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SMALL GROUPS LITERATURE REVIEW ~FRAMEWORK~

In order to most effectively analyse 'best practice' in the field of small groups ministry, the literature review framework adopted was deliberately designed to correlate and complement the '*Small Group Field Questionnaire*' (see research report).

LITERATURE SOURCE:

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A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

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B: Number:

2. Function:

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3. Prayer:

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*Mission:

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1. Small Groups:

2. Leaders:

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THE MINISTRY OF SMALL GROUPS

- LITERATURE REVIEW -

LITERATURE SOURCE: *The Trellis & The Vine:*

C. Marshall & T. Payne (2009: AUS)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Thesis: Disciple-making disciples:

Following on from the Great Commission in Matt 28, Marshall and Payne put forward the thesis that Christians are called to be **disciple-making disciples**. For pastors this should therefore be their core task and responsibility (p13). However, the *'trellis work'* of ministry (structures, programmes etc) can often take over from the task of *'vine work'* (planting, watering, nurturing, equipping and maturing the saints) resulting in ministry maintenance not ministry growth.

Aim: The aim of the book is to call all Christians, and Christian ministers in particular, to make a shift in ministry focus back to the core task of growing *'disciple-making disciples'*. To also be equipping and engaging every member in the same, that all may respond to the Matt 28 call: *"a commission that makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple"* ¹

Our aim should be to help every believer understand that to BE a disciple is to BECOME a *disciple maker*.

Goal = to build a ministry based on 'people' rather than 'programmes'

To grow the *vine* not the *trellis*.

The goal of all ministry activity (not just 1-1) is to *nurture disciples* ²

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Note: Although the book's emphasis is not primarily about small groups it does make these points.

3 Key things need to be noted in regard to small group ministry...

1. Small groups do not necessarily guarantee true gospel growth:

The rise of church growth movement in the 70's brought the question- 'how might large churches with a pastor & small staff best care for people?' The answer came in the rise of small groups, here members could have a set of personal relationships in which they are known and cared for. ³ A small group ministry does not generate growth in discipleship in and of itself. It only happens if group leaders (or members) take responsibility for actively *discipling* members.

2. For true gospel growth, small groups must be intentional means of discipling and disciple-making:

The goal should not be to simply 'get people into small groups', for *"unless Christians are taught and trained to meet with each other, to read the bible and pray with each other, and to urge and spur one another on to love and good works, the small group structure will not be effective for spiritual growth"*. ⁴ The effectiveness of small groups for true gospel growth depends on how small group ministry is executed.

3. Small groups are not mandatory and disciple-making is a much broader concept:

It's important to recognise that small groups are just *one avenue* in which to nurture disciple-making disciples, in fact *"it's very possible for a great deal of personal growth and discipling work in a congregation to be done 1-1, without any involvement in structured small groups"*. ⁵

¹ The Trellis and The Vine: Col Marshall and Tony Payne (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009) P. 13.

² Trellis and The Vine: P. 153.

³ Trellis and The Vine: P. 97

⁴ Trellis and The Vine: P. 100

⁵ Trellis and The Vine: P. 101.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

B: Number:

2. Function:

Disciple-makers and 'mini pastors':

Group leaders should be trained to see themselves not merely as facilitators or organizers but also as front line disciple-makers and 'mini-pastors' of those in their group.⁶ Leaders will therefore need training in how to do that.

3. Training:

All God's people should be being trained and equipped in some way:

Being a disciple-making disciple involves 'word ministry'. Foundational to word ministry is '*equipping the saints for the work of ministry*' or '*preparing God's people for works of service*', with the goal of maturity in mind (Eph 4). This must therefore encompass not only the training of leaders but also small group members.⁷

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

All called to word ministry:

Although group leaders are the appointed teachers and under-shepherds, there must also be a commitment to 'every member ministry', this includes 'word' ministry. All Christians can be involved in prayerfully bringing the word of God to others, to 'speak the truth of God's word' in whatever way and to whatever extent their gifting and circumstances allow in each of their various contexts.

What's referred to is basically: a "*Bible-reading movement...in families, churches, workplaces and neighbourhoods. It would be a chaotic web of personal relationships, prayer and bible reading- more of a movement than a programme-but at another level it would be profoundly simple and within reach of all*".⁸

2. Bible Study:

3. Prayer:

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

2. Support:

Group members must be taught and trained to disciple and care for each other:

PC is founded on disciples being trained to care for and disciple other Christians.

Small groups are a convenient structure in which pc may happen, but the structure itself doesn't make it happen.

*"Unless Christians are taught and trained to meet with each other, to read the bible and pray with each other, and to urge and spur one another on to love and good works, the small group structure will not be effective for spiritual growth."*⁹

Group members need to be engaged in prayerfully speaking God's word as pastoral ministry:

Given that spiritual growth only comes by the Holy Spirit's work, and by Christians taking responsibility to speak the word of God to each other, we need a model of church and pastoral ministry where "*prayerfully speaking of the word is central, and in which Christian's are trained and equipped to minister God's word to others. Where*

⁶ Trellis and The Vine: p.163.

⁷ Trellis and The Vine: p.44.

⁸ Trellis and The Vine: p. 57.

⁹ Trellis and The Vine: p. 100.

our congregations become centres of training where people are trained and taught to be disciples of Christ who, in turn, seek to make other disciples".¹⁰

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Disciple-makers and mini pastors:

Small groups could also run short courses within their small group to help members grow in discipling skills and confidence e.g. personal evangelism etc.

LITERATURE SOURCE: **Sticky Church:**

L. Osborne (2008: Nth Coast Church San Diego, Cal. USA).

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Thesis: Member retention for growth:

Osborne's thesis is that churches frequently focus on methods to reach people but give scant attention to keeping or retaining them. The thrust of the book therefore, is that in order to more effectively grow churches and grow members, churches must become '*stickier*'. Rather than focussing all attention on 'widening the front door' churches need to become better at '*closing the back door*' as a means of church growth.

Aim: Exploring 'stickiness and a working model to follow:

The purpose of the book is to explore what makes a church welcoming and sticky. Particularly exploring the model of '**sermon-based small groups**' (a lecture lab model for studying the weekend sermon in more depth) as a means to achieving that end. Osborne's goal is to provide a working model that can be adapted to any ministry setting (whether large or small).

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

1: Small groups help close the back door:

In Osborne's view, closing the back door & making church sticky is best done by a commitment to 'sermon-based small groups'. Small groups are viewed as '*the hub*' of the ministry (80% are in groups). They achieve this % by reducing all competing programs in the church. Every new initiative is assessed by 'how it will impact growth groups'.

2: Small groups exist for Christ-centred relationships:

Although there are many apologetic models for small groups, Osborne sees the primary focus of his small groups is to "*foster significant Christ-centred relationships... everything else is secondary*", including study of the Bible.¹¹

Small groups exist to meet the widespread need for '*significant and sticky relationships*' (as opposed to groups whose primary purpose is evangelism, discipleship, church growth or shepherding).

Note: how Osborne evaluates *quality* of relationships on p106.

¹⁰ Trellis and The Vine: p. 99.

¹¹ Sticky Church: Larry Osborne (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) p. 101.

3: Small groups should be 'process' oriented:

Osborne rejects the idea that spiritual growth and discipleship are linear. Rather, the process is haphazard, messy and winding. His belief is that most spiritual growth comes as a result of life putting us in a '**need to know**' or '**need to grow**' situation.¹²

Sermon-based (lecture-lab) small groups take this haphazard learning and growing process into account, because the focus is not so much on *curriculum* but *process*. Therefore the topic in any week will flow out of whatever was taught in the previous weeks sermon.

4: Small groups should bring 'people and process' together:

The *goal* of a sermon-based group is to 'velcro' people to the 2 things they need most when faced with a 'need to know' or 'need to grow' situation i.e. the Bible and other Christians. Osborne's belief is that God's Word speaks to an array of subjects no matter what the situation, therefore its content need not be systematic to be effectual. The small group aspect guarantees closeness to other Christians to benefit from and draw upon their corporate knowledge and support.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Leader + Host + Trainee:

Small groups have a leader (or leadership couple), a host (or host couple) & often a trainee.

Both the Group Leader and the group 'hosts' must always be selected and trained:

Osborne's most important quality in leader selection is based on the following criteria in order of priority.¹³

1. '*Spiritual Warmth*': not necessarily spiritual maturity (a growing relationship with Jesus)
2. '*Relational Warmth*': good social skills and emotional intelligence
3. '*Avoid appointing*': 'hyper-spiritual God-talkers' or 'single-issue crusaders'.

- * Potential leaders are vetted by group leaders and staff.
- * Be wary whose recommendation to follow for selection of appropriate leaders
- * Never ask for volunteers

B: Number:

* Every group has a leader + 'host' (most often made up of 2 couples)

* Group leaders are asked to appoint an apprentice leader who heads up the group at least once a quarter.

2. Function:

Leaders as discussion facilitators:

Because the method is 'sermon based' as its central content method.

Leaders are primarily group '*discussion facilitators*.' Leaders therefore require less experience, knowledge & skills leading a discussion than leading an inductive Bible Study.

The role of hosts:

Every group has a leader and a 'host' (usually 2 couples) that teach, counsel, disciple, pray, visit hospitals, lead worship, provide communion and baptise members.¹⁴ The hosts role is to provide a welcoming home environment, provide feedback and support to the leader and to organise, co-ordinate group members into action to meet the practical needs of group members as they arise and to organise the group socials and service projects.¹⁵

¹² Sticky Church: p.42.

¹³ Sticky Church: p.124.

¹⁴ Sticky Church: p.51.

¹⁵ Sticky Church: p180f.

3. Training:

Because sermon-based groups only need facilitators, finding and training leaders becomes easier. Facilitators therefore require less experience, knowledge and skills to lead discussion.

Training compulsory but few in number:

Training leaders and hosts are compulsory but is reduced to 2 major meetings a year. (Instead they produce a weekly short training and insider information audio CD for leaders 10-15mins).

Documented roles:

Leaders and 'hosts' are given a documented list of their core responsibilities to be agreed upon before they take up leadership.¹⁶

Regular group breaks:

Groups break for the summer and short breaks each quarter (every 10 wks). During the summer break they use a variety of other programs to connect people.

New versus veteran training tracks:

There are separate training tracks depending on whether leaders are new or veterans.

Apprentice's compulsory:

Group leaders are asked to appoint an apprentice leader to lead at least once a quarter.

Records of member attendance:

Leaders must keep records of member attendance as part of their leadership responsibility.

B: BIBLE/PRAYER:

1. Teaching:

Discussion with required homework for members:

Discussion only, lead by a group facilitator.

A sermon study note outline is distributed at each service as well as pre-small group homework questions as an extension to the sermon topic.

2. Bible Study:

Discussion based:

A 45 min group 'discussion' based around a common sermon series, with the study questions designed to cover Bible passages that are either complementary or parallel to the main text of the sermon, but not covered in the Sunday message.¹⁷

They tend to use a standard 'template' for group time and group materials (though this varies with more experienced groups).

Homework prep expectation:

Group members are expected to come prepared by completing the weeks 'homework' discussion materials beforehand. With 3 basic aspects of the material covered each study: '*Know me, Into the Bible and Application*'.

3. Prayer:

Groups end with 15-30 mins of prayer, splitting along gender lines to do so. Everyone participates by using 'sentence' prayers one item at a time.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

After sharing refreshments, groups spend 15-30 minutes at the beginning of each group sharing prayer requests and updates (though the order may change from group to group).

¹⁶ Sticky Church: p.178f.

¹⁷ Sticky Church: p.87.

2. Support:

The role of hosts and members:

The appointed small group 'hosts' are given the responsibility to co-ordinate the follow-up of practical needs of members during a crisis. Small group members are also expected to be available for prayer and support.

Success evaluation:

The success of the sermon based small group ministry is ultimately evaluated on the quality of the relationships within the group (i.e. defined by: practical needs met, holidays and vacations spent together, encouragement and tough confrontations! and at the level of membership retention.¹⁸

Complex pastoral care issues:

Issues beyond the expertise of the leaders are taken to their training coach of staff for additional help or guidance.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

*Ministry:

All groups are asked to take on at least one service project a year and have at least one social gathering a year. All service projects are monitored. Groups are given support and service project options.

D: EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

The success of the sermon based small group ministry is evaluated on:

1. The quality of the relationships within the group (practical needs met, holidays and vacations spent together, encouragement and tough confrontations)
2. The level of membership retention.

2. Leaders:

All leaders and hosts receive a written evaluation of the group and their leadership from group members at the end of each quarter.

OTHER:

Vision and direction:

The advantage of sermon based small groups is ensuring the teaching team keeps the church focussed and headed in the same direction (whether casting vision, clarifying direction or dealing with issues).¹⁹

Span of care:

Will depend on 'comfort zones'. Group must be small enough for every one to contribute but large enough that no one is forced to do so. When groups get too large they lose their 'stickiness'. Osborne believes that the ideal size for a group of married couples is 12-14, for singles 8-12.

Group composition:

* Affinity Groups:

Osborne makes a distinction between the 'spiritual unity' we all share in Christ and the bond that comes with deep friendship.²⁰ With friendships built on strong commonality, shared interests, values and experiences that bind them together. Therefore members are encouraged to choose a group *primarily*

¹⁸ Sticky Church: p.106.

¹⁹ Sticky Church: p.62.

²⁰ Sticky Church: p.78.

according to who's in it over where or when it meets. Groups have been instituted for "*singles, peace officers, newly weds, blended families, parents of teens*" etc. ²¹

**New Groups for New People:*

There's a philosophy of '**New Groups for New People**'- where the common bond new people share is their lack of established relationships and a need to establish relationships. Like 'lego blocks', established church members tend to have a limited number of 'connector points', once full, there's the tendency to be 'friendly' but not to 'connect'. By contrast new people have no ready connectors and are therefore open to make them.

Covenants and evaluation:

All groups review and sign a group 'covenant' at the beginning of each quarter. ²²

The covenant outlines the following:

1. The stated purpose of the group
2. The 5 marks of a healthy group
3. Guidelines & agreed covenant commitment:
(Time, childcare, study, prayer, homework, attendance, refreshments, social & commitment to a service project).

Group members fill out evaluation forms each quarter covering areas such as: group components, length of meeting, discussion, homework, leadership, the host, and future intention to continue in the group. ²³

Group multiplication:

Because there's an emphasis on developing significant and deep friendship relationships among group members above all else, Osborne rejects the idea that groups should be made to split and multiply.

My Critique Notes:

Prime focus on relationships above all other small group purposes.

Measure of relational health of a group ²⁴

Members are encouraged to 'shop around' until they find the *right* group for them.

They are also given an 'opt in /out' option. Does this generate an attitude of consumerism?

Could generate a 'groups must fit me' attitude that the scriptures don't hold? ²⁵

Choosing leaders who have 'spiritual warmth' but not necessarily 'spiritual maturity' ²⁶

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Growth Groups* : C. Marshall (1995, AUS)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

This is primarily a book that aims to define and outline the distinctive elements of a Christian (vs. secular) small group, as a practical training manual for training small group leaders in how to teach the Bible and pray with other Christians, and to offer guidance on preparing leaders in how to engage believers in evangelistic enterprise. ²⁷

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Small groups are for Christian growth:

²¹ Sticky Church: p.79.

²² Sticky Church: p.172f.

²³ Sticky Church: p.173f.

²⁴ Sticky Church: p.106

²⁵ Sticky Church: p.110.

²⁶ Sticky Church: p. 124.

²⁷ Growth Groups: Col Marshall (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 1995) p.6.

Using the *book of Colossians* as his core text, Marshall sets the vision that small groups are *primarily places where Christians can grow* through Christ-centred Bible study and encouraging each other to obey God's word. Small groups can also be a catalyst for the growth of the gospel (*cf: Col 1:10, 2:6-7, 19, 4:5,12*).²⁸

Small groups are to be Christ centred and gospel growth committed:

In this regard, the *goal* of a small group is to be Christ-centred not group centred.

