the project revealed the need for a more stable time period for initiating

small groups. After reviewing attendance figures for the past year, I concluded that the

small group program suffered as a result of running from April to July 2008. In April and

May, attendance fluctuated because of Mother's Day, graduations, and other special

events. In June and July, many members took vacations. By conducting the project from

January to April or from September to December the statistical data would improve

simply because the attendance is less volatile during those times. Still, the project proved

the validity of small groups to boost attendance even during the lower attendance months.

Second, the small group intervention birthed the need for ongoing training of

small group leaders. The well-attended Leader Training Course, offered four times prior

to the launch of small groups, provided practical start-up assistance and motivation.

Ongoing training issues surfaced in the June 4, 2008 meeting when only seventeen small group leaders attended. The project needed additional emphasis once the project commenced, but busy schedules and lack of desire prevented additional training. Creative, motivational tactics for inspiring leaders could have produced greater results in the overall project. Making future small group training a priority requires leaders to aggressively plan, promote, and persuade leaders to achieve greater success.

Third, the project necessitated the need to obtain more accurate small group survey instruments and analysis procedures. Leadership discovered that most people dislike surveys of any kind. The thirty-two-answer survey proved too lengthy for people to complete in church, during the allotted break (even then, this caused service disruption). Some completed the Small Group Survey at home and returned it later. The anonymous survey encouraged honest answers.

The statistical analysis, though not scientific, provided adequate assessment to ascertain people's general appraisal of small groups before and after the intervention. Finding better ways to analyze statistical data might require additional research, but it would provide further validity to the project. By changing questions ten and eleven on Small Group Survey Two, the project obtained valuable information regarding the results of community. Leadership must refine the survey and analysis measurements.

Fourth, the project reinforced the need for upper-level, lay leadership involvement. A member of the executive team endeavored to participate as a key leader from the start of the project, but his work schedule prevented him from assuming a leadership role. In August, he attended the Leader Training Course, and he presently

leads a successful small group. The project needed the participation of gifted lay leaders to coach and train other leaders.

Implications of the Project

The project revealed several discoveries regarding small group ministry's ability to overcome growth plateaus through facilitating assimilation and developing community. Without prior experience, leadership launched small groups and assumed their viability. As the project concluded, several factors emerged, which provided solid evidence for the effectiveness of small groups at Muskogee First Assembly and other venues. The project's findings substantiated the ability of small groups to break growth barriers, create community, produce personal growth, and evangelize the unchurched.

First, the project substantiated the ability of small groups to break growth barriers. In a medium-sized town, with a stagnate population growth, and eight Assembly of God churches, small groups produced significant growth during the worse time of the year for church attendance (April to July 2008). Small groups increase church attendance in slow, gradual, and deliberate ways. After in-depth, personal involvement with this project for over a year, I strongly advocate small groups to spawn growth in any venue, anywhere, at anytime.

Second, the project established the capacity of small groups to create community. The evidence of connection produced visible expressions of joy. Many people enjoyed new social connections and fellowship soared to new levels. Young married couples got out of bed for small groups on Sunday morning. Prior to this project, these couples experienced little connection.

The responses received to question number ten on Small Group Survey Two reflect solid evidence about the power of small groups to create community.[5] The question stated, "Small groups have positively impacted my life in the last four months." Respondents gave the following answers: 101—yes; 22—no; 13—no response. Among the many positive comments, five stand out:

(1) "We have been coming for three weeks. Making friends in small groups makes it easier to come back. Sharing in class with friends makes it easy also."
(2) "Having a small group of friends to meet with and have fellowship with has been so uplifting. We share our problems and get positive prayer input."
(3) "Build great relationships! It's nice to meet other couples who have the same struggles/issues. We work through life together."
(4) "Being new to a church, it helps me get to know other people and feel more a part of the church."
(5) "I feel the small groups helped me to be a part of the church."

Third, the project emphasized the ability of small groups to produce personal growth. In Small Group Survey Two, ninety-seven took time to answer question eleven; "I have learned new things about God in the last four months in my group." Respondents gave the following answers: 86—yes; 11—no.[6] Fifty-three explained what they learned. Five personal comments reflect the feelings of most:

(1) "I have learned how patient God is with me, and how much he loves me."
(2) "I have learned ways to talk with my spouse—ways to grow closer as a family."
(3) "I have learned how to be more patient."
(4) "I have learned about the need to witness and invite people to ask Jesus into their hearts."
(5) "I have learned Jesus is the only reason that offers a definite future and hope to a person."

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[5]See Appendix F for all the responses to question ten.

[6]See Appendix F for all the responses to question eleven.

The project demonstrated the power of small groups to produce spiritual transformation. This reason alone establishes strong argument for the validity of small groups in any setting.

Fourth, the project affirmed the potential of small groups to evangelize the unchurched. The total weekly church attendance grew during the ministry intervention primarily due to unchurched people attending small groups during non-traditional times. Among those attending the small groups during the test phase were an average of fifty people, who had never been a part of Muskogee First Assembly. Non-traditional groups such as water aerobics, motorcycle riding, and scrapbooking small groups provided entryways into the church. The power of small groups to evangelize was the big surprise of the project.

