

Small Talk

September 2009

Remodeling Small Group Ideas



A small group is an intentional gathering, varying in size, meeting regularly for the purpose of joining God's mission.

If you are familiar with the Small Group resources that have been available through CRC Home Missions and Faith Alive, you might recognize a slight change to the above. The old definition ended by saying, Small Groups met "...for an agreed upon Christian purpose." Is it really so different? We feel this definition is more accurate to God's call to the church.

What exactly is God's mission that we are called to join? Two passages that outline God's basic instructions for the church are found in Matthew 22:37-40, the Great Commandment, and Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission. In these passages, God outlines three essential behaviors: love the Lord, love your neighbor and go make disciples.

These commands were not issued to individuals but to the New Testament community. Today, even though we live in an individualistic culture, God intends for us to carry out his mission together. Small Groups are the perfect place to nurture love for God, love for each other and going out to make disciples. People who have studied mission have observed that when these three are growing in groups, spiritual transformation happens and God's kingdom grows. John Wesley, way back in the 18th century, called these three things knowledge, community and experience. Hugh Halter, in his new book, [The Tangible Kingdom](#), calls them communion, inclusive community and mission.

The following story written by a Coffee Break Bible study ministry director, Laura Wessels, illustrates what it would look like to grow these three agendas in Small Groups.

"Since 1992, Coffee Break at Second Reformed Church has been helping women grow in their knowledge of God's word and to create lasting friendships in the midst of raising children. Like any program, it ebbed and flowed through the years, but eventually the program faced challenges as more women chose to work full-time outside the home. In 2003, the nursery and Story Hour were very small, and if a young mom came, she would eventually leave because she wasn't finding the fellowship she needed. As Coffee Break director, I struggled with getting Coffee Break back to what it was meant to be—an outreach to women and moms who were seeking Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Eventually I finally made a private decision that I shared with only our pastor: if Coffee Break continued the way it was, we would end the program. Along with that decision, I placed all the young moms in one group instead of scattering them throughout. Those young moms came, and they stayed. [Con't on page 2. . .](#)



Reducing Anxiety of the First Meeting

I recently showed up at an event uninvited! No fun. As a result, I have become aware of the anxiety I have going to an event for the first time. Small Group Leaders can ease the stress for first timers at gatherings by communicating and preparing well.

What do people want to know?


- What time? How long will it last? Remember: Start on time, end on time.
- Where? Download and email maps or give clear directions. Include information on parking, which door to use and where to find the group.
- Who else will be there?
- What should I wear? Is it a shorts, jeans, khaki or dressier event?
- Will there be other surprises like dogs or cats? What about children?
- What will we do when we get there? Provided a brief outline of the event

Phone call, email or printed invitation with clear instructions. A combination of two or more reduces anxiety greatly.

Resources

[Special Reformation Devotional: being Transformed](#). To receive daily devotionals during the week leading up to Reformation Sunday [sign up here](#).

[Bethesda: come to the water](#) by: **Bonnie Nicholas** This Bible study is especially for women who have suffered abuse or who are hurting in other ways.

 [Discover Your Bible: Judges](#) The book of Judges tells of a troubled time in Israel's history, in which the people were often at war as they settled into the land God had given them. But it's also a time of heroes and miracles by which God worked to sustain his struggling people to bring a Savior into this troubled world.



An Exciting Coffee Break Conference

This past July, over 360 Korean small group leaders from throughout the United States, Canada, Mexico, Korea, Japan and China gathered in the City of Industry, California, for a time of renewal and growth. In its seventh year, the Korean Small Group/ Coffee Break Conference offered a variety of resources for the attendees, while also keeping to the theme "Songs of the Pilgrim," based on First Peter. Each night included a talk on this theme by the primary speaker, Reverend Dong Won Lee from JiGooChon Church (one of the largest in Korea). The conference was enhanced through worship and prayer, small concerts, a powerful play based on the book of First Peter, testimonies and seminars.

The workshops and seminars available covered a variety of topics, some relating to Story Hour, body languages and English-speaking ministries. There was also an extensive, in-depth workshop specifically on the Korean Coffee Break ministry, held at a nearby church. Presenters included Neva Evenhouse, who began the Coffee Break ministries in the early 70s, and Betty Veldman Wieland, a former director. Through placing attendees in 40 small groups, the conference was also able to illustrate how Bible studies can use discovery methods in low-key, comfortable environments.

Overall, these four days were certainly a time to refresh, recharge and rejuvenate as participants of the conference were able to share in fellowship over meals, in seminars, through small group discussions, in prayer and in worship. The 2010 conference is already scheduled for July 6-9, and will also take place in the City of Industry, CA. Visit <http://www.coffeekbreakkorea.org/> for more information.



-- Kyu and Grace Paek



Remodeling Small Group Ideas con't . . .

Many faced some kind of crisis: battling cancer, getting a divorce and needing to find a job, still another WAS pregnant AND IN financial need. Together, we listened and prayed and helped. At Christmas, we pooled our money and gave gift cards to several women in our group. Here's what one said to me in an e-mail later: "You'll never know how much your thoughtfulness means to me. I needed to go out to Wal-Mart tonight and didn't really have the money, and before I left, Karen stopped with your gift. Then as I proceed to use the gift card, the cashier read me back the total of what was left on the card and she then said, 'Wow, someone must really love you,' and at that moment, I thought, 'Yeah, someone does really love me.' You guys gave me the best gift of all, your friendship and love." Something happened and changed that year as we ministered to each other. It was a real turning point for our Coffee Break. The love we shared was contagious! The next fall, I asked two of the moms to lead the original group so I could begin a second group for moms of school age children. By this past September, 2008, we created yet another young moms group because of the high response! Our Coffee Breaks groups are now vital and alive as the women support and serve each other, walk with each other and pray with each other, all week long."

As you think about what this Coffee Break ministry did, what kind of change could your group exhibit? Imagine members of in depth Bible study group that put aside their agenda and decide to open the group to people unfamiliar with the Bible. They realize, first of all, they will need to pray that God will guide them to the individuals to invite. They will then need to choose different material that would be more easily understood and applied by someone who is perhaps looking at the Bible for the first time.

Once new people come to the group, the members will be very welcoming and take great care not to act superior, like they have "arrived" spiritually in their knowledge of the Bible. They will make every effort to imagine what they would feel like if they were looking at the Bible for the first time, and, therefore, be careful in how they explain things. They will be certain to refrain from using "church talk", phrases or terms that are used in churches and by Christians. They will see themselves more like missionaries in a foreign culture, being very sensitive to the people with whom they come in contact. As they grow to know and love the new people in the group they will begin to share not only the Bible lesson, but their lives as well.

Finally, those who have been a part of the group in the past will need to deepen their faith in God, because the task of bringing the Word of God to a culture unfamiliar with its content is daunting. They will need to depend on God's wisdom rather than their own, perhaps in ways they have never done before. Their prayer life will ramp up as the call out to God for help, because they realize how desperately they need his power to not only verbally communicate the gospel, but actually live it out before other people.

The clear call for groups to join God in mission by loving God, loving each other and going, will ignite exciting change. Perhaps the true, as well as the hypothetical story, have provided you with a goal that is a little bigger or more daring than what you are currently experiencing in your group.

If you would like more information on ways your small group ministry can grow in these three agendas, please [contact your regional Ministry Developer](#). They provide training, consulting and coaching for small group ministries. She/he can provide training, consulting and coaching for small group ministries.



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