

# Village Church Small Groups

## 1. Why small groups?

There is tremendous benefit to the concept of growing both big and small at the same time. Attracting students is an important goal in youth ministry; however, depending on how many students a group attracts, new challenges tend to arise. While large group settings offer a much more thrilling environment, the fundamentals of community can be lost. Students can experience difficulty making deep connections with other students. They feel lost in the crowd, and it's not a conducive environment for personal mentoring.

Small groups offer a way for large groups to grow small, and in doing so offer some important traits that large groups lack:

- A handful of deep personal connections
- Individual mentorship
- A comfortable environment which facilitates openness and honesty
- A place where students can be individually challenged to seek God and grow in faith.
- A place where true accountability can take place.

It is the will of this program that every student would connect with a mentor and develop a relationship that goes beyond simply being entertained. This relationship is one that encourages students to seek biblical knowledge, seek Christian relationships, answer difficult questions about faith and the nature of God, and generally grow in a relationship with Christ. I believe, through contemplation and prayer, that a small group structure is the best way to fulfill this will.

## 2. What biblical purpose(s) do small groups fill?

I'd like first to recall an explanation of the early church:

"The early church was built on small groups of people who came together to support one another in a whole new way of life. These primitive communities were visible evidence of an alternative to the status quo of their culture. Today we need small bands of people who take the gospel at face value, who realize what God is doing in our time, and who are living proof of what it means to be in the world but not of the world. These 'base' communities or neighborhood churches should be **small enough for intimacy, kindred enough for acceptance, and gentle enough for criticism**. Gathered in the name of Jesus, **the community empowers us to incarnate in our lives what we believe in our hearts and proclaim with our lips**"....

**"The experience of community is neither a luxury for the spiritually affluent nor a panacea for the lonely, bored, and idle. It is, in fact, a necessity for every Christian.** It is my personal conviction that this is what Jesus and Paul meant when they spoke of the

church-small Christian communities praying and worshipping together, healing, forgiving, reconciling, supporting, challenging, and encouraging one another".....

- Brennan Manning

Manning's illustration is drawn from glimpses of the fellowship the disciples shared shortly after the death and resurrection of Christ:

**"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer...Every day they continued to meet together** in the temple courts. **They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.** And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved."

- Acts 2:42-47

In his recounting of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke paints an amazing picture of fellowship in the early church. Because the Church was a concept of fellowship among believers, early Christians were free to completely live within the Church. It's a dynamic of fellowship that is somewhat lost in the modern concept of the Church as a structure, or place of worship. I would like to recapture the fellowship and experience of the early disciples by replicating a home fellowship structure within our youth program.

### **3. How will YOUR student(s) benefit?**

- "...communities praying and worshipping together, healing, forgiving, reconciling, supporting, challenging, and encouraging one another".....

Brennan Manning

Brennan Manning painted an incredible image of the early church experience in his book, "The Ragamuffin Gospel". This description is what inspired me to strive to develop a youth ministry that would create a similar experience for the students. I'm seeking to accomplish this by establishing small, intimate groups of students who will grow together in faith by praying together, worshiping together, healing each other, supporting each other, CHALLENGING each other, and encouraging one another.

### **4. How does the Youth Ministry benefit?**

As a ministry staff we are limited in our ability to impact a large number of students in a deep way. Deep impact requires time spent. Small groups allow the youth ministry to minister to an innumerable amount of students, who, no matter the size of the youth group, will always receive the proper attention and care needed to disciple.

### **5. How will YOUR family benefit?**

- "the community empowers us to incarnate in our lives what we believe in our hearts and proclaim with our lips"....

As a youth ministry, we seek to be a parent run group. We are a tool to be used by your family. We seek to assist you in raising your students, not only with a knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ and their relationship to Him, but also with the knowledge and ability of how to live out that life. Small groups provide closer discipleship which furthers this goal.

**6. Who leads the groups?**

The truth is small group leaders aren't always young, hip, energized adults who just love and adore students. I have two requirements: they LOVE GOD, and LIKE TEENAGERS. The primary role of the small group leader is to "facilitate" conversation, teaching, and encourage meaningful relationships. We have small group leaders of all ages and each have been equally effective in the ministry.

**7. What is the curriculum?**

We provide each group with a start-up curriculum. We have a variety of curriculum for the leaders to choose from. We will require that each group follows a pre-approved bible study agenda; one that I have taken the time to review for content. Typically these are video driven, bible study series that are focused on teen issues.

**8. When are small groups launched?**

Small groups will begin in the fall; however, each small group is launched only after a leadership team has been formed and organized, housing locations have been finalized and all students have been divided into the groups.

Small groups run in seven week cycles, beginning in September and ending in June each year, with a one week break between each cycle and a break over Christmas. Although small groups would not meet over the summer months, established groups will keep relatively the same students from year to year.

**9. Why do we meet in homes?**

Homes not only provide the small group with a relaxed, distraction free, safe environment, they also allow more members of the church to exercise hospitality and share in the blessings of this ministry.

**10. What resources are needed?**

PEOPLE: We need hospitality people to open their homes once a week. We need gifted leaders to guide the group, and we need volunteers to assist those leaders.

TIME: We need everyone involved from leaders, to students, to the parents of students to commit to the necessary time requirements.

MONEY: There are expenses incurred varying from group to group depending on how each group wants to spend their time. This is part of the youth ministry budget.