Recommendations for Muskogee First Assembly

The project created a new modus operandi for Muskogee First Assembly. Leadership dismounted a dead horse—growth through big events—and mounted a charger—growth through small groups. The project forever changed the way Muskogee First Assembly's people perceive church ministry.

Lifting small groups to a new level requires further action. As leadership acts on the following five recommendations, small groups will achieve greater excellence: (1) improve counting procedures, (2) develop a small group reporting system, (3) link new attendees to small groups, (4) strategize for success, and (5) provide clearer direction to the leadership team.

"You can't manage what you can't measure!" This anonymous management adage remains true for businesses as well as churches. The project revealed the need to

improve attendance counting procedures. To ensure consistent reporting results, the

attendance counting procedures remained the same throughout the project analysis. When

viewing the results, secretaries discovered several names missing on the computer

database. This presents an opportunity to improve the attendance tracking system, so staff

can accurately track every person, every week. Ministry leaders' insight and input in this

area will help correct this flawed system.

Leadership must develop a small group reporting system for small group leaders

and the leadership team. Secretaries gathered attendance information from the small

group leaders by telephone. Many small groups hosted people who do not attend

Muskogee First Assembly. Leadership must require better strategies and systems for

obtaining weekly small group data, because these unchurched small group attendees

represent potential church members.

Leadership must develop a clear way to link new attendees to small groups. Many

people, during the April to July 2008 time period, attended small groups through the

invitation of leadership, a small group leader, or church members. Most visitors "fell off"

the radar screen. The project's results revealed the need for tracking first time visitors and

designing a program that links visitors to a small group.

Furthermore, leadership must strategize for success. A plan for promoting small

groups and training leaders must exist three months prior to the next semester. This

degree of in-depth planning will communicate to the congregation the importance of

small groups. Leadership must rewrite the *Leader's Training Manual* and incorporate

some of the results from this project, which include new small group success stories,

practical tips, and new small group concepts. Careful planning also includes scheduling dates and times for the initial leadership training, as well as ongoing training.

Last, leadership must provide clear direction to the leadership team. As pastor I must devise refined guidelines and goals that will improve future small group ministry, outline the duties and responsibilities of the discipleship pastor, and communicate the importance of teamwork. These recommendations should enable leadership to achieve even greater results.

Recommendations for Future Study

When adventurous astronauts blasted off in a spacecraft to the moon, they opened up a whole new world for future exploration. Discovering new worlds can only occur through the knowledge gained from traveling to previously challenging places. This project uncovered the need for future study of the unknown galaxies surrounding the planet of small groups.

First, multi-level coaching in a small groups program presents unique challenges. A plan for taking small groups from the initial level to a multi-level approach demands further study. The leadership dynamics used to reach one level of small groups must change for the next level of coaching.

Second, assimilation strategies for new attendees remain a crucial priority. Future research could explore the psychological and spiritual ramifications behind why some adults resist joining small groups. The nature of the problem suggests cultural, spiritual, and historical issues leaders should explore.

Third, the church represents diverse ethnicities. Recommendations for future study involve identifying a particular cultural ethnicity represented in the congregation,

researching unique social psychological factors, and then forming a methodology to better incorporate particular people groups into small groups.

Last, leadership should conduct further studies regarding how to bring new attendees into small groups more efficiently and effectively. The strategy must focus on easy, understandable, and productive procedures. A study of church systems could possibly uncover solutions to this problem. Additional topics for future study could include church government, leadership styles, ministry venues, and church personalities in regard to the effectiveness of small groups.

Conclusion

Overcoming the growth plateau at Muskogee First Assembly involved a synthesis of spirit (biblical-theological), mind (literature review), systems (small group review), and matter (Muskogee First Assembly), which resulted in a prescribed course of action and produced outstanding results. Lives changed through the ministry vehicle of small groups. This project links Jesus, the Disciples, the New Testament Church, and countless saints throughout the centuries with the members of Muskogee First Assembly. Small group ministry linked more than people together—it linked the Church's past with our church's future.

Small Group Survey One

Small Group: *A group of 3-12 people who meet on a regular basis and come together to grow, encourage, and strengthen one another.*

Please circle one response

1. I am currently in a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

2. I feel I would benefit from a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

3. I believe small groups can be effective in changing my life.   **Yes**   **No**

4. I feel uncomfortable sharing my personal issues in a small
   group and listening to others share their personal issues.   **Yes**   **No**

5. I believe small groups help assimilate people in the body   **Yes**   **No**
   of Christ

6. I need to be a part of a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

7. I feel personal Bible study and prayer are more effective   **Yes**   **No**
   than a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with people who hold me
   accountable.   **Yes**   **No**

8. I feel small groups are just another program, and I don't   **Yes**   **No**
   see the relevance in my life.

9. I do not have time to be in a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

10. My hobbies/interests are:

_____

_____

_____

11. If you were to be a part of a small group, which of the following categories would appeal to you: *(circle all that apply)*

Fishing	Scrapbooking	Sewing	Painting
Bible Study	Walking	Reading	Cooking
Hunting	Golfing	Fitness	Hiking
Camping	Crafting	G12 Groups	Prayer
Horseback Riding	Sunday school Classes	Senior Saints	Supper Clubs
Young Married	Youth	College	Singles
Ministry Groups	Blended Families	Divorce Care	Widows
Breakfast Clubs	Moms with Preschoolers	Friendship Groups	Empty Nesters

List any other groups that would interest you:

_____

_____

12. If you were to join a small group Bible Study, please list three topics or studies that would interest you.

(a) _____

(b)_____

(c)_____

13. How many people would you feel comfortable with in a small group? _____

14. What recommendations do you have to help improve our Sunday school (Connect Groups) program at our church? If you were looking to join a class or a group, what would you look for?