Christian small groups should also be committed to the spread of the gospel and sharing in gospel enterprise.²⁹

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Selection of group leaders is based around 3 broad requirements from (*1Tim 3:1-13, 5:17-25 & Tit 1:5-16*).

Requiring a life 'above reproach', not a young convert, and 'ability to teach' (i.e. understanding and communication).³⁰

A job description for leaders is specifically outlined.³¹

In looking for potential leaders they ask:³²

- Who is leading others?
- Who is already encouraging others in Christian growth?
- Who is wrestling with the Bible and Theology?
- Who is sorting out issues of godliness?

B: Number:

Leader + assistant/apprentice:

Best scenario is leader working with an assistant. Groups larger than 12 will need more.

2. Function:

'Shepherds' (i.e. bible teacher/pastor):

The leaders role is to be a Bible teacher/pastor responsible for the conclusions drawn by the group.

Marshall prefers the use of the word '*Shepherd*' to describe this role, one who guides the group by teaching the word of God.³³

Evangelistic enterprise:

Part of the leaders role is also to gather together fellow believers in evangelistic enterprise.

3. Training:

Training by Pastors:

"*The quality of a group is determined by the quality of its leaders*" therefore a good leadership team requires careful selection, training and supervision. Training should therefore be a priority. In most churches training needs to be done by the Pastor.³⁴

Book as training manual:

²⁸ Growth Groups: p.20.

²⁹ Growth Groups: p. 17, 69f.

³⁰ Growth Groups: p. 83f.

³¹ Growth Groups: p. 84.

³² Growth Groups: p.123.

³³ Growth Groups: p.21.

³⁴ Growth Groups: p.119.

The 'Growth Group manual' is designed for use in 10 one hr sessions in a training group with a trainer, with groups limited to 10. The course aims to train members in both the philosophy of small group ministry as well as provide skills practice and feedback.

Post course: leaders continue to need regular in-service training, support and encouragement with the Pastor or small groups trainer.

Apprentice model: An apprentice model to recruit, assess and train is also encouraged within small groups.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:
2. Bible Study:
3. Prayer:

Prayer needs to be given a priority in the group. Occasionally devoting an entire mtg to prayer. Prayer focus will be for themselves, for others, and for the proclamation of the gospel (*Col1: 3-14, 4:2-6*).

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:
2. Support:
3. Co-ordinated Action:

***Mission:**

Small groups should have a mission beyond themselves by praying for gospel preachers, being thoughtful about relationships with unbelievers, and speaking about their Christian beliefs (*Col 4*). The group can also train each other in evangelistic skills as well as take opportunities to engage in an evangelistic endeavour as a group.

***Ministry:**

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

The book provides a list of 6 key areas to help evaluate a group, encompassing the areas of Bible learning, prayer, personal godliness, group life, evangelism and leadership.³⁵

2. Leaders:

Spiritually speaking, the measure of success as good stewards is their 'faithfulness in God's business'- i.e. whether they have held on to the truth of the gospel and taught the gospel (*1Cor3: 1-15, 4:1-5*).³⁶ Practically speaking Marshall also outlines questions for a leaders self- assessment.³⁷

OTHER:

Training for all:

There's opportunity within the small group structure to encourage every member ministry and to offer opportunities for members to engage in, and be trained in the various ministry skills associated with small group life, as well as training each other in the skills of evangelism.

Unifying factor for the church vision:

The small group network also affords opportunity to hold the church together with unified purpose and direction. Leaders can educate and enthuse members about the vision, goals and programmes of the church.³⁸

³⁵ Growth Groups: p.131.

³⁶ Growth Groups: p.82.

³⁷ Growth Groups: p.131.

³⁸ Growth Groups: p.22.

Communicating expectations (covenant?) pre-group not during:
Better to spell out the group expectations to members 'before' the group starts rather than after.
This yields higher likelihood of commitment from the beginning.

Termination/life span:
Finite life spans are preferable.
Setting a termination or review point after a year, providing a way out for leaders and members.

Empty Chair for newcomers:
An empty chair should be placed as a reminder that groups should consider themselves open to newcomers.

Resources:
The book provides a helpful list of resources available to small group leaders as well as Bible study prep sheets and a sample study.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Adult Bible Fellowships* : K. Larson (1997: USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Thesis: The necessity to create mid sized congregational gatherings:

The Philosophy of the book is to explore the value of creating '*medium sized congregational groupings*' as a subset of the larger weekly Sunday (celebration) service. ABF'S are a designated congregational grouping mid way between the larger weekly gathering and the traditional 'cell' or 'small group', it claims to more adequately serve the *needs of both* those settings.

Larson believes that churches using the traditional- *very large group* + *smaller cell* model miss out on the whole 'web of relationships' that happen when a larger group exists.³⁹ Therefore medium size '***Adult Bible Fellowships***' are created to bridge this gap. These 'subset congregations' (i.e. groups of 20-90) or communities within a church are then organised for Bible Study, fellowship and outreach.

Larson believes that with a growing emphasis on adult education in society, as well as a growing vacuum in the need for more meaningful relationships, to have church groupings such as this that's small enough for everyone to know everyone, yet large enough to create a broader set of fellowship relationships beyond the small cell.⁴⁰

AIM: Study of the Word and fellowship within affinity groups:

Within ABF's, the focus is on study of the Word with an emphasis on building *fellowship relationships*. The belief is within ABF'S members are more effectively challenged to study God's Word, apply it, and fulfil 'one another' commands.⁴¹ ABF's seek to provide Bible study, care, social relationships and evangelism in one ministering sub-unit. Larson also believes people fellowship best within affinity groups of similar age and interest.

It's interesting to note that Larson also believes congregation members, though encouraged to be involved in more than one aspect of church life, should be free to choose between the large 'celebration' gatherings and that of mid-size congregations and small group cells.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Note: Although the book's emphasis is not primarily about small groups it does make these points.

Small groups are for discussion, accountability and transparency:

Larson believes that the mid sized congregational setting is the primary place where '*content, application and fellowship*' happens. The small group 'cell' experience is also necessary within these mid sized congregations, but

³⁹ Adult Bible Fellowships: K. Larson (1997) p.13.

⁴⁰ Adult Bible Fellowships: p.15.

⁴¹ Adult Bible Fellowships: p.10f.

their function is more an avenue of discussion, accountability and transparency.⁴² These groups are promoted as part of ABF life but Larson also recognises not everybody may want to be part of one.

There can be many types of small groups:

ABF small groups are built around 4 Main types...

1. *Bible study groups*: where discussion and questions are important.
2. *Discipling groups*: of 5-8 members, usually separated by gender
3. *Special need support groups*: (e.g. alcoholics, single parents, students, those with similar needs or goals)
4. *Ministry teams*: Larson believes some of the best relationships and discipleship happens when planning and executing ministry together.

All groups, regardless of type, have an emphasis on accountability and transparency.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

B: Number:

2. Function:

3. Training:

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

Central teaching with smaller cells meeting to discuss/share/pray:

ABF's have a set teacher followed by small cell groups meeting for discussion.

However, there was no detail given to what happened within smaller cell groups of an ABF.

2. Bible Study:

ABF's are not so much about curriculum as the key concern. Both 'fellowships' and small cells within the fellowship are free to choose their relevant content suitable to their needs.

The small group cells are built around 4. Main types...

1. *Bible study groups*: with discussion and questions.
2. *Discipling groups*: of 5-8 usually separated by gender
3. *Special need support groups*:
4. *Ministry teams*: for various ministries of the church.

3. Prayer:

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

ABF's are about pastoring and caring and sharing and fellowship and have leaders and structures put in place to achieve these aims. However, there was no detail given to what happened within smaller cell groups.

2. Support:

⁴² Adult Bible Fellowships: p.23.

ABF's are about pastoring and caring and sharing and fellowship. Therefore they include a system of caring, hospital visitation and meeting special needs and have leaders and structures put in place to achieve these aims. However, there was no detail given to what happened within smaller cell groups.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

The ABF's include a plan to bring those on the 'fringe' of church or outside the church into these smaller groups.

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:
2. Leaders:

LITERATURE SOURCE: *What the Guru Learned* :

Tony Payne (The Briefing: Feb 2011 #389, AUS)

ARTICLE PHILOSOPHY:

Thesis: Minimize trellis growth to keep vine growth core:

The article posits that whilst both 'management' trellises and 'ministry' trellises have a place in supporting a ministry, they can also get in the way of true vine work and become a work in themselves. The aim therefore should be to create the *minimum number of trellises* necessary to foster and support vine growth.

Purpose: Both top down and bottom up ministry as means of disciple-making:

To keep 'vine growth' at the core, churches (small or large) need to engage in both a 'top down' and 'bottom up' model of ministry. Both should be done in an integrated and coherent way, where public and private individual ministry work together to reinforce each other. Both means are occasions for disciple-making.

Aim= growing disciple-making disciples:

The primary focus needs to be on developing and maintaining the growth of each person in the church as a 'disciple-making disciple'.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Philosophy dictates practice:

The way churches do small groups says a great deal about their ministry philosophy i.e. whether groups are merely a structure to 'park' people or a 'theatre' for disciple-making and training.

Small groups are not mandatory but value depends on execution:

Small Groups are just one of the 'trellises' in which vine ministry can take place. Small groups are not mandatory but they can be helpful and fruitful for ministry and spiritual growth (or useless and dangerous, depending on how they're done).

Small groups are for training and nurturing vine workers in the group and beyond:

Small groups are not defined by size, location or frequency, these are incidental and variable, but small groups are primarily a '*span of pastoral care and growth*', where the rationale of the small group is for "*members to be trained and nurtured as vine workers who seek each other's growth through the Bible and prayer, and the conversion and growth of others outside the group by the same means*".⁴³

⁴³ What the Guru Learned: Tony Payne (The Briefing: Feb 2011 #389) p.16.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

B: Number:

2. Function:

Teach and train as 'mini pastors' to group and individuals:

Small group leaders are 'mini-pastors' whose job is to *teach and train* a band of brothers and sisters under their care *by* prayerfully leading bible discussions, as well as individually working with each person to see them grow.

3. Training:

A necessity:

Largely our training of small group leaders is vastly inadequate.

Training leaders is slow and intensive work but is indispensable.

Aim observe godly character and conviction:

To work with a group of potential leaders over several months in the leader's home, to get to know them personally and pray for their godly character and conviction.

'Pre' and 'post' training:

Teach leaders the Bible, and training in the practical skills of leading a Bible discussion.

Once they start leading, meet together monthly to keep training in the Bible, group review, troubleshoot and pray together.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

Small group leaders are 'mini-pastors' whose job is to *teach and train* a band of brothers and sisters under their care *by* prayerfully leading bible discussions, as well as individually working with *each* person to see them grow.

2. Bible Study:

Small groups are places where members seek each other's growth through the Bible and prayer.

3. Prayer:

Small groups are places where members seek each other's growth through the Bible and prayer.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

2. Support:

Small groups are primarily a span of pastoral care and avenues for vine growth.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

***Mission:**

Small groups should be places where members are not only to be trained and nurtured as vine workers who seek each other's growth through the Bible and prayer, but also seek the conversion and growth of others outside the group by the same means.

***Ministry:**

Small groups are places where members can be trained and nurtured as vine workers who seek each other's growth through the Bible and prayer.

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:
2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Individual discipling:

No matter what stage of life or circumstance, all individuals need the same thing i.e. the word of God prayerfully spoken. Therefore we need to be finding ways of discipling each other personally and individually.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Starting Small Groups & Keeping Them Going* :

Intersections (1995, USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Small groups should be viewed as God's gift for transformation:

A key thesis of the book is that churches should *not* start a small group ministry in order to be successful, for church growth strategy, or to meet the psychological needs of Christians. Small groups are not primarily a new program, nor another entry point or way to incorporate members (they may be the results but not the reason).

But people should be in small groups because it's *faithful to do so*. Community is a gift of God *for transformation*, and we're called to share that gift with one another. ⁴⁴

The failure of small groups is the failure to train:

One of the key reasons small group ministry fails to achieve this transformation process is the lack of adequate training and ongoing support for leaders.

Aim=Training manual:

The aim of the book is to therefore provide a step-by-step guide on 'how to implement a small group ministry in the church'. For new leaders as well as ideas for existing small group ministries.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

The purpose of community is transformation individually and corporately:

Built around the philosophy that God gives the gift of community (*koinonia*) for the transformation and renewal of the church, small groups are seen as a *means of transforming both individual as well as corporate* life. ⁴⁵ Small groups provide a setting where community can be experienced and built. ⁴⁶They're places where people can be nurtured and renewed for ministry, where there's opportunity for involvement, study, discipleship, outreach and support. ⁴⁷

Aim: To produce disciple-making disciples:

The ultimate aim of a small group ministry is to provide an "*intentional and relational model of small groups that will work in any size church and in a variety of ways...creating ministries that meet people at the point of their need and helping people to become disciples and grow into producing disciples*".⁴⁸

Small groups must be spiritually distinct:

In the societal surge of interest in small groups, Christian small groups must be distinct, both in philosophy and focus. Biblically faithful small groups must be tested according to their faithfulness to the gospel and to the apostolic tradition.

The manual outlines 4 guidelines to test that truth.

⁴⁴ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: *Intersections* (1995) p.8.

⁴⁵ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.7.

⁴⁶ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.8.

⁴⁷ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.13.

⁴⁸ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.46.

These 4 elements become the core elements of all small groups.

1. *They listen to God* (i.e. they centre on prayer and God's Word))
2. *They are caring places* (sharing, supporting, building community)
3. *They relate to the church*
4. *They welcome the stranger*

Small groups are uniform in key components but vary in type:

Small groups need to be flexible and intentional, flexible in type but intentional in purpose.

The book outlines 3 types of small groups:

1. *Discipleship groups*
2. *Support and recovery groups*
3. *Ministry groups*

Essential components of all small groups *regardless of type* must include Bible input, mutual support through intentional community building; group ministry beyond itself and prayer.

All small groups must be both *intentional* and *relational*.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Selected, interviewed and publically commissioned:

Leaders are selected, interviewed and invited to lead by the Pastor or small group co-ordinator.

The co-facilitator is recruited by the facilitator as a 'facilitator in training', and given training within the group. Once leaders are selected and trained there's a special 'commissioning' service held in which they make leadership promises before the church.

The manual provides a clear job description for facilitators, co-facilitators and group hosts. ⁴⁹

B: Number:

Facilitator + host+ co-facilitator:

Leadership consists generally of a facilitator, a 'group host' and a co-facilitator trained up to lead a group.

2. Function:

Facilitators/pastors/trainers:

Group leaders are largely facilitators 'monitoring and encouraging the group to do its work'. ⁵⁰ Their role is primarily to act as assistants to ministry staff in pastoral ministry. Their role is to also recruit & train up their co-facilitator.

3. Training:

Essential and compulsory:

Leader training (and ongoing training) is essential to the intentional small group ministry approach. It not only emphasises that the church leadership sees small groups as important but by investing in, and supporting leaders there's greater likelihood the groups they lead will remain healthy and grow.

Therefore all training is not only necessary but should be compulsory for all small group leaders. ⁵¹

Support, training, nurture and encouragement:

⁴⁹ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.40f.

⁵⁰ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.50.

⁵¹ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.48.

As well as an opportunity to provide theological guidance, training should aim to provide leaders with encouragement and affirmation, help them gain confidence & skills, and provide an avenue for accountability and troubleshooting.

Develop a leadership community:

It's important to provide on going training and support to leaders, not only by staff or small group co-ordinators but also by peer small group leaders. Facilitators need opportunities to learn from each other and to experience a support system outside their own group.

Different group 'types' need varied training and accountability:

Leaders of the 3 group types receive specific training for their particular group type, as well as ongoing training and support in their leadership. Bible and content guidelines are specifically tailored to the particular group 'type', and accountability structures are put in place for all leaders.

Church based training manuals:

As well as this training manual the book also encourages individual churches to develop their own unique 'group facilitator manual' for leaders with written job descriptions and appropriate resource forms for administrative tasks.

