The Essential
CONNECTION

why small groups are needed in your life & church

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Introduction

Christian education is at the heart of ministry.   Jesus told His disciples in the Great Commission to be   "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:20).

As the Christian educator attempts to fulfill this God given mandate, he is faced with an enormous number of choices in setting forth a program of Christian education in the local church.   As we enter the closing days of the twentieth century and of the second millennium, the church of Jesus Christ finds itself confronted with multiple ideas, philosophies, approaches and organizations all arguing for their particular brand of Christian ministry. Among the many, one approach has come to the forefront. From humble beginnings as merely an experimental approach to Christian education in the 1960's and 1970's to being a mainstream option in the 1980's to being a full-blown movement in the church in the 1990's, the small group approach to ministry is the current celebrity among the many. However the Christian educator comes to view this approach to ministry, he dare not ignore it. "According to a recent three-year, Lilly

Endowment funded Gallup study, more adult churchgoers today are involved in Bible studies and self-help groups than in Sunday School."[1]   Not only are small-groups a phenomenon of the church but "at present four out of every ten Americans belong to a small group that meets regularly and provides support and caring for those who participate in it."[2]   "These are not simply informal gatherings of neighbors and friends, but organized groups."[3]   Another indication of the proportions of the movement is that small group resources have become a major market for publisher. One authority writes that in the years 1991 to 1995 "over 650 new curricula have entered the market."[4]

Small groups are seen by many as not only being an effective educational tool but a means of church growth. Many of the larger evangelical churches see small groups as a way to keep the congregation connected. As Gustave Niebuhr writes, "Still even if their congregation is vast and the minister a distant figure, each mega-church tries to offer intimacy by steering newcomers to small groups."[5]

In seeking to evaluate the small group approach to Christian education one must come to one of several options. Option one: This movement is merely a fad with limited, temporary results. Option two: It is a method that is biblically acceptable and works in our current cultural setting. Option three: It is a scripturally mandated method, which works with all peoples in all times. If we accept option one, we can choose to participate in, or avoid this approach as it suits our fancy. If option two is correct, we should participate for practical reasons but understand that the potential

exists that something better will come along. If option three is correct we must strive to bring our churches' programs in to this format and use it as "the method" of adult Christian education.

The purpose of this work will be to support option three. It is this writer's conviction that the Bible supports this approach to Christian nurture and history, culture and educational theory, although subordinate to divine revelation, support small group ministry as an essential strategy for Christian education. It is my intention to convince the reader that adult Christian education must move from an academic setting that transfers information, to a relational setting that transfers the life of Christ. It is my opinion that the best approach for achieving this is what has come to be known as a small group approach. I will seek to present the small-group/relational approach to adult Christian education as one that can pass the test of both biblical authority and practicality in ministry.

Chapter one: The biblical basis for a small group educational approach

Most writers on the subject of small group ministry claim biblical support for this style of ministry. McBride offers us one such example.

> "The small group ministry is founded on a rock-hard biblical base. This firm foundation guards against the storms of change brought about by the many programmatic fads that blow through our churches. Although initially these fads seem exciting and potentially beneficial, the quickly subside because they lack a clear biblical basis. Small groups are not one of these fanciful fads. In fact, of all the potential ministry formats available to the local church, small groups have the greatest biblical support."[1]

Unfortunately, most of the literature, while claiming biblical authority for the small group concept, is woefully inadequate in setting forth the revelational basis for small group ministry. I would offer three areas that give biblical support to small group ministry: An anthropological argument taken from the biblical account of the

creation of mankind, and two biblio-historical examples, namely the disciples of John and the disciples of Jesus.

CREATION

In the first chapter of the Bible, which describes the work of the Creation week God on six occasions offers His evaluation of all He had made. It was evaluated as good (Gen. 1:4,10,12,18,21,25).   Then He offered His overall summary of the goodness of creation. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day."* (Gen. 1:31 KJV). After expressing the fundamental goodness of creation, He finally identified one thing that was not good. "And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone;" (Gen. 2:18). Morris says of this event,

> "At the end of the six days of creation, God saw that everything He had made was 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). The last act of creation, however was that of woman; hence, prior to this final work, the creation was yet incomplete. Man, especially, was incomplete without woman; and this was not good (this does not mean it was evil, but only that it was unfinished and therefore imperfect). God Himself, therefore said; 'It is not good that the man should be alone.'"[2]

We were created to be social beings. We were designed by our Creator to interact with others and need fellowship with our God. This basic need of man did not cease at the fall. Although fellowship with God was broken and we stood in need of redemption, man still possessed this social need.   The implication for Christian education is that we must recognize the social quality of man in our educational

endeavors. We should design opportunities for people to be together as well as to interact with each other.

The vary nature of our creation and existence forms a powerful argument for a relational approach to religious education. Too often we are using a model of education that gets people together but allows no outlet for the interaction that is a basic need of our nature. The small group format is a model that allows this social need of man to be met in a natural setting as well as providing a superior format of adult religious education.

THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN

John the Baptist stands for all time as a unique servant of God. He was one of only two who were under a Nazarite vow from birth (cf. Luke 1:15, Judges 13:1-5, Num. 6:2-21). His birth to a barren woman was announced by an angel and he was named according to the instruction of God (1:13, 59-63). He was the first person to recognize Jesus' divinity after the conception. (Luke. 1:41ff). He was the chosen forerunner of Jesus. He went forth in the spirit and power of Elijah to announce the coming of the Christ and to prepare the hearts of the people to receive their Messiah. Jesus reserved special praise for John when he said. "... Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist:" (Matt. 11:11).

Even though the Holy Spirit has given us much information concerning the life, person and ministry of John, it is easy to forget that he was not a first century

"lone-ranger." He, as the prophets before him and Jesus after him, was surrounded by a trusted and vital group of disciples.

This group appeared to form spontaneously, as no record is given of them being "called" as were Jesus' disciples. John's disciples, his small group, indicate to us the naturalness of small group ministry. Its naturalness is seen in its formation, continuance and in meeting the needs of those who are part of the group.

Four observations surface from the disciples of John that prove instructive to an exploration of group ministry. First, seeking to be part of a group is a natural felt need of all persons. One only has to look at the extremes to which an inter-city gang member will go to remain part of the group. Many examples can be called to remind one of the naturalness of groupings of individuals. This author can still distinctly remember the "groups" of students during his secondary school days. With the ministry of John from his preaching and baptizing in the Jordan, to his prison experience, to his death, a group of disciples is pictured around him.   With no formal "call" stated, one can only assume that among those who repented and submitted to being immersed in the waters of baptism were those who desired to remain with John, to seek further instruction, and to serve their God by serving with and for God's chosen servant. The formation of this group was as natural as life itself.

The naturalness of group formation is to be used to the advantage of the church of Jesus Christ. The sense of belonging, purpose, and mutual accountability and responsibility is a powerful dynamic for effecting life change. If we continue to

structure the church to only minister to the individual (the television church?) or to minister to a large impersonal group without allowing structures that lead to relational ministry, our back door will be frequented as much as our front door.

A second and often misunderstood and overlooked aspect of small group ministry is the opportunity of pointing people to Jesus by means of the small group dynamic. In the preaching of John, we see a constant emphasis on the One who would follow and the superiority of that One (cf. Matt. 3:1-12). Through this constant theme of John's preaching and life, the group naturally absorbed this message as their own. When Jesus came to be baptized of John there already was trust in the man, which led to trust in the message which lead to them becoming, not only followers of John but of Jesus as well.