_____

_____

15. What night(s) in order of preference would you like to attend a small group?

Please put a 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice, and so on…

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1st Week of the Month							
2nd Week of the Month							
3rdWeek of the Month							
4th Week of the Month							

Please Circle **one** number *(1 2 3 4 5)* for each of the following questions *(questions 16-32):*

	Just Beginning	Getting Going	Well Developed

16. I am developing authentic relationships/community within my church family.　　1 2 3 4 5

17. I am more loving, grace-giving and forgiving to others than I was a year ago.　　1 2 3 4 5

18. I am intentionally cultivating my relationships with Christian friends and spiritual mentors.　　1 2 3 4 5

19. I am regularly connecting with my immediate family relationships (parent, siblings, kids and spouse).　　1 2 3 4 5

20. I am resolving conflict in my relationships with others in a biblical manner.　　1 2 3 4 5

21. I have a growing relationship with God through regular quiet time in His Word and prayer.　　1 2 3 4 5

22. I respond to challenges with peace and faith rather than anxiety and fear.   1 2 3 4 5

23. I have a relationship with someone who encourages my spiritual health and personal growth.   1 2 3 4 5

24. I am expressing my unique God-given design as a way of life (at home, at work, and at church).   1 2 3 4 5

25. I am open and praying to be used by God and use my gifts for ministry.   1 2 3 4 5

26. I am serving in a regular (once a month or better) ministry in the church.   1 2 3 4 5

27. I am discovering new ways to cultivate and develop my gifts for ministry.   1 2 3 4 5

28. I am actively praying for and cultivating relationships with un-churched friends and family.   1 2 3 4 5

29. I am regularly investing in the spiritual life of another person (spiritual reproduction).   1 2 3 4 5

30. I am faithfully attending church worship services for spiritual renewal and refreshment.   1 2 3 4 5

31. I have a personal plan and process to help me achieve my goals and dreams.   1 2 3 4 5

32. I am pleasing God in every dimension of my life.   1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX B

Small Group Leaders Training: How to Do Small Group Ministry

Table of Contents

Chapter

Love People

Stay Balanced

Learn to Listen

Learn to Ask Questions

Practice Truth Telling

Celebrate Achievements

Turn Meetings into Holy Moments through the Holy Spirit

Expect Conflict

Be Patient

APPENDIX C

Sermon Series: Live Together or Die Alone

Sermon One: The Ultimate Reason For Community
Preached: March 2, 2008 a.m.
Text: Acts 2:44

Introduction
Four Quick Facts:
- Fact 1: Meeting for worship once a week will never bring community.
- Fact 2: We are not doing what Jesus told us to do—Matthew 28:19.
- Fact 3: People are hungry for genuine community.
- Fact 4: Community can never be manufactured.

Why do small groups?

I. Community defines the very nature of God (Gen. 1:1-3).

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit participate in shared interdependence and interrelationship.

II. You were born for community (Gen. 1:26-27; 2:18).

Even though God created Adam as His image bearer so he could have community with him, he also saw something missing in the relationship factor. Adam's aloneness was not good. God made woman, not just for procreation, but also for a relationship that would fulfill God's community design.

III. You are in hiding (Gen. 3:1-10).

Satan introduced broken relationships and hiding. When man and woman broke community with each other, they broke community with God. Humankind went into hiding.

IV. You need to be restored to who you are (Gen. 3:8-21; 1 John 1:7; 1 Cor. 5:17-18).

Out of His desire for community, God took the initiative to search for Adam. God took the initiative and made garments out of animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness. God made the final move by sending Jesus to be the sacrifice for sins. True relationship happens through God's provision of redemption.

Sermon Two: Friends and Family—The Ultimate Small Group
Preached: March 2, 2008 p.m.
Text: Acts 2:42-27

Introduction
Each person should possess two kinds of blood brothers:

- Natural blood ties
- Spiritual blood ties

Everyone in these two categories needs to disciple those close to them.

I. Family Small Groups

Israel consisted of a covenant community made up of tribes, clans, and households. The tribal community of Israel consisted of twelve tribes named after patriarchal fathers that were the sons of Israel (with the exception of Joseph, but consisting of Joseph's two sons). Tribes were broken into clans. Clans were made up of large households all who lived together in the same house including slaves, concubines, foreign residents, and servants.

How to Disciple Those Close to You

1. Realize that God has a spiritual plan for your family (Gen. 12:1-5).

2. Realize that God has chosen you to disciple your family (Deut. 6:4).

    - Ephesians 6:4—Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (NIV).

    - Faith must exist as a family affair.

II. Friendship Small Groups

Proverbs 18:24

Israel's friendship circles were small groups involved in covenant relationships.

A. Friendship Groups Done Wrong (Job 42:7-11)

1. There is a great responsibility in friendship.

2. No one should ever have to do life alone.

B. Friendship Groups Done Right

1. David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1-4; 23:15-18)

2. Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah (Ruth)

Conclusion: Live in community experiencing life together as Family.