B: BIBLE/PRAYER:

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

Bible input is central in all groups, but content selection depends on the particular group type.

3. Prayer

Spiritual 'schools':

Small groups are considered "*spiritual schools where Christians learn to pray and share one another's concerns*". Essential components of all small groups regardless of their type will include Bible input, mutual support through intentional community building; group ministry beyond itself and prayer.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

Sharing lives together is how groups express their identity as a Christian community and the means in which lives are transformed. Without it groups can intellectualize the good news, or become purely task oriented.

Therefore groups should spend time sharing joys and failures, as well as demonstrate support, empathy and love.

2. Support:

Social networks/families:

For many, small groups serve as social networks and surrogate families that provide the loving relationships and responsibilities that make living in our highly individualized society possible.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

***Mission:**

Evangelistic empty chair:

On the basis of the Great commission, small groups should encompass the 'empty chair' system to welcome and invite the stranger. Small groups also serve as spiritual schools where Christians learn how to share the gospel more effectively, to pray for unbelievers and to look for opportunities to welcome them into the group.

Small groups are often great places for the unchurched that may not choose to become active in church but may happily participate in a small group with others.

***Ministry:**

Groups are asked to take on specific tasks to serve their church or the wider community.

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

Small group members are given an evaluation form to assess their small group experience.⁵² It reflects on all aspects of group learning and life including the leadership.

2. Leaders:

Evaluation and reports:

The facilitators prepare written reports on the state of their group to the small groups Pastor/Co-ordinator. The report encompasses attendance, visitors and new group members, an assessment of group health, the 4 key essentials, training needs and their intention of continuing.⁵³

OTHER:

Any small group philosophy should be outcome of the mission of the church:

All small groups and group leaders should be given an understanding of how small groups fit into the overall mission of the church.⁵⁴

Span of care:

Maximum 12

Transition issues:

One of the strengths of the book is that it deals with how to set up a small group ministry where none exists, but it also gives helpful guidance and sage advice on how to best transition an already existing small group ministry into one which may better reflect a healthy small group philosophy.

Multiplication:

Groups should be kept small, as groups grow beyond 12 members should be encouraged to multiply the group rather than continue to grow in size.

Empty chair:

All groups should be considered as open to newcomers, keeping an empty chair present at each meeting and intentionally praying for it to be filled. Facilitators and members are encouraged to invite new members.

New members groups:

New members to a church need assistance to integrate into a new community. The book suggests dedicating a person or committee to help new members through this process (including the small group process). The book suggests one method is to develop a '*new members*' class that runs for a month and models small group components (especially helpful for the unchurched).

The studies/material may cover all aspects of integration into church life and community This also affords an opportunity to help the small group co-ordinator decide where each new member may best fit into the regular network of small groups once the group ends.⁵⁵

Communication/ covenants and life cycles of small groups:

The book provides helpful information on these important aspects of small group life.⁵⁶

Small groups must not become independent but kept part of the system:

Small groups can believe they're self-sufficient & attempt to become independent of the larger church. Groups must therefore be monitored & given strong leadership. To prevent splinter groups of discontent churches must articulate very clear understandings about the role and vision of small groups within the church from the

⁵² Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.42.

⁵³ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.33.

⁵⁴ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.48.

⁵⁵ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.43f.

⁵⁶ Starting Small Groups and Keeping Them Going: p.53f.

beginning and review it regularly. They must also put in place mechanisms for accountability in leadership, content and group dynamics.

Dedicated oversight of ministry by staff or co-ordinator:

As the small group ministry of a church grows so must staff or oversight structures to maintain quality.

Resources:

The book provides sample sessions, leader job descriptions, case studies, checklists, practical tips, sample covenants etc. as well as a resource list at the back of other small group materials to refer to.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Leading Better Bible Studies* : K & R Morris (1997, AUS)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

The aim of the book is to help readers learn how to *best help fellow Christians grow* through the ministry of small groups. To do so it utilizes insights from adult education combined with well thought out Biblical principles, as well as lots of practical advice to achieve that aim.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Their stated philosophy of small group ministry is based on Paul's words in 1Tim 4:2: to "*proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching*".

The task is to *proclaim the message*, to do it with utmost patience, with the goal of bringing people closer to God through study of his Word and relationship with him through Christ. To do this to the greatest effect, leaders must *teach, model and love* their people well.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: [Selection & Criteria:](#)

B: [Number:](#)

2. Function:

Facilitators and shepherds:

The function of the leader is to facilitate the process of helping members to grow to maturity in Christ (*Col 1:28*). Primarily by leading Bible input, but also by facilitating prayer, providing pastoral care and promoting evangelism.

⁵⁷ In doing so the leader is to consider themselves co-workers with God (*1Cor2: 5-9*) shepherds of the flock under their care & models to imitate (*1 Pet 5:1-5*). ⁵⁸

3. Training:

Resource:

The book itself is designed to be a resource and training manual for small group leaders. Only those who need to learn the basics require training.

Supervision versus training:

The Morris's also suggest that more experienced and trusted leaders should not be expected to continue to repeat training they have already completed.

⁵⁷ *Leading Better Bible Studies*: Karen Morris and Rod Morris (Sydney South: Aquila Press, 1997) p.7-8, 17.

⁵⁸ *Leading Better Bible Studies*: p.9.

Suggesting several alternative models...

1. *Supervision*: where support & mentoring replaces ongoing basic training for this level of leader. The book provides advice and suggestions on leader supervision/mentoring ⁵⁹
2. *Peer appraisal*: by a group of leaders at the same level of experience.
3. *Reflection and self-appraisal*: which might then be talked about in peer appraisal or supervision.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:
2. Bible Study:
3. Prayer:

Prayer should be central to the life of any small group.
The leader's role is to help the group prayer life in 3 ways.

1. To model a mature prayer life
2. To teach people how to pray
3. To encourage members to do it.

Small groups should be encouraged from the beginning to set an agreed upon goal regarding prayer in the group.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:
2. Support:

The Morris's refer to 16th C theologian *Martin Bucer's* writings as a guide to the role of p.c and support within a small group. ⁶⁰

They therefore see the leaders role as 5 fold...

1. *To draw to Christ the alienated*
2. *To lead back those drawn away*
3. *To secure those who fall into sin*
4. *To strengthen the weak*
5. *To urge stronger Christians to forward the good*

3. Co-ordinated Action:

- *Mission:
- *Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:
2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Span of care:

This considered a critical decision. 10 -the recommended ideal.

Their theory is that every additional member increases the diversity of goals & expectations, with conflicting needs and values. It reduces participation time per person and increases the time it takes to perform tasks.

It reduces physical space & comfort & is difficult to care for a group of that size individually. ⁶¹

Not everyone suitable for small groups:

⁵⁹ Leading Better Bible Studies: p.191f.

⁶⁰ Leading Better Bible Studies: p.160.

⁶¹ Leading Better Bible Studies: p.111f.

Their belief is that not everyone is suitable for small group membership, those who are domineering of others or insatiable in their need for support can extinguish groups in their need for attention. These members are better cared for in 1-1 discipleship.

The necessity to recognise adult education/ learning styles and life cycles of small groups:

Those leading adult small groups need to recognise and take into account aspects of adult education theory, learning styles and the natural cycle of small group life. The book provides helpful information on these important aspects of small group life.

Resources:

Undoubtedly one of the strengths of this particular book is the wise and helpful advice it gives on everything from group learning styles, identifying a 'maturity matrix', dealing with conflict, through to when it's appropriate for a leader to intervene on a group/individual issue.

The book also provides lots of very practical tips and suggestions, a comprehensive list of Bible study techniques, trainer discussion questions with each chapter, checklists, sample studies, ice breakers, evaluation lists etc. as well as a resource list at the back of other small group materials to refer to.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Using The Bible In Groups* : R. Hestenes (1983, UK)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Considered one of the original 'classics' on small group ministry, Hestenes' book aims to explore the *value and purpose* of a small group ministry from a Biblical, historical and community based perspective, as well providing a practical resource on the 'how to' of small group ministry for group leaders.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Connected to the larger church philosophy:

Hestenes believes that it's critical that the purpose of any small group ministry be related to a commitment to the larger church congregation, not replace it.⁶² Her belief is that we need to meet in small groups because they help believers become what they were meant to be- "*people set free by the love of Christ, who seek to share his love with others*".⁶³

Defining small group ministry:

Hestenes is one of the few to put forward a definition of small groups, she defines a small group as "*a deliberate face-to-face gathering of 3-12 people who meet regularly and share the common purpose of exploring together some aspect of Christian faith and discipleship.*"⁶⁴

Benefits of small groups:

The benefits of such a small group ministry is outlined as - an avenue to meet a Christian's need for spiritual growth, support and encouragement, strength to face temptation, to give and receive love, and to serve others. When the Bible is central to this process, it enables the transformation and renewal spoken about in Rom 12:2 and 2Tim 3:15f to take place.

Hestenes believes that small groups are also helpful avenues for the development of lay leadership, social justice concerns, creating 'communities of concern' and ministry service.⁶⁵

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

⁶² Using The Bible In Groups: Roberta Hestenes (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983) p.20.

⁶³ Using The Bible In Groups: p.10.

⁶⁴ Using The Bible In Groups: p.21.

⁶⁵ Using The Bible In Groups: p.10f

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

A priority:

Churches need to select and train leaders as the first and foremost part of building a small group programme. Good leaders make for good groups.⁶⁶

Qualities:

Qualities are more important than sophisticated techniques, therefore good leaders should be selected on the following criteria:⁶⁷

- Concerned for the spiritual growth and development of others
- A positive Christian faith
- A liking for people
- A servant spirit
- A desire to explore the meaning of scripture with others
- Been a previous small group participant.

B: Number:

Hestenes suggests there are various patterns of leadership a group could adopt.

- The same leader every week
- Partnership- where a group has 2 or 3 designated leaders who share in the various tasks
- Rotating leadership across members

2. Function:

Facilitators/enablers:

Hestenes believes that small group leaders do not function as teachers or lecturers but facilitators, helpers and guides to learning and discovery.⁶⁸ Hestene's argues that this kind of leadership function requires more preparation from a leader than less, as it requires much greater familiarity with scripture passages to offer wise guidance and exploration than directive teaching methods.⁶⁹

Differing types bring differing functions:

Hestenes defines a small group as "*a deliberate face-to-face gathering of 3-12 people who meet regularly and share the common purpose of exploring together some aspect of Christian faith and discipleship*".

Within this definition Hestenes believes there can therefore be different kinds of small groups with differing *specific* purposes and roles of the leaders.

Leadership tasks:

The book outlines the tasks of leadership as prayer, preparation, group guidance and care of members.

3. Training:

Training to preclude unhealthy groups:

Small groups can potentially become avenues of shared ignorance, clusters of critique and discontent, become separatist and potentially do more harm than good, appropriate training of leaders is therefore promoted as the critical remedy.

Churches need to select and train leaders as the first and foremost part of building a small group programme. Good leaders make for good groups.⁷⁰ This book serves as a training manual for leaders.

B: BIBLE/PRAYER:

⁶⁶ Using The Bible In Groups: p.42.

⁶⁷ Using The Bible In Groups: p.36.

⁶⁸ Using The Bible In Groups: p.36.

⁶⁹ Using The Bible In Groups: p.39.

⁷⁰ Using The Bible In Groups: p. 42.

1. Teaching:

Hestenes' outlines 4 basic types of groups, all of which use the bible as a core element.⁷¹

Each different group will therefore carry varying content.

1. Study groups (concentrated study of the scriptures)
2. Sharing groups (Gaining bible insight to apply to circumstances through discussion and reflection)
3. Ministry groups (service oriented with scriptural input) within this subset would be included church committees, accountability groups and mission groups.
4. Discipleship groups (for young in the faith)

2. Bible Study:

3. Prayer:

Prayer is a significant part of small group life; therefore a reasonable amount of time is given to this aspect of group life. Prayer also has a unifying factor for its members. Hestenes recommends both beginning & ending groups in prayer.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

2. Support:

Support not therapy:

Support and care of members should take place during and between meetings. While Christian small groups can be therapeutic, they are not set up as therapy groups. Here the role of the group leader is to help a member get the appropriate help they need.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Covenants for purpose, obligations and connection with larger church:

Hestenes believes all Christian groups need to develop a clear sense of *purpose*, where all members are clear on their purpose and commit themselves to work towards achieving them.⁷² Small group members need to know what they're joining and what obligations are involved i.e. covenant.

The group's purpose should also be related to the group members' commitments to the larger church congregation. Good covenanting should encompass relationship expectations, the use and place of scripture, prayer, time length, input, intensity, and leadership pattern.⁷³

Group life stages, leadership styles and member functions and responsibilities:

The book also encompasses helpful information and guidance on these 3 areas of group life and dynamics.

Resources:

The book also provides lots of practical tips and suggestions, a comprehensive outline of various Bible study methods (as well as procedures and keys to success of each method) sample studies, checklists, tips on

⁷¹ Using The Bible In Groups: p.35.

⁷² Using The Bible In Groups: p.19.

⁷³ Using The Bible In Groups: p.23

questioning techniques and relationship dynamics, as well as a resource list at the back of other small group materials to refer to.

LITERATURE SOURCES:

Leading Life Changing Small Groups :

B. Donahue: Willow Creek Resources (1996, USA) ...and...

Building a Church of Small Groups : B. Donahue & R. Robinson (2001, USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

To grow larger means growing smaller:

Willow Creek recognised that having experienced exponential growth through its evangelistic endeavours, new ministries & the growing need to disciple its members, there was a risk of losing 'community', and with it, life-giving transformation.

The decision was therefore made to redesign Willow Creek with community life at the core, based around an intentional small group ministry aimed at building "a biblically functioning community of Christ followers who live out the practice of community and relational integrity".

In effect this adopting this practice meant adopting the principle that 'for a church to keep growing larger, by necessity it must also grow smaller.'⁷⁴

Using the 'Meta Church' Model: A concern for 'community' and 'relational transparency':

Using the '**Meta-Church**' model (i.e. 'meta' a reference to organization not size) first outlined by ***Carl George**, Donahue makes a distinction between churches that merely have a small group ministry, and churches where the whole church is structured around a small group ministry model, providing a common delivery system for ministry throughout the organization, whether it be youth, children, choir, outreach etc.⁷⁵

Willow Creek committed itself to moving from "a church where small groups were optional to a church where small groups defined the core organisational strategy...a church body with a small groups skeleton".⁷⁶

**Ref: Carl George: 'Prepare Your Church for the Future'. See Appendix for a review of this book.*

A whole staff and leadership responsibility:

Donahue suggests that one of the unique aspects of this 'whole church' small group model is it's not the sole responsibility of one staff member alone to implement the ministry, rather all staff and board members take responsibility for modelling group life and participate in furthering the vision for groups.

Aim = Reference and resource manual on the meta-church model:

'Leading Life Changing Small Groups':

Aims to provide a reference and resource manual to help churches put the meta-church model to work in their local church. It does so by outlining the Biblical principles and values that undergird small group ministry, offering principles and resource guides for training, developing and recruiting leaders, and strategies and resources for managing group life, shepherding members, and multiplying small group ministry.

'Building a Church of Small Groups':

⁷⁴ Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone: Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) p.14.

⁷⁵ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: Bill Donahue: Willow Creek Resources (1996, USA) p.16.

⁷⁶ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.12.

Aims to help church leaders learn how to become a church of small groups. It contains practical and governing principles from the Willow Creek experience and those of other churches. The book attempts to use both theological and sociological argument to build a case for the necessity of small groups. It also outlines how leaders can make the necessary shifts from *'vision to practice'*, instructions on how to deploy leaders and a chapter on how to transition a church's small group philosophy.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Small groups are not optional but epicentres of growth:

Donahue's belief is that connecting people in small groups is not an optional sub-ministry of the church they *are* the church in its smallest unit. Churches without a small group ministry cannot produce optimal life change for believers.⁷⁷

The small group strategy Donahue advocates is based on Carl George's *'Meta-Church' Model.* The central premise of this 'meta' (i.e. here meaning 'change') model is that pastors give first priority to the promotion and multiplication of small groups as *essential centers of growth.*

As implied in the term, *meta*, the Meta-church model is about change... about transformation. It's about challenging readers to *"institute in their churches a different model of social architecture"*. Leaders are called to break out of ineffective paradigms, offering an outline of the practices and principles necessary if the church is to reap an increased harvest of souls while at the same time, caring for its members. The central premise of George's book is that a pastor should elevate to first priority the promotion and multiplication of certain smaller groups; they are the essential centers of growth.

