

# Small Talk

summer 2008



## Transforming Community

During my thirty years of ministry, I've developed some unhealthy rhythms which have impacted my spiritual life. I often work seven days a week, compromising my personal time with God for the demands of ministry. On occasion, after spending some time with my wife and family, God was pushed out of my day. I was walking perilously close to burn out.

Understand, I'm a member of two small groups. My men's group has met weekly

for over fifteen years! We care deeply about each other. We encourage and pray for one another. I am also in a couples group with my wife. We've met monthly for over fifteen years. We camp together. Our children have grown up together. We've celebrated life and grieved together.

In ministry, I encourage people to slow down. I talk about the value of silence and solitude. I preach on the priority of spending time with God and setting aside time each day to simply be *present* with God. In my spiritual desert I realized I needed to practice what I was preaching . . .

So I called five friends in ministry; friends also burning the candle at both ends. I shared my spiritual dehydration and thirst. Together we enrolled in *The Transforming Community* (a two year commitment to attend eight quarterly three-day retreats designed specifically to help strengthen our soul—our relationship to Jesus Christ—in the midst of the pressures and demands of ministry). We've spent prolonged periods in silence and solitude, experienced self-examination and confession, practiced daily *lectio divina* (divine reading) and searched our deepest desires. Together, we have learned how to be more *present* with God. We have discovered a rhythm of disciplines and spiritual practices that continues to transform our lives.

As important as these extended retreats have been, there is another critical ingredient—our small group, our "community" within (The Transforming) Community. We ride together to Chicago. At each

retreat, we spend our early mornings walking and talking together. We reflect for four hours on the return trip, and between each retreat, we spend a day together practicing the presence of God.

This new small group has added three important dynamics essential to creating and sustaining a rhythm that nurtures our souls—three dynamics missing in my other two small groups:

- 1. Affinity.** We are all pastors. Who share a passion for ministry. We experientially know the struggles, pressure points, demands, and temptations of ministry.
- 2. Accountability.** We ask each other the hard questions: Have you been prioritizing time with God? Are you regularly doing *lectio divina*? Are you spending quantity time in solitude and silence? We know each other intimately, it is very difficult to bluff.
- 3. Vulnerability.** We trust each other. We have been transparent. We have confessed to each other. We've leaned on each other in ways that are unavailable and inappropriate with parishioners.

Has it completely transformed my life? Not yet. Is it impacting my life? Absolutely! Developing a spiritual rhythm and practicing the presence of God is a lifelong process. But being intentional about it in a small community changes everything.

—Douglas Kamstra,  
pastor of Calvary CRC, Wyoming, MI

in community

## Small Group & Evangelism Conference

Excitement is mounting for the 2008 **Small Group and Evangelism Conference** July 18-20 in Lombard, IL. This "Signature Event" sponsored by Christian Reformed Home Missions will feature keynote speakers Timothy Brown, Harvey Carey, and Joyce Rees. There will be worship and breakouts to equip and inspire those who work with small groups, Coffee Break, children's preschool ministries, and campus ministries as well as for church planters and those who work in outreach ministries.

See [www.crhm.org/conference](http://www.crhm.org/conference) for complete information and registration. It's not too late to **register now!**

888-644-0814 www.smallgroupministries.org



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## Resources

*Small Groups and Evangelism training download* from [www.buildingsmallgroups.com](http://www.buildingsmallgroups.com). This excellent downloadable resource is available to you at 50% off. Buildingsmallgroups.com has generously offered this to our Small Talk readers by using Coupon Code *sge2008*. Please check it out at their website.

*Christ-Based Leadership* by David Stark. Church leadership must change in order to respond to spiritual needs. This book lays a foundation for biblical leadership. Published by Bethany House.

*The Relational Way* by M. Scot Boren. A book that describes the biblical mandate for community and practical ways to think about relational connections. TOUCH Publications.

*The Transforming Center* ([www.the-transformingcenter.org](http://www.the-transformingcenter.org)) Info on retreats and published resources by Ruth Haley Barton.

## Garden Party

How does your garden grow? You've heard talk of *organic* small groups. "Organic" implies life, health, growth, and of course, change. Everything that is living and healthy changes. The big question then, how can we grow through change?

First of all, take a walk through your small group garden or greenhouse and appreciate the beauty of the many plants and their purposes. Notice how the beauty is magnified as the vibrant colors and varieties come together. Evaluate the needs of each – are there young plants that need to be transplanted to grow? Does that group need more sunlight? Do these fragile plants need protection? Are the mature plants ready to be pruned?

You get the picture. Your garden is unique, it has its own special design. God creates the growth, but as ministry leaders we create the environment whereby people and groups thrive. *Next Steps for Small Group Growth*, by David Stark and Judy Stack-Nelson, describes four goals for groups and contains practical evaluation tools to accomplish them.

### Four Goals for Groups

1. The spiritual development of each group member
2. The spiritual health and depth of the group as a whole
3. Training members for leadership by identifying and using their gifts and talents
4. Contributing to the growth of the small group ministry

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If your ministry does not provide an environment for healthy growth and change, ask the hard questions. If you saw amazing growth in the past but not today, do the work of evaluating. Ask where needs have changed. Assess gifts, passions, and interests. What about life cycles – beginnings and endings? The *Next Steps* CD, available from Faith Alive Resources (1-800-333-8300) contains excellent resources for evaluation.

For those who can say, yes, our small group ministry is expanding, multiplying and changing – celebrate! Maybe it's time to throw a garden party!



## Talk Back

Teri Hyrkas told us about her CBB group (Coffee Break Bloggers). She learned many important lessons this first year. "I was very concerned that a blog setting for Bible study was not going to foster spiritual growth or help build relationships because we would feel isolated from each other and God. But comments posted included words of encouragement, concern and love for participating bloggers. Insights into the scriptures were shared and discussed. Prayers were asked for and given. Life stories were shared." It takes time and determination. Bottom line, Teri says it's about love. "If you love this techie medium and the age group whose brains are programmed for cyberspace, don't let anything stop you from blogging away!"

Please share your stories of ministry in small groups. What have you done to serve others or to have a missional impact on your community? E-mail us at [smallgroups@crcna.org](mailto:smallgroups@crcna.org).

## Growing From Committee to Small Group

A church steering committee for small groups met regularly to learn, plan, and develop small group skills. One night the agenda was short and they finished early. Instead of going home, they decided to learn more about each other. Each person shared something from the first 1/3 of their life. Since all of the members were over 50, there was a common bond. The members blessed each other with funny stories of early memories. Some shared experiences of pain and suffering, struggling through WWII in Holland and immigration to Canada. After laughing and crying together, someone commented that this was the "best meeting they ever had." The committee had become a small group!