The church is not an organization, but a family—blood and spiritual!

Sermon Three: Where Ordinary People Become Extraordinary
Preached: March 9, 2008 a.m.
Text: Acts 2:44

Introduction

- Are you ordinary?
- Would you like to become extraordinary?
- Are you ready for a makeover?

Ordinary people are on three levels!

I. Level One—Casual

This is where everyone starts.

    A. Andrew and John (John 1:35-39)

    B. Peter (John 1:40-42)

    C. Philip (John 1:43-44)

    D. Nathanael (John 1:45-51)

Many ordinary people are on a casual level with Jesus.

II. Level Two—Changed

    A. Let's examine how three ordinary people moved to level two. (Luke 5:1-11)

    B. Many ordinary people have experienced their lives changed.

    C. This is where ordinary people began to imagine their possibilities

III.Level Three—Committed

    A. Jesus selected twelve ordinary men. They committed to follow Him (Luke 6:12-16).

    B. This is where ordinary people become extraordinary!

Conclusion—Committed disciples change a casual world!

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Sermon Four: The Gathering
Preached: March 9, 2008 p.m.
Text: Acts 2:44, Matt. 18:19-20

</div>

Introduction
- What is the difference between a Bono U2 concert and church?

I. The Nature of a Secular Gathering

Ekklesia means "gathering" or "assembly" in its simplest form.

1. Who: Who Share Affiliation
2. Where: Who Meet in One Place
3. When: Who Meet at One Time
4. What: Who Meet with an Agenda
5. How: Who are Empowered to Meet

What makes the difference between a social gathering and a spiritual gathering?

II. The Nature of a Spiritual Gathering

When the church gathers together, it is not the same.

1. Who: Who Share Affiliation—Christians

2. Where: Who Meet in One Place—A Church or Home or …

3. When: Who Meet at One Time—At 10:30 a.m. and Other Times

4. What: Who Meet with an Agenda—A Service Program or Small Group Curriculum, Event, Activity …

5. How: Who are Empowered to Meet by the Holy Spirit's Power

Ekklesia means "gathering" or "assembly" in its simplest form.

1. We are ones called out from the world (1 Pet. 2:9).
2. We are a continuation of what the Lord began through Moses (Exod. 12:3).
3. We are assembled by God.
4. We are assembled for mighty purpose.

The *ekklesia* remains unique from anything the world has to offer in that the Church belongs to Christ to fulfill His plan in discipling the world (Matt. 28:18-20).

Sermon Five: Connection Points, Part I
Preached: March 16, 2008 a.m.
Text: Acts 2:44

Introduction
- Small groups present the best option for discipleship. Have you connected?

Let's view various connecting points.

I. A Discipleship Small Group (Acts 2:42-47)

- The main ingredients of the small group meeting included teaching, fellowship, meals, prayer, miracles, caring for one another, and worship.

- "And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (v. 47).

II. An Outreach Small Group (Acts 5:42; 16:13-34)

What is an outreach small group?

 a) Small Group Evangelism Started on the Streets (Acts 16:13-14)
 b) Small Group Evangelism Moved to Lydia's House (Acts 16:15)
 c) Small Group Evangelism Went Back to the Streets (Acts 16:16-18)
 d) Small Group Evangelism Moved to the Jail 23 (Acts 16:16:25)

III. A Prayer Small Group (Acts 12:1-17)

Where did this prayer meeting happen? Mary, wealthy, opened her large home to accommodate a large group! Jerusalem churches provided a network of small groups meeting in homes across the city.

Could discipleship, fellowship, and prayer be mixed into one powerful moment?

Conclusion: Have you found a connecting point?

Sermon Six: Connection Points, Part II
Preached: March 16, 2008 p.m.
Text: Acts 2:44

Introduction

How do a man and woman meet?
Was it chemistry or God?

Did you ever think that God has a small group meeting that will make your life complete?

IV.   A Work Place Small Group (Acts 18:1-11)

1 Thessalonians 2:9
Did Paul's contacts in the community come through tent making?
Was the workshop where the greatest missionary work was accomplished?

V.   A Couples' Small Group Ministry (Acts 18:18-28)

Paul left Priscilla and Aquila and they started a small group ministry. This mighty couple changed Apollos' life. I believe Priscilla and Aquila laid the foundation in Ephesus for the later work Paul would do. Ephesus turned out to be one of the strongest churches ever. (1 Cor. 16:19; Rom. 16:3-4)

VI.   A Singles' Small Group (Col. 4:15)

What about Mary, Lydia, Nympha, and Phoebe? (Rom. 16:1)

VII.   An Apartment Small Group (Acts 20:7-12)

This "house church" was actually an "apartment church."

Conclusion—Two questions

1. Are you connected?

2. Could you start a small group where you live?

Sermon Seven: Our Purpose in the Real World
Preached: March 30, 2008 a.m.
Text: Acts 2:44, 1 John 1:3

Introduction
- We are aliens on a dark planet that is deeply affected by sin.
- We live out a circle of being on this dark planet.

What is our purpose for small groups as it relates to the world?

I. We live in this world (1 John 1:1-2).

- Jesus came from another world to live in this world.
- Jesus was a physical being who existed in a real world.
- You live in a real world! It is not an illusion.