If small groups become the epicenter of church life rather than the Sunday service, then regardless of the church's size it will be able to perform its mission to train and equip its members, to reproduce and grow, to evangelize... while meeting the immediate needs of its congregants. Because of their potential, George believes that small groups are the most underdeveloped and underused resource in the church today.

Small groups rather than 1-1 are the ideal route to discipleship:

Based on George's philosophy, the belief is that small groups (rather than 1-1) are the *ideal route* to discipleship and the key to building Christian community.⁷⁸

Aim of small groups is 'disciple transformation':

The Church exists not just to collect the saints but transform them. The governing mission statement of Willow Creek is to *"turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ"*.

Towards that end the small groups aim to *"connect people relationally in groups (of 4-10 people) for the purpose of growing in Christ-likeness, loving one another, and contributing to the work of the church, in order to glorify God and make disciples of all nations"*.⁷⁹

4 foundational/core components to achieve community:

Donahue and Robinson list 4 non-negotiables for achieving community within small groups, suggesting that even omitting one will severely reduce the church's *'community quotient'*.⁸⁰

Small groups must be/have...

1. *Built on authentic relationships*
2. *Places where truth meets life*
3. *Experience healthy conflict*
4. *Provide well-balanced shepherding:* so that people can be both cared for and disciplined.

Needs and variety necessary:

⁷⁷ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p23.

⁷⁸ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.145.

⁷⁹ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.21.

⁸⁰ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.55.

A variety of small group types are necessary to meet individual needs of believers as well as diverse needs of the body as a whole.⁸¹

Donahue lists 5 of the typical group 'types' at Willow Creek:

1. *Disciple-making Groups*: specifically for discipling others
2. *Community Groups*: build community and invite new members
3. *Service Groups*: complete service tasks and invite new members
4. *Seeker Groups*: explain the gospel and disciple new believers
5. *Support Groups*: support for those working through issues

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Intentional leadership development:

Within the meta-church model leadership development is intentional (both by small group leaders to apprentices, and by staff to leaders). Leaders, with direction and support of staff, are responsible to identify potential leaders and disciple them in the direction of small group leadership.

Qualifications:

Donahue lists 7 qualifications of a small group leader:⁸²

1. *A Christ follower*: a mature believer
2. *Depth of Christian character*
3. *Called to use their gifts in shepherd ministry*
4. *Competence to lead and guide a group*
5. *Having a compatible temperament and passion for this particular ministry*
6. *Committed to the task of seeing others grow*
7. *Having the capacity* i.e. time, energy and resources, to fulfil the ministry

Apprentice programs are vital in order to foster the development of emerging leaders and multiply small group ministry.

B: Number:

Leader + apprentice + host:

Each group consists of an active leader, at least one apprentice and a host/hostess. No groups start without at least one apprentice per group.

2. Function:

Facilitator, nurturer, trainer, shepherd and 'birthing' agent:

Small group leaders role is to facilitate group members "*growth in Christlike character through learning, loving one another, and contributing themselves and their resources*".⁸³ The leader is responsible for caring for and nurturing group members. It is also the leader's responsibility to recruit and mentor an apprentice, attend training and plan the group's 'birthing' process.

3. Training:

Quality determines outcome:

"*The small group ministry in a church rises and falls on the quality of its leaders*".⁸⁴ Donahue and Robinson believe that the future of a church's small group ministry rests on the small group leader's shoulders. Therefore

⁸¹ Building a Church of Small Groups: Graph p.183. Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p. 23,28.

⁸² Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.38f.

⁸³ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.23.

⁸⁴ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.123.

the criteria, selection, training and follow-up coaching of small group leaders is a non-negotiable of effective small group ministry.

Support, skills and vision casting:

The priority of church leaders must be the support and training of small group leaders. Training should encompass skills & vision casting. Small group leaders are also allocated a coach for encouragement and accountability.

Coaches work with no more than 5 small group leaders at any one time. Coaches have oversight by a staff person, division leader or small group co-ordinator.⁸⁵

Span of care:

Span of care right across the church, whether coaches to leaders or leaders to small group members, must always be no more than 1:10.⁸⁶

**Note: Donahue & Robinson draw much of their leadership training philosophy and emphasis from Carl George's "Nine Keys To Effective Small Group Leadership"*

B: BIBLE/PRAYER:

1. Teaching:

Discipling is best done in groups not 1-1:

Donahue believes, that in order to avoid cloning Christians. That 1-1 discipling is best done within a small group context where individual believers are taught, mentored, loved, encouraged and exhorted by many brothers and sisters in Christ.⁸⁷

Using the example of Jesus and Peter, Paul and Timothy, Donahue argues that 1-1 ministry is only used in leadership contexts not for basic discipleship.

Shepherding plans for group members:

Donahue outlines a framework shepherding plan that all small group leaders can use to help them set individual discipleship goals for their group members.⁸⁸

2. Bible Study:

Content according to type:

The curriculum is set according to the particular group 'type' (see section above).

'Disciple-making' groups have a set curriculum, in 'community and service' groups the curriculum is worked out between leaders and coaches, 'seeker' groups are governed by member questions, and in 'support' groups, content is determined by the ministry leaders. Guidance is given to leaders on how to choose the right curriculum and materials for their particular group.⁸⁹

3. Prayer:

Is considered a critical part of the spiritual growth and therefore should have an important place within small group life. A section is dedicated specifically on issues of small group prayer in the book.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

Donahue and Robinson call the church to return to "authentic spiritual community with Christ and others" and in order to do so small group values and practices must change to achieve this kind of spiritual community.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: See diagram p. 31.

⁸⁶ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.23.

⁸⁷ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.145.

⁸⁸ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.146.

⁸⁹ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.183f. Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.99f.

⁹⁰ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.57.

They suggest that 5 practices are absolutely necessary for any group to build authentic relationships: ⁹¹

1. *Self-disclosure*: to know and be known by *appropriate* self-disclosure
2. *Care giving*: to love and be loved by serving the other first, and by thoughtful listening and action
3. *Humility*: to serve and be served
4. *Truth-telling*: to admonish and be admonished (i.e. a loving call to change), speaking and hearing the truth
5. *Affirmation*: to celebrate and be celebrated by encouraging and affirming others

2. Support:

Though every small group member is expected to offer some care and support to fellow members, the group leaders carry primary responsibility for member nurture and care. This is why there is a strict '*span of care*' ratio of 1:10. Leaders are not expected take the role of counsellor or therapist.

3 types of care:

Donahue distinguishes 3 levels of fundamental care giving: *primary*, *mutual* and *back up* care.

1. *Primary care*: the normal level of support, care and nurture provided for group members.
2. *Mutual care*: the support and mutually interactive care members provide for each other, as in Gal 6:2.
3. *Back up care*: is done with the advice and support of the 'coach' who helps the leader to work out an appropriate 'care strategy'.

In exceptional crisis care situations, the first point of call is also the coach.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

As part of a '*Shepherding Plan*' for each group member, group members discuss how they might serve in various ministries of the church together, as well as considering how they might extend compassion as a group locally and globally. ⁹²

*Ministry:

As part of a '*Shepherding Plan*' for each group member, group members are encouraged to explore how they can be using their gifts to serve the wider body of Christ and how they can be encouraging fellow group members to do the same. Groups also discuss how they might serve in various ministries of the church together, as well as considering how they might engage in ministry as a group locally and globally. ⁹³

EVALUATION:

Willow Creek has developed very specific tools for groups and group leaders for feedback and evaluation. ⁹⁴

1. Small Gps:

A '*Planning For Change*' tool is provided every 6 months to help groups discuss their growth and maturity as a group. The tool is optional and is completed by the leader and the group together. There's also an optional '*Leader Feedback & Development*' tool offered twice a year for members, apprentices and Coaches to provide feedback to help leaders build on strengths and improve skills.

2. Leaders:

Leaders and apprentices are provided with a compulsory '*Touching Base*' form monthly that helps them summarize meeting activity, apprentice development, make future plans, provide prayer requests and engage in celebration.

⁹¹ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.60f.

⁹² Building a Church of Small Groups: p.146.

⁹³ Building a Church of Small Groups: p.136. Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.146.

⁹⁴ Leading Life Changing Small Groups: p.137f.

OTHER:

Span of care:

Donahue strictly enforces a strict 'span of care' ratio of 1:10, 10 the absolute maximum.

Multiplication using apprentices/ open chair for newcomers or enquirers:

The meta-church model believes that small groups do not exist for themselves but should encompass a strategy for growth and reproduction. Part of the responsibility of leaders is to birth a new group assisted by an apprentice leader. The use of the open chair is utilized to allow for consistent, well-paced group growth and enables newcomers and enquiring seekers to find a group.

Affinity groups:

Groups typically form around areas of affinity such as marital status, age, ministry, task, personal need, life stage etc.

Covenants to communicate vision, expectation and accountability:

Donahue believes all Christian groups need to develop a vision and of what they want to become and clear objectives that enable them to achieve that end. Developing a 'group covenant' becomes an expression of group values, expectations and behaviours for which group members can hold each other accountable. Donahue suggests that keys to good covenant formation should encompass values, ownership statements and logistical issues. Covenants should be formed over time, involve everyone and be reaffirmed regularly.

Resources:

The book provides information and instruction on how to study the Bible, how to share your faith, stages' learning styles and development of group life, as well as guidance on how to identify, recruit and train apprentice leaders. It provides lots of practical tips and suggestions, charts, checklists, role job descriptions, questioning skills, prayer activities, icebreakers etc. There's a Q & A and additional resource list placed at the end of each chapter outlining specific references related to particular topic/concept at hand.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Growing Christians In Small Groups*: J. Mallison (1989, AUS)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Aim: Resourcing a small group ministry:

Probably one of the most comprehensive books on the topic of small groups to come out of the 80's, Mallison aims to *provide a resource that will enable anyone to commence and maintain an effective small group.*⁹⁵

Mallison works towards this aim by exploring the value and purpose of a small group ministry from a Biblical, historical and community based perspective, as well as providing a practical resource guide on the 'how to' of small group ministry for group leaders.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Biblical and historical motivation for adopting small groups:

Mallison proposes 3 reasons churches should feel compelled to adopt small group ministry- the example of Christ in his strategy for ministry, the example of the early household church movement in Acts and the history of renewal and revival in the church.⁹⁶

Christian groups must be distinct:

Mallison views small groups as basic building blocks in the life of a local congregation, and fundamental to the development of individual and corporate Christian lifestyle. As such, Christian small groups must be distinct in their focus and purpose.

⁹⁵ Growing Christians In Small Groups: John Mallison (Homebush West: Anzea, 1989) p.13.

⁹⁶ Growing Christians In Small Groups: p.3f.

Mallison views the *prime purpose* of Christian small groups to be the following: ⁹⁷

1. *Where Christ is honoured and obeyed*
2. *In fellowship together, to gather under the authority of God's Word and apply it to life*
3. *To bring unbelievers to a living faith in Christ through prayer & evangelism*
4. *To take responsibility to minister to each other and to enable corporate accountability*
5. *To prepare each other for mission in the world (i.e. social concern locally and globally)*

Small Groups may vary in type:

Mallison believes that there can be many kinds of 'general' small groups that can function in the Christian church to meet the varying needs of members (eg. task, friendship, interest, discussion, Bible study, personal development, support, *koinonia* (communal fellowship, evangelism, prayer and mission). The book doesn't focus on these particular type of groups.

Small Groups are a key source of church growth and renewal:

Mallison is principally concerned with small groups related to church growth and renewal, of which he lists 7- 'Contact' and 'Evangelistic' Groups that bridge relationships with unbelievers and explain the gospel, 'Nurture' and 'Growth' groups to orient new believers and grow Christians, the 'Growth Leaders' Cell' to develop, teach, train and encourage small group leaders, and lastly 'Evangelistic Prayer Triplets'.

Wrong ministry motives and lack of practicing basic fundamentals cause group failure:

Mallison believes the reasons small groups often fail to meet expectations is because participants haven't understood, or put into practice, certain *basic principles* that keep group life vital. Small group ministry is also hindered by churches that use small groups as a gimmick to get lapsing members back on the rails, or to prop up ailing structures. ⁹⁸

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Mallison suggests 3 criteria in leaders selection:

1. *A person who loves Jesus:* growing and observing spiritual disciplines
2. *A person who loves people:* care concern, availability and servant heart
3. *A person who loves Christ's church:* loyalty, commitment to church's growth and unity

A person is then invited by the leadership team to lead, having first explained to them what role and responsibilities are involved.

B: Number:

2. Function:

Facilitator-enablers

Mallison sees the function of small group leaders as 'facilitator-enablers' who are open to self-disclosure and have good communication skills. Mallison recognises the need for some formal teaching within the informality of small group meetings. At times meaning the leader must occasionally adopt the role of a teacher

3. Training:

Both pre-service and in-service training:

Training for leaders should involve both pre-service and in-service training.

Training enables clear co-ordination of small groups as well as providing a forum that helps group leaders maintain a common sense of direction.

⁹⁷ Growing Christians In Small Groups: p.7f.

⁹⁸ Growing Christians In Small Groups: p.2.

Training should encompass regular group and leadership evaluation (both formal and informal) skills and troubleshooting as well as the support and pastoral care of leaders.⁹⁹

Oversight co-ordinator:

Mallison recommends that once there are enough small groups in a church there should be an appointed person to train and pastor leaders.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

Mallison recognises the need for some formal teaching within the informality of small group meetings. At times meaning the leader must occasionally adopt the role of a teacher

3. Prayer:

Personal and corporate prayer:

Small groups provide opportunity to explore the meaning and purpose of prayer, they're ideal situations in which to provide help for people in personal & corporate prayer. (Mallison is so committed to encouraging community prayer life he dedicates 2 chapters on the subject, encompassing prayer ideas, forms of praying and keys for effective prayer cells).

Evangelistic prayer triplets:

Mallison suggests that groups adopt the practice of instituting *evangelistic prayer triplets* within their group to regularly pray for unbelieving friends. Training offered should vary from ministry to ministry depending on the competency and experience of leaders. Training should also encompass the trainer modelling good leadership style, skills and attitudes.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

2. Support:

Members should be encouraged to support and care for each other beyond the small group meeting time both practically & personally.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

***Mission:**

Mallison believes that few churches realise the potential of small groups for evangelism and service in the community. He stresses the need for small groups to function as *launching pads for mission*, and not become retreat pods from the world.

Evangelistic prayer triplets:

Mallison suggests that groups adopt the practice of instituting evangelistic prayer triplets within their group to regularly pray for unbelieving friends.

***Ministry:**

Small groups should be encouraged to serve the church community in some way, not just individually but also take on some form of Christian service as a group.

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

⁹⁹ Growing Christians In Small Groups: p.32f.

Group members fill in questionnaires related to their experience of group life to be passed on to group leaders as part of their leadership training and evaluation. Leaders are also encouraged to regularly invite feedback from members on an informal basis.

2. Leaders:

Mallison places a high emphasis on creating avenues and opportunities to evaluate group life and leadership. He sees evaluation as vital to maintaining healthy small groups in the church.

The book makes 4 suggestions regarding areas that need evaluation: ¹⁰⁰

1. *Purpose*: was it achieved?
2. *Content*: what was learned?
3. *Group Process*: how well did the group work together?
4. *Personal Growth*: what happened with individuals?

In-service training should encompass regular leadership evaluation (both formal and informal). Mallison uses a checklist covering different facets of group life for leaders to use, as well as feedback from questionnaires filled in by small group members.