In John chapter one we have an account of two of John's disciples. Andrew is the only named disciple of John. "The identity of the second is not given. Probably he is John, the author of the Gospel. John the disciple often spoke of himself not by name but by some phrase such as, the other disciple.."[3] John the Baptist identified Jesus to these two disciples and they began to follow Jesus. Andrew in turn brought his brother Peter to Jesus (John 1:35-42). This is a perfect example of how relational ministry can bring others to Jesus. The relationship the disciples of John had with John led to an acceptance of His faith in Jesus which continued to spread through the social network.

Later after Jesus' ministry had been established, the two ministry teams found themselves ministering geographically close to one another. There arose a question

among John's disciples as to their feeling concerning Jesus having a larger following than John. (John 3:25-30). This question of allegiance is one that should be used by us to point persons back always to the Savior. John masterfully prevents the beginnings of a personality cult by always directing the priority back to Jesus with these words.

> "Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I *must* decrease." (John 3:28-30)

As others are attracted to a group through its love, mutual caring and sharing and the tangible sense of belonging, one has established a non-threatening and natural way to introduce others to Jesus. The sense of ease in pointing people to Jesus is reinforced by the role models that exist. When the person of Christ is presented, the accepting reaction of the group helps in leading to acceptance on the part of the person who may be more questioning. The power of joined testimony and group acceptance is a powerful tool for evangelism. The first task of Christian education is to teach all men that Jesus offers salvation to all who believe.

The above is not to suggest that other forms of evangelism are not acceptable and used by God or that other forms could not be used in conjunction with small group ministry but the naturalness of evangelism in this setting should remind all that unbelievers should always be welcomed and recruited into our small group setting and the Gospel should always find its way into small group curriculum.

A third observation from John's disciples is that the process of growing in Christ involves having positive, living role models as well as having an understanding of the Scriptures. This process will be detailed later in this text but for now we will focus on another vital part of our growth and that is to have a structure within the church that meets the needs of individuals as well as allows for ministry opportunities to minister to others. This is a natural outcome of small group ministry and will be explored in a later chapter.

A final observation from John's small group is that it is the ideal arena for meeting the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of individuals.

An example of this group meeting the *emotional needs* of other can be seen when John was put in prison by Herod for preaching against his unlawful marriage to Herodias his sister-in-law (Mark 6:17-18). During this imprisonment we know that there was continued contact between John and his disciples in that they brought word of the ministry of Jesus. (Luke 7:18). That they kept in touch during his dark trial that would end in his death, shows that this group of devoted disciples which formed in the days of ministry performed a valuable ministry of emotional encouragement in the closing days of John's life.

The small group also meets the *spiritual needs* within the group. Not only did the disciples bring word to John of what Jesus was doing, they also took John's question to Jesus (Luke 7:19ff). The question seems out of character for John. This is the one who boldly asserted that Jesus was the "lamb of God," and now he asks if He is

the One who should come or should they look for another. Perhaps the question was prompted by the fact that John, like so many others, was focused exclusively on an earthly kingdom, or perhaps even though he expected to "decrease" he never expected such an ignoble end. Whatever the motivation or doubts in the heart of John, the support of his disciple led to hearing Christ's words of comfort as to Jesus' true identity. The two disciples of John who carried the question also carried the answer, and that was they were simply to state what they had witnessed; the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead raised and the poor having the gospel preached to them. All of these evidences are proof positive that Jesus was the Messiah that should come. John's reaction is not given but doubtless his heart was gladdened in the reconfirmation that Jesus was the Messiah and his was a valuable role in announcing His coming.

For all of God's children there are times of despair and doubt, if we have a group of loving believers around us, we have the natural spiritual support structure in place to lift our hearts back to a firm confidence in God.

The life of John also provides an example of *physical needs* being met through the small group. The last time we hear of John's disciples was after the death of John. John was beheaded when Herod was tricked into fulfilling a foolish promise to his wife's daughter. John's disciples' simple and last act of love in regard to John was that they provide for a proper burial of his body. This, coupled with the fact that they

reported John's death to Jesus, indicated again that these had grown not only as followers of John but also of Jesus.

There are many times in which we have physical needs. Fortunately, many of these are short of needing a proper burial. These need to be met through other caring persons. What more natural place to have these needs met than through the group of loving believers that of which we are a part?   While the direct link to Christian education may not be quickly seen, suffice it to say that unless our love is expressed in the meeting of tangible needs, there will be little opportunity for others to hear what we have to say in ministry.

The disciples of John prove that mutual group ministry is a natural part of meeting the needs of people. Whether the need is social, physical, spiritual or emotional, the small group is the natural place to have these needs met.

THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS

"Jesus Christ is pictured as the greatest small group leader in history. He is our model."[4] Such is the consensus of the proponents of small groups. It is true that while Jesus ministered to the individual, as well as the multitudes, He did have a special ministry to the twelve. Many small group authorities go so far as to declare that the upper limit of the small group is twelve, seeing Jesus as the perfect example in small group ministry. There is validity in examining the ministry of Jesus and the twelve since the primary task of the church is to make disciples. Jesus followed a pattern that was already practiced in His day.

"In Jesus' first-century world disciples were usually the students of a particular teacher, apprentices who learned all that their master could teach so that they could go on to become masters themselves. In addition to teaching the Jewish law and the tradition of Moses, the rabbis (or teachers) sought to train their disciples to live out their faith as obedient followers of God."[5]

Apart from His example with the disciples, Jesus' teaching on the subject should lead us to understand the value of a small group in the disciple making possible. Jesus taught that, "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master." (Luke 6:40). In discussing this passage Lawrence Richards writes, "Knowing what the teacher knows is not the goal. The goal is likeness to his person. In understanding of life, in attitude, in values, in emotion, in commitment, the communication of life demands sharing of all that a person is with another that through such sharing growth toward Christlikeness might take place."[6] "... He ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach," (Mark 3:14). If the goal of Christian education is to become like the master and if we must "be with" the teacher to accomplish this, then the small group is a method to accomplish this.

Further support for this idea of the disciples of Jesus being a model small group is that eleven of the twelve became the apostles of the church. The early church also followed a similar pattern. "The large group in the Jerusalem church met for celebration, preaching, motivation and testimony (see Acts 3:11); and in small cells for fellowship, accountability, instruction and identity (see Acts 5:42). From these observations, I conclude that the norm for the New Testament church included both

cell groups and larger celebration groups."[7]   Continuing this theme Arnold writes, "From the beginning the church met together in larger groups for corporate worship. But small groups also had a place in the life of the church. The apostles not only taught large groups, but they also went from house to house visiting small groups in homes as they taught and made disciples (Acts 5:42)."[8]

While many aspects of the apostolic church cannot and should not be recreated we can take the example of the early church of continuing the idea of small groups of believers gathered for mutual teaching, learning and ministry as one that should be sustained today. By so doing we are following sound biblical examples and being true to the nature of our creation.

The Biblical basis of small group ministry could be further supported by exploring the "Sons of the Prophets" (cf. II Kings 2:3,5; 4:38; 6:1), the synagogue, the family (Deut. 6:6-9) and the "one another" passages of the New Testament epistles. It is enough to say that while small group ministry is not the end all of ministry; but in the adult Christian education program of the local church it is both biblical and practical. This is true since "we all need the ministry of others; we require their input into our lives to encourage, exhort, edify, admonish and adjust us. We will not make it alone. Body ministry is more than an impersonal transfer of information; it is an impartation of life."[9] As we will see in chapter three, the true task of Christian education is not the transfer of information alone; it is the transfer of Christ's life.