II. We are not of this world (1 John 1:5-7).

- The world does not recognize us. You are an alien.

III. We live in our own world (1 John 1:7; 2:17; 4:4).

- We live in our own world. We experience real fellowship, love, and joy.
- We enjoy a taste of heaven on earth.

IV. We must take our world to a lost world (1 John 2:1-2).

Look at our circle of being:
    a) We live in this world
    b) We are not of this world
    c) We live in our own world
    d) We take our world to a lost world

Conclusion

- What is our purpose for small groups as it relates to the world?

- We must take our world to a lost world!

Small Group Survey Two

Small Group: *A group of 3-12 people who meet on a regular basis and come together to grow, encourage, and strengthen one another.*

Please circle one

1. I am currently in a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

2. I feel I would benefit from a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

3. I believe small groups can be effective in changing my life.   **Yes**   **No**

4. I feel uncomfortable sharing my personal issues in a small
   group and listening to others share their personal issues.   **Yes**   **No**

5. I believe small groups help assimilate people in the body   **Yes**   **No**
   of Christ

6. I need to be a part of a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

7. I feel personal Bible study and prayer are more effective   **Yes**   **No**
   than a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with people who hold me
   accountable.   **Yes**   **No**

8. I feel small groups are just another program, and I don't   **Yes**   **No**
   see the relevance in my life.

9. I do not have time to be in a small group.   **Yes**   **No**

10. Small groups have positively impacted my life in the last   **Yes**   **No**
    four months.

Please explain:

_____

_____

11. I have learned new things about God in the last four months   **Yes**   **No**
    in my group.

    I have learned:

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

12. If you were to join a small group Bible Study, please list three topics or studies that would interest you.

    (a) _____

    (b)_____

    (c)_____

13. How many people would you feel comfortable with in a small group? _____

14. What recommendations do you have to help improve our Sunday school (Connect Groups) program at our church? If you were looking to join a class or a group, what would you look for?

    _____
    _____

15. What night(s) in order of preference would you like to attend a small group?

    Please put a 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice, and so on…

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
1st Week of the Month							
2nd Week of the Month							
3rdWeek of the Month							
4th Week of the Month							

Please Circle **one** number *(1 2 3 4 5)* for each of the following questions *(questions 16-32):*

		Just Beginning	Getting Going	Well Developed
16.	I am developing authentic relationships/community within my church family.	1 2 3 4 5		
17.	I am more loving, grace-giving and forgiving to others than I was a year ago.	1 2 3 4 5		
18.	I am intentionally cultivating my relationships with Christian friends and spiritual mentors.	1 2 3 4 5		
19.	I am regularly connecting with my immediate family relationships (parent, siblings, kids and spouse).	1 2 3 4 5		
20.	I am resolving conflict in my relationships with others in a biblical manner.	1 2 3 4 5		
21.	I have a growing relationship with God through regular quiet time in His Word and prayer.	1 2 3 4 5		
22.	I respond to challenges with peace and faith rather than anxiety and fear.	1 2 3 4 5		
23.	I have a relationship with someone that encourages my spiritual health and personal growth.	1 2 3 4 5		
24.	I am expressing my unique God-given design as a way of life (at home, at work, and at church).	1 2 3 4 5		
25.	I am open and praying to be used by God and use my gifts for ministry.	1 2 3 4 5		
26.	I am serving in a regular (once a month or better) ministry in the church.	1 2 3 4 5		
27.	I am discovering new ways to cultivate and develop my gifts for ministry.	1 2 3 4 5		
28.	I am actively praying for and cultivating relationships with un-churched friends and family.	1 2 3 4 5		

29. I am regularly investing in the spiritual life of another person (spiritual reproduction).　　1 2 3 4 5

30. I am faithfully attending church worship services for spiritual renewal and refreshment.　　1 2 3 4 5

31. I have a personal plan and process to help me achieve my goals and dreams.　　1 2 3 4 5

32. I am pleasing God with every dimension of my life.　　1 2 3 4 5

Small Group Survey One Results

Small Group: *A group of 3-12 people who meet on a regular basis and come together to grow, encourage, and strengthen one another.*

#	Comment	Yes	No
1.	I am currently in a small group.	104	110
2.	I feel I would benefit from a small group.	198	16
3.	I believe small groups can be effective in changing my life.	196	14
4.	I feel uncomfortable sharing my personal issues in a small group and listening to others share their personal issues.	67	139
5.	I believe small groups help assimilate people into the body of Christ.	209	4
6.	I need to be a part of a small group.	169	39
7.	I feel personal Bible study and prayer are more effective than a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with people who hold me accountable.	107	92
8	I feel small groups are just another program, and I don't see the relevance in my life.	29	172
9.	I do not have time to be in a small group.	49	142

10. My hobbies/interests are:
    Answers varied by survey respondents making it impossible to categorize by subjects.

11. If you were to be a part of a small group, which of the following categories would appeal to you:

Fishing—58	Scrapbooking—40	Sewing—37
Bible Study—89	**Walking—64**	Reading—46
Hunting—35	Golfing—26	Fitness—63
Camping—68	Crafting—36	G12—1