Evaluation retreats:

Mallison also argues the value of holding annual evaluation and planning retreats for both members and leaders where questionnaires are filled in by leaders and members beforehand and then processed and discussed over the retreat.

OTHER:

Span of care: 6-12 max

Covenants to communicate expectations and accountability:

Mallison believes that groups often fail because of unclarified or competing expectations. Mallison argues that groups need clear and agreed upon purpose that's generated from within the group, and to which the group holds each other accountable. The Book offers various models of covenanting.

Evangelistic 'empty chair':

An empty chair should be placed as a reminder to group members of the unsaved and to urge them to pray and work towards filling the chair.

Multiplication:

Mallison believes that one of the soundest strategies for church growth is based on the establishment and expansion of small groups. A church committed to growth can experience both quality and quantity growth through a well thought out and processes small group strategy, with the purpose of birthing built into the way the small group functions.

Resource:

Mallison's book canvasses an enormous array of input and information, touching on everything from - how to study the Bible, how to use small groups for evangelism, leadership styles, people needs, communication skills and group dynamics, stages and development of group life, as well as guidance on how to select and develop a small group leadership team etc.

The book also includes a list of references related to each topic area at the end of each chapter as well as a number of programme ideas, meeting and leader checklists in the appendices.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *The Big Book on Small Groups* : J. Arnold (1992, USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Thesis: The 'why' of small group ministry:

¹⁰⁰ Growing Christians In Small Groups: -.33.

Arnold states clearly that although the book contains some 'how-to' of small group ministry that's not its primary aim. More important are the *principles that underlie the 'why'* of small group ministry.

Arnold lists 3 key purposes centring on *disciple making, leadership and community*:

1. *Discipleship*: following on from Matt 28 the key function of the church (and therefore small groups) is to make disciples.
2. *Leadership*: Disciples need disciple-makers. Therefore leadership is essential to small group ministry.
3. *Community*: people only learn to grow in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. In this regard, community is not one aspect of group life it is the very structure within which the group operates.

Aim:

Therefore the goal of the book is to help *equip effective leaders 'make disciples'* through small groups.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Disciple-making is the goal and leadership the foundation:

Arnold works towards this aim by exploring the necessity of *disciple-making* from a Biblical, historical and community based perspective. Arnold's belief is that the *goal* of small group ministry *is discipleship*; its foundation *is leadership*, and the structure of that small group leadership *is community*.

His belief is that this disciple-making activity must be *intentional* in order for small groups to take root and grow.
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Defining small group ministry:

Arnold defines a small group as: "*an intentional gathering of three to twelve people who commit themselves to work together to become better disciples of Jesus Christ*".

Small Groups may vary in type but must share the same goal of disciple growth:

Within the broad context of the stated definition, small groups may vary in type assuming a variety of formats and focuses (e.g. covenant, discipleship, ministry, special needs, affinity, house church groups etc). All groups must however be marked by the same commitment to share the process of disciple growth.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Qualities:

Leaders should demonstrate the following character qualities:

1. *Character evidenced in their relation to God*: mature, obedient & humble
2. *Character evidenced in their personal life*: aware of strengths/weaknesses, servant hearted, not afraid to take responsible risks, ethical.
3. *Character evidenced in their relationships with others*: nurturing, sensitive listener, honest openness, available to lead.

B: Number:

2. Function:

Lead, recruit and outreach: Leaders role is to co-ordinate and lead meetings, recruit members, develop apprentices from within the group and lead the group towards outreach. ¹⁰²

101 The Big Book on Small Groups: Jeffrey Arnold (IVP, 1992) p.20.

102 The Big Book on Small Groups: p.253.

3. Training:

The book a leader's training resource:

The book itself is designed to also function as a 13wk leaders training resource.

It's suggested that either the minister or a competent lay leader direct the course training.

B: BIBLE/PRAYER:

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

3. Prayer:

Arnold's belief is that "*true prayer belongs in small groups because its effects are enhanced in community*".¹⁰³ Prayer activity allows groups to learn about God and also helps members get to know each other better. Arnold's belief is that prayer also gives structure to the rejoicing, suffering body of Christ spoken of in 1 Cor 12, where believers identify with each other's struggles and joys.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

2. Support:

4 basic care needs to address:

Arnold believes that there are 4 basic individual care needs small groups must address in love:¹⁰⁴

The need for...

1. *Reality*: helping members live obediently by providing them with the reality as God defines it i.e. His truths coupled with the challenge of life in a sinful fallen world.
2. *Acceptance*: nurturing happens when individuals learn to accept themselves, and others before God.
3. *Stimulation*: motivating members to growth by engaging with inspiring role models, as well as stimulation in knowledge & guided application.
4. *Relating*: loving, caring and genuine concern from leaders.

Not counsellors:

Small groups should not become therapy groups nor leaders professional counsellors.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

Within the group: Arnold's belief is that small groups can be extremely effective means through which people can be brought to Christ.¹⁰⁵ Group members pray for non-christian contacts that could be invited into the group. They also recommend the 'evangelistic empty chair' method.

Beyond the group: Groups are also encouraged to foster mission concern and evangelistic outreach as a group beyond group time.

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

2. Leaders:

¹⁰³ The Big Book on Small Groups: p.157.

¹⁰⁴ The Big Book on Small Groups: p.88f.

¹⁰⁵ The Big Book on Small Groups: p.163.

Leaders are provided with a guided self-evaluation form to fill in on a regular basis, as well as a monthly report to submit to the small groups co-ordinator/overseer. ¹⁰⁶

OTHER:

Covenants to communicate group nature and member requirements:

Groups should be encouraged to adopt a clear and concise covenant that communicates the nature of the group and its membership requirements.

Evangelistic 'empty chair':

An empty chair should be placed as a reminder to group members of the unsaved and to urge them to pray and work towards filling the chair.

Resource:

The book is Leaders to also function as a resource for group leaders with leaders notes for every chapter, job descriptions, sample studies, small group activities, meeting guidelines, managing group dynamics and pastoral needs as well as tips on the 'how to' of small group ministry. Each chapter ends with questions for discussion and reflection on its topic area.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *How To Lead Small Groups* : N. McBride (1990: USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

McBride's book has primarily been written for the small group leader, whether new or veteran. It has a threefold aim: to set forth a *Biblical basis* for small groups, to provide a basic introduction to *small group dynamics*, and to present a sampling of *topics, methods, tasks and skills* associated with leading small groups.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Part of an overall philosophy of disciple-making:

McBride's belief is that small groups cannot *do* or *be* all things, but needs to be part of an overall philosophy of ministry that includes activities designed to contribute to the *disciple-making* process. ¹⁰⁷

Biblical model and mandate:

McBride's belief is that small group ministry is not a programmatic fad but firmly founded on a *biblical base*, citing the O.T tribal structure, the model of Jesus' ministry, the household church in Acts, the Great Commission and N.T 'one another commands' as examples.

Holy Spirit driven:

McBride also believes the *Holy Spirit* is the "*unseen but present group member and leader*" and we serve as his "*co-leader, the human instrument of his guidance and direction*".

Therefore our primary role as leaders is to "*facilitate the Holy Spirit's ministry in members lives*" through planning and guiding the group activities. In this regard the Holy Spirit performs 7 ministries within a small group, he indwells, guides, teaches, convicts, intercedes, enables and unifies. ¹⁰⁸

Defining small group ministry:

McBride offers this definition of a small group: "*a voluntary intentional gathering of three to twelve people regularly meeting together with the shared goal of mutual Christian edification and fellowship*". McBride then goes on to unpack this definition. ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ The Big Book on Small Groups: See sample on p. 254.

¹⁰⁷ How To Lead Small Groups: Neal F. McBride (Colorado: Navpress, 1990) p.69.

¹⁰⁸ How To Lead Small Groups: p.22f.

¹⁰⁹ How To Lead Small Groups: p. 24f.

Different group types but same goals:

McBride recognises that although there may be different types of small groups (eg. process oriented, content oriented, task oriented or need oriented) it is fundamental that for the purposes of '*glorifying God*' (1 Cor 10:31) they all share the same 4 basic goals:

1. *To foster biblical love*
2. *To promote fellowship*
3. *To build the body* (whether it be evangelism or discipling)
4. *To nurture spiritual gifts* (each one must use their gifts for ministry service)

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Approval and selection:

Leaders serve for a minimum of 1 year after approval by the elders.

Qualifications:

McBride believes that every leadership position in the local church has 2 fundamental attributes- *qualifications for service* and the *specific tasks*, or job description, and small group leaders are no exception.

McBride outlines **6** indispensable qualifications all small group leaders should possess.¹¹⁰

1. *An understanding of spiritual principles:* i.e. spiritual maturity (1Tim 5:22)
2. *A growing relationship with Christ:* evidenced to all who will model themselves on the leader (2Pet 3:18).
3. *A commitment to caring for people:* a willingness to offer care, support and encouragement to others (1 Cor 12:25).
4. *A desire to serve:* Willing to undertake the responsibilities it entails (Gal 5:13)
5. *A willingness to learn:* willingness to grow into the role (Eph 5:10)
6. *A resolve to spend the necessary time:*

Prep expectations:

Leaders are expected to invest a minimum of 2 hrs per week (excluding meetings) in preparation and group member contacts.

Accountability and support:

Group leaders are accountable to the small group steering (guidance) committee.

The steering committee makes monthly contact with every small group leader, provides resources, training and other assistance as needed.

B: Number:

2. Function:

Definition of a small group leader:

McBride defines a small group leader as: "*the person(s) appointed and recognised to serve the group by enabling the members to achieve their purpose(s) for being in a group*".¹¹¹

Function- oversight and facilitation:

The group leaders primary role is to give oversight and leadership to the group by leading and enabling group discussion, support and group management. Their role is also to follow up group members who miss meetings.

¹¹⁰ How To Lead Small Groups: p.29f.

¹¹¹ How To Lead Small Groups; p. 31.

Distribute leadership amongst members:

Although Mc Bride strongly believes in an observable and delegated leader for small groups, he also advocates some leadership be distributed across small group members for healthy group growth and leadership formation.
112

3. Training:

Pre-training and follow-up meetings compulsory:

Leaders are required to attend an initial leadership training workshop and subsequent **STP** (*sharing, tips and prayer*) leaders meetings every 6-8 weeks.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

Depends on group type:

The materials chosen and the emphasis on them will be dependent on the group type (i.e. *process, task, content or need*).

4 Steps of study for all groups:

Though the groups may operate on different types, the Study sessions all contain the same 4 basic steps.

1. Approach the Word
2. Explore the Word
3. Discover the Word
4. Apply the Word.

3. Prayer:

Regardless of group type, McBride views prayer as an essential component of healthy small group activity. The leaders role is to help members have positive experiences of group prayer. Each group focuses on 5 general aspects of prayer together.

1. Praise
2. Thanksgiving
3. Confession
4. Prayer for others
5. Prayer for personal needs

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

McBride is one of the few authors to specifically note anything about the place or importance of sharing within a small group (though in other literature it is assumed). McBride suggests that sharing may take place at different points within a group and can be identified by 4 distinct levels: ¹¹³

1. *Level 1: Non-personal general information:* casual sharing of facts beyond the personal
2. *Level 2: Non-personal related information:* everyday circumstances related to the sharer
3. *Level 3: Personal factual Information:* disclosing of casual personal facts about self
4. *Level 4: Personal intimate information:* feelings, behaviours, emotions and experiences.

The more a group is able to advance through the stages of a group life, the more likely they are to share at a more advanced level.

2. Support:

112 How To Lead Small Groups: p.61.

113 How To Lead Small Groups: p. 95.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

As part of the 4 goals for small groups, groups and group members are encouraged to engage in activities to *extend and build the body* (whether it be evangelism or discipling)

*Ministry:

As part of the 4 goals for small groups, groups and group members are encouraged to engage in activities to *nurture spiritual gifts* (each one must use their gifts for ministry service)

EVALUATION:

Biblical rationale:

McBride dedicates a whole chapter to evaluating small groups.¹¹⁴ Convassing the what, when, why and how of the evaluation process, as well as suggesting reasons why ministers don't evaluate their small group ministries. McBride goes so far as to offer a biblical rationale for justifying its necessity.¹¹⁵

2 Stages of evaluation:

McBride suggests that evaluation at a formal level takes place at 2 times:

1. *During the life of a group (formative):* Making decisions about small group relationships, processes and activities while they can still be modified.
2. *As a final activity as the group draws to a close (summative):* Making decisions about the relationships, processes and activities that took place in the group with a view to improving future groups or to abandon groups all together.

2 areas of evaluation:

McBride suggests that 4 main areas of group evaluation are necessary:

1. *Details:* practical components of meeting time, place etc.
2. *Format:* how the time is divided and specific activities within the time structure
3. *Relationships:* the level of communication, care, sharing between members etc.
4. *Leadership:* how the leader sets tone, model process, motivates members, arranges details etc.,

External versus internal evaluation:

McBride suggests that it can be useful to have someone external from the group conduct the evaluation process. In McBride's opinion, external evaluators work best in the *summative* context, whilst internal evaluation works best during the *formative* process.

1. Small Gps:

At each stage of the evaluation phases (listed below) leaders are encouraged to seek input and feedback (both formal & informal) from group members.

2. Leaders:

Leaders are required to submit a monthly progress report on behalf of the group, as well as a 6month group calendar. McBride provides a detailed outline of forming a small group evaluation process for leaders using carefully defined steps based on 3 evaluation phases...¹¹⁶

1. *The planning Phase:* preparing to evaluate
2. *The process phase:* acquiring needed information
3. *The product phase:* making and communicating judgement decisions

Leaders are encouraged to develop checklists, keep records, use rating scales and anecdotal evidence as part of collecting useful feedback & evaluation data.

¹¹⁴ How To Lead Small Groups: p.117f.

¹¹⁵ How To Lead Small Groups: p. 120.

¹¹⁶ How To Lead Small Groups: p.126f.

OTHER:

Span of care:

Maximum of 12 recommended. The bigger the group the more relationships need to be formed and maintained.

Self select groups:

McBride's preference is that because adults prefer making their own choices they should be able to select the group they want to join.

Age homogeneity only:

McBride prefers that groups be homogeneous in terms of age commonality (i.e. a 5-10 year spread) that facilitates closer friendships and quicker group development, but other factors do not matter.

Covenants for motivation, growth and direction:

As an essential part of the '*norming phase*' in small groups, covenants aim to progress a group through the *childhood phase* to maturity. Groups are encouraged to adopt a clear and concise *covenant* (or group agreement) that communicates the nature of the group and its membership requirements. McBride believes that members are more highly motivated and perform more efficiently when a group possess clear goals and understandings. The Book offers various models of covenanting.

Resources:

The book provides information, tools and checklists on leadership skills, covenanting, group stages, handling conflict, questioning techniques, group dynamics, problem solving, as well as material on leadership styles and group evaluation.

LITERATURE SOURCES:

The Disciple Making Pastor: (1999)

& The Disciple Making Church: B. Hull (1990: USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Disciple-making for mission and maturity:

Both Hull's books- the '*Disciple Making Pastor*' (DMP) and The '*Disciple Making Church*' (DMC) canvass the same theme with a slightly different focus, and that is the necessity, process and practice of *disciple-making* for true individual and corporate growth of the church.

Hull's belief is that the evangelical church is in *crisis*, giving in to the consumer '*what-can-the-church-do-for-me*' syndrome, an unhealthy preoccupation with numbers in seats over real spiritual growth, and loss of its core identity that the church exists, not for itself but *for mission*. For Hull, the cure is found in returning to the call of the Great commission, to be *making-disciples and ministry multiplication* as the fundamental means of reaching the world and maturing the saints.¹¹⁷

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Vehicles for disciple-making:

Hull describes disciple making in 3 forms: the large group, the small group, and 1-1. He argues from Christ's example with the disciples, that Jesus' intentional and prioritised training of a small group of 12 is a case for viewing small groups as the *primary discipling vehicle* for 'full orb'd disciple-making'.¹¹⁸

Hull's belief is that effective small groups possess all the necessary ingredients to fully teach people to obey, that is, *to make disciples* (i.e. ingredients of *skill development, relationships, accountability and group outreach projects*).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ The Disciple Making Pastor: Bill Hull (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1999) p.11f.

