

Small Talk

fall 2008



Passing the Baton

“Dropped batons. U.S. men’s and women’s teams fumble chances for gold.”

The headline from Beijing jumped out at me as my computer connected to the internet. What? Both teams? In the Olympics? Reading further I see that yes, indeed, both teams fumbled. Wow.

I wonder how often we drop the baton. The Christian ministry we’re involved in begins with a bang – lots of energy! It grows nicely and even sustains itself. And then what? Somewhere into the journey we take our eye off important things. Good leaders get less support because they’re doing a good job. New leaders come on-board without purposeful training. Groups accomplish their goal and disband but no one encourages the members to continue to grow. The vision statement we wrote five years ago served us well and looks good on paper, but is not embedded in the hearts of people today.

Reality check #1: You can’t win a relay race without the baton.

What is our baton? What are we passing on? As Christian runners we cling to Jesus, his love, life, and mission. We must get serious about keeping Jesus and his ministry as our focus.

Group question: *How are you keeping Jesus in the center?*

Reality check #2: You can go fast, but you can’t go far without unified purpose and vision.

Evaluate your purpose, vision. Each leader should know how their purpose fits within the church’s mission.

Group Question: *What is your group’s purpose?*

Reality check #3: You can have great runners but they can’t accomplish their goal if they are not connected.

BSF = Bigger, Stronger, Faster! North American culture idolizes the big and the quick. But churches need places for people to grow, and growth takes time. Every stage is important. We need entry level groups, growth & accountability groups, leadership and service groups. Group Question: *How can we grow this year?*

Reality check #4: We need each other. You can’t win a relay race by yourself.

Small groups are about relationships – learning to give-and-take through the easy and hard parts of life. Leaders need support and coaching. Group Question: *How can we best encourage each other on the journey?*

I apologize if these seem like “duh” statements to you. They are. But somehow over time the *stuff* of ministry settles over us like a thick fog. It seems we hear a far-away fog horn sound a warning, but we can’t see the way forward. Coaching and courage are needed to see our present reality as well as vision for the future.

There are no gold medals in ministry, however, the writer of Hebrews paints a spectacular picture larger than any Olympic competition. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, let’s RUN!

“Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that

so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” (Hebrews 12:1,2)

Talk Back

Afton DeVos tells of her small group made up of young married couples. “When our small group formed, we decided we wanted to be intentional about giving back to those less fortunate at least once or twice a year. We became aware of a transitional housing facility for homeless families in the city that holds a “Fun Club” every Saturday morning. This offered us an opportunity to shed light into lives of children. We decided to do a craft – painting pots and planting plants for them to watch grow. We explained that God ‘plants’ us and we have to water ourselves. God will help us grow and learn new things, like being kind to others and doing what is right. The kids loved painting the pots – they were so messy! After they were finished, the parents picked up their children, and you could see the gratitude on their faces. It was a small, simple way to give back. As a group we connected to each other in new ways as well.”

We’re inviting you to talk back to us about your small groups. Any topic is fair game this quarter. Send your stories to smallgroups@crcna.org.



Christian Reformed Home Missions

Following Christ. In Mission Together.



Resources

www.disciplemen.com – If you’re looking for a web resource for leading men, check this out. From their vision statement: “No man fails on purpose – most wake up in the morning wanting to succeed. Our desire at disciplemen.com is to walk alongside pastors and men’s ministry leaders who are equipping men for success that matters.”

www.ZondervanChurchSource.com – Many small group studies and church campaigns are available.

Discover the Parables of Jesus – This brand new small group inductive Bible study and leader’s guide is available now from Faith Alive Resources (1-800-333-8300) or www.faithaliveresources.org. Discover what Jesus wants to show and tell us about the kingdom of God through these stories.

The Reason for God, Belief in an Age of Skepticism, by Timothy Keller. This book addresses difficult questions head-on as Tim Keller provides an intelligent yet compassionate discussion in which believers can stand their ground and verbalize their faith. (Copyright 2008 by Timothy Keller, published by Penguin Group USA Inc.)

Quotable Quotes

“When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen.”

—Ernest Hemingway

“Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

—Chinese proverb

The Spirit “Rained”

Showers of blessing ‘rained’ down on those who attended the 2008 Small Group & Evangelism Conference in Illinois this summer. For pictures, reports, and audio of the main speakers go to the website, www.crhm.org.

Here are a few quotes from the main presentations worth repeating:

“What is it we’re trying to tell? This good news, this gospel? How are you telling it? Does it seem like *good* news? Like a radical embrace? Like a reversing of the brokenness? What do you think good news is to people who are lonely? That they can have friends! What’s good news to someone who’s poor? That you don’t have to be poor! What’s good news to someone who’s sick in their body? That they can be healed.”

—Joyce Rees

“I’m admonishing us to have a grace makeover. A grace makeover means that when I’m made over I become an agent of grace, because I’ve been made over by grace. That means because grace made me over I become a person who administers grace, because God has been so good to me! God has been good to you! We are redeemed to redeem. We are healed to heal. We are delivered to deliver. And we’re made over to make over. We stand shoulder to shoulder to let the world see the Body of Christ!”

—Harvey Carey

“Look at one scene God gave us to show us how to worship. (Revelation 1, 2, 4, and 5.)

. . . Worship *sends*. We gather to feast on the good things of God in order to be *exploded* on the earth as the people of God. God sends his people out of worship into the world. He sends them into every place on the planet.”

—Timothy Brown

Leader vs. Host

There’s been much written and taught about the words we use and the expectations we have. In regards to small group ministry, you’ve probably seen many titles given to the one “in charge” of the group – leader, facilitator, host, and discussion leader are a few. Here’s a little chart comparing the leader and the host. Without imposing judgement on either, we invite you to ponder the differences with respect to your ministry needs.

Cultivating Leaders	Versus	Finding Hosts
Ministry training		Service focused
Long term		Short term
People centered		Program/task oriented
High commitment		Low commitment
Investment of time, effort & life		Investment of time & resources
Teaching to fish (Matt. 4:18-22)		Feeding the fish
Makes a spiritual difference in others’ lives		Gets the task of job done

Karen Wilk, Small Groups Team Leader
Christian Reformed Home Missions