Chapter Two: The Historical Basis for a Small Group Educational Approach

While not as authoritative than the Scriptures, the history of the church does lend support to the argument that the small group is a viable and preferred method of adult Christian education in the local church.

In this century many point to the small group movement as having its origins in the research into group dynamics. Two persons can be identified as founders of this type of investigation; their names are Lewin and Lippitt. "The study of small groups - recognizing their value and their uniqueness for accomplishing purposes - is of recent origin. Kurt Lewin, a Prussian who came to the United States in the 1930s, is considered to be the father of what we today call 'group dynamics.' His founding of a Research Center for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1946 opened the way for new studies that provided important insights for those who saw small group process as a frontier for learning an personal response."[1] Prior to the

founding of the research center at MIT, one of Lewin's colleagues, Ron Lippitt, was also studying group dynamics. In 1937, Lippitt "performed a series of elegantly designed experiments on the effects of democratic, autocratic and laissez-fair leadership of boy's groups. The experimental study of group dynamics began here."[2]

In spite of these modern attempts to explore the small group through experimental research, the small group approach to education, and particularly religious education goes further back than the 1930's, in fact, much further back.

One of the first manifestations of what could be identified as a small group would be the house church. "After the day of Pentecost, the church met in the temple courts and from house to house (Acts 2;46; 5:42; 20:20). In fact, except for those mentioned in specific geographic locations (such as Ephesus), the only churches referred to in the epistles are those in people's homes (see 1 Corinthians 16:19, for example). The church did not become building-centered until 313 A.D. when the first basilicas were built during the reign of Constantine. It seems strange: Sunday school is considered the grand old man of Christian education while small groups are thought of as the new kid on the block. In church history, however, it's the other way around!"[3] Jeffrey Arnold sees the house church as God's means of protecting the church during times of persecution. "The church needed the 'house church' for its survival. There were periods of intense persecution for the first few centuries after Christ, so the early church was often not able to meet openly, nor were they allowed to purchase large buildings for gathering. They relied on the more protective environment of the home

to nurture and protect the gospel in the live of believers. Somehow (to our surprise) the church was able to multiply without large buildings, mass meetings, and a plethora of 'how to' books!"[4]   There seems to be a natural connection between the house church and the modern "home Bible study."   "This small homogeneous, informal group meeting for direct Bible study calls to mind New Testament references such as the house of Justus, Stephanus, Cornelius, Lydia, Nymphas, Titus, Aquila and Pricilla and Apphia and Archippus."[5]

I do not believe that we must move all of church life back to the home but we as Christian educators can attempt to make our educational settings more "home like." We can do this by limiting our educational units to a small group and move away from the arid, academic setting of the past. In so doing we can create an environment to allow believers to involve themselves in each other lives and by so doing, accelerate the disciple making process.

Even after the church moved from the home to the "church building," small groups continued to minister with and to each other. "The small group was the basic unit of the church's life during its first two centuries. Early Pietism was nurtured by the *collegio pietatis*, or house meetings for prayer, Bible study and discussion. The road to the reformation was paved by small group Bible studies. The small group was the basic aspect of the Wesleyan Revival in England. Small groups undergirded the Holiness Revival that swept America in the late 1800's."[6]

The most outstanding example of small group ministry was the system established by the Wesleys in the Methodist Movement. They formed what was known as the class meeting, which was essentially a house church. "The class meeting averaged twelve in number and met one evening each week. Each person reported on his spiritual progress."[7] At these meetings it was the business of the leader to conduct a public examination into the manner of life of each member of the class, to praise those who were living well, to admonish those who were falling before temptation, and to exhort all to go on in the way of holiness."[8] According to Gangel and Benson "the idea of a band system came from Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians of Herrnhut. An average of six members would compose a band. They met weekly and confessed their faults to one another. They were to encourage spiritual progress and not to function mainly as disciplinary."[9]

Just as small groups of believers coming together for mutual ministry have been a part of church life throughout its history, they continue to exist today. However, today this approach has moved beyond a few select souls meeting to confess their sins; it has grown to such proportions that many see it as changing the nature of the church. Some authorities see the modern small group movement as the next great turning point in church history.

> "The small group movement is thus the latest in a series of cultural realignments. At the start of the eighteenth century, American religion underwent its first period of realignment. ...Denominational pluralism was the result. During the nineteenth century, a second major realignment took place. The hegemony of a few Protestant denominations was undermined. Faith became more democratic and more thoroughly American. New denominations proliferated,

congregational autonomy and diversity were strengthened... Now, at the end of the twentieth century, denominational structures are waning considerably. ...Small groups provide greater variety and allow greater freedom in selecting the religion of one's choice than ever before. They make faith more fluid, championing change itself and creating modular communities that can be established and disbanded with relative ease."[10]

Although the examples cited above do show that small groups of believers have always existed within the church, it has only been the last 30 years that this approach has become widely accepted as a recognized, structured approach. Lawrence Richards cites John L. Casteel's book, *Spiritual Renewal Through Personal Groups*, published in 1965, as being "one of the earliest books to document and discuss the impact of the small group on individuals from a religious perspective."[11] Richards own book, *A New Face for the Church* published in 1970, which resulted from "two professional seminars held at Wheaton College's Honey Rock Camp in 1967 and 1968,"[12] brought additional legitimacy to the small group as a method of religious education. During the late 1960's and early to middle 1970's several innovative pastors began adopting the small group or "cell-group" as the major structural component of the local church. Dale Galloway, Gene Getz and other prominent pastors adopted and popularized this approach.

By the 1980's the small group was a widely accepted option for religious education both within and without the local church. By the 1990's everyone seems to have jumped on the small group bandwagon. The small group concept is in place even outside the evangelical church. One example would be that some Catholic thinkers see the small group movement as a means of drawing toward a new wave of ecumenical

movement. "Ecumenists can no longer look, as they once did, to the traditional denominational labels. A new form of tribalism is growing. These new tribalisms are forming and giving birth to a revised form of traditional structure by which they exercise faith: the small group."[13]

By 1996 the diversity of small groups is amazing, "Wuthnow/Gallup statistics confirm the diversity. Small groups include 800,000 Sunday-School classes (involving 18-22 million people), 900,000 Bible-study groups (15-20 million people), 500,000 self-help groups (8-10 million people), 250,000 political/current-events groups (5-10 million people), and 250,000 sports/hobby events groups (5-10 million people)."[14]

So, what does history tell us in regard to small group ministry? Only this, that the nature of man and pattern of ministry as revealed in the Bible has been confirmed and carried on since Apostolic times. The small group should not be viewed as a passing fad but as a vital approach to Christian education that has been proven over nearly two millennia of church ministry. The Christian educator should accept the small group approach as the preferred method in nurturing adults to maturity in the faith and seek to incorporate this approach into the educational structure of the local church's ministry to adults.

Chapter Three: The Educational Basis for a Small Group Educational Approach

The small group is an ideal setting to accomplish the task of Christian education. In this chapter it shall be my purpose to contrast the traditional/academic approach to adult religious education in the local church with the relational/small-group approach. I shall also attempt to demonstrate that the relational/small-group approach provides the greatest opportunity to accomplish the church task of Christian education for adults.

THE TRADITIONAL/ACADEMIC APPROACH

The academic approach can best be described as the traditional approach to adult religious education in the local church. The setting is very much "school-like." One person, the teacher, is the "expert" who seeks to transfer biblical information to his students. The lines of communication run almost exclusively from teacher to students and students to teacher (see figure 1).

Although various methods of instruction can be used, the most common is lecture with some question/answer and discussion mixed in.