¹¹⁸ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.153.

¹¹⁹ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.176

Definition of small group:

DMC defines a small group as "an intentional gathering of 3-14 people who meet on a regular basis, with the common purpose of inviting the people they love to join them in discovering and growing in the adventure of a Christ-honouring life-style at work, in family life, and with extended family members".¹²⁰

2 year cell group 'cycle':

In his 2nd book 'The Disciple making Church' Hull outlines a very specific structure for growing and developing a small group ministry structure within a church. Hull adopts a very specific cell based ministry structure that sets small groups within a 'mini-congregational' structure within the larger church setting (much like Larson's ABF concept).

The small groups cycle through a 2year program: incorporating both Bible study, skills training and development in *disciple-making*.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

The necessity of selection:

Because the ultimate goal is to *mature the saints* and *multiply the ministry*, Hull therefore takes leadership and leadership selection very seriously. Selection for leadership is made from among a pool of people who have gone through training.

Hull refers to the Biblical principle of leadership selection and also cites 5 reasons why the careful selection of leaders is critical:¹²¹

1. *It protects the product:* not reducing the leadership of Christian life or witness to the lowest common denominator but to mature, experienced, committed leadership.
2. *It produces a good product:* The church will grow & the integrity crucial to multiplication is maintained.
3. *It protects the church from trouble:* Leadership is based on objective Biblical criteria reducing the likely accusation of favouritism.
4. *It models the objective:* This is true Christian parenting. Teachers model their teaching.
5. *Something to aspire to:* The disciple becomes like their teacher.

B: Number:

Leader + apprentice

2. Function:

Oversight, training and disciple-making:

The responsibilities of the small group leader are to:¹²²

1. *Create an environment for personal growth:* through Bible-study, prayer, care and worship
2. *Work through others to care for the group:* by coaching group members how to care for each other and have a concern for the lost (the 'not yet' disciples)

¹²⁰ The Disciple Making Church: Bill Hull (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1990) p.125.

¹²¹ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.147f.

¹²² The Disciple Making Church: p.234.

3. *Oversee group progress*: preparing studies, keeping group prayer journals, attending to own spiritual disciplines
4. *Reproduce self*: training and recruiting of apprentices

3. Training:

Again, because the ultimate goal is to *mature the saints* and *multiply the ministry*, Hull believes strongly in *intentional* training and preparation of leaders for ministry.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

Limited 1-1:

Hull de-emphasises the role and significance of all 1-1 ministry, except for those who demonstrate leadership potential. He recommends that some 1-1 be done with every group member to deal with issues as they arise.¹²³

2. Bible Study:

Differing content for differing levels of growth:¹²⁴

Hull proposes different material appropriate for each stage of Christian growth and discipleship development.

1. *Beginners*: simple, relational forms of study designed for group building & spiritual formation
2. *Continuing groups*: deeper Bible study that challenges member to wrestle with their faith and with their life together as a group.
3. *Mature*: material that helps members explore faith and also mission and the call to disciple-making

Basic skills and assignments:

Group members are taught basic Bible-study skills, which are reinforced by weekly assignments. The ultimate goal is that members become self-feeding and they understand the major themes of scripture.

3. Prayer:

Skill development:

Hull believes an important aspect of *skill development* for small group members is learning how to pray and keeping records of how God answers those prayers.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

Skill development:

Hull believes an important aspect of *skill development* for small group members is learning how to share one's life with others, being open, learning to love others in a concrete fashion and experiencing the benefits of supporting others.¹²⁵

2. Support:

Decentralization of pastoral care through small groups:

Hull is a strong believer in the decentralization of pastoral care.

Using Eph 4:11-12 as the cited text, Hull argues that a Pastor's primary role is teaching (leading, protecting feeding) and equipping the saints for ministry. Pastoring (*i.e. playing close attention to people and their needs*) is a corporate responsibility, it is part of the '*works of service*' given over to the entire body of Christ.¹²⁶

¹²³ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.173f.

¹²⁴ The Disciple Making Church: p.240.

¹²⁵ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.176.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

Attitude adjustment and skill development:

Hull believes an important aspect of *skill development* for small group members is *outreach*. The training consists of both *attitude adjustment* (i.e. concern for the lost, de-privatising of faith) and *skill development* –learning to tell their own stories, building bridges to non-Christians, and learning how to use basic evangelistic tools.

Hull believes that although this is the most difficult of the small group skill development that it is the most urgent & rewarding, without it: "*Bible-study is academic, prayer is boring, and fellowship is superficial. Without outreach, the church has failed, and Christians fail*".¹²⁷

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Covenants for peer pressure and development in spiritual disciplines:

Hull believes that forming group covenants not only sets right expectations regarding the purpose, practice and values for group members, but also generates an in-built peer pressure amongst group members to maintain those commitments.

Hull also believes that setting clear commitments and spiritual/relational objectives help Christians take spiritual disciplines seriously.

Evaluating next step to spiritual growth and disciple-making:

At the end of every 2year small group cycle each member is assessed as a means of encouraging the next step in the disciple-making process.

Mini-congregations for pastoral care:

Similar to Larson's ABF idea, Hull suggests the development of '*mini-congregations*' (40-70) within the larger church congregation in order to more effectively encourage members to take on the responsibility for pastoral care and meeting the practical needs of each other. Much like Larson's model, each mini-congregation has its own leadership team & allocated small groups.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups:*

N. Searcy & K. Thomas (2008, USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Challenging false assumptions and calling for paradigm shift:

Searcy and Thomas believe that the failure of small group ministry is that many of our small group systems make wrong assumptions about groups. Their goal is to challenge those assumptions, re-think small group

¹²⁶ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.181.

¹²⁷ The Disciple Making Pastor: p.176.

methodology, and design a system that "keeps with the New Testament integrity of small groups while accomplishing New Testament results".¹²⁸

With this goal in mind, Searcy and Thomas outline a small group ministry system aimed at being 'simple and reproducible', a system that enables small groups to become "self-sustaining and life changing".¹²⁹

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Searcy and Thomas challenge conventional wisdom on small group strategy and call for a *paradigm shift* in traditional thinking about small group structure, strategy and methodology. To do so they set forth **12 'big ideas'** (or paradigm shifts) aimed at provoking leaders to re-think small group ministry approaches.

They challenge readers to begin thinking...

Methodology:

1. **From inside out not outside in:**

For growth and increased participation, focus energy on signing up new people, fringe members, irregular attenders, those 'not yet assimilated'. As opposed to focussing on re-signing existing committed members. The goal is to start moving members from 'the crowd' to 'the core'.

2. **Think larger not smaller:**

Have larger small groups (i.e. 12-15) than smaller ones. Searcy and Thomas believe this counters the impact of irregular attenders, there's less leader work to generate discussion and participation, and diffuses the impact of tricky personalities.

3. **Think friends not intimacy:**

The theory is we tend to *undersell* the importance of basic friendships and social relationships and *oversell* the importance of personal and intimate relationships in small groups.

It's unhelpful to promote small groups as the best place to form intimate relationships. It fosters unhelpful focus and expectation, forced or contrived intimacy, and often generates disappointment and reduced spiritual growth as a result. The goal is that small groups become places to connect with people, form new, basic godly friendships, with a focus on growing together spiritually in a social context.

**Note: they outline some very interesting data on the value and place of varying forms of 'physical and social space'.¹³⁰*

Structure:

4. **Think short-term not long term:**

In releasing small groups from the goal that they need to exist for creating intimate relationships enables greater freedom to structure small groups more effectively to suit their greater purpose i.e. spiritual growth and maximum congregational participation.

In this regard short-term groups are more effective than long-term groups. Adopting the education system's principle of 'stress and release'. Searcy and Thomas believe we grow most effectively in a 'time bound' semester-based system. It encourages greater 'sign-up' participation levels and precludes group stagnation. Life, and small groups should be a series of *sprints* not *marathons*.

***Note:** Searcy and Thomas believe this short-term approach is especially effective in getting more men to participate.

5. **Think promotion months not on-going sign ups:**

If Churches adopt a 'semester based small group system' they should also adopt a promotion month system rather than a 'join any time' approach. The aim = the month is exclusively dedicated to raise

128 Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups: Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas (California: Regal, 2008) p.6.

129 Activate: p. 5.

130 Activate: p.21f.

small group excitement by utilizing positive peer pressure, sermons, testimonies, emails, promos and personal invites to get as many new or fringe members engaged.

"Every newcomer God entrusts to your church should receive a clear, heartfelt invitation to be in a group".¹³¹

6. Think church 'of' small groups not 'with' small groups:

Searcy and Thomas believe that the small group ministry is MOST effective when small groups are at the core and they don't have to compete with other competing church programs.

Unlike the *buffet* approach that use small groups as an 'add-on' to church life, this system focuses on and runs all ministry through the small group system.

The church's two-fold focus is the *weekend service + small groups*.

To reduce all other potential options & competing activities to ensure all other ministries and events are subservient to that focus.

Strategy:

7. Think easy not hard:

Searcy and Thomas believe that every step we add to the sign-up process we lose a percentage of participation, therefore small groups should be '*easy to get into and easy to get out of*'. Easy to get into by establishing a '*one-step*' sign-up process (via church card or website) and easy to get out by setting solid *end times* and *end dates*.

8. Think ahead not behind:

Successful small group ministries don't just focus on the present but plan ahead. So momentum for a January start is already rolling 3-4 months before.

9. Think full staff participation not staff specialist:

Searcy and Thomas believe, that to have a ministry based around small groups every person on staff needs to have a part in it, especially the lead Pastor. The church's attitude toward small groups will be a direct reflection of the Senior Pastors attitude, and they will know what's important by what they see the Pastor be and do, not what they say. They buy into the leader as a person before they buy into that leader's vision.

The Pastor doesn't necessarily have to run the system but he has to be the no 1 champion and *promoter* of it, he has to be engaged in how it's *implemented*, and most importantly, he has to be *in* the system. Employing a staff person to assist in this ministry should be a secondary activity.

Leadership:

10. Think apprentice not expert:

Searcy and Thomas believe that serving as an apprentice/coordinator in a group will prepare potential leaders to lead a life changing small group on their own, regardless of how long they've been Christians or what their level of training & expertise. To do otherwise only limits the number of potential leaders to pool from.

They believe leaders are not raised through heavy training or leadership development programs but by the same method Jesus used with the disciples, by "*organic apprenticeship*".

11. Think decentralisation not staff control:

Groups grow faster and are healthier when we trust God with our volunteer leaders and when we trust our volunteers with our people. This means giving leaders some freedom to choose their own topic of study for 2 of 3 semesters (approved by staff) the last semester the whole church studies the *sermon-based material*.

12. Think leader multiplication not group multiplication:

131 Activate: p.180.

Through a semester-based system and the practice of apprenticing, groups are then multiplied naturally by multiplying leaders.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

*"If you take care of your group leaders, they will take care of your small groups system"*¹³²

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Requirements for potential leaders:

1. A follower of Jesus
2. Attends church faithfully
3. Has been to a small group & preferably as a co-ordinator
4. On track to church membership

B: Number:

Leader + Coordinator/apprentice

2. Function:

Discussion Facilitators:

Small groups are discussion based, not lecture based.

Leaders are asked to do 4 things as part of their leadership expectation:

1. Pray for group members daily
2. Lead the group
3. Meet with their team leader in a *Growth Group Huddle* once a semester
4. Work with their team leader and staff to form new groups from their current group each semester.

3. Training:

A half-day leaders training in the *nuts and bolts* of group management, role clarification, evangelism and pastoral care, vision casting and facilitation techniques.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

Leaders are free to choose their own topic of study, approved by staff, for 2 out of 3 semesters, the last semester the whole church studies the *sermon-based material*.

3. Prayer:

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

2. Support:

Leaders are ultimately responsible for their group members, but part of their role is to encourage group members to care for & support one another. Prayer is viewed as a significant means of offering pastoral support and care.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

¹³² Activate: p.222.

*Mission:

As part of its inbuilt DNA all groups are expected to be involved in a planned evangelism project once a semester.

*Ministry:

As part of its inbuilt DNA all groups are expected to be involved in a serving ministry together at least once a semester.

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

At the end of each semester all small group members are given a group evaluation form to complete. It asks them to assess everything from their own spiritual growth, their group experience & their intention to re-sign for groups in the following semester. ¹³³

2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Scalable growth and leadership structure:

Searcy and Thomas have developed a scalable growth and leadership structure for small group oversight and accountability.

The structure is as follows:

1. General manager of groups overseeing 5 coaches
2. One coach oversees 5 leaders
3. One team leader serves 5 growth group leaders
4. One growth group leader serves 15 group members

Covenants:

S&T believe that people grow best when accountability is high and the expectations are clear. That *people take seriously the expectations that you take seriously* and that *"agreements on the front end will prevent disagreements later"*. ¹³⁴

The group covenant is ultimately a spiritual growth tool. It should encompass issues related to commitment to attend, to encourage and pray for others and a willingness to explore next steps in spiritual growth. ¹³⁵

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group*

Culture: A. Stanley & B. Willits (2004, USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

The need to create 'authentic' community:

Stanley and Willits believe we're living in a culture that largely lives and works in relational isolation and we therefore craving meaningful relationships and community. Arguing from Gen 1-2, the Trinity and Jn 17, they posit the theory that *"God's biggest dream for us is authentic community – the kind of meaningful relationships that are best characterized by oneness with him and with one another"*. ¹³⁶

¹³³ Activate: p.96.

¹³⁴ Activate: p.194.

¹³⁵ Activate: p.199.

¹³⁶ Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture: Andy Stanley and Bill Willits (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2004) p.40.

The book aims to convince readers of the necessity and responsibility of the church to create that community, for it's only by building 'authentic Christian community' that true 'oneness and transformation' can be known or experienced. The book then outlines the practices that are needed to create such community.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

The role of small groups will be unclear without first defining the church mission, strategy and values:

A Church must ask itself 3 pivotal questions to determine how to conduct their ministries

1. *What do we want people to become?*
2. *What do we want people to do?*
3. *Where do we want people to go? (i.e. activity)*

Goal to 'make disciples':

Using Matt 28 as the defining text, the mission is to help individuals (believers and non) continue to take steps forward in relationship to Christ and growth in him.

Stanley and Willits define *spiritual growth* around the pursuit of 3 vital relationships: ¹³⁷

1. *Intimacy with God*
2. *Community with insiders*
3. *Influence with outsiders*

Small group 'culture' is the key:

For Stanley and Willits the small group ministry the answer to the above was found in creating a small group ministry. For Stanley and Willits this approach is not a program it's a culture, "*small groups are not an appendage to our ministry; they are our ministry*". Their belief is that small groups don't impact a local church until they become part of a church's culture. Therefore everything in the church's ministry is structured around maintaining and promoting that small group culture.

Senior Minister pivotal to culture formation:

Stanley and Willits believe that in order to effectively create a culture of small groups in a church it cannot be left to the delegated small group's Pastor, it must begin at the top with the Senior Minister. ¹³⁸

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Stanley and Willits have 5 criteria for group leaders:

1. *Connected:* i.e. members of the church
2. *Character:*
known as a person of integrity and solid reputation...
3. *Embrace the church group 'culture':*
support & subscribe to the strategy and values including apprenticing and multiplication.
4. *Good chemistry with staff and leadership:*
team players and someone others benefit from being around.
5. *Competence:* demonstrable passion and skills to lead a group.

B: Number:

¹³⁷ Creating Community: p. 108.

¹³⁸ Creating Community: p.14.

2. Function:

Shepherd, monitor and facilitate:

Group leaders are responsible for providing groups with vision, direction and support.