Horseback Riding—44	**Sunday School Class—54**	Senior Saints—10
Breakfast Clubs—23	Youth—18	College—18
Young Marrieds—53	Blended Families—14	Divorce Care—12
Ministry Groups—39	Mom's with Preschoolers—18	Friendship Groups—50
Painting—22	Cooking—62	Hiking—36
Prayer—66	Supper Clubs—29	Singles—20
Widows—4	Empty Nesters—11	

12. If you were to join a small group Bible Study, please list three topics or studies that would interest you?

Marriage (God's Plan for)	17
Bible—Learning/Study	14
Prayer (Effective)	08
End Times—Bible Study on	07
Raising Children (Parenting)	07

13. How many people would you feel comfortable with in a small group?

Number of People in Group	Survey Responses
5	6
6	10
7	10
8	20
9	7
10	39
11	11
12	51
N/A	65

14. What recommendations do you have to help improve our Sunday school (Connect Groups) program at our church? If you were look to join a class or a group, what would you look for? **Answers varied by survey respondents making it impossible to categorize by subjects.**

15. What night(s), in order of preference would you like to attend a small group?

Week #	Mon	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun
1	15	4	10	7	8	8	6
2	1	14	3	8	2	3	1
3	0	8	5	5	4	4	0
Any week	26	15	15	16	18	23	19

		Just Beginning	Discov-ering	Getting Going	Growing	Well-Developed	NA
16.	I am developing authentic relationships/community within my church family.	35	24	51	32	40	37
17.	I am more loving, grace-giving, and forgiving to other than I was a year ago.	7	8	43	60	65	36
18.	I am intentionally cultivating my relationships with Christian friends and spiritual mentors.	28	19	62	42	30	38
19.	I am regularly connecting with my immediate family (parents, siblings, kids, and spouse).	10	9	38	42	84	36
20.	I am resolving conflict in my relationships with others in a biblical manner.	10	9	38	42	84	36
21.	I have a growing relationship with God through regular quiet time in His Word and prayer.	20	19	50	60	36	34
22.	I respond to challenges with peace and faith rather than anxiety and fear.	16	13	63	46	34	47
23.	I have a relationship with someone that encourages my spiritual health and personal growth.	14	16	46	54	48	41
24.	I am expressing my unique God-given design as a way of life (at home, at work, and at church).	15	14	44	59	49	38
25.	I am open and praying to be used by God and use my gifts for ministry.	15	14	39	54	58	39
26.	I am serving in a regular (once a month or better) ministry in the church.	54	12	21	18	58	56
27.	I am discovering new ways to cultivate and develop my gifts for ministry.	31	24	55	35	23	51

		Just Beginning	Discov-ering	Getting Going	Growing	Well-Developed	NA
28.	I am actively praying for and cultivating relationships with unchurched friends and family.	19	20	48	42	34	56
29.	I am regularly investing in the spiritual life of another person (spiritual reproduction).	27	25	44	40	31	52
30.	I am faithfully attending church worship services for spiritual renewal and refreshment.	9	7	28	44	89	42
31.	I have a personal plan and process to help me achieve my goals and dreams.	16	18	38	59	44	44
32.	I am pleasing God with every dimension of my life.	18	15	56	65	20	45

Small Group Survey Two Results

Small Group: *A group of 3-12 people who meet on a regular basis and come together to grow, encourage, and strengthen one another.*

#	Comment	Yes	No	NA
1.	I am currently in a small group.	106	25	05
2.	I feel I would benefit from a small group.	124	03	09
3.	I believe small groups can be effective in changing my life.	123	08	05
4.	I feel uncomfortable sharing my personal issues in a small group and listening to others share their personal issues.	34	94	08
5.	I believe small groups help assimilate people into the body of Christ.	128	01	07
6.	I need to be a part of a small group.	118	07	11
7.	I feel personal Bible study and prayer are more effective than a weekly or bi-weekly meeting with people who hold me accountable.	51	57	28
8.	I feel small groups are just another program, and I don't see the relevance in my life.	4	124	08
9.	I do not have time to be in a small group.	17	99	13
10.	Small groups have positively impacted my life in the last four months. **(See individual comments below.)**	101	22	13
11.	I have learned new things about God in the last four months in my group. Please explain. **(See individual comments below.)**	86	13	37
12.	If you were to join a small group Bible Study, please list three topics or studies that would interest you?			

Marriage (Healing/Happy/Staying)	11
Bible—Learning/Study	08
Family	05
God's love, mercy and forgiveness	04
Jesus—Ministry, Life/How to Walk With	04

13. How many people would you feel comfortable with in a small group?

Number of People in Group	Survey Responses
5	6
6	2
7	6
8	9
9	9
10	18
11	3
12	26
N/A	46

14. What recommendations do you have to help improve our Sunday school (Connect Groups) program at our church? If you were look to join a class or a group, what would you look for?
(See individual comments below.)

15. What night(s), in order of preference would you like to attend a small group?

Week #	Mon	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun
1	11	7	3	2	3	4	4
2	4	3	1	3	3	1	0
3	3	4	1	2	1	2	0
Any week	9	13	25	8	12	13	28

	Just Beginning	Discov-ering	Getting Going	Growing	Well-Developed	NA
16. I am developing authentic relationships/community within my church family.	19	11	37	30	23	16
17. I am more loving, grace-giving, and forgiving to other than I was a year ago.	6	4	61	23	33	9
18. I am intentionally cultivating my relationships with Christian friends and	12	11	32	44	23	14

spiritual mentors.