The setting is likely (although no [obscured by figure]

manner. Such as is the setting in an au [obscured]

that the students can see face to face is [obscured]

arrangement discourage relational devel [obscured]

size tends to keep it impersonal.

Figure 2 Lines of communication
in an academic setting

There is usually an effort made t [obscured]

to life in this setting but usually the appl [obscured]

expert/teacher. This setting usually off.... only the most superficial kinds of

Scriptural applications.

The academic setting may have some positives but it has many more negatives in seeking to teach adults. First, the similarity to a "school" setting can be a discouragement to those who have had less than stellar academic careers. Just the reminder of one's school days can squelch the enthusiasm of many.

A second negative is that just as there are styles of teaching, there are styles of learning. A summary of Marlene LaFever's writing on the subject can shed some light on learning styles.

Auditory Leaner

"An auditory learner is one who primarily learns through hearing. The message can be communicated by the spoken word from a teacher. They sometimes have difficulties with distracting sounds and are often excellent at memorization."

"The educational system is stacked in favor of the auditory learner as most traditional methods are of an auditory nature. Since these persons are able to retain much of what they hear the naturally
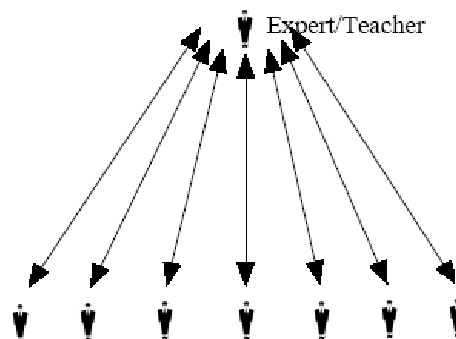
do well in school, which contributes to a good self image which leads to further success in the academic world. Even though 90% of our teaching is auditory, only about 20% of our students are auditory in their learning style."

Visual Learner

"A visual learner is one who learns by seeing. He can typically remember 75% of what is seen during a class. They often take notes and then decorates them with diagrams and doodles. He enjoys reading. They need to see words and picture in order to learn and have to write things in order to remember them. Sounds are out of the frame of mind for the visual learner but can be distracted by visual stimuli. They tend to be easily emotionally moved."

"Among those who have been raised and conditioned by television, the need for visual teaching is even more important. Many tests have shown that when picture and text went together, learning and retention were much higher.   About 40% fall in the category of visual learners."

Tactile/Linesthetic Learner

"The tactile/kinesthetic learner is one who has to touch and do in order to learn. This puts these students at risk in the ordinary school or Sunday school. He must have movement in order to learn. Often these children cannot sit still if the activity does not include manipulating materials. There seems to be more boys in this group than girls which may explain why more boys are not excited about the Sunday school and drop out when parents no longer require attendance.

"It is important especially in the ministry of Christian education that we do not mismatch learning methods with learning styles. This understanding can be a key for us to reach even more with the Word of God.   I can only begin to imagine the implications for the ministry of preaching which is an almost exclusive auditory method."[1]

 The academic setting is essentially geared for the auditory learner.

Therefore as much as 80% of the population will not do well learning in this

setting.

A third and more profound negative is that this approach furthers the idea that the goal of Christian education is the transfer of information. Lawrence Richards, writing in *Christian Education: Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ*, argues for a view that Christian education should be seen as the transmission of life and not the transfer of information. He writes:

> "Christian education must always be concerned with life. Christian education must be designed for the whole person, not for a single dimension of his personality. For this reason we must begin to challenge what we have done and are doing in Christian education. We must begin to raise the question of whether we are communicating life...or isolated beliefs. We must ask whether or not our acceptance of secular school structures as the context for the communication of faith may not actually hinder Christian growth. By attempting to teach faith in 'school' settings we perhaps have inadvertently given learners the impression that biblical truth is for the mind only, divorced from doing, and that learning God's Word is a separate and distinct intellectual activity for the young!"[2]

THE RELATIONAL/SMALL-GROUP APPROACH

I am persuaded that the best opportunity for the transfer of life, and to see genuine change take place in the lives of people is by a small-group/relational approach. In this approach the lines of communication are open between all members of the group (see figure 2). The teacher is not seen as the "expert" but as the learner/leader who is there to learn as well as teach. In fact each member is both learner and teacher. Since there is an emphasis on participation and a great flexibility of teaching methods, one can overcome the limitations of a particular learning style.

As the emphasis is shifted from only information to the transfer of life, the size of the group becomes more important. "What do small groups have to offer that large Sunday school classes cannot? It is difficult to know people in a group of more than ten to twelve intimately. The larger the group, the harder it is for most people to be open about themselves. It has been demonstrated over and over that the greatest spiritual growth happens in small groups."[3]

Small groups, which of their very nature, facilitate interpersonal interaction, provide the opportunity for their members to share with each other not only statements of biblical truth but models of biblical truth. Modeling is an essential ingredient in Christian educa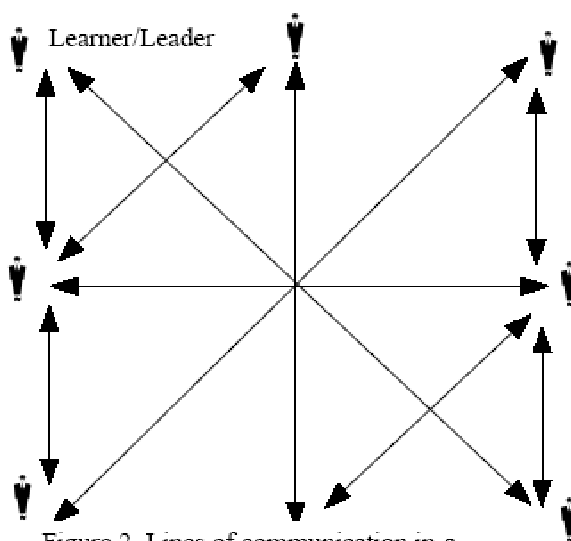tion, for Jesus said, "The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master."   The word translated "perfect" in this verse is, *kathrtismenos*, which is from *katartizw*. The basic idea is that when one is fully trained or taught, "so instructed or equipped,"[4] he will become like his master.

Figure 2 Lines of communication in a relational setting

"Knowing what the teacher knows is not the goal. The goal is likeness to his person. In understanding of life, in attitude, in values, in emotion, in commitment, the communication of life demands sharing of all that a person is with another

that through such sharing growth toward Christlikeness might take place."[5]   It is

not enough to hear the truth we must see it in action and see it growing within the

lives of other believers. Jesus called His disciples to be with Him (Mark 3:14)

"because they needed to see enfleshed the concepts which He taught. They

needed to see the Word incarnated if they were to truly understand and be moved

to respond, and thus become like their teacher!."[6]   The small-group/relational

approach offers the best opportunities for modeling biblical truth.

Richards offers seven factors which enhance the teaching of faith as life

and each one of these can more easily fit into a small group format as opposed to

a traditional, academic format. These factors are: "1. There needs to be frequent,

long term contact with the model(s).   2.   There needs to be a warm, loving

relationship with the model(s). 3. There needs to be exposure to the inner states

of the model(s). 4. The model(s) needs to be observed in a variety of life settings

and   situations.   5.   The model(s) needs to exhibit consistency and clarity in

behaviors, values, etc.   6.   There needs to be a correspondence between the

behavior of the model(s) and the beliefs (ideal standards) of the community. 7.

There needs to be explanation of life style of the model(s) conceptually, with

instruction accompanying shared experiences."[7]

As the arrangement in the academic setting affects the learning of those

involved, the arrangement of the small-group setting is also important.   The

common arrangement for the small-group is described by Ruth C. Haycock: "In

order to permit student involvement, adult classes should be small enough so

members can know one another and feel at ease in discussion or other

participation. Small classes allow a teacher to use a variety of methods and materials. Room arrangement, as well as class size can either encourage or discourage participation. When adults are seated around a table or in a circle or U-shape, more discussion is encouraged because they can see each other. But when adults are seated more formally in rows, they tend merely to listen to the teacher and answer his questions."[8]

To properly understand the place of small group in the educational ministry of the local church one must arrive at a biblical understanding of the nature of Christian education in the local church. One must understand that the local church is a completely different entity than a school. One is an organization designed to educate. The other is an organism designed to help believers grow to Christ-likeness. The church is a living body of believers in which all have a role of putting in as well as taking out. We are all both learner and teacher. Richards elaborates on this point. "For an adequate Christian education, we need also to realize that each of us needs many teachers. That the Body as a whole, and members of the Body individually, each will contribute something to each person's growth in Christ. Rather than thinking of 'teachers' as specialized individuals who function in a classroom, we need to see one another as believer-priests, who are always, in every contact, nurturing an discipling one another."[9]

Another important factor of the relational/small-group approach is that of accountability. If one pursues an approach which is basically impersonal there is an absence of accountability for spiritual growth between members of the body.

In reviewing church history Gangel and Benson make the following observation. "Many churches and groups have failed to arrive at any level of discipline and because of that failure, are continually growing weaker. Some kind of accountability is mandatory for healthy churches."[10]

The strongest setting for accountability is in a one-on-one approach to Christian education. While some churches have had success in offering programs that incorporate a one-on-one discipling approach, such programs are hard to maintain as well as staff. Also, one-on-one programs do not allow for multiple models of the Christian life to be shared by the learner. Accountability particularly in areas of moral behavior must also be connected to church discipline which necessitates a larger group of believers. For most churches the most practical way to facilitate accountability into the religious education of adults is through the small-group. Such will offer multiple models; a larger base for discipline, and the naturalness of the forming of relationships will all lead to greater levels of accountability for their own spiritual health and growth.

OTHER BENEFITS OF THE RELATIONAL/SMALL-GROUP

SETTING

The small-group can also be a setting to provide other forms of ministry in addition to the ministry of Christian education. Carl George identifies four dimensions of ministry for the small-group. Each cell (small-group) "addresses four dimensions of ministry: loving (pastoral care), learning (Bible knowledge), deciding (internal administration), and doing (duties that serve those outside the group)."[11]

The growth of the body is another concern to most churches. The educational approach can also lead to either growth of the body or become a choke point for church growth. Although numerical growth may not be directly related to the educational process those who are truly involved in the ministry of Christian education must have a desire to see the church grow. The relational/small-group approach seems best suited to allow maximum numeric growth as well as personal and corporate spiritual growth. Small groups should be designed to allow leadership to be developed from within. These trained leaders can then move on to multiply the number of groups. The process of multiplication of cells (small-groups) is a key to church growth. It also allows the pastor or administrator to become what George calls a rancher rather than a farmer. What he means is that a pastor who attempts to be the primary care-giver to all in a congregation (a farmer) is limiting the growth of the church. This is true since it will grow no larger than the size for which he can provide care. If one thinks in terms of ranching, one oversees a larger operation in which the ranch-hands (lay small-group leaders) tend the primary care of the individual herds while the pastor supplies the vision and oversight of the ranch. George writes, "Pastors must think of themselves not as leaders of one big church family but as leaders of groups within the whole, who give attention to the persons who require it as appropriate to their level of need."[12] The church should be freed in this model to allow lay-leaders to provide primary care and nurture and the church should be able to grow beyond the limitations of a pastoral staff.

The ministry of evangelism is also facilitated in small-group ministry. In fact many continue to see the small-group Bible study as mainly an evangelistic ministry. Although the purpose here is to discuss the role of the small-group in Christian education, it is vital to remember that evangelism is to encompass the whole of the church's ministry. Evangelism can take place in the course of worship, fellowship, or service, as well as during our educational activities. It is best to see evangelism as an ongoing activity that permeates every facet of church life and is not strictly a distinct activity.

The small-group educational setting is an ideal place for evangelism to take place because the personal, relational and non-threatening atmosphere of this grouping of individuals should allow enough comfort for the unbeliever to participate while at the same time coming to a decision concerning the claims of Christ.

Another factor that leads to evangelism in the small group setting is that many small-groups are developed around the idea of a particular need. This is the support group concept. Whether the need is chemical dependency, parenting, singleness or divorce recovery, the small group designed to meet those with needs in these areas will naturally draw in those with felt needs that are unbelievers. Many who came to Jesus did not come to have their spiritual needs met but to have their physical needs met. While Jesus was able to meet the physical need, He also met the spiritual need of those who sought His help.

A final factor is that those who come to Christ through a small-group outreach approach are already connected with a group that can provide the

discipling that is necessary for Christian nurture. In fact the discipleship program is already in place before evangelism takes place.

CONCLUSION

It is the opinion of this writer that the above mentioned ideas as well as many others lend support to the relational/small group approach to adult Christian education in the local church. The Christian educator would do well to evaluate this approach considering these educational issues in order to structure a workable and effective program of religious education in the church of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Four: The Cultural Basis for a Small Group Educational Approach

"The neighborhood bar is possibly the best counterfeit there is to the fellowship Christ wants to give His church. It is an imitation, dispensing liquor instead of grace, escape rather than reality, but it is a permissive, accepting, and inclusive fellowship. It is unshockable. It is democratic. You can tell people secrets and they usually don't tell others or even want to. The bar flourishes not because people are alcoholics, but because God has put into the human heart the desire to know and be known, to love and be loved, and so many seek a counterfeit at the price of a few beers."[1]

The church is the place that should provide the answers to life's questions. It should meet the needs of those who are searching or lost; those who need genuine love and genuine grace. What does a person in need of these find when stepping into the fellowship of a local church that maintains the "we have always done it this way" philosophy? Will he be herded into a Sunday School class

where he sits in a neat little row staring at the back of a stranger's head, listening to a dry as dust lecture about the genealogy of Mephibosheth? After the class, the one or two who stop briefly to shake his hand invite him to stay for an equally impersonal worship service. In all likelihood this person will be back to warming a bar stool before the day is out.

In a culture that is declining, the church must rise up and meet the true needs of the culture if it is to be saved and the church must do it in a way that meets the changing needs of that culture. "Many people in today's society feel abandoned, alienated, and alone--even those in the church. Small groups can be a place of acceptance, healing, grace, and unconditional love, a place that is warm and feels safe."[2] It can be the place where the lonely man can find a surrogate family outside of the neighborhood bar.

Christian education can best take place in an environment in which there is love and acceptance as well as an unwavering stand for the truth. "Psychologists tell us that our attitude and environment can directly affect our ability to learn and retain what we learn. In other words, things learned in an enjoyable experience will be more likely to 'stick.'"[3] The purpose of this chapter will be to briefly identify some cultural trends which should lead us to a small-group/relational model of adult Christian education.

Our cultural decline has robbed us of most of the social networks of earlier times that tended to support the individual and maintain the health of the society. Society can only maintain its health if its cultural allows for social networks to aid in individual in personal development. This is true for the society

outside as well as inside the church. The basic (and God-ordained) "social" network is the family. In fact if one were to identify God's program for religious education it would be the family.   There is no better relational, life-centered depiction of education than in the following passage.

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates. (Deut. 6:4-9).

 No one would dispute the conclusion that the family is under siege today. "America and Europe alike are witnessing profound changes in the structure of the family -- increases in divorce and in births outside marriage. Great economic and social forces, combined with policy itself partly shaped by those forces, have weakened the link between parenthood and partnership."[4] The social/cultural trends to be discussed below show that the church needs to provide not only help to families but the need for the church to provide "family-like" settings for those who are in need of relational support. Small groups provide this family-like setting for church-centered religious education.

DIVORCE.

"In America, families are valued tremendously -- so much that most people will have at least two of them. Americans are religious, but have one of

the highest divorce rates in the world."[5]   "In the United States, the rate of divorce has more than doubled since 1960. At current rates, we can expect about half of all marriages to end in divorce."[6] Our laws have made it easier than ever to terminate a marriage, no longer does one party have to prove "fault" before a marriage has been granted and the result has been predictable. "The switch from fault divorce law to no-fault divorce law led to a measurable increase in the divorce rate."[7] Another bit of bad news is that studies confirm that though a couple may be religious this seems to have little impact on the statistics concerning divorce in America. "Religion is a nonsignificant correlate of divorce. Thus, the religiosity finding may suggest that belief in the sanctity of marriage and adherence to religious precepts, though perhaps once strong enough to prevent dissolution of marriages, have weakened."[8]

If half of the families in America are disintegrating where does that leave those who have lost this social network but still have the needs of being a social creature. One area in which the church can address this situation is to devote resources to strengthening the family. A small-group support system that provides the transfer of Christ's life rather than just information can develop spiritually mature believers that can have spiritually mature marriages and families. The maintenance of the family should be a major thrust of our educational efforts.

SINGLE PARENT HOMES

"Among families with children under age 18, nearly 30 percent were headed by a single parent in 1991. Since 1960, this rate nearly tripled, from 9.1 to

28.6 percent. In about nine out of ten cases, single parent families are headed by women. Between 1970 and 1986, a 135 percent increase occurred in children living with divorced mothers."[9]   "In fact, 30 percent of all Americans, and a whopping 63 percent of the nation's Black families were headed by single parents in 1993, the Census bureau reported. The last census, in 1990, counted more than 7 million single parent families. The number represents about 28 percent of all families with children. That up 13 percent in 1970 and 22 percent in 1980."[10]

With the proliferation of single parent family there are many who are and have been raised in families that are not providing the needed parental guidance and involvement of both a father and mother. God's design was and is that children be raised by two parents. While many single-parents strive and do an adequate job of raising children those who are generally successful have a support network to help in the task.   A church-centered small group can provide a key ingredient in the support network for single parents, by providing for spiritual development, the teaching of parenting skills and providing a reduced-stress environment in which to encounter the truth of God's Word.

ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS

"In 1960, only 5 percent of all births were to unmarried parents. By 1991, it was 29.5 percent. For whites, the 1960 to 1991 increase was from 2 to 22 percent; for African Americans, from 23 to 68. In these same years a 620 percent increase has occurred in children living with mothers who never married."[11]

Like the statistics on single-parent families the statistics on out of wedlock births are equally alarming. It seems that in some sections of our society that all

recollection of the traditional family is fading fast. If the traditional family ideal is to be preserved it must come from living models of Christian families that share their lives with others, rather than simple offering lectures and a judgmental attitude.   A setting that allows the learner to become like His master (cf. Luke 6:40) can allow the living testimony before the world that the family that God designed is the best method of raising children and preserving society.

LONELY ADULTS

"In 1988, 24.1 percent of all households were a single person living alone, compared to 13 percent in 1960."[12] One author puts it this way,

> "Even as stress and pressure have been increasing, people have tended to isolate themselves. Many apartment dwellers live in rigid isolation, barely greeting neighbors when they are unfortunate enough to meet each other in the hallways coming and going. Demands of career and homemaking, or the second job, further separate and isolate. As people move from rural to urban areas or from suburban locations to cities, their ties are cut but rarely re-formed as strongly after the move. And as people work frantically to cram recreation time into an already full schedule, those people often feel they have reached the breaking point."[13]

Perhaps this stress and pressure is the reason that, "Depression affects more than 11,000,000 Americans each year."[14]

A setting that allows genuine relationships to develop and can offer care to those who are lonely can become a magnet for drawing people to Christ and providing an ongoing ministry of discipleship. The fact that the members of the body of Christ love each other is a living testimony that real change has occurred in the lives of believers.   "By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." John 13:35. This love expressed to those lost souls

in a lonely society can open the door for the life-changing ministry of Christian education.

DISAPPEARANCE OF THE COMMUNITY AND EXTENDED FAMILY

With the trends toward increased mobility and the shrinking size of families, and the increase of divorce there has been a natural disappearance of the extended family. The extended family along with the relatively static makeup of communities once provided a natural support mechanism for families and individuals. With extended families and closely knit communities there were built in standards of acceptable behavior by the group. There were rewards for conformity to the values of the group and consequences to violating them. With the disappearance of community and the extended family to which could be added the anti-family welfare state, latch-key kids, humanistic education, and a corrupt entertainment industry, there are no longer visible, living models of moral standards for the next generation to accept.

One author sees the development of a new kind of extended family. Han Suyin writes, "I have no doubt that the future will see this large 'extended' family being recreated, in the sense that will not be based simply on the notion of blood relations but rather on ties of affection."[15] This trend to have "extended families" that are not connected by blood relations shows itself in many settings. One popular sitcom which is a hit in the Nielson ratings depicts such a group is *Friends* which offers a dramatic theme of "six mildly neurotic single twentysomethings in search of life, with punch lines."[16] While this show can

promise no hope of offering moral standards or anything resembling traditional Christian values, it does reflect a society in search of family and community.

Perhaps one manifestation of this trend is the small group movement. One author has stated it this way, "to a large extent small groups have emerged in response to the weakening of family and community ties. Shattered, fragmented lives can only be rebuilt in the company of others."[17]

The church can minister to those whose lives are lacking the involvement of community and extended family and use the natural appeal of a relational/small group to educate these concerning to values of Christianity. It seems there is a wide open door to use the small-group as means of reaching and teaching those in search of community.

One encouraging aspect is that the opportunity exists to minister to a wider range of people due to the felt need for community and the meeting of this need in the small-group context. One study pointed out that "though women, older individuals, and better educated Americans are somewhat more likely to join groups, such demographic differences are modest, and other social cleavages that frequently divide Americans -- race, income, community size -- are even less consequential."[18] Our small-group approach to Christian education can overlap the missionary work of the church. We had best make the attempt.

Chapter Five: The Essential Elements of a Small Group Educational Approach

The thrust of this presentation has been to set forth supporting evidence for the conclusion that the small-group is the best approach to adult Christian education in the local church. It has therefore been, to this point, basically a "why-to" presentation. It is not the purpose to present a "how-to" of small group ministry. I do wish however to offer a brief statement of my philosophy of small-group ministry particularly in meeting the educational needs of adults. This is an important discussion for even if their is biblical, historical, educational and cultural support for this type of ministry but no clear philosophy to see it as a fully integrated part of local church ministry it will be rejected by most ministers devoted to the sanctity of the local church. It is true that there is a wide divergence of perspective on small-groups. On one end of the spectrum there are those who see the small group as providing all that is needed for Christian

nurture and in essence the organized church should be replaced by small, house-churches. On the other end are those who see every facet of church life as small-groups (choir, deacon board, committees etc.) that can be used to provide for the one-another ministry within the body. It is my position that the local church as it now exists provides the best chance for ministering effectively to the most people. The church gathered in a large group is preferable for worship, which includes the preaching of the Word of God. At the same time the educational, evangelistic, and caring ministries of the local church can be effectively carried out in the small group pattern.

I would offer as a statement of philosophy that in order for small groups to fulfill their rightful role in the local church, small group ministry must include five essential elements.

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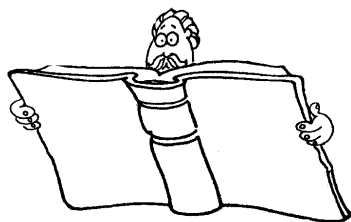
Most proponents of small-group ministry place great emphasis on the importance of having as a focus the communication of biblical truth. In declaring this Richards writes, "In giving this vital role to the small group I am not in the least suggesting we diminish the role of Scripture. Rather we place Scripture as central to the life of the small group. I do point out, however that our normal method of teaching God's Word (by sermon) has both communication limitations and also serious

limitations on life impact. Certainly I do not deny that the Holy Spirit used the preached Word. I only insist that He is much freer to use the word in a small group where it is studied and discussed together, and this one of God's purposes in creating the church."[1]

While a needs based approach or a support group approach may directly meet the needs of many and can be used as a vehicle for growth these should always point to the Word of God as the source of all the answers to the questions of life. For if we do not point people to the word of God, even if we exemplify biblical values, we will not provide a foundation for spiritual growth which is the heart need of all. Resources should be sought (fortunately they are plentiful) that lead the group members to a direct involvement with the Word of God. Group leaders should at every opportunity lift up the place of the Bible in the life of a believer and share its claims with unbelievers. Further the small group can become an ideal means of encouraging accountability in personal, individual study of the Bible and the teaching of the Bible to children of group members.

DISCIPLING PURPOSE
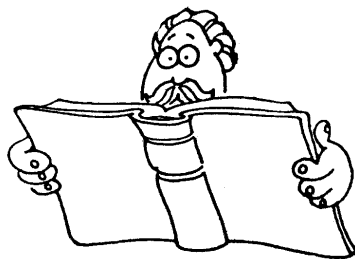
True Christian education demands that we strive to see persons grow spiritually. "Growth is what the Bible is all about. If the status quo were to be maintained , then God would not have had to intervene in human history as often and as

persistently as He has. Yet there are some small groups that study the Bible for years and never seem to produce spiritual growth. One of the charges leveled against 'small group Bible studies' is that tangents and academic intrigue are too often the fruit of study. So there is the dilemma facing groups interested in making disciples: how to use the textbook of the Christian life in such a way that growth in knowledge ultimately leads to wisdom grace and love."[2]

Small groups can provide the way for Christian education in the local church to provide genuine discipling of the members of the body.   Other methods can be used successfully but as stated previously, the small group offers the advantage of multiple living models and a greater opportunity for care than other programs.

SIZED FOR RELATIONSHIPS

The consensus among small-group authorities is that limiting the size of a group will maximize meaningful relationships between group members. On this subject Galloway writes, "the ideal number for good group dynamics and for caring and dialogue is somewhere between eight and twelve. Participation is much greater wehy you stay within those numbers. Add more, and it's much more difficult ot get people to interact and participate. It becomes very difficult for one leader to give the kind of care people need, especially between meetings, when a group grows to more than twelve people."[3]

Hopefully the case for relationship among group-members has already be made in this work. However, it bears repeating that living models are necessary for true discipling to take place. We need each other and we need to have groups that are small enough to allow the life of Christ to be shared. We must move beyond being "data dumpsters" for we desire to share "attitudes, values, character. These are socially anchored. These are learned in our association with others throughout our lives. We need a community in which the Word of God is made flesh, and it authoritative message is studied and obeyed together."[4]

GEARED FOR GROWTH

Here we mean numerical growth. One essential point that needs to be stressed that reproduction is a natural and necessary part of life. Each group should, in keeping with the ideal that evangelism is an all-encompassing mission of the church, should allow growth within the group but the addition of new members. As stated in the last section there is a limit to how large each group should grow but there needs to be room to grow within the group. Perhaps a group should start out with six to eight members and set as a prayerful goal that the group will grow to twelve. One of the worst things that can occur in the life of the church or small-group is to become closed to the needs of those outside the group.

But what to do when the group reaches the number of twelve or more? At that the point the group should not divide it should multiply. From the outset there should be a goal of training group leaders from with in the small group. Galloway expresses this principle from his ministry in Portland, Oregon, "the leader of each small group must receive careful training and supervision. These leaders grow out of existing groups and then go out and start new groups, out of which new leaders grow who launch another set of new groups."[5]   The pattern for multiplication should look something like this.
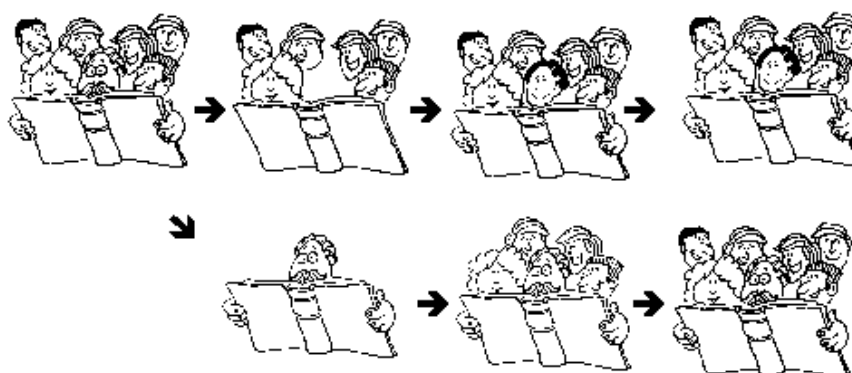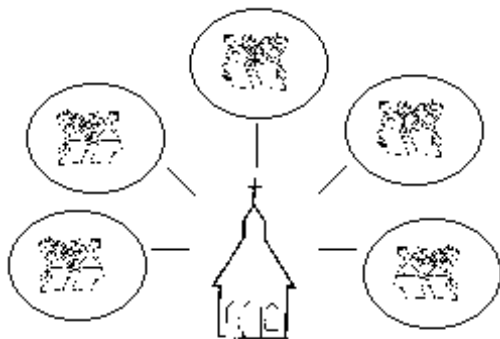

Follow the arrows from the single group at the top right. A leader and perhaps a few members are spun off to start a new group while the original group undergoes a reconstitution and continues it own growth.

CONNECTED TO A GREATER BODY OF BELIEVERS

"Small groups can do a disservice to the church when they overestimate their importance or underestimate their importance. The can do damage when they spend

group time tearing down instead of building up. And they can miss important service opportunities when they forget that they exist to make the larger body of Christ stronger."[6] Small groups are not the end-all of church life or even of religious education. They do provide an opportunity for education and discipleship but there is a place for the church gathered. It is when the church is gather into a larger group that worship can best take place. There is overlap in this pattern. There will be worship in the small group to some extent and there will be Bible teaching in the worship service but each seeks to maximize what that setting does best. Also to provide the other necessary services it would seem best that church be composed of a large body that is then sub-divided into several small groups. Some of these services would include, spiritual training for children and youth, world missions, counseling, discipline, financial accountability, and Christian schools.

CONCLUSION

Small groups are an essential approach to adult religious education in the local church. This can be support on the multiple grounds presented in this work, and offers the opportunity for the Church of Jesus Christ to fulfill its mission. This message is best summarized in Colossians 1:27-28, "To whom God would make known what *is*

the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:"

<center>**Footnotes**</center>

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Appendix 1 Resources for small groups

Resource Catalogs

Serendipity House
P.O. Box 1012
Littleton, CO 80160
1-800-525-9563
Fax (303) 798-8102

Resources for Small Groups Catalog
Christian Book Distributors
P. O. Box 7000
Peabody, MA 91961-7000
(508) 977-5000
Fax (508)977-5010

Group Publishing Inc.
2890 N. Monroe Ave.
Box 481
Loveland, CO 80539-9935
1-800-447-1070
Fax (303) 669-3269

Internet Sites

Cell-Church Files
http://www.grmi.org/ministry/cell-church

Small-Group Network
http://cymetric.com/smallgroup

Selected Publishers

Bethany House
11300 Hampshire Ave. S.
Minneapolis, MN 54438
1-800-328-6109
Fax (612) 829-2503

Intervarsity Press
P.O. Box 1400
Downers Grove, IL 60515
1-800-843-9487
Fax (708) 964-1251

Navpress
P. O. Box 9099
Oxnard, CA 93091
1-800-366-7788

Victor Books
1825 College Ave.
Wheaton, IL 60187
1-800-323-9409
Fax (708) 668-3806

Word Inc.
1501 LBJ Freeway Suite 650
Dallas, TX 75234
1-800-945-3932

Zondervan Publishing House
5300 Patterson Ave., S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49530
1-800-727-3480
Fax (616) 698-3293

Organizations

Small Group Services
5702 Sam Houston Circle
Austin, TX 78731
(512) 795-9967

Renewal (Fellowship Bible Church)
P.O. Box 2400
Dallas, TX 75221
1-800-736-3925

New Hope Community Church
Portland, OR
1-800-935-4673

Willowcreek Association
P. O Box 3188
Barrington, IL 60011-3188

Appendix 2
One Group's Experience and Evaluation

Overview

In April of 1995 a small group was begun within the congregation of Calvary Baptist Church, Portsmouth, Ohio. The following is not presented as a complete inquiry of the potential for small group ministry but the testimony of one group of believers who have attempted to make the shift from an academic setting of adult Christian education to a relational one. The former adult educational efforts had sought to use creative methods and materials but were oriented toward an academic setting.

This group has met during the Sunday school hour on Sundays. Additional fellowship activities are planned to allow further times of interaction at least every other month. The following is an excerpt from a document prepared to sharpen the focus of the proposed group.

> **PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL**   4/7/95
>
> THE NEED:
> > We need a young adult setting that allow the transmission
> > > of life as well as content.
> >
> > We need enough of a core group to reach "critical mass."
> > We have not seen the current system showing signs of
> > > growth.
> >
> > We need to break free of the "academic" environment
> > We need a group that will be appealing to those CBC
> > > most needs to reach (young adults)
> >
> > If this age group does not expand to be the new core -- we
> > > are simply counting down to extinction.
>
> THE GOALS:
> > To establish a group that has enough size to be exciting
> and   unintimidating
> > To establish a group that can build relationships with each
> > > other
> >
> > To establish a group that can build for mutual
> > > accountability
> >
> > To establish a group that can absorb and nurture new
> > > believers and attenders of the age group we most
> > > need to reach.
> >
> > To establish a group that can have small group interaction
> > > outside of "class time"

THE PLAN:
         Use the existing students and teachers to produce this
                group.
         To be less academic and more life-sharing.
         Home Bible study, fellowship & Gathering time support
                activities.
         Real ministry project -- primarily directed at growing the
                group.
         direct, personal recruitment to this group.

While the above plans and goals have shifted slightly during actual implementation the above formed the beginnings of this group. As of now (April 1996) the group seems to have found itself as far as identity and format. Goals for the future include leadership training and laying the ground work for the group to grow through multiplication.

Evaluation 4/1/96

Rather than depending on anecdotal information as to the value of this small group in March of 1996 the group undertook a survey to determine the attitudes and actions of group members.   The following information is a compilation of information obtained by this study. This information is offered as small but significant support of the worth of the small group in adult education in the local church. It is this author's opinion that the overall favorable trend in responses support the conclusions of this academic paper. These surveys were done in writing and were conveyed to the facilitator in a completely anonymous fashion so as to encourage complete candor. The results are broken down into the following categories.

OUTREACH

87.5% of responding group members have invited someone to specifically attend this small group

FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

• Group members who said they thought our fellowship activities are
    conducted at about the right frequency   57.1%

• Group members who said they thought our fellowship activities are
    conducted too infrequently   42.9%

RELATIONAL EVALUATION

- Group members who said they had made new friends through group
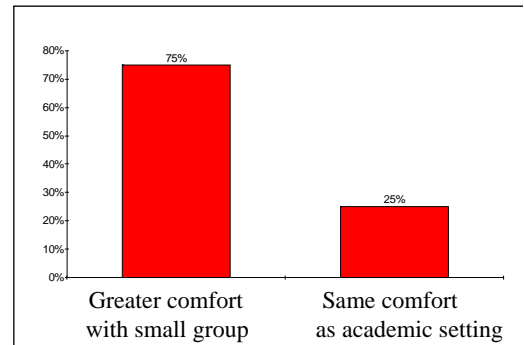   75%

- Group members who said they miss group when absent
        100%

- Group members who said they have learned from others in the group

        definitely   62.5%
        possibly   37.5%

- Group members who said they
        are more comfortable than
        previous format
        75%

- Group members who said
        they about as comfortable
        as former format
        25%

- Group members who said they had previously been in any kind small
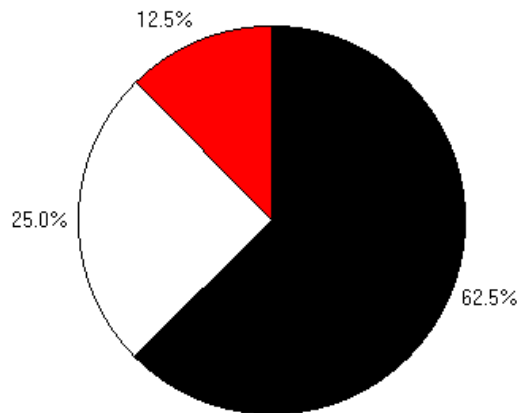   group
        50%

- Group members who said they feel they are learning more than previous
        format
        100.0%

- Group members who said they are more likely to provide care for a
        person in the group as opposed to other in church but not in group
        87.5%

with- Group members who said they more likely to share personal problem
                        some in group
        87.5%

FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

- Group members who said they would like group to grow large
    37.5%

- Group members who said they would like growth by multiplying into other groups
    62.5%

- Group members who said they would stick to current group if needs based   groups were available
    62.5%

- Group members who said they would move to a needs-based group if available
    37.5%

- Group members who said they, with proper training and help

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

- Group members who said that when thinking of biblical examples

    50% mentioned the disciples/apostles
    25% mentioned the early church
    12.5% mentioned John the Baptist
    12.5% mentioned other examples

Conclusion

In the one year of this group's existence there have been many other evidences that this approach is the best for fulfilling the mandate of Christian education of adults within the local church. These experiences have led to a resurgence of optimism about the future potential for the entire church. It is our expectation, that with God's help we shall continue to help each other grow to maturity in Christ and to expand the ministry through the multiplication of small group ministry throughout our assembly of believers. Above all, our heart is that what ever may come of our efforts we desire that in all things we may say; "to God be the glory. Amen."

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