1. The leaders shepherd the group primarily by facilitating the organization of the group and monitoring group health.
2. Guide discussion
3. Meet with Director of groups 1-1, 3 times a year and 'leader huddles' 3 times a year
4. Attend the 2 training events run each year
5. Update group admin data as needed

3. Training:

Leaders are given training and personal oversight by: meet with Director of groups 1-1, 3 times a year, attending 'leader huddles' 3 times a year and participating in 2 training events each year.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:
2. Bible Study:
3. Prayer:

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:
2. Support:

Decentralised leadership and care:

Stanley and Willits believe there should be many shepherds in a church not just one. Small groups enable churches to spread out the leadership and care responsibilities to the places where it happens best, with the people to whom others have connected well. Their belief is that "*people are naturally cared for best by those who know them best - those with whom they are walking through life*".¹³⁹

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

'Invest and invite':

Christians are encouraged to prioritise relationships with unbelievers. To *invest in their lives*, then *invite them* to a Christian activity.

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:
2. Leaders:

OTHER:

De-clutter programmes and purposefully stream people towards groups:

Believing that church programs should not compete with each other, Stanley and Willits adopt what they call a '**foyer to kitchen**' strategy designed to take members through steps down the relational path to where they want them to go i.e. into a small group.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Creating Community: p.96.

¹⁴⁰ Creating Community: p.117.

*** Foyers:**

large environments most utilized by unbelievers and designed to 'change people's minds about church'.

*** Living rooms:**

medium sized environments designed to 'change people's minds about connecting' eg. discussion/interest groups or gatherings designed to help people connect and make new friends.

*** Kitchen table:**

small group environments designed to 'change peoples minds about their priorities' i.e. align them with God's.

This environment has 2 tracks:

1. The 'starter track'- targeted at seekers, starters & returners (a 13 week group)
2. The 'growth track' or 'community groups' – consisting of 6 couples or 8 individuals aimed at spiritual growth and developing authentic Christian community.

'Date groups' as a 'try before you buy' method:

In order to counteract the *commitment phobia* of some, Stanley and Willits have designed an 8 week 'date' or 'starter' group aimed at allowing members to test out whether they 'gel' before forming a formal commitment.¹⁴¹ Each leader is provided with a leaders curriculum guide for the 8 weeks as well as being linked to a staff person to monitor progress and to shepherd the leader. The group is provided with an intro DVD outlining the church small group expectations and goals.

Covenants:

The purpose of the group covenants are: "to provide a predictable environment where participants experience authentic community and spiritual growth". The 6 'values and goals' around which group covenants are formed are – *relationships, authenticity, confidentiality, respect, availability and multiplication.*¹⁴²

Closed groups:

Because of their strong emphasis on relationship building, Stanley and Willits purposefully have a *closed group* strategy i.e. they do not encourage new additions to a group unless the whole group agree to it. Stanley and Willits believe that new member *disruption* impacts group momentum and focus and potentially compromise small group life.

Limited time span and group multiplication:

After 18 months-2 years groups are encouraged to end and multiply. Leaders are encouraged to identify an apprentice within the 1st 6 months of the group to enable a more seamless multiplication process at the end.

Small group Director:

The Director is responsible for shepherding, equipping and leading group leaders. Their priorities are to shepherd leaders, enlist leaders, oversee group multiplication, leadership training and administration.¹⁴³

LITERATURE SOURCE: Leadership On The Front Foot : Z.Veron: (2009: Aus)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Strategic and missional:

The aim of the book is to provide church leaders with 23 principles that enable them to become proactive and strategic in their goal to create 'missional churches'. In this regard, the book has a clear philosophy that the minister *cannot*, and *should not*, attempt this ministry alone, rather there must be an emphasis on 'intentional spiritual growth' from the Pastor down, and an equipping of the saints for 'every member ministry'.

¹⁴¹ Creating Community: p.135.

¹⁴² Creating Community: p.182.

¹⁴³ Creating Community: p.177f.

Therefore, the core task of every Senior Minister should be to encourage one-another ministry, and ensure church members are encouraged and equipped to achieve that aim.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Note: Although the book's emphasis is not on small groups it does make these points.

Big must become small:

The belief is that as a church grows larger, by necessity it must also grow smaller. In other words, as the church grows it's important that regular members are well pastored. One method of effectively achieving pastoral ministry is ensuring members are in small groups. Small groups are listed as one of the core strategies of the church.¹⁴⁴

Small group as extended family:

There is therefore an expectation that most members will be in small groups mid-week. Small groups are viewed as an extended family, eating together, sharing life together and offering practical support, as a normal family would.

3 Focal points of small groups;

The 3 focal points of this small group ministry are bible study, prayer and care.

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

B: Number:

2. Function:

3. Training:

Training and equipping of leaders for various ministries are listed as one of the Core Strategies of the church (p204). Though the nature of this training is not outlined in any detail.

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER:

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

The 3 focal points of this small group ministry are bible study, prayer and care.

3. Prayer

The 3 focal points of this small group ministry are bible study, prayer and care.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

The 3 focal points of this small group ministry are bible study, prayer and care.

2. Support:

It is made clear in the way that the minister teaches and directs the small group ministry that the small group is where deep personal care for one another should primarily happen.¹⁴⁵ Each small group is seen as an extended family, eating together, sharing life together and offering practical support, as a normal family would.

¹⁴⁴ Leadership On The Front Foot: Zac Veron: (Anglican Press Australia, 2009) p. 204.

¹⁴⁵ Leadership On The Front Foot: p.184.

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

2. Leaders:

OTHER:

Group membership rotation:

To avoid cliques & inward focus, groups are changed around regularly, usually at the start of a ministry year. Each small group has a life of only 1-2 years.

This method ensures:

- newcomers being accepted and included faster
- more people across the congregation get to know each other across the years
- reinforces church members looking outwards than inwards
- unworkable groups are able to change
- bible study leaders experience leading different groups
- opportunity to raise up and train assistant leaders and thereby multiply the ministry long term.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Total Church* :

S. Timmis & T. Chester (2008: 'Crowded House Church', UK)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

Thesis: Missional church in a post-modern world:

In the post Christian era the Church must examine how it might need to do church differently as an exercise in doing Christian mission in a post-modern world (i.e. how we might create church with '*easy-to-see, easy-to-do, easy to understand, come in and join us feel*' for the unchurched).¹⁴⁶

Timmis and Chester believe that part of effective post-modern mission involves placing a large emphasis on Christian's willingness to more intentionally share their lives with one another and welcome unbelievers into a close network of relationships. This emphasis means having to therefore think about church growth differently (i.e. the need to then grow by planting new congregations rather than acquiring bigger congregations and buildings).¹⁴⁷

Gospel centred and community centred:

To achieve this aim 2 key principles shape the way they 'do church'. Being...

1. Gospel centred and 2. Community centred (the Word creating and nourishing the community, while the community proclaims and embodies the word. Both are central to mission.¹⁴⁸

Aim: All of life, mission and ministry, whether evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care, social serving should involve "*ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality*".¹⁴⁹ The concept of total church therefore = having an *identity* that shapes the *whole of life*, so that all of life + mission become 'total church'.

Principles not perfect practice:

The book is about outlining 'principles and vision' rather than a description of perfect practice.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel And Community: Steve Timmis and Tim Chester (Illinois: Crossway Books, 'Crowded House Church', 2008) p. 9.

¹⁴⁷ Total Church: cf. p. 92.

¹⁴⁸ Total Church: p. 15, 88.

¹⁴⁹ Total Church: p. 63, 137.

¹⁵⁰ Total Church: p.19.

Therefore it's not meant to be prescriptive.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *Simple Church* : T. Rainer & E. Geiger (2006, USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

To pursue 'disciple-making' spiritual transformation not programmes:

The book aims to call Pastors to de-clutter crowded ministry programmes in order to more specifically and strategically focus on the important task of disciple-making.

It recognises that most ministries focus on programmes and not the process of *spiritual transformation* therefore achieving little impact.¹⁵¹

It acknowledges the problem is not a lack of desire to make spiritual growth happen but often inability to know *how* to do it. The book therefore aims and to help Pastors design and implement a clear and '**simple** discipleship process' for their church where the goal is to partner with God in moving people through the stages of spiritual growth. Christ formed in people is the goal.

To simplify the process to spiritual growth:

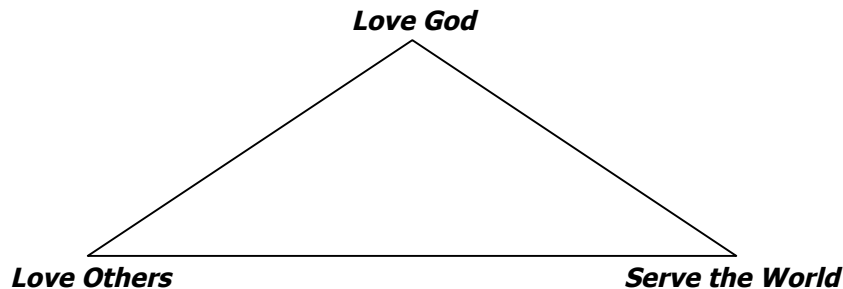
A 'Simple church' is **defined** as: "*a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it.*

The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus)".¹⁵²

The book proposes that **4 key concepts** are necessary to scale down and simplify ministry structures & bring about strategic change- **clarity** (starting with a ministry blueprint) **movement** (removing congestion) **alignment** (maximising the energy of everyone) and **focus** (saying no to almost everything).

Clarity —> **Movement** —> **Alignment** —> **Focus**

Simple Church = developing a simple discipleship process e.g.



LITERATURE SOURCE: *Iron Sharpens Iron* : O. Saer (2010, UK)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

The aim of the book is to outline the key benefits and challenges of small group ministry as well as provide a basic practical tool to help small group leaders create groups that thrive.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY:

Saer believes small groups, though not mandatory, can be a helpful place where Christians can learn to help each other study the Bible, care for each other, pray together, and be a good base from which to reach the lost.

¹⁵¹ Simple Church: Tom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2006) p.62.

¹⁵² Simple Church: p.67.

That just as 'iron sharpens iron' (Prov 27:17), so small groups can be a great context for Christian believers to "sharpen one another, to help one another step forward in lives of wholehearted Christian discipleship".¹⁵³

SMALL GP COMPONENTS:

A: LEADERSHIP:

1. Selection:

A: Selection & Criteria:

Saer's belief is that leaders should be selected on the same basis as that used in passages like Titus 1:6-9. i.e. where the priority is given to 'character' (according to the Titus list) and 'conviction' (i.e. doctrinal orthodoxy and a willingness to counter distortion) over 'competency' for the task as the prime selection criteria. Leadership is for those with a proven track record of practical godliness and doctrinal orthodoxy.

B: Number:

2. Function:

3. Training:

B: BIBLE/PRAAYER

1. Teaching:

2. Bible Study:

Saer believes small groups are a helpful place we can help others study the Bible, and where we can put into practice the one another command to 'teach and admonish one another' (Col 3:16).

NOTE: Saer has one of the most helpful chapters I have seen on developing prayer life in a small group.

3. Prayer:

Saer believes small groups are a helpful place where mutual prayer (Eph 6:18), learning what mature prayer looks like and encouragement to pray can happen.

C: SHARING/ACTION:

1. Open Sharing:

NOTE:

Saer has a helpful chapter on sharing (including things best not shared in the context) and caring a small group.

2. Support:

Saer believes small groups are a helpful avenue by which members can care for one another and carry each others burdens (Gal 6:2).

3. Co-ordinated Action:

*Mission:

Saer believes that the work of evangelism is always a shared task (Phil 1:27) therefore small groups can be a good base from which we can reach the lost, where members can work together to advance the gospel.

*Ministry:

EVALUATION:

1. Small Gps:

¹⁵³ Iron Sharpens Iron: Orlando Saer (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2010) p. 22.

2. Leaders:

Saer provides a checklist in the Appendix to for leaders self-evaluation

OTHER:

Growth and freshness:

Saer believes it is good to consider changing the whole dynamic of a group by adding 3-4 new members for a fresh start and renewed growth.

Covenants:

Saer suggests covenants can be helpful for setting and clarifying the aims and modus operandi of a group & that this process is the most important thing a group can start with. A sample is provided in the Appendix.

Resources:

The book provides information, tools and examples on Study models, covenanting, group stages, questioning techniques, group dynamics, problem solving, as well as material on application techniques, how to effectively manage group contributions and group evaluation. A short list of reference resources is provided at the back of the book.

LITERATURE SOURCE: *The Big Book on Small Groups* : J Arnold (2004: 2nd Ed. USA)

BOOK PHILOSOPHY:

* See notes on 1st edition.

The updated version includes new material and training input.

Noteworthy is the new introductory chapter on '*The Power of Small Groups*' that traces a brief history of discipling in the early church and outlines the *importance of disciple making through small groups*.

Part of what the book also hopes to achieve is to reverse the key attributes that make small group cliques unhealthy, so that groups are not trapped by inward focus. The hope is that readers might learn principles that might help them build '*community intentionality*' into their group systems with an emphasis on disciple-making.
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Apart from revisions, and the new introductory chapter, there are also 3 other new additions to this edition:

1. A chapter on 'starting a group'
2. A chapter on 'multiplying community'
3. An appendix addition providing a 'small group starter kit', 'training resources' and 'resources for building strong groups'.

The book is basically a training course to introduce new leaders to healthy group principles.

Chapters 1-4 designed as the core 'small group training' course.

Chapters 5-12 for follow-up training

At the end of each chapter there's a section on 'ideas for Coaches/Trainers with exercises and discussion points.

SMALL GP PHILOSOPHY: See notes on 1st edition.

'ADDED' COMPONENTS: notes for 2nd ed.

Need to redress 'ingrown group cliques' for viability and transformation:

Most Small group movements today have become decidedly 'inward focused' in orientation with 'long term family like' commitments being vogue.

154 The Big Book on Small Groups: Jeffrey Arnold (IVP: 2nd ed. 2004) p.23.

But "unfortunately, these long-term groups were nothing like families, because even (especially?) families have an 'outward focus'. That is, from generation to generation, children are born, move out, find partners, form new families...a family tree is not a straight line...inward focused groups face the same problem".¹⁵⁵

Arnold argues that in order to counter this unhelpful trend churches and ministries need to find ways to multiply and create new group opportunities as well as address training and structure needs if groups are to remain 'viable and transformative'.

Three dimensions of healthy group life: 'inward, upward and outward':

Arnold wants to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy groups. Arnold believes that not all groups provide a positive impact. "If structured carelessly, groups can hinder growth, exclude people, provide platforms for negative or destructive personalities, and keep people from reaching their potential for service and outreach".¹⁵⁶

Therefore groups must focus on building *certain qualities*. Arnold proposes that he derives these qualities from Jesus' practice and scripture to give this working definition of small groups... "A small group is intent on participating with Christ in building his ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world".¹⁵⁷

Arnold suggests that this definition seeks to locate Christ's transformative, kingdom building activity within the 3 different relationship dimensions reflected in Eph 4:11-16: **Inward** (the individuals relationship with the group) **upward** (Christ's relationship with the individual and the group, **outward** (the individual and group's witness to the world). Strong, healthy church and group life will have a balance of all 3 dimensions.

Inward expression = groups discipline of learning to care for members

Upward expression = learning and applying Biblical truth through nurture and worship

Outward expression = the groups discipline of cultivating a commitment to service and evangelism.

Skillful small group leaders will incorporate the three dimensions of healthy group life: 'inward, upward and outward':

According to Arnold good small groups & skilful small group leaders will integrate the 3 dimensions into group life with by including prayer and worship, sharing, study, prayer for outreach and planning for a service project (p54).

Skillful small group leaders share group care:

Following the N.T 'one another' commends, Arnold argues that Biblical caring is best done 'by the body- to the body'. That this role is not the sole responsibility of staff or of small group leaders but should rightly be the responsibility of every member of Christ's body.

Arnold argues that part of the process of disciple making and discipleship involves moving people past the daily effort of surviving and into the joy of being Christ's children in the world. In this regard, small groups will not be able to meet all needs, but they can address some of the most significant needs that human's possess, namely:¹⁵⁸

Accountability to move towards God's way of living

Support through offering friendship, prayer, exhortation and encouragement

Empowerment to live the Christian life more effectively by study of God's Word

Inclusion by acceptance and nurture

Orthodoxy, orthopraxis and orthopathy:

Arnold believes that small groups can teach *orthodoxy*, encourage *orthopraxis* and embrace 'orthopathy'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ The Big Book on Small Groups: (2nd ed.) p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ The Big Book on Small Groups: (2nd ed.) p.32.

¹⁵⁷ The Big Book on Small Groups: (2nd ed.) p.32.

¹⁵⁸ The Big Book on Small Groups: (2nd ed.) p.106.

¹⁵⁹ The Big Book on Small Groups: (2nd ed.) p.146f.

Orthodoxy (right belief): can be taught by discovering what is true about God in his Word.
Orthopraxis (right action): by encouraging one other to live a life of obedience God's way.
Orthopathy (right feeling): with the help of the Holy Spirit and by following God's will and way in pursuit of joy and peace.

Evangelism and multiplying community:

Arnold believes that small groups are a significant means through which people can be brought to Christ.

This can be done by encouraging small groups to pray for non-christian friends, helping group members to be effective witnesses of Christ in character, life & relationships, inviting people into groups and teaching people how to lead another to Christ. In order to be effective this emphasis on evangelism needs to be *intentional*, with the whole group committed to the process.

The goal is to *make-disciples*, therefore the process does not end at conversion of non-Christian group members, but to nurture them to maturity.

Much like the Cell Church movement, once groups grow to a certain point they should have it built into their DNA that they will eventually split and form new groups.

APPENDIX:

Review of 'Prepare Your Church for the Future': Carl F. George by Craig Simonian:

Taking his cue from churches like the 'Yoido Central Full Gospel Church' in Seoul, Korea, George proposed that the organizational principles of a Meta-church allows a church to maintain quality, no matter how much numerical success it experiences.¹⁶⁰

- . Churches of the future will be committed to making more and better disciples.
- . Churches of the future will be more concerned with the size of the harvest than with the capacity of their facilities.
- . Churches will be known primarily as caring places rather than as teaching associations.
- . Pastors will genuinely encourage ministry by the laity, despite centuries of modeling to the contrary.
- . Lay ministry assignments will involve leadership of a group.
- . Laity, given the opportunity, will invest time, energy, and money to learn the skills required to do a competent job of pastoring.
- . Pastors and people will remain dependent on the Holy Spirit to make His gifts available for mutually edifying one-another ministry.

1. Background of the Author

Over the past decade, Carl F. George has emerged as one of America's leading church growth consultants. Appropriately, Carl George has directed the Charles E. Fuller Institute of Evangelism and Church Growth and is a recognized consultant for churches and church leaders in over five dozen denominations. He has also directed a organization committed to his principles of church growth, called Consulting for Growth. George's first national book release was *Leading and Managing Your Church*, which he co-authored with Dr. Robert E. Logan in 1987. However, it was important to George to author a book which encapsulated the heartbeat of his vision and values for church growth.

That book, first published in 1991, is *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Since receiving a great deal of accolade for this publication, George has gone on to write several other books, *How to Break Church Growth Barriers* (1993), *The Coming Church Revolution* (1994), and *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership* (1997). According to Peter Wagner, Carl George is in "the top echelon of church growth analysts and consultants in the US." Indeed, with his vast church planting, church growth, and pastoral experience, Carl George has earned the right to speak. *Prepare Your Church for the Future* is, therefore, our opportunity to listen... and learn.

1. Publication Data

Prepare Your Church for the Future, subtitled, "Introducing the Meta-Church: Large enough to celebrate, small enough to care", was published in 1991 by the Fleming H. Revell Company, based in Tarrytown, New York. Its second release was published in 1993 under the same title. The forward was written by George's long time friend and mentor C. P. Wagner.

2. Intended Audience and Purpose

With little uncertainty, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, is intended for every member of one's congregation, from its pastoral staff and elder board, to the quiet parishioner sitting in the last pew. It is profound because it challenges these individuals to redefine "church" and how the church "does business". In its pages, a model is presented that will seem so simple, yet its implementation within the traditional church may not be as simple as it seems. If the church is to be prepared for the changes that will come along with the new millenium, then it must be willing to change its approach. George's meta-model (*meta*, meaning "change") takes a fresh look at what God has called the church and its members to be.

Prepare Your Church for the Future is in the interest of all because it addresses how the church must

¹⁶⁰ http://www.ourvineyard.org/files/Book_Review_for_Carl_George1.htm: p. 53.

respond to the needs of those in crisis, those looking for more intimate exchange with other believers, those trying to reach out to their communities, and etceteras. Carl George knows this, and thus, he attempts to translate various concepts in ways every parishioner can understand. Indeed, according to George, average church goers make up the heartbeat of the church, not the paid clergy.

3. Summary of the Book

As implied in the term, *meta*, the Meta-church model is about change... about transformation. It is about challenging readers to "institute in their churches a different model of social architecture". [1] Believers are called to break out of ineffective paradigms, offering an outline of the practices and principles necessary if the church is to reap an increased harvest of souls while at the same time, caring for its members. This is not to say that George rejects all that the church has been doing. Rather, he would have us shift our focus. Indeed, the "central premise of this book is that a pastor should elevate to first priority the promotion and multiplication of certain smaller groups; they are the essential centers of growth". [2]

If small groups become the epicenter of church life rather than the Sunday service, then regardless of the church's size, be it 150 or 100,000, the church will be able to perform its mission to train and equip its members, to reproduce and grow, to evangelize... while meeting the immediate needs of its congregants. Because of their potential, George believes that small groups [3], which can be found in so many churches today, are the most underdeveloped and underused resource in the church today.

George begins the first section of *Preparing Your Church for the Future* (chapters one through three) by articulating the enormous changes our society has experienced over the years. His purpose here is to demonstrate that the church must address the new issues of the day if it is going accomplish what God is purposing for it. Then, in chapter two, he identifies a number of strategies with which the church has tried to implement in order to effect positive change and growth. He then identifies those churches who have experienced growth and reproduction as those who embrace a particular vision of small group ministry. However, as he shows in chapter three, once these churches grow to a certain level, the quality of ministry within the church tends to decrease... particularly with regard to member care.

George begins his next section, in chapter four, by formally introducing his Meta-Church model. For our author, the two most visible elements of a meta-church are the small, home based groups (which he defines later on in the book) and the celebration meeting which represents the cluster of small groups, that make up the church, coming together as a body. The role of paid staff (clergy), in this model, is simply (not necessarily easily) to manage those leaders responsible for overseeing the caring of and leadership formation of a ten-person cell, that is, the cell group leader. As the church grows, the pastor would then serve more as a shepherd to those overseeing the cell group leaders.

In chapter five, four key concepts of the Meta-church model are explained. This first involves the idea of assimilation of newcomers. For George, it is essential that newcomers feel not only welcomed but accepted by small group members who can empathize, accept, and listen. Thanks to the dynamics of small groups, newcomers will far more likely develop an authentic sense of belonging, which will inevitably lead them back again. Secondly, the author differentiates between those newcomers who come to church vis-à-vis the "front door" as opposed to the "side door".

It will be difficult for traditional church leadership to integrate the latter group into the vision and purposes of the church. Those who enter the side door, on the other hand, will come to the church having already developed relationships with a cell leader and members. Again, because they are being cared for, they will more likely remain and participate in the church's vision.

The third concept, already mentioned, is George's belief that "mouse-sized" cell groups of up to ten people, do the best job of "keeping" people involved and growing. As the church grows, the need for a new leadership infrastructure becomes necessary. Thus, his fourth concept calls for a "church infrastructure of systematic pastoral care that is people centered, ministry centered, and care centered." [4] Here, pastoral care is not assumed to be the responsibility of the teaching pastor, but rather, the cell group leader.

Section three begins with chapter six and deals specifically with how cell groups, the *building blocks* of the meta-church, work. A cluster of mouse-sized groups (called this way because of their small size and propensity to reproduce!) signifies the essence of the Meta-church, where genuine caring serves as the fuel which propels a church to growth. Chapter seven explains how to cast the vision for pastoral care in each group. For George, it is essential that small group leaders accept more than the traditional responsibility of "facilitator". Rather, he or she functions as a lay pastor responsible to tend to their ten-or-so member flock.

In order to see this happen, the pastor's main function is the equipping and training of this group. This runs counter to the traditional perception as pastors being those who do the ministry in the church. Indeed, the Meta-church pastor is committed to getting his congregation to do the work of the ministry! Here, leadership development is built into the very genetic code of the church's mandate. With the small group committed to caring for one another, they are ready to reach out to the un-churched around them.

While chapter eight highlights several impediments, which can stifle a group from properly caring for one another and from reaching outward, chapter nine presents George's strategy for leadership development. He also describes a leadership structure that he would implement in a meta-model church. For example, rather than use titles, George prefers simple designations for their leaders, particularly in the early stage of meta-church development.

Thus, rather than call oneself a cell group leader, they would be designated as "X", a leader of ten. "L's" serve as coaches of five X's. Over the L's are the C's and over the C's are the D's, who George likens as a corporate CEO. This leadership structure is encouraged to meet twice each month in what George calls a VHS meeting, standing for Casting **V**ision, **H**uddle-time to discuss successes and problems, and **S**kill-building.

The last two sections, encompassing chapters ten through thirteen, seek to cast vision regarding the "big-picture" of what the Meta-church is and what the reader's church could be if these principles were implemented. George makes it clear that a transition from a tradition program-based church to a Meta-church, is no simple task. In fact, he says that the typical church will undergo several turnovers in leadership before getting it right. [5]

The roles of paid staff must change from those who do "everything" to those who primarily cast vision and organize the meta-church's leadership structure. This can be difficult for the traditional pastor who is used to being the center of church life. George feels that "pastors in churches of less than 200 are often so in love with providing primary care that they can't bear to turn them loose." [6] While the senior pastor is the leader of the Meta-church, leadership is far more decentralized than in the traditional church.

Carl George goes on to remind his readers that his model is more than caring for one another, it is about the creation of care groups, which focus on reaching out to the un-churched. In most circumstances, George feels that planting new churches is a must for those congregations who have embraced the meta-model. He writes, "the wise pastor will lead a church in a constant rhythm of extending, then expanding, then extending." [7] The key phrase here is, "lead a church" rather than doing it all himself.

The meta-church is one that utilizes non-clergy leadership as the medium through which outreach is done and growth occurs. *Prepare Your Church for the Future* ends with a presentation of three churches presently implementing the Meta-church model... demonstrating the impact it can have inwardly and outwardly. George's conviction regarding the potential of this church paradigm is so strong that he writes that it, "has kindled a divine mission from which my soul can find no rest." [8]

4. Evaluation

Format & Style:

While *Prepare Your Church for the Future* is as "thorough as a modern operator's manual for a new laptop computer," as Peter Wagner writes in his forward, it is nonetheless "written in plain English and in a captivating, literary style." Most readers should find this entirely true. He writes not only as a church growth expert, but as a pastor who has been there and done it himself. Thus, the book does not come across as some dissertation but rather, it reads mostly as smoothly as a biography. Yet, there are several concepts in the book that, admittedly, read like a Ph.D. level astrophysics text. And, in an effort to more clearly explain the meaning of these concepts, George offers charts and illustrations that takes matters from bad to worse.

Diagrams explaining the Meta-zone concept and the Meta-map and Meta-axis are among the worst. Once you realize what it is George is getting at, one can hardly understand why he could not have devised a more simpler way of explaining himself. Other than these few deviations from sanity, *Prepare Yourself for the Future* is written in a style suitable for all readers.

Content:

By analyzing the condition of the contemporary church, Carl George has designed a new blueprint that will

prepare churches for what lies ahead in the new millenium. In all fairness, however, little of what George articulates is new, per se, but it certainly had not been articulated (prior to its first printing) in a single volume as he has done in *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Thus, George's book takes us beyond theory to show just how a congregation might be a Meta-church. Those who are unable to look beyond traditional forms of how church get done may not buy George's conviction that the Meta-model is the model of the future. Those who are content with where there church is at may put he book aside, insisting that it represents one of hundreds of possible models.

Ultimately, however, this writer is in agreement with Carl George that the Meta-church model, which represents the basic framework of Ralph Neighbor's *Cell Church* model and Larry Kreider's *House to House* model, is more than just another idea in the sea of church growth principles postulated over the past decade. Those seeking to birth congregations which grow and reproduce, to whatever membership size, while still providing a safe, caring environment for its worshippers, will understand that the Meta-church model is unique. Again, in his introduction, Wagner writes, "*Prepare Your Church for the Future* may well be the most significant step forward in church growth theory and practice since Donald McGavran wrote the basic textbook, *Understanding Church Growth*, in 1970."

There are only a few aspects of George's model, which appear to be more problematic than is communicated. That is, how a traditional, program-based church, can make the transition to the cell group model when there has been no tradition of leadership development that would have provided a large team of initial cell group leaders. Will pastors really be able to caste a vision for something that will dramatically alter church structures?

The meta-church model would define one's membership in the church not by their attendance at Sunday meetings but rather their participation in a small group. But what about those who can not attend a small group because of time commitments or those who just prefer to worship in the last pew once each week? Or, the family who would like to attend a small group but no child care is provided and they can not afford to hire someone? What about the many Americans today who would feel far more comfortable being invited to a church meeting where they did not have to be the center of attention as a newcomer, than being invited to someone's home, which may seem more threatening?

Is the church no longer responsible for these kinds of folks? What about those who enter the church vis-à-vis the *front-door*? Through what process will they become assimilated into the small group network? If Sunday morning is simply a time for the clusters of small groups to come together in corporate worship, what structures are left which would minister to the newcomer not connected to a care group?

George likens the celebration meeting to a packed stadium. How did the 70,000 people get there, he asks? Probably through hundreds of car loads of people, each car load representing a small group. But again, what about the one who just hears the commotion and walks into the stadium? It would seem that, while a church would do well to transition to the Meta-church based model, they ought not throw the "baby out with the bathwater."

In other words, there are structures in traditional churches that allow for assimilation of *front-door* newcomers. Indeed, the meta-church is structured to minister more or less to those who enter by means of the *side-door*. Answers to this and other questions relating to a transition strategy can, however, be found in *The Coming Church Revolution*, which dedicates six chapters to the subject.

6. Significance for Ecclesiological Studies

For some readers, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* will be read with the intention of implementing a few of its ideas within the established structure of their churches. Whether they will experience any value in implementing some Meta-church aspects without having embraced the values that under-gird them is doubtful. For others, it will serve as the calling cry, the Magna Charta, which they believe will allow them and their churches to reach their full potential in Christ as those commissioned to care for one another while reaching the world around them. In and of itself, this would be enough to warrant attention from ecclesiologists.

Additionally, however, George raises a number of points bound to surprise some and shock others. For example, some might argue that if the role of small group leader is pastoral, why does George so strongly assert that women can equally fill the role? It addresses questions with regard to how churches change and how they define themselves and their mission, what role and titles their leaders should embrace, how larger churches can fulfill their responsibility to care for its members and how smaller churches can effectively reach out to their communities and the world around them.

Indeed, anyone studying ecclesiology will find Carl George's pragmatism refreshing and the thoughts provoking. While it is by no means presented as the only viable wineskin for the new millenium, certainly it is an effective one. If embraced along with the Wine himself, the Holy Spirit, history will no doubt prove the Meta-church model to have been a powerful force in seeing the world reached for Christ.

[1] Carl George, Prepare Your Church for the Future (NY: Fleming H. Revel Company, 1991), p. 219.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

[3] Small groups can also be referred to as cell groups, kinship groups, etc.

[4] George, p. 78.

[5] Ibid.. p. 71.

[6] Ibid., p. 192.

[7] Ibid., p. 192.

[8] Ibid., p. 220.

SMALL GROUP LITERATURE REVIEW

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