		Just Beginning	Discovering	Getting Going	Growing	Well-Developed	NA
19.	I am regularly connecting with my immediate family (parents, siblings, kids, and spouse).	8	10	22	37	51	8
20.	I am resolving conflict in my relationships with others in a biblical manner.	7	9	43	38	25	14
21.	I have a growing relationship with God through regular quiet time in His Word and prayer.	9	19	35	44	28	10
22.	I respond to challenges with peace and faith rather than anxiety and fear.	14	11	40	38	23	10
23.	I have a relationship with someone that encourages my spiritual health and personal growth.	11	8	22	45	38	12
24.	I am expressing my unique God-given design as a way of life (at home, at work, and at church).	13	7	30	50	25	11
25.	I am open and praying to be used by God and use my gifts for ministry.	12	7	28	42	35	11
26.	I am serving in a regular (once a month or better) ministry in the church.	22	14	16	20	32	32
27.	I am discovering new ways to cultivate and develop my gifts for ministry.	22	14	39	29	12	20
28.	I am actively praying for and cultivating relationships with unchurched friends and family.	12	12	33	38	25	16
29.	I am regularly investing in the spiritual life of another person (spiritual reproduction).	11	19	33	33	22	18
30.	I am faithfully attending church worship services for spiritual renewal and	7	8	16	26	66	13

refreshment.

	Just Beginning	Discov- ering	Getting Going	Growing	Well- Developed	NA
31. I have a personal plan and process to help me achieve my goals and dreams.	11	17	43	30	19	16
32. I am pleasing God with every dimension of my life.	9	17	45	33	15	17

Comments Provided by Survey Respondents for Question 10: "Small groups have positively impacted my life in the last four months."

- We have been coming for three weeks. Making friends in small groups makes it easier to come back. Sharing in class with friends makes it easy also.
- Learned to appreciate and enjoy the small group, meet new people.
- I have opened up more with people and I do know that my life and others matter.
- Being ready for eternity.
- Having a small group of friends to meet with and have fellowship with has been so uplifting. We share our problems and get positive prayer input.
- Build great relationships! It's nice to meet other couples who have the same struggles/issues. We work through life together.
- My class teaches me new things every week. Occasionally I teach them something useful.
- I have made new friends that have enriched my life.
- Being new to a church, it helps me get to know other people and feel more a part of the church.
- I am learning more about myself.
- Challenged me to explore the Word more.
- I'm a quiet person, it helps me be able to open up more.
- Fellowship is great
- Small groups are where it is.
- Divine and ordained connections with some mighty women of God
- We are in Fusion young married class and love it. Class has empowered us to invite friends.
- You get to be around other Christians and hear their triumphs and struggles and get encouragement from it.
- Just good to have Christian fellowship
- I enjoy being with people
- Enjoyed the fellowship; got to know people better
- My small groups help me to work through my problems and helps me to be a part of my brother's solutions.
- First time in a SS class
- It gives me a chance to express my desires and opinions and have people around me who are concerned about me.
- Made some new friends.

- It helps me understand a lot more about the Bible and helped me in a lot of things that I didn't know.
- I have begun looking at things much more positively than I used to.
- Better understanding of others and their issues
- As the Holy Spirit deals with and opens up many things in each of our lives, we share and see things from different views.
- I look forward to leading my group once a month and being a part of another group each Sunday.
- Interaction with people of like mind
- Totally enjoy class; helping hurting people find hope and help in Christ.
- We have been doing the same thing for all these years. It's just a different testimony, so what's the big deal?
- They have kept me involved while I worked.
- We now have more friends than before. Met awesome new people
- I've learned quite a bit to reach out to others.
- Growing in faith with the guys in the group
- I have met new and interesting people and made friends
- It made me aware of others and being connected with each other makes you feel more loved.
- I go fishing with one of the guys in my group and we fellowship on the water.
- I have enjoyed getting to know people; learning more about marriage has inspired us to start a group.
- I love all the small groups I'm already in.
- I feel the small groups helped me to be a part of the church.
- I have not attended.
- We need other people.
- I can voice my needs and realize others have similar needs.
- Sharing and having a small group to call on when I need extra prayer.
- Opportunity to share and grow.
- Having a good group of people supporting you.
- Hearing others' testimonies encourages me and hearing others' needs helps me to pray and encourage them.
- Because I'm in the choir small group, I know they have made a big impact on my life. I trust them and I enjoy being with them. If for some reason that I miss, I can actually feel this in my spirit.
- I have learned that you have a support group to help you through rough times.
- Kept me from doing the things I know I shouldn't do.
- Let me connect with new friends and old friends and made me think about issues and learn from them.
- We just started, but it has been very positive. We really enjoy coming.
- I have enjoyed small groups in the past and I look forward to the day of the week. I miss it.
- Growth – faith
- I have grown closer to those in my small group. I like being held accountable.
- I have really enjoyed our group. I have learned a lot and feel I have made progress in thinking about my eternity.

- Getting to know new people or ones who have been coming in a closer relationship. Sharing with other our battles, joys, etc.
- Small groups enable me to be close to and get to know people and we can help each other grow better in Christ.
- I feel I can open up and share my thoughts.
- Fellowship
- I meet with the teens. I see them draw close to each other and God
- Led a short-term small group and loved it.
- Close relationships developed and enhanced.
- I feel I have connected with other couples and that there are others with the same problems and I am not alone. My spouse and I have no married friends and we hope to make some new friends in our group.
- I am a leader of a group. I have had to be on time accountable before my group. When they need prayer they call me. They need to be involved and so do I.
- Strengthened my walk with the Lord.
- Helped my marriage to grow.
- My relationship has grown with my spouse and friends. I am drawing closer to the Lord and having fun at the same time. It is great having a spiritual family to lift each other up in prayer and share our lives with.

Comments Provided by Survey Respondents for Question 11: "I have learned new things about God in the last four months in my group. Please explain."

- God is walking next to me everyday. I just need to be reminded He was there. We enjoy coming to church. God is great and He forgives. This church will not change my life, but God will. The church is a bonus.
- That God is in control of all things.
- I have learned stuff about His judgment that I did not know.
- I have a better understanding of the blessings that others bring to my life.
- Studying David has made me realize how patient God is with me and how much he loves me.
- Heaven and rewards
- To be more positive and to not be so serious about everything.
- I have learned about heaven and many other things.
- The power of small groups
- The agape unconditional love of Christ
- I have learned ways to talk with my spouse; ways to grow closer as a family.
- Not so much new/reinforcement
- That James was actually one of the leaders of the church
- Many ways to defeat the giants in my life
- That I'm not doing a lot of things and not following the way I'm supposed to.
- How little things are more important to Him than I used to believe
- I should be more attuned to others in my group
- Share but don't take up too much time. Be still and hear God!
- That small groups help you become more self-assured in speaking

- Unity
- How to be more patient. How many people truly care about me and my hubby.
- Learned to be patient
- The need to witness and invite people to ask Jesus into their hearts
- The Lord is pleased when we care about each other
- Remembering my 1st love
- How to handle issues in my life
- Our Bible class is very informative
- We are always learning new stuff
- Peace, peace, peace
- How to withhold judgment on people
- I did not realize that there are levels of heaven and what you really need to get where you want to be.
- That God is more interested in me and my family and wants to help you in all parts of your life.
- About forgiveness
- Jesus (Christianity) is the only reason that offers a definite future and hope to a person.
- I am understanding my husband better. I've learned to listen more. I'll take what we talk about in class with me all week. It's always on my mind.
- I am learning to let go of my daughter now that she is 18 and living on her own. This is the hardest thing I have ever done and a small group would be a lifesaver for me right now. I need it.
- God is faithful and on time
- That I may not be as far in the Word as I should be.
- I've only been in church a few years, but never realized all that goes on with judgment and eternity.
- How faithful He is and ever-present to show how much
- That God loves everyone. No matter where they are.
- Every lesson we study brings out more information
- Learned about the levels of heaven
- God is moving among the teens
- To know the people in my church better
- You can't face life alone
- Marriage & family
- He is my Savior and He forgives
- God wants every marriage to be divine. He loves everyone.
- He loves me so much and that we have not understood how much more He wants for us to grow because we have had so little time for Him – he wants all of me.
- So much in Sunday school
- God wants me to be happy and joyful.
- How to allow God to help me when others push my button to respond with kindness.

Comments Provided by Survey Respondents for Question 14: "What recommendations do you have to help improve our Sunday school (Connect Groups) program at our church? If you were looking to join a class or a group, what would you look for?"

- Consistency – preparation is good
- I think everything is going well; friendly caring people
- Class never starts on time; not organized or ready for class
- More accountability; names and phone numbers of group members
- Families/couples/people in the same age group
- Lesson plan format; lots of Scripture reference and discussing
- Ushers telling where groups are at. My kids and I wandered around for 30 minutes trying to figure out where to go.
- Go back to starting at 9:30 a.m.
- Video along with discussion helps to relate to daily lives
- Maybe more interactive activities outside of the normal settings
- Have more ways to get together on a social level
- More participation
- More activities
- People of similar interests and goals
- My class is doing okay.
- Everyday issues and truth of God's Word concerning these.
- Teacher's spirit and knowledge
- Trustworthy people
- Move the starting time back to 9:30 a.m. since the Pastor doesn't get done at 9 a.m.
- Fun people and Bible study
- A group of fun, loving guys who love the Lord and want to serve Him with all their hearts.
- I like our Bible class the way it is and don't want to be in a small group other than Sunday School.
- To really study the Word of God; you can get much accomplished with a good leader and curriculum.
- Friendliness and real honesty with people loving people
- Interested in the same things that I am interested in
- Some kind of contest
- Start at 9:30 a.m.
- Couples
- 9:30 a.m. start time
- Maybe have the leaders introduced and have them explain what their group is studying
- Fellowship
- Someone who is prepared and the time is valuable because we learn together
- Maybe a class or two that uses quarterlies for new converts or remembrances
- Casual gifts of the Spirit in operation
- Go back to 9:30 classes

- Learn more about Jesus Christ
- Married couples, couples with kids, teens, parenting
- Keep the music in the sanctuary quiet while the classes are going on
- Maintain one-on-one contact
- Everyone being friendly; not putting me on the spot
- Something